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Critical Insights

A Journal of the Department of English Language and Literature

NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY
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The Competence to See and the Courage to Act

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Notre Dame University Bangladesh (NDUB)

critical.insights@ndub.edu.bd

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EDITORIAL

Editing a literary journal involves a continuous focus on the process of publication from shortlisting the articles, sending them to the reviewers, returning the articles to the authors with the reviewers' comments, and remaining alert until the journal comes out of the press in print. This, however, can in no way make the editor less sensitive, especially with regard to new publications of literary texts and also to important happenings in the world of literature and academia. In 2025, the world lost two famous litterateurs: the Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who died on May 28, 2025, and Mario Vargas Llosa, the Spanish-Peruvian Nobel Laureate who passed away on April 13, 2025. Notre Dame University Bangladesh and *Critical Insights* also lost Fr. Leonard Shankar Rozario, CSC, who was the Publisher of the Journal, the Registrar of the University, and also an Associate Professor in the Department of English at NDUB.

Ngugi (born January 5, 1938, in Kenya) wrote his first major novel, *Weep Not, Child* (1964), in English. As a postcolonial writer, Ngugi was sensitive to the effects of colonialism in Africa, which made him switch over to writing in the Bantu language spoken by the Kikuyu people of Kenya. In all his writings, Nguigi spoke boldly in favor of his downtrodden people who were the victims of colonialism, which even led to the loss of their traditional culture and beliefs. While Ngugi bemoaned the sufferings of the deprived people of his country, he was a strong critic of those who supported the colonizers and perpetrated different kinds of suppression and torture on the masses, whose pains and woes are expressed in his writings.

Ngugi was also a cultural and political activist, which led to imprisonment in 1977. Unfortunately, Ngugi was not even given the opportunity to defend himself in a court of law against the charges brought against him. Ngugi thought his incarceration was because of his rejection of the English language in favor of Gikuyu, a native language that people related to easily. The author's rejection of English was indeed a valiant protest against the colonizers, whose language was also English. As an important writer in postcolonial studies, Ngugi relentlessly questioned the high status and privilege of the English language and culture in postcolonial Kenya. Ngugi pioneered a movement that culminated in replacing the English Department at Nairobi University with the Department of Literature, where African Literature was given top priority.

In addition to his novels and plays, Ngugi wrote essays on culture, literature, and politics that were published in *Homecoming* (1972), *Writers in Politics*

(1981*), Barrel of a Pen* (1983, *Moving the Centre* (1993), and *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams* (1998). Ngugi was a prolific writer who went on writing until the very end of his life. After he left writing in English and started using Gikyuyu, it was an ingenious way of getting back to the empire.

Nguigi's greatness as a postcolonial author lies in the fact that his name will always be mentioned alongside those of Edward Said. Gayatri Spivak Chakravorty and Homi Bhabha, all belonging to the first generation of postcolonial theorists. Both Ngugi and Said agreed that colonialism was not yet gone, but its remnants remained embedded in the postcolonial reality, reshaped by repressive governments that treat the citizens of independent countries with disdain and apathy. People of these newly independent countries are still shackled to poverty, and the ruling class continues the same exploitation that the colonizers had resorted to. Although historically the days of colonialism are over, in reality, many of the tools of oppression, used by the colonizers, have merely changed hands.

Mario Vargas Llosa is primarily a novelist and essayist, but he was also a political activist, eventually a politician, who contested the Presidential election but was defeated. Unlike Ngugi, Llosa was not left-leaning; he chose the middle path and wanted democracy to flourish in Peru, where he was born on March 28, 1936, and where he died on April 13, 2025. Llosa's novels include *The Time of the Hero* (1963), *The Green House* (1966), and *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969). Many critics argue in favor of Llosa being the most significant writer of Latin America, whose impact on the world was more than any other author of Latin American origin.

Llosa had always been a scathing critique of military dictatorships in Latin America that he thought were aimed against the peoples of countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Military dictatorships in these countries violated human rights in different ways. From forced disappearances to extra-judicial murders, and from curtailing civil liberties to destroying democratic institutions, the military did everything possible to secure its stay in power at the expense of liberty and economic justice.

In his widely acclaimed debut novel, *The Time of the Hero (1963)*, Llosa satires the characters in a military academy, which infuriated the men in uniform so much that they burnt thousands of copies of the novel publicly. The novel is about a group of cadets in the Leonardo Prado Military Academy in Lima, who want to be relieved of the sadistic ragging, mindless military discipline, and senseless regimentation. The young cadets, in their frenzy to subvert the system, trigger off betrayal, murder, and revenge that put at risk the military hierarchy.

The structure of the novel is also notable: it has two parts consisting of eight chapters with an epilogue. Llosa uses multiple narrators to fast-forward the plot. There is an omniscient third-person narrator and two first-person ones whose identities remain secret until much later in the novel. Llosa's next major novel, *The Green House(1966),* is also remarkable for its non-linear narrative and the author's exposure of the brothel and the frontier, both of which restrict economic outflow and social transgression. In this novel, Llosa shows how the military and the police enforce sexual norms. Also, the depiction of females such as bar waiters, native girls, and nuns becomes an example of how power is responsible for regulating female bodies and their desire. According to Carlos Granes:

> *The Time of the Hero*, *The Green House*, and *Conversation in the Cathedral,* published respectively in 1963, 1966, and 1969, were great fictional constructions in which he [Llosa] made a detailed analysis of Militarism, machismo, religious dogmatism, or any other form of irascible power that held sway over people. Whether it was in military academies, brothels, missions, jungle areas, or bourgeois surroundings, it always ended badly for Vargas Llosa's characters, who were spiritually weak, submerged in the most abject mediocrity, or turned into something they didn't want to be. (8)

In the end, I have to express my gratitude and indebtedness to Father Leonard Shankar Rozario, CSC, the Publisher of *Critical Insights*. In his death, Notre Dame University Bangladesh lost a promising scholar who was also simultaneously working as the Registrar of the University. Soft-spoken and mild-mannered, Fr. Shankar will be remembered for a long time by his students and colleagues. On behalf of the Board of Editors of Critical Insights, I express my deep condolences to the family of the deceased.

Golam Sarwar Chowdhury
Editor

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Tall Crosses and Safety Pins: A Historical Note to Isidora Sekulic's "Madam Nola"

John K. Cox

Professor of East European History, School of Humanities, North Dakota State University

In the writer Isidora Sekulić (1877-1958), Serbia has one of its greatest and most unusual women intellectuals. Sekulić, or simply "Isidora" as most Serbs refer to her, is most often read today as a novelist, although she wrote far more literary and art criticism and philosophical travelogues than fiction. She also published ethnographic works and short stories. In 1950, she became the first woman admitted to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, a fact that, along with some of her modernist tendencies, puts her in somewhat the same category as Marguerite Yourcenar, who was the first woman admitted to the Académie Française (in 1981). Only a few short works by this great writer exist in English translation, although in Serbia she is frequently referred to in films, radio dramas, and tourist guides, and some of her works feature prominently in school and university curricula. "Madam Nola" is one of her most frequently anthologized pieces, and it has never been englished before the (partially completed) project you have before you. "Madam Nola" is the longest constituent part, and the second in sequence, of the novel Kronika palanačkog groblje (Eng. The Chronicle of a Provincial Town).

Little background is necessary to understand this story. We are presented, in clear contours, with a beloved but loveless main character, whose life of sacrifice and achievement lives on after her death through the many lives she touched. In addition, as in most of Sekulić's writing, historically accurate economic, social, and religious conditions are set forth in clear terms. But some historical context will make it more enjoyable for the non-specialist reader. The first salient issue is the setting of the piece. The time is around the turn of the 20th century, when Belgrade was the capital of the newly independent state of Serbia and was located on its northern border along the Danube River, adjacent to Austria-Hungary (the Habsburg Empire), which was historically both its rival and patron. The place is the region known in the 20th century as Vojvodina, or Vajdaság in Hungarian. This Habsburg, and later Yugoslav (and now Serbian) region, which consists of the older historical region known as the Banat plus parts of adjacent areas, is a fertile agricultural

zone with a great diversity of ethnic groups. In it, Serbs and Hungarians predominate, but Sekulić includes many other representative characters: Germans, Slovaks, Jews, Hungarians, and Italians in this story, and many other groups in the rest of the novel.

Reading this author is, however, not always easy due to some stylistic features. It is very characteristic of Sekulić that she employs a wide-ranging lexicon, for instance. It is the translator's duty to make sense of (and reproduce the sense of) archaic or regional vocabulary, but it is worth noting that "Madam Nola" has rich terminology that reflects the history of the region. In this short passage alone, for instance, we encounter the words salaš, štajervagn, rakija, and vladika, which come respectively from Hungarian, German, Turkish, and Montenegrin. These terms have been retained in the text, and explained through context, to enrich the reader's sense of place. Finally, Sekulić's syntax can also be challenging. We are faced with long paragraphs containing mixtures of reported speech and narrative exposition, multiple speakers, unclear attributions, variable punctuation, nicknames, family names and patronymics, and feminine surnames. Not all of these are major points, or drawbacks, but one does hear from Serbs that her writing was jumbled or breathless or crowded or digressive. It is hoped that the current translation balances a sense of Sekulićs style with the need for intelligibility (achieved through minor textual interventions).

The large, oft-reprinted and oft-republished but never translated book that is the source for this story was published in Yugoslavia in two versions. The first version came out in 1940, shortly before the country was absorbed in the bloody fighting of World War II; a second, expanded version came out in 1958, the year of its author's death. The work is considered a novel, and although it is quite canonical in Yugoslav and Serbian literary histories and school curricula, it is not traditional, in terms of its composition, as a novel. It is a set of lengthy, or very lengthy, stories or novellas, which some scholars think are separate novels. They are, however, held together by their common location, a graveyard and its surrounding city just outside Belgrade, in the province of Vojvodina (at the site of modern-day Zemun), and by a common time period and some recurring characters. Furthermore, the feel of the constituent elements and the narrative structure are the same. All of the stories are deeply entwined with the history of greater Belgrade, but only its peripheral or rural parts. Sekulić plants many maxims and bits of wisdom between the descriptions and conversations, in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Thomas Hardy. Many scholars consider Sekulić to be an exponent of general philosophical pessimism and modernist decline, but the stories, which represent a kind of dialogue between the inscriptions on the

inhabitants' tombstones or grave markers and their lives and reputations, often accentuate the positive, especially in individual virtues, and concentrate on strong female characters.

We shall now offer a thumbnail sketch of each of the other novellas in the volume, so that the context of "Madam Nola" becomes clearer. In "The Town and Its Last Greeks," the emphasis is on the dying out of cultures, as well as religions and, for lack of a better word, castes (occupational-ethnic categories), especially among the region's Cincar and Greek populations. "The Children" examines life in the small city through the experiences of young people, and their teachers, doctors, and parents, especially in periods of great tragedy due to natural disasters and crime. "Kosta the Earthquake" traces the life of a good-natured and honest tailor, who had been rejected by his own military family and ends up isolated from his own, because his sons go off to work in factories in distant Budapest (Hungary) and Romania. Kosta earns his nickname through his colorful way of talking, and he is highly respected among the other masters and apprentices in his town, until he drops everything and becomes a fruit farmer. "Ambitions, Smoke" tracks the squandered lives of the brightest students from the local schools. In "The People of Kašikara," we are confronted with the lives of the working-class residents of the upper town of Zemun, on the Austro-Hungarian side of the border with Serbia. The story might remind a reader of something by Emile Zola or Ivan Cankar. We encounter coachmen, washerwomen, servants, and day-laborers, cobblers (and other tradespeople), court clerks, and bargemen, as well as a few wealthier veterinarians, government officials, and merchants in the trade on the Danube running between Vienna and the Ottoman Empire. While some of the poor emigrate to America, others dream of owning land and supplement their income by harvesting the nuts of the giant walnut trees on the shady streets and working in the pork export business between Serbia and Austria. Finally, "The Vlaovićes" is a chronicle of a powerful rural family that has died out and is only buried in the town graveyard because of a long-running feud with their village priest. This family is proud and stubborn and spiteful, and its extreme wealth "had no biography" or personality. The townspeople were afraid of them and now tell stories about their strange behavior on their estate and elsewhere.

In conclusion, it is hoped that the publication of this excerpt from "Gospa Nola," which is in turn one of the constituent novellas of the fictional work Kronika palanačkog groblja of 1958, will spark interest in the anglosphere about the rest of her writing. Publication of this extract, which forms the first part of the second part of the novel, will also be a spur to this translator to continue his efforts to translate the entire, extensive book. Born

in Austria-Hungary, Isidora Sekulić lived in a Serbia that was part of two different Yugoslav states during her lifetime. Her career thus spans a very wide, and typically Central European, set of historical and political events. Her colorful biography, often discussed in Serbia but still not researched in full, is considered both inspiring (for her palmary achievements as a female intellectual) and mysterious (her marital status and even her lexical choices). Her ethnography extols the virtues of traditional Serbian nationalism, her fiction celebrates common decency and common sense, her milieux foreground ethnic diversity and multi-culturalism, her personal career path focuses on Western Europe (Germany, England, Norway, France, and Hungary), and her art criticism salutes the achievements of Russia. It is a joyful thing that Isidora Sekulić remains one of the rare Serbian women to have a secure place in that country's literary canon; and one may readily believe that English-speaking audiences will benefit from study and appreciation of her works and ideas as well.

**The source for this translation is: Isidora Sekulić, *Kronika palanačkog groblja* (Novi Sad: Matica ssrpska, 1960). The translator would like to express his thanks to Tereza Bojković and Vesna Stamenković for their help with archaic and rural phrases in this text.

Madam Nola

Isidora Sekulić

Translated in English by: John K. Cox

The tomb of the Lazarić family, although they died out not too long ago, is today a collapsed crypt full of weeds and debris of bricks, granite, and fence-posts. This smashed-up corpse clutched the bases of a few more or less dilapidated grave-top crosses and propelled them up into the air. One of the markers stood out from the others; it was fairly well-preserved and stood straight up, like a mast on a shipwreck. It was the cross of Mrs. Stanojla Lazarićka. It was a handsome display with a boat and a mast. Madam Nola, who sometimes referred to herself as "a lively person," in fact seemed to be on duty still, standing guard over vessels that had run aground, a bunch of little boats that were clinging to her, along with tugboats and barges. In the tomb, besides Madam Nola, there happened to be otherwise only men, including of course her husband, Mr. Toša. All around the grave, and quite a bit farther from the town, were scattered the graves of people who had once been connected to Nola, or to her husband. There, on the hillside, in a cheaper, narrower tomb, lay Madam Nola's sister, the beautiful Julica; with her was her middle husband, the second of three, whom they called the Marquis. The first of her trio, Doctor Mirko, one of the most prominent citizens of the town---there he was, too, beneath a thick layer of ivy, with his wife and son, without any further descendants. Julica's third husband, Marko Popović-Srba, lived until recently on the remnants of Mr. Toša's *salaš*, as they called a farmstead in these parts. He was a once handsome man who had lived a neglected and undignified life. He'd twice undergone operations for cancer. "And what of it? If it's a crab, then at least it's not a lion!" Srba was also already in a graveyard, but it was the one near the *salaš*. And maybe Madam Nola's cross stood so strangely straight and high out of longing for her dear foster son. Along the narrow little path leading away from the Lazarević tomb, one reaches, to the north, the wall between the Orthodox and Catholic graveyards. Here somewhere, along the periphery, people claimed the favorite servant of Mr. Toša was buried, the gardener and dog-handler named Ljuba, who was a witness to the misfortune that had occurred on the farmstead. It was also said he was perhaps a participant in that crime, but later, on account of life's strange pathways, he was a sort of son-in-law to Madam Nola. On the other side of the wall slept his wife, Paula, a Slovak. She was the former housemaid and adopted child of Nola. Also, in the Catholic cemetery--no one knew where any longer--was also buried the knife-grinder with the blue spectacles. Rajnhart was his name, but Madam Nola gave him the nickname Luka. The knife

grinder's wife had been laid to rest in faraway Germany. Next to the small Catholic chapel was interred the very animated parish priest. And there was an invisible cord binding Madam Nola's mast to the skeleton of an Italian beauty from Trieste, who was buried heaven knows where. Near the cemetery well, Madam Nola had buried the unfortunate drunkard of a veterinarian; Pava, the woman veterinarian, ended up here later. And again, by means of another cord, Madam Nola was also tied to the grave, or perhaps the mausoleum, of a famous engineer and professor in Saxony, at one time a little kraut in Madam Nola's household. Onto the hillock in the cemetery, even with Nola's mast, had climbed the always high-flying and highly educated Mr. Joksin, Esquire, the chief judge of the local court. And so on. And today, atop Madam Nola's grave, was the famed dance of shadows. It quivers, it braids together and intersects; it buckles and tears itself free and hovers. No one knows, and no one can see, where the shadows come from, but they come.

It had long been said around the town that Madam Nola had adopted Paula the Slovak. That case was the first in a series that had underscored what kind of heart Nola had. The local newspaper reported that there was to be an eclipse of the sun, and that a nice viewing opportunity would present itself on such and such a day at such and such a time. Madam Nola, both as a business-woman and a zealous church-goer, had a great amount of respect for the sky, and she wanted to watch the eclipse, so she gathered information on the position of the sun according to the windows of her house. She knew, of course, where the east lay. But from early in the spring till deep in the autumn, she, by the time the sun came out, was usually already somewhere on the road, driving to her fields and stables, and very frequently she dozed off just from sitting in the cart. Therefore, she addressed Paula: "Go on now! Show me, but so a person can understand, where the sun is when you spot it from the kitchen." Paula walks directly over to the wrong window. "For God's sake, child. The sun doesn't come up over there! It sets there, towards evening. How in the world do you not know that? Oh, heavens!" Paula blushed. Nola went on: "Good God, I'm going to have to cross myself. So, have you ever seen that window turning red in the morning?" "No, I haven't." "Well, which one does turn red, then? Surely, it's this other one, since there are no others."

Paula was silent. "How can this trip you up so much? Come on, be so kind as to tell me that you see the sun every morning through this window." "I do not see it." Madam Nola paused cautiously. She thought: either the girl is confused by the way I'm grilling her, like in school, or she has heard about the eclipse and is afraid of it. She stroked Paula's cheek, scrutinizing her hair full of ribbons, and said gently: "Is it right, what I said?" "I don't know. The lady

knows.” Madam Nola now hastened out to the hallway, crossed herself once, and then a second time right away, and decided to adopt Paula.

“It's that German church, and that devil of a parish priest! A hundred rosaries and Hail Marys, but she can't see the Lord's sun. She is seventeen years old, and she's been in my household for a year, and every morning she accompanies me out to the green gate, which is right where the morning sun strikes. O God, forgive this old woman her sin. I nourish her body, but I take no interest in her soul. But who can remember to do everything? This beautiful girl of mine follows along in the processions; the nuns taught her how to sew, and she can find any demon lurking in any nook of my house, but she can't see the sun in the sky. You might as well keep her locked in a barn...I must talk with her mother. I will care for her like my own child. I cannot allow this pretty, good-hearted child to stay wild and take beatings from men her whole life.”

For the greater part of her years, Madam Nola led the life of a widow. She did not even pass ten years with a husband, and under ordinary conditions, she only rarely used her husband's name. Somehow, when people were at her grave, memories of Mr. Toša were revived. “Look, I beg you—" said someone. “See what is written on the marker?” Had Lazarić been fated on that day to escort them with Madam Nola’s body, he would be close to a hundred years old. “We didn't think about that, but it wasn't that we didn't know. Had we not, in our younger years, heard so many times that Stanojla Perčinova, over there somewhere across the Serbian-Bosnian border, had married a man more than thirty years her senior.” – “Right you are. And with my own eyes I once saw the odd groom that was Toša, and his odd ‘bride,’ big and strong like a healthy young man...It turned out to be a miracle. And there were misfortunes, but good deeds of the type that seldom come to pass. May God forgive everything to the soul of Madam Nola.”

She did not just look manly; she was a man. “Yes--strict, serious, upright like a man.” “And smart, smart, pal, nobody could match her in that. And so strong that she never knelt, and she valiantly defended herself and others...A man! Only death could dress her like a woman. It's a shame God did not grant her a child of her own.” --Here the pummeling of the earth on the coffin ceased, and one of the people near the edge of the grave said in a very excited voice: “She was a mother, a holy mother! May God be good to her, and merciful, and may she rest in peace.”

When the procession came back down from the grave, the conversation turned into a proper almanac. Out were names, facts and figures,

and anecdotes. They soon arrived, however, at Nola's house, at the famous green gate on the driveway. And now the joking and laughter commenced. "Oh my God, what's going to become of that *štajervagn*? (Madam Nola was inseparable from that yellow two-horse carriage. Old-fashioned, heavily used, narrow, poorly maintained, muddy and dusty, it came creaking out every morning before five, every single day, as sure as the "amen" in a prayer. Madam Nola rode into the fields on it, to her corn, to the mill, to the *salaš*, off to a village. On the way, she pushed her big coarse boot into the coachman's back to get him to stop---to pick up someone and bring them along.) She often took me to the brickyard and to my vegetable garden, which was pretty far out of her way. I'd climb up, and there was room for me to sit next to her, but she didn't miss a beat, didn't budge. It's like I can see her right now. Her shoes were proper army boots; the laces were as thick as your finger. Her outfits, piece by piece--do you remember? A gray skirt, a blouse, and a coat of the same gray fabric, down to her knees. A safety-pin on her back, and through the safety-pin, if it was windy, was attached a wool scarf to keep her back warm. Her black hair, slicked down and pulled together in a tight bun. A little hat on her head, neither masculine nor feminine, and it was gray, too, and meant neither as a flourish nor as protection. What's more, it was all cracked from getting wet and then drying out. Large hands, strong, always without gloves."

She laughed at Josa, the coachman, who, as soon as autumn set in, would put on his woolen mittens: "You put your hands in sheaths, and then you drive like that? The reins slip out of your hands, and the horses have no respect for you!" In the summer, on the seat next to her, was the perpetual trench coat, which she never donned; she just sat on it. An umbrella, dark green in color, enormous, patched, with a thick, banged-up handle with a crook in it. If she is simply passing by one of her fields, she ties the handkerchief onto the top of the umbrella, stands up in the cart, and brandishes this standard a few times, so that the workers could see it and know she is there and that she might come out...But all of it suited her well...I mean, especially that uniform of hers..."Well, her style of grooming eventually grew elaborate. As Madam Nola aged, she hung a pince-nez on a broad black band. My sons, who hung around over there because of Julica, described that pince-nez to me: huge and awe-inspiring, both when it dangled and swayed and when it was planted on her hefty nose. Supposedly, one rascally apprentice attached an old pair of spectacles to a dray horse and said: "And here I give you Madam Nola!"

"Wait, I still need to finish my part. We ride along--we ride, and she seldom utters a single word. She naps, and it's obvious that she's always tired. But tomorrow she will get up with the chickens again. When we get close to

the brickyard, I motion to her with my hand, and she uses her foot to give Josa a sign on his back, and then I jump out. She never shook hands. “All right then, farewell!” she nodded at me, and then she just shouted to Josa: “Josa, the gentleman is leaving. Is there a sparrow hiding beneath your cap?”

On the return trip to the town, Madam Nola couldn't pick up anyone with her cart. It was too full at that point. There were two shops to supply the town and one butcher shop. Together with the coachman, Madam Nola unloaded hampers of eggs, greens, fowl, *rakija*, flour, peasant towels, and blankets. In each arm she clutched a ham, and she delivered them right away to the butchers. She called out to the Hungarian who ran the shop: "Go on and take these, and weigh them, and write it down right away. Or else later on you’ll cheat me,” she joked. “So, let’s agree now on what is mine and what is yours.”

“Eh, we sextons,” the conversation continued, “we know a different Madam Nola. The same cut of her clothing, to be sure, but it was all black and very fine, and our benefactor would appear at the church service punctually, to the minute; she stood in her row there, tall and straight and black, like a *vladika*, one of our bishops. She put good money in the collection bag. For the beggars in front of the church, no matter how many of them there were, she found spare change. Of course, she directed a sharp word to anyone who needed it, but she gave. May God forgive her for the way she treated priests. She loved the church, but she did not love priests, and at the drop of a hat, she would toss off some reprimand at them, but when she saw a church, she donated to it with both hands. You should repair those ripidions. Is it really a matter of indifference to the priest that you carry those clubs around in the church? I will pay, whatever it costs.” -- “Yes, yes, sharp, sharp even in front of the church, and when she comes out of it, too. We, her foremen and servants, came on Sundays, after the liturgy, to settle accounts and make requests.” The place was swarming with peasants, tenant farmers, and middlemen. They complained about each other, and the Jew named Štajn was perpetually complaining about them. There was a ruckus until she approached. As soon as she took up her position before them, everything grew quiet, and every dispute was abandoned. She sized us up and began: “You, Štajn, do not forget that in this house there is no gouging or fleecing. Let us have no more added zeros! And you, Maksa, don’t be like that grandfather clock of yours on the *salaš* that displays one time and strikes another, for I can tell what time you’re showing. I'm coming from church, pal, and I can see through you like glass! It's true! Don't stall, and don’t lie!” And the people spoke truthfully, and everything was cleared up..... [END OF EXCERPT]

Shakespeare as Viewed from Contemporary Critical Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper of mine has a dual purpose. Presuming that reading contemporary Shakespeare criticism is a relatively new field of study in Bangladesh, I have enlisted a number of books on the subject to familiarize the general readers. I have printed this list of books at the end of this essay for those who want to look at it. In the main essay, I mention several essays, but not all, to inform the readers about the critical approaches undertaken in Shakespeare studies today. The technique I have followed here is to discuss the theories in groups rather than as individual theories, making it easier to understand the alignment of critical thoughts on Shakespeare and the non-alignment. Secondly, I would like to give an idea of determining my position as a Shakespeare critic and highlighting my critical views with the support of critics whose ideas I have found relevant to my meaning. What this means will become clear as I progress with the paper.

Jonathan Gil Harris, whose book, Shakespeare and Literary Theory (2010), I have heavily depended on in writing this paper, discusses two critical positions on Shakespeare: the Iagoist and Henryist positions. He begins his "Introduction" by using a speech by Canterbury in King Henry V as an epigraph. This is an attribute to King V's excellent command of oratory, which blends the knowledge of the practical world with the art of theorization: "So that the art and practice part of life / Must be the mistress to his theoric" (1.1.51-52). That is, all human actions are amenable to theorization. On the other hand, Iago condemns Cassio as a "'bookish theoric' given to 'Mere prattle without practice'" (1), meaning theorization without substance.

"For Henryism," says Harris, "all practice—no matter how unselfconsciously—by theory" (2). And Shakespeare and critical theories are, as Harris says, "kissing cousins" (4). Harris quotes Terry Eagleton as saying, "... it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida" (4). Harris also reports the Slovenian

psychoanalytic theorist Slavoj Zizek having said that "Shakespeare without doubt had read Lacan" (4).

Commenting on the inseparability between critical theory and Shakespeare, Harris makes this brilliant conclusion: "Shakespeare and theory do not belong to different times and lands; they are instead kissing cousins, speaking a shared tongue" (4).

Ronald Barthes ends his famous 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author," with "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."[1] That is when the door for the critics opened wide. What Shakespeare meant in his works is less important than how we want to interpret him. The fable of the six blind men going to the zoo to perceive what an elephant looks like is a close analogy to how we view Shakespeare. Therefore, as Greenblatt said, Shakespeare is no longer a unified artist. [2]

Critical theories on Shakespeare have mushroomed over the last hundred years. From foundational studies highlighting Shakespeare's humanism and universalism to psychoanalytical and gender studies, which comment on the peculiarities of gender formation, and cultural and materialistic studies, which focus on the material aspects of human societies, Shakespeare criticism has come to a point where posthumanism and ecocritical studies now call the shots.

For me, wading through this "sea of troubles" (Hamlet, 3.1.59)[3] created by these intensely insightful and scholarly essays and books is a challenging job. But I have found something reassuring. The critics' quest goes in two major directions: should Shakespeare be studied singularly by his texts, or should he be studied by considering other extra-textual factors? All the major critical interpretations fall into these two divisions, this way or that way. For instance, the textual criticisms include formalism, universalism,

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[1] In Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, Edited by David Lodge. Revised and expanded by Nigel Wood (Harlow, England: Longman, 1988, 2000), 150.

[2] See his General Introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

[3] All the quotations from Shakespeare's works refer to the following edition: The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works: Revised Edition, Edited by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan; Consultant Editor Harold Jenkins (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1998).

structuralism, new criticism, close reading, textualism, deconstruction, character studies, etc. And the extra-textual interpretations will call for new historicism, cultural materialism, psychoanalysis, feminism, queer theory, Marxism, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, ecocritical theory, mimetic desire theory, ecofeminist theory, posthumanism, cognitive ethology studies, and so on. Another way to assess them is to recognize that many of these theories are aligned ideologically and thematically, and are different only in degrees.

My Position as a Shakespearean Critic

This paper aims to speak about the dominant interests I have accrued from this hard-boiled critical world. It will be found that I am in favour of a non-formalist approach. Why? Well, as Said concocted the word 'orientalist' for those European scholars who wanted to view the East as they imagined it, I may pose as an orientalist in the reverse order. As Professor Serajul Islam Chowdhury once quipped, the students of English studies are Macaulay's grandchildren, so is or is not my position as a critic of Shakespeare. But this allegation cannot be sustained anymore as English studies and Shakespeare have become both global and glocal phenomena, and millions of Shakespeare idolaters are there like me, whose first language is not English, and like me, many of whom are not colonized as my forefathers were. Ian Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (1961; in English translation 1964), is an iconic non-English, non-colonized figure, from whose position my critical position is not different.

Yet, Iago's speech, "I know our country disposition well" (Othello, 3.3.196-207; 204), resonates with me, and it hurts me too. Yes, as much as Othello is a stranger to Venice, I am also a truant visitor to the world of Shakespeare.

Atef Laouyene, in his essay, "'I am no Othello. I am a lie': Shakespeare's Moor and the Post-Exotic in Taleb Salih's Seasons of Migration to the North" (2008) brings in David Kastan to highlight Talib Salih's situation, which is similar to my feelings about Shakespeare. Kastan is quoted as saying, "What value Shakespeare has for us must, then, at least begin with the recognition of his difference from us; only then can we be sure that what

we hear are his concerns rather than the projections of our own."[4] Sure enough, Kastan speaks about two situations across time: Shakespeare's and mine. Laouyene's further paraphrasing helps: "While admitting that this kind of critique stems from a 'historical naivete', Kastan suggests that it is also emblematic of an unwavering commitment to the 'situatedness of the critic' whose 'presentist' attitude determines his or her negotiation with the past."[5]

Miguel Ramalhete Gomes gives a more succinct definition of presentist studies: "... presentism has sought...to complement historical work with an equally complex awareness of the importance of the critic's own context in shaping Shakespearean criticism."[6]

That is fine, so far as the difference in time between Shakespeare and Kastan, Laouyene, or me exists. But I am like Othello, from a far-off country and a different culture and language, whose exposure to Shakespeare happened because of the colonial past of the subcontinent. So, I am a global as well as a presentist (glocal) respondent.

For me, Shakespeare has not only travelled through time but also space and culture, as Alexa Alice Joubin emphasizes: "The transnational cultural flows go beyond the scope of geopolitical divisions of nation-states and cultural profiling." [7]

However, to particularize Shakespeare in the paradigm of global English studies, we should include translation, adaptation, appropriation, dramatization, filmization, and redaction studies.

I have translated eleven of Shakespeare's plays in Bengali prose, though in the early phase of the colonial rule, Lala Sitaram (1861-1937) was what Macaulay would have liked to see. He translated Shakespeare's six plays in Urdu and fourteen in Hindi. In his preface, he said that the idlers of India had better read Shakespeare to learn "the tenderness of Cordelia, the fortitude

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[4] In *Native Shakespeare: Indigenous Appropriations on a Global Stage,* Eds. Craig Deonne & Parmita Kapadia (Surrey, England: Ashgate 2008), 213-232, 214.

[5] *Native Shakespeare,* 214.

[6] *Native Shakespeare,* 233.
[7] *Native Shakespeare,* 248.

of Edgar, the fidelity of Kent and the heroism of Henry V."[8] My allegiance to Shakespeare can thus be seen as historically subsumed. And translation plays an ambassadorial role. In an extended effort, I have also, in English, edited, annotated with lengthy introductions, three Shakespearean plays for Albatross Publications, Dhaka, which are as follows: *As You Like It*, *Hamlet,* and *Macbeth.*

The Double-Fold Critical Approach:

Universalism/ Humanism/ Formalism/ New Criticism vs New Historicism/ Psychoanalysis/ Queer Theory/ Feminism/ Marxism

Based on Ben Jonson's famous eulogical line on Shakespeare, "He was not of an age, but for all time,"[9] hundreds of quotations, like "To be, or not to be" (*Hamlet,* 3.1.56), or "Cowards die many times before their deaths, / And the valiant never taste of it but once" (*Julius Caesar,* 2.2.32-33) or "The world is mine oyster" (*The Merry Wives of Windsor,* 2.2.2) can easily be decontextualized from his works and applied to any conceivable human situation of any culture, age and country. Shakespeare, of course, is not unique in this respect. All great writers have these virtues of universality in their works.

Secondly, Karen Raber, "Posthumanist studies,"[10] traces the birth of humanism back to the Roman Architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (80 BCE to 15 BCE), who said, in his masterpiece, *De Architectura,* that the human body was the most proportionate entity in the world. In 1490, Leonardo Da Vinci drew the figure of the Vitruvian Man in a circle and a square. The Renaissance ideal of humanism, that is, human-centredness, was born. Hamlet uttered in 1601: "What a piece of work is a man...the paragon of all animals" (2.2.305 ff.). Despite Hamlet's reference to man's reduced status as "this quintessence of dust" (2.2.310), man's exceptionality was recognized at the expense of all

[8] Harish Trivedi, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1933), 18. This is a must-read book for Shakespeare enthusiasts in the subcontinent.

[9] Used as the epigraph by Greenblatt in his General Introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare,* 1.

[10] *The Arden Research Handbook of Contemporary Shakespeare Criticism,* Edited by Evelyn Gajowsky, 2021, 292-304.

other organisms. With a further elevation of this image in the eighteenth century, that is the Age of Reason, allowing a bifurcation between the mind and the body, where the body was reduced to, as Hamlet says, "That flesh is heir to" (3.1.63), by the nineteenth century, however, the human supremacy was challenged in the Romantic poetry (Wordsworth, etc.) and paintings (Gainsborough and Constable), where an adoration for nature was conceived as the recognition of the fact that the humans could not be at the centre and was instead a part of the great ecological world. The Vitruvian Man was actually a Vitruvian Straw. It was further noticed that the Vinci man was a white European, neither a black nor a woman. In reaction, theories like Ecocritical, Antihumanism, and Posthumanism were developed to confirm the zoological ordinary identity of the human.

In the Shakespearean critical field, however, the humanist purchase ran fine for a couple of centuries, but a searching interest grew to connect Shakespeare's writings with the age in which he lived. Some advanced critical views, however, maintain that such a quest to find traces of his life in his writings is futile, and rather they can be derived from other sources and documents. My point here is that though it is impossible to reconstruct a replica of what Shakespeare meant, the critics' desire is to attempt to understand Shakespeare's life and writings in tandem accurately. Stephen Greenblatt, the proponent of the groundbreaking new historicist theory, famously opened the first chapter of his seminal book, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), thus: "I began with the desire to speak with the dead."[11]

While Greenblatt's critical engagement with Shakespeare has excavated the extra-literary sources to put Shakespeare in a historical perspective, on a fictional level, writers have also attempted to recreate a verisimilitude of Shakespeare as he might have lived. Maggie O'Farrell won the "2020 Women's Prize for Fiction" by writing *Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague,* in which she vividly describes the last moments of Hamnet's death, through which we get a glimpse of the father that Shakespeare was.[12]

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[11] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 1.

[12] Maggie Farrell, *Hamnet: A Novel of the Plague* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 229: "He [Shakespeare, but unnamed in the novel] moves quickly across the room and pulls back the cloth. And there is his son's face before him, a blue-white lily-flower, eyes sealed shut, lips pursed, as if the boy is displeased, unimpressed by what has taken place.

Greenblatt, in his 2004 biography of Shakespeare, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare,* writes about the connection between Shakespeare's acting as Hamlet's father's Ghost and the deaths of Hamnet, his son at the age of eleven, and his father, which anticipates O'Farrell's poignant description.[13]

This correspondence between critical and creative biographies resonates with my understanding of the role of a writer's critic. Rather than focusing on the universalized aspects, my natural bent is to explore the life and society of a writer's age to glean a deeper insight from his writings.

This biographical approach may directly contrast with the formalist approach, where every meaning must come from the text and whatever is printed between the two covers. One good example of formalist criticism is Cleanth Brooks's study of the child image in *Macbeth'*s soliloquy: "And pity like a naked new-born babe" (1.7.21). Commenting on the simile of pity imagined as a naked boy, he views that the language is paradoxical as the child is suggesting both the newborn's helplessness and the angelic power: " . . is Pity like the human and helpless babe, or powerful as the angel that rides the winds?"[14]

Like Brooks, the structuralists, led by famous figures like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Ludwig Wittgenstein, etc., tended to maintain that words become a font of undecidedness, to use a term that gestures towards the persistent wavering at the heart of linguistic meaning. Referring to words and their meanings not always carrying one-to-one fixed correspondences, Harris refers to Feste/Clown in *Twelfth Night* for saying: "a sentence is but a cheveral glove to a good wit, how quickly the wrong side may be turned outward" (3.1.12-13). When Juliet, from her balcony, desperately utters to

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"The father cups a hand to the son's chill cheek. His fingers hover, trembling, over the bruise on his brow. He says, No, no, no. He says, God in Heaven. And, then, crouching low, over the boy, he whispers: How did this happen to you?"

[13] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 322: "Enacting the purgatorial spirit who demands that the living listen carefully to his words—'lend thy serious hearing / To what I shall unfold' (*Hamlet,* 1.5.5-6)—Shakespeare must have conjured up within himself the voice of his dead son, the voice of his dying father, and perhaps too his own voice, as it would sound when it came from the grave. Small wonder that it would have been his best role."

[14] Cleanth Brooks, "The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness," in *Harold Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages,* Macbeth, *edited with an introduction by Harold Bloom, Volume Editor: Janyce Marson* (New Delhi: Viba Books, 2010), 253.

Romeo, who is standing below, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (2.2.43-44), she helps linguistics like Saussure to stress the undecidability of the meanings of words. In a short distance from here, Rene Girard's theory of 'mimetic desire' acknowledges the structural inevitability of human emotion. For instance, Romeo's passion for Juliet conflicts with Juliet's parents' choice of Paris as her would-be husband. So, a love triangle is structurally formed where Romeo must desire to outdo Paris's bid for Juliet, even though it might turn him into a martyr of love. Girard's idea of scapegoating can also be applied to the play by conceiving that for the strife between the families of the Montagues and the Capulets, the lovers are made the scapegoats.[15]

New Criticism also falls into this formalist and structuralist category, of which *Theory of Literature* (1949), written jointly by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, is a representative book. They quote W. T. Stace as saying, "... the play *Othello* is not about jealousy but about Othello's jealousy, the particular kind of jealousy a Moor married to a Venetian might feel."[16] Stace recognizes the play's racist basis, but he refuses to generalize it as a clashing point between two cultures. His view is not far off from that of Bradley, a famous formalist and character-based critic, who viewed Shakespeare's handling of Othello's character from a non-racialist perspective, saying that Shakespeare would have laughed if anybody told him that his portrayal of Othello was very accurate as a Moor. Bradley implies that Shakespeare was just creating a character named Othello, whose racial identity was merely incidental.[17]

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[15] Mimetic desire issues out of a competitive zeal. One person desires to imitate another person in gaining a thing. Girard applies his theory of scapegoating to a situation where there is no difference between two contending figures—undifferentiation takes place—and in such a situation someone else is to be blamed for the impasse and that someone is the scapegoat. Harris, 36: "This is often done through an act of arbitrary violence against a scapegoat who is blamed for the undifferentiation, and who is made to carry its burden by being killed or banished."

[16] Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: A Harvest Book: Harcourt Brace & World Inc. 1949), 32.

[17] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Third Edition with a New Introduction by John Russell Brown, Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1904;1992), 159: "I do not mean that Othello's race is a matter of no account. . . . It makes a difference to our idea of him; it makes a difference to the action and catastrophe. But in regard to the essentials of his character it is not important; and if anyone had told Shakespeare that no

Greenblatt's interpretation is just the opposite. His New Historicist approach also merges with the Reader's Response Approach, when he views the problem of Othello from a racial perspective. In "The Improvisation of Power,"[18] Greenblatt says that Iago makes Othello a victim of the rhetoric that he is a converted Christian, and culturally, he is not a white Venetian, but a Moor from North Africa. He constructs the idea that Desdemona will become impatient with Othello because of their race, age, and cultural gaps, and will go for "some second choice" (2.1.232-233). Capitalizing on it, Iago injects the seed of suspicion into Othello: "Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio" (3.3.200).

When he realizes that he has brought Othello completely under control, he proceeds, according to Greenblatt, to improvise an idea gathered from old theological texts that even adultery can be committed by a legally married couple if they are sexually too forward.[19] Greenblatt's idea here is that Iago has not only aroused Othello's suspicion about Desdemona's loyalty but has also improvised that his married life is tantamount to sin as he has prioritized his lust over modesty. And who is responsible for turning his modesty into lust? Of course, Desdemona. So, Desdemona must be removed as a sinner, for she has betrayed him twofold: she had established a liaison with Cassio and turned Othello into a sinner too.[20]

Englishman would have acted like the Moor, and had congratulated him on the accuracy of his racial psychology, I am sure he would have laughed."

[18] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago a£nd London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, 2005), 222-254.

[19] Greenblatt quotes Saint Jerome, who said "An adulterer is he who is too ardent a lover of his wife" (248). Then he mentions Saint Jerome quoting from Seneca: "All love of another's wife is shameful; so too, too much love of your own…. Nothing is fouler than to love a wife like an adultress" (248). Calvin is also quoted: The "man who shows no modesty or comeliness in conjugal intercourse is committing adultery with his wife" (248). The "*King's Book*, attributed to Henry VIII, informs its readers that in lawful matrimony a man may break the Seventh Commandment 'and live unchaste with his own wife, if he do unmeasurably or inordinately serve his or her fleshly appetite or lust'." (248)

[20] "This moment of erotic intensity, this frank acceptance of pleasure and submission to her spouse's pleasure, is, I would argue, as much as Iago's slander the cause of Desdemona's death, for it awakens the deep current of sexual anxiety that with Iago's

A similar feeling is also expressed by Hugh Quarshie, the great Ghana-born non-white RSC actor of Shakespeare, who, in his speech delivered at the Shakespearean Conference in Barcelona, said that Shakespeare wrote *Othello* with racial prejudice. He says he, therefore, never acted as Othello to avoid subscribing to Shakespeare's racist perceptions. (But I found out much later that he performed as Othello, maybe, after, he wrote the essay, "Second Thoughts About *Othello*").[21]

To come back to Greenblatt, he actually proposes this brilliant theory of improvisation against the orientalist Daniel Lerner, who theorized that the success of the Western imperial powers was due to their superiority as a race to other races. Greenblatt flatly refuses this racist supremacist interpretation and comes out with the idea that, like Iago, who is a member of Western societies, the European imperial powers also exerted an improvisational quality wherever they went to plant colonies. We can supplement this idea by referring to the divide-and-rule policy improvised by the British in ruling India by enforcing a communal divide between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Greenblatt's contention with John Dover Wilson, a vanguard of old historicism and a pioneer of New Criticism, can also be noted to show the difference between New Criticism and New Historicism. Wilson edited the Cambridge New Shakespeare edition of *Richard II* (1595) in 1939, and in his Introduction, he left this perception that the usurpation of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke was just a formality of power handover, and it did not worry Shakespeare's Queen Elizabeth. But Greenblatt, evoking the exchange between history and literature, said that firstly, Elizabeth likened herself to Richard II[22], and, secondly, the play was demanded by a group of Earl of Essex's supporters, led by Sir Gelly Meyrick, who approached Shakespeare's company, Lord Chamberlain's Men with a payment of 40 shillings on top of

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help expresses itself in quite orthodox fashion as the perception of adultery." (*Renaissance Self-fashioning,* 250)

[21] Hugh Quarshie, "Second Thoughts About *Othello*," 1999: International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper No. 7 (Clouds Hill Printers, Chipping Campden). Quoting " . . . Iago's statement, 'These Moors are changeable in their wills' (1.3.348), Quarshie opines that "Of all the parts in the canon, perhaps Othello is the one which should most definitely not be played by a black actor." (5)

[22] John Dover Wilson, ed. *Richard II* (Cambridge University Press, 1939, 2009), Introduction xxxii: Elizabeth reportedly told her librarian, William Lambarde, in August 1601: "I am Richard II, know you not that? . . . This tragedy was played forty times in open streets and houses."

their regular charge of £10 to stage an special performance of *Richard II* on the eve of the coup on February 7, 1601. The rebellion failed, but the investigation prompted the authorities to question the company, though Shakespeare was spared. So, Greenblatt emphasizes that while Wilson ahistorically concludes his argument in favour of keeping fiction as fiction, he discusses this as an instance of how fiction relates to the real world.[23]

In *Shakespearean Negotiations,* Greenblatt studies *King Lear* in "Shakespeare and the exorcists," and observing the language of Tom o'Bedlam, that is, Edgar, he concludes that Shakespeare must have read the book *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) by Samuel Harsnett. The book was written against the fake Catholic practices of exorcism, by which, in the name of driving away witches from the supposedly possessed people, the Catholic priests spread their influence on the faithful. But the practices were pure and simple forgery, where certain made-up rituals were acted out to impress the patient and the public watching the exorcist's performance. There was nothing genuine but all fraud, and with the transition of England from the Catholic Queen Mary to the Protestant Elizabeth, these Catholic rituals were forbidden. Harshnett's book was a strong protest against these fake practices. However, by emphasizing that Shakespeare might have read it, Greenblatt suggests that what intrigued Shakespeare about these practices was how these false techniques induced the spectators' interest and suspense. As the stage was a playground for sustaining suspense, Greenblatt opines that what was banned on religious grounds, or these practices being evacuated of their original religious significance, was revived by Shakespeare as a perfect ploy for stage activities.[24] This is how the background source becomes a powerful tool for judging a literary product, not in isolation but in the context of a conglomeration of social factors.

Such brilliant connections, however, were considered inadequate or confined to mere conjectures by critics like John Drakakis, a quasi-cultural textualist critic, who raised the question, in "Intention and Editing" (2010) about Greenblatt's propriety in conjecturing that the reference to the mermaid

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[23] Stephen Greenblatt, *Tyrant: Shakespeare on Politics* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), 15-23, 17-18.

[24] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations,* 94-128: "Because with our full complicity Shakespeare's company and scores of companies that followed have created profitably to our desire for spectacular impostures" (128).

sitting on a dolphin (*AMND,* 2.1.149-154)[25] grew out of Shakespeare's memory of his visit to Kenilworth to watch a performance with his father when he was a boy.[26] Drakakis says, we do not know whether Shakespeare had gone on such a visit; there is no concrete document either, so Greenblatt has inferred an episode that may not have happened.[27]

W. H. Auden, known for his anti-biographical stance, wrote a sonnet about Shakespeare's life, highlighting that what happened between Shakespeare and his wife is perhaps unwarranted for critical writings.[28] Like

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[25] *AMND,* 2.1. 149 ff: Oberon: "Since once I sat upon a promontory, / And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back."

[26] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004). Greenblatt guesses that the Queen's Men visited Stratford in 1569, the Earl of Leicester's Men in 1573, and the Earl of Warwick's Men in 1573, all of whom were looked after by John Shakespeare as the Mayor. And about the source of the dolphin reference in *AMND,* Greenblatt writes: "In the single most extravagant entertainment Leicester staged for the queen during her long stay, a twenty-four-foot-long mechanical dolphin rose up out of the waters of the lake adjacent to the castle." (30, 46)

[27] John Drakakis, "Intention and Editing," *Style:* Volume 44, No. 3, Fall 2010, 365: "Greenblatt's own narrative is hedged around with 'seems,' 'maybes,' etc., to the point where we can see the writer being progressively seduced by the very fiction he is in the process of creating. We do not know if Shakespeare knew about this particular entertainment; we do not know whether he had watched it as a boy; we do not know if his father ever took him to this spectacle; we do not know what contemporaries thought about an eight-mile trip from Stratford to Kenilworth."

[28] A shilling life will give you all the facts:
How father beat him, how he ran away,
What were the struggles of his youth, what acts
Made him the greatest figure of his day:
Of how he fought, fished, hunted, worked all night,
Though giddy, climbed new mountains: named a sea:
Some of the last researchers even write
Love made him weep his pints like you and me.

With all his honours on, he sighed for one
Who, say astonished critics, lived at home;
Did little jobs about the house with skill
And nothing else; could whistle; would sit still
Or potter round the garden: answered some
Of his long marvellous letters but kept none.

the poet's wife's indifference to his fame, his life may be of no importance to us in judging his works, because many unfounded conjectures take place.

Like new historicism, feminism is a study of culture rather than the text for the signified language only. Iago's pejorative line about women: "They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown" (3.3.206-207) is a nuanced repetition of Hamlet's now rather infamous line: "Frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146). But Elaine Showalter in her landmark essay, "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism" (1985) argues that Ophelia has been misrepresented by the subsequent ages as epitomized by the great nineteenth-century painter John Everett Millais, where she rather is shown as a beautiful corpse who has lost her agency due to her being a woman. That is, Ophelia's situation is compromised in the succeeding phases of criticism by the traditional male view of women, failing in love, becoming subjected to neural attacks, that is, becoming insane: "These Pre-Raphaelite images were part of a new and intricate traffic between images of women and madness in late nineteenth-century literature, psychiatry, drama and art."[29]

A few years later, after this essay was published, Janet Adelman, in her pathbreaking book, *Suffocating Mothers* (1992), articulated that in King Lear, the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia may be treated as another instance of how the patriarchal values sanitize the rebelliousness of the females. Cordelia who was a strong character in the earlier parts of the play is made to shed off all her spiritedness and succumbs to Lear's (a male progeny) customized view of daughter, which he expected to find in Cordelia, 'tenderness,' but which he did not find in the kingdom-dividing scene: "So young and so untender?" (1.1.108).[30]

W. H. Auden, *Selected Poems,* ed. by Edward Mendelson (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979), 32.

[29] Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism," 85.

[30] Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origins in Shakespeare's Plays,* Hamlet *to* The Tempest (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 1992),125: "Insofar as the Cordelia of 1.1. is silenced, insofar as we feel the Cordelia who returns more as an iconic presence answering Lear's terrible need than as a separate character with her own needs, Shakespeare is

All these above complaints can be summed up by referring to Virginia Woolf, the arch-feminist critic of the first generation, who said in "Shakespeare's Sister" (1929) that if Shakespeare had a sister with equal talent, she would never have shone like Shakespeare simply because she was a woman.[31] For Woolf, as Harris says, "Material conditions are paramount in fostering creativity."[32]

Queer Theory /Psychoanalysis/Materialism

From feminism to materialism is a short walk. With Petruchio's utterance in *The Taming of the Shrew,* "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua" (1.2.74), all romantic comedies in Shakespeare thematically turn into the mode of marriage proving a gateway to fortune for young men. Young lovers like Lysander, Bassanio, Orlando, and Ferdinand all fall into this group of fortune seekers through marriage.

But Petruchio's forceful dominance over Katherina is redeemed by intense love and mutuality of feelings. Petruchio admits that his cruel behaviour is only a surface matter: "This is a way to kill a wife with kindness" (4.1.196) or Katherina's long reconciling speech at the end, 5.2.137-180, about "her loving lord" (161), has given this idea to the gender critics that the cross-exchange of feelings between the genders was also experimented by Shakespeare through the use of disguise. Rosalind as Ganymede in *As You Like It* says: "I could find in my heart to disgrace my man's apparel and to cry like a woman" (2.4.4-5). Going beyond the significance of being a stage device, her disguise makes Rosalind recognize the presence of him and her in

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complicit in Lear's fantasy, rewarding him for his suffering by remaking for him the Cordelia he had wanted all along."

[31] Virginia Woolf, "Shakespeare's Sister," this passage quoted by Harris, 110: "Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there complete by themselves. . . fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground . . . fiction is like a spider's web attached so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often attachment is scarcely perceptible; Shakespeare's plays, for instance, seem to hang there completely by themselves. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in midair by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in." (Woolf 1929, 3-4)

[32] Harris, 108.

herself, which conforms to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the queer theoretician, who claims that Shakespeare's sonnets play into the inbetweeners of 'he' and 'she': " . . . the master mistress of my passion" (Sonnet 20, 2).

This psychological cross-gender fixation is the basis for Freud's notion of the Oedipus Complex. An infant grows an automatic fascination for his/her opposite parent, and grows a sense of rivalry with his/her same-sex parent.[33] Why does Hamlet not take revenge at once on Claudius? Based on this mother-fixation tendency by a male child, Freud theorizes that Hamlet feels his rivalry towards his father, as the possessor of his mother, has been materialized by his uncle, who killed his father and has been playing a substitute role for him (Hamlet).

While for Freud, sexuality precedes the societal factors, for Lacan, Melanie Klein, and Michel Foucault, human instinct is not atavistic; it is socially determined. More like a deconstructionist, Lacan believed in the loose connection between the signifier and the signified. Referring to Polonius's question, "What do you read, my lord?" and Hamlet's retort: "Words, words, words" (2.2.191-2), Lacan comments, as paraphrased by Harris, that "For Lacan... signifiers always slide away from meaning to other signifiers."[34] Similarly, Melanie Klein conceives of the 'Object Relations Theory' by which she entertains the idea that an infant's first fascination goes towards his/her mother's breast. She mentions the 'good breast' as having positively sustained the child's growth, implying that human consciousness develops through the orientation of the objects in his/her surroundings. Soon, however, because of external factors, he/she develops a destructive impulse out of envy and jealousy. H/She feels dispossessed. Othello's turning from a loving husband into an uxoricide is what Klein implies by envy created from a plot of

[33] Harris, 77: "Freud famously called this infantile nexus of sexual longing, aggression, and repression the 'Oedipus complex'. The name derives from Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus, deserted at birth by his royal parents and brought up by shepherds, kills a man whom he does not know but who turns out to be his biological father, and has sexual relations with a woman who is, also unbeknownst to him, his biological mother. Finding out what he has done, Oedipus blinds himself, a punishment that Freud reads as a displaced form of castration."

[34] Harris, 96.

jealousy.[35] Foucault has given the same idea about our psychological orientation. Foucault refers to Lady Macbeth's somnambulism, explaining that her social position causes her symptoms, and the recriminations she encounters are society's disciplining and marginalizing processes.[36]

Marxist Materialism: Commodity Fetishism and Reification, or money gives the alienated ability to mankind.

Karl Marx refers to *Timon of Athens* in his essay "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society" (1844). Timon accidentally comes across hidden gold in the ground and digs it out with an accompanying soliloquy: "What is here? / Gold? Yellow, glittering precious gold?" (4.3.25 ff). Harris summarizes Marx's comment on this incident: "For Marx, Timon's speech shows a transhistorical awareness of how money enables people to become their opposites based on their ability to buy what they do not have. It is thus the 'alienated *ability of mankind*' [sic], the '*truly creative power'* [sic] that allows anyone who has it to convert mere thought into action."[37] This leads to commodity fetishism as human agency is given to the commodity.

In *King John,* the Bastard makes the most pointed comment on the efficaciousness of the commodity: "The smooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling commodity, / Commodity, the bias of the world . . . / This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word" (2.2.573-574, 582).

This can be tagged with Georg Lukacs's idea, given in his book, *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), that this kind of economic transaction reifies the objects in the same way as the Marxist concept of commodity fetishism.

The crown, for instance, is a good example of both commodity fetishism and reification. We see the usurpers chasing it: King John, Claudius, Macbeth, Prince Bolingbroke, the usurper brothers in the comedies, Duke

[35] Harris, 88: "The play's title character destroys the object he loves—Desdemona—and this typifies for Klein the way in which jealousy betrays the workings of an envy that is little more than greed stimulated by fear."

[36] Harris, 180: " 'Lady Macbeth's delirium reveals to those 'who have known what they should not' words long uttered only to 'dead pillows'" (Foucault 1973, 30).

[37] Harris, 148.

Shifting the Social Identity: Passing as a Categorisation of the Self in a Stratified Society in Langston Hughes' Short Fiction

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Abstract

Racial Passing can be viewed as a conscious masquerade by the African-American mulatto to shift their categorisation in the society, in pursuit of opportunities and acceptance. Through the analysis of Langston Hughes' short fiction, "Passing" and "Who's Passing for Who?", this research article seeks to interrogate the politics of racial pretense and the rationale behind it. Drawing from the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner, and W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of "double-consciousness" this study delineates the manner in which the coloured population responds to a threatened selfhood in a stratified society. In the first story, Passing is observed as a subversion of racism, and the second story expands the horizon of the same from merely a racial masquerade to a garb of social behaviour. The stories viewed in the light of the aforementioned theories aid in exploring and explicating the perplexity and the woes experienced by the mixed-race American due to their dual heritage and an ambiguous identity. The analysis puts forth the argument that though the coloured population was "passing" in the strive for opportunities, the veil came at the cost of alienation from one's home and heritage. It also aims to depict the tragic fate and the tumult of the African-American mulatto in light of the confusion created due to the indistinctness in the colour-line, due to the act of Passing.

Keywords: Social-Identity Theory, racial passing, double-consciousness, identity, Langston Hughes

Introduction

The Reconstruction era brought with itself legal rights for the Black American; however, the privileges and opportunities continued to belong to the White population (Bullock 79). Even as late as the Harlem Renaissance, the social conditions upheld a barrier against racial equality and served to implement discrimination through laws of segregation, such as the Jim Crow alongside hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. The Coloured folk were free

from the ties of slavery but not from the shackles of racism and oppression, meaning that they were only "quasi-free", thrust in the middle ground where they were "not Chattel, not Free" (Hornsby 105). Thus, the Coloured people found themselves in a quagmire, unable to decipher if they were chained or not. The Mulatto, here is the epitome of life on the Colour line, divided not only by his/her skin colour and race, but also by the roots of his family. Thus, in striving for opportunities, "the light-skinned mulattos started to cross the 'barrier' that was set up between black and white societies" and began to Pass for White (Watson 2).

The Mulatto, generally defined as the descendant of a Black and a White individual, is specifically termed as a "cultural hybrid, as a stranded personality living in the margins of fixed status" by the sociologists (Bullock 78). Always struggling between two different identities originating from two different cultures and races, the Mulatto is termed to be a "normal biological occurrence but a sociological problem in the United States" (78). The traumas of the Coloured American often position them as the "Tragic Mulatto" in literature, where the phrase often denotes a bi-racial character, mostly the offspring of a White father and a Coloured Mother. Often light-skinned, the Mulatto is depicted to suffer hardships due to his/her mixed-blood identity (p.78). Due to their fair skin, the Mulattos often indulged in the act of Passing, where the Coloured people often pretended to be White. Passing has often been described as the act of "crossing the colour line", especially in the postbellum era when the "black bourgeoisie" aspired to "Whiteness" and the privileges that came along with it (Watson 1-3).

The works of the Harlem Renaissance writer, Langston Hughes, often discuss the themes of the tragic Mulatto and racial Passing, in addition to discussing ideas of identity, humour, hardships, and much more. Being a versatile expert in the realm of writing, Hughes was all, "a journalist, historian, essayist, translator, playwright, lyricist, founder of a theatre group, and editor" (Brown 253). Interestingly, the themes of the Mulatto and Passing are spread across all forms of his art. He discusses the tumult of the Mulatto in his poems "Cross" (1925), and "Mulatto" (1927), his short stories "An African Morning" (1952) and "Father and Son" (1934) which was written from the plot of his play with the same name as his poem, "Mulatto" (1935) and further crafted into an opera called "The Barrier" (1949). (Davis, 1955, p.195). The theme of Passing has also been explored in his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940), his poems "Cross" and "Passing" (1925), his short stories "Passing" (1934) and "Who's Passing for Who" (1952), his novels and plays are also adept with the traces of the same (Bennett, 2000, 670). Though the themes often intersect as

they originate from the same source, there is a fine line of distinction between them. While the Mulatto does not always refer to an individual Passing; "the Passing figure is a subset of the Mulatto" (Alolaiwi 298). The selected stories are observed to depict the fate of the "tragic mulatto" and the description of Passing as both a justification from the ones in a garb and a conflicting social obligation to survive. Though this research article only focuses on two short stories from the literary oeuvre of Hughes, it must be noted that the aforementioned themes are not confined only to the selected works.

The two forthcoming sections analyse Hughes' "Passing" (1934) and "Who's Passing for Who?" (1952) respectively, in light of the Social Identity theory and the 1903 Duboisian model of "double consciousness" (Turner& Tajfel, 1986; Bois 2007). The basis of the former is that one's identity is defined by the social category one belongs to, and this group "provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category- a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept" (Hogg et al. 259). Thus, the social identity becomes a protocol for "self-regulation", governing one's behaviour, thoughts, and feelings, also leading to stereotypical "in-group" and "out-group" behaviours (260). In the African-American context, if the Mulatto associates with the Coloured social group, he/she would regulate one's behaviour similarly to the patterns noticed in the group. However, if the Mulatto chooses to Pass to be White, or shift the social identity, the behavioural patterns would change accordingly. It is vital to note that, as per the theory of Turner and Tajfel, this shift occurs in the case of a "threatened social identity", which may be the case with the marginalised groups or, in the scope of the research, the African-American individual, specifically (Worchel et al. 19). This deliberate shift of identity, however, raises the question of the person's knowledge of the change. This consciousness of looking at oneself through the glance of an outsider in America is described by W.E.B. Du Bois in his The Souls of Black Folk (1903) as "Double Consciousness" (8). In the tumult of a twoness, the Coloured person measures himself against the scale of "a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity", or the White world (8). The "American Negro", finding himself in both social groups, attempts to uphold his dual identity without losing sight of any (9). In other words, the Mulatto's association with two different social groups came with the power and the simultaneous confusion of social shift and fluctuation.

The aforementioned stories, in light of the theories in question, depict that racial Passing emerges from a tumult of identity due to their "double-consciousness", and leads to a conscious shift in social categorisation in pursuit of opportunities otherwise reserved for the White population of the society. Focusing on the politics of Passing as a defence mechanism in a racist

society, the stories seek to question if the masquerade is merely limited to a racial crossing of the colour-line, or does it also expand to pretence and behavioural shifts as a means of "social comparison" (Worchel et al. 20). Through the response of the protagonists to the stratified society, this study interrogates what is of prime importance to the Mulatto, one's identity, home, and heritage, or social elevation and acceptance.

"Passing"

Written in the form of a letter by a son to his mother, this short story depicts the tale of Jack, a Coloured man Passing to be White. Though referred to as the "shallow offspring's apologies", the letter justifies the masquerade that the marginalised section of society had to put up to attain the basic rights of a citizen and equality in one's profession (Mayberry15). Jack begins with a tone of self-condemnation, calling himself a "dog" for not speaking to his own mother on the street, justifying that he would have done it if he didn't have a girl along (Hughes 46). Thus, suggesting that it wasn't merely a career, but one's social life and prospects of love that were hampered by being Coloured in America. He highlights that he wouldn't have to Pass to keep a "good job" if the White people liked their Coloured counterparts, but they simply assumed the latter to be "thieves and liars, or else diseased—consumption and syphilis" (46). This serves as an appropriate example of the reaction of a group with a "lower subjective status" in comparison to the others, which Tajfel and Turner discuss in great detail in their 1986 chapter "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour" (Worchel et al. 19). The reaction of Jack refers to the aspect of "Individual Mobility", wherein:

> Individuals may try to leave, or dissociate themselves from their erstwhile group. This is probably more likely the more they approach "social mobility" pole of the continuum of belief-systems…This strategy usually implies attempts, on an individual basis, to achieve upward social mobility, to pass from a lower-status to a higher-status group. (19)

In other words, Jack had perceived the "Black" world to be the "lower-status group" and the "White" world, due to the presence of opportunities, and dominance over the former, as the "higher-status group". In light of this, he decided to completely dissociate himself from his mother, his Coloured family, and his roots.

However, on shifting the group and beginning to Pass, he comes to know of this "false propaganda" and the terrible tales being circulated about

his people (Hughes 46). This draws towards the assertion of Tajfel and Turner that the evaluation of one's group was done in reference to the comparison held with the other group (Worchel et al. 16). Thus, Jack suggests, after being a part of the "in-group" Whites, that the White population considered themselves superior as a result of conscious belittlement of the Coloured. Jack proudly tells his mother of the $65 he makes a week in addition to being a prospective candidate for the "chief office secretary", but in extreme humility accepts that he could be in the place of the "Coloured boy porter who sweeps out the office" if he wasn't dark-skinned like him (46). Jack is aware that despite his talents and accomplishments, a Coloured person wouldn't be hired even for a clerk's post, no matter how smart. This reflects his "double consciousness" where he views his primal identity through the eyes of the White Americans, who measured the "out-group" with "amused contempt and pity" (Bois 8). By Passing, not only does he seek privileges otherwise denied to him, but also subverts the power structures by deceiving the boss who would detest having a Coloured secretary (46).

Despite the joys and the perks that Passing offered him, Jack is ridden with guilt and feels "mighty bad" about ignoring his mother in the public, who, he believes, knows that it is for the best and in fact encourages him to pass (Hughes 46-47) He confesses that what makes Passing difficult, was "having to deny your own family when you see them" even though both him and his mother realise that it was for the best (p.46). Jack's guilt originates from his dual identity and the consciousness of belonging to two social groups and ethnicities. His simultaneous co-existence in a "low-status and high-status group" makes him experience a "psychological tension derived from their motivation to improve their social identity while still belonging to a low-status group" (Chipeaux et al. 2). In other words, his racial masquerade might be able to provide him with social opportunities and elevation, but it also brought forth a culpability of not only belonging to a marginal group but also of keeping it clandestine.

Not only does his mother understand his Passing, she also supports him by refraining from speaking to him in the street (Hughes 46). In fact, Jack points out it was she who "backed me up, and told me to go ahead and get all I could out of life" (47). Thus, it isn't merely Jack's alienation from his family, but also his mother's strength that highlights the woes associated with Passing. Mayberry describes Jack's mother as a "tragic mulatta…who gives up her son" for him to earn a living (15). In addition to his mother, there also exists an estrangement from his siblings, who, unlike Jack, didn't get the privilege of a White skin to Pass for White, nor did they get a college education like him because their White father died, leaving all his wealth to his White family

(Hughes 47-48). Though his mother is depicted to be proud of her roots, enough to forsake the rights and the aid her husband's White family owed them, she does not prohibit her son from breaking ties with his heritage; in fact, she encourages him.

The Social Identity Theory serves as a parallel to Jack's condition with a hypothesis of a stratified social group with social hierarchies of "unequal division of objective resources and a corresponding status system" with "weak prohibitions to Passing" (Worchel et al. 20). It points out that since "individual mobility" suggests "disidentification," the subordinate group is likely to lose its cohesiveness (21). In specific terms, Jack's Passing to be White, implies a reduction of the family's attachment and cohesiveness, as can be noticed in the disdain of his siblings with regard to his masquerade (Hughes 47). Jack doesn't understand why they were not happy about his act of Passing since he was not harming them in any way. Tajfel and Turner explain this in their theory, affirming that the weakening of "subjective attachment" due to an individual's mobility to a high-status group can cause dual damage. First, it might lead to a blur in the vision of "distinct group interests corresponding to the distinct group identity"; and second, it might "create obstacles to mobilizing group members for collective action over their common interests" (Worchel et al. 21). With respect to the short stories, the first damage relates to the specific interests of the members of the subordinate group, for instance, the siblings of Jack, who aim for either the skin colour to have the privilege to pass, or educational benefits like Jack, which they were devoid of (Hughes 47-48). The second problem suggests that the members of the low-status group, who do not mobilise, or cannot mobilise, such as Jack's siblings in the story, may try to hinder the ones Passing for collective benefit rather than an individual's specific well-being. Jack's doubt about Glads and Charlie being as tactful as his mother in being oblivious of him in the street with a girl points out to the second claim of the Theory as per the aforementioned hypothesis (47-48). This can also be viewed as an "intergroup conflict", attached to the notion of "renegade" or "traitor", where the existing members of the group might scorn the one trying to shift or elevate his identity (Worchel et al.10). His mother's reaction, however, does not align with the response of the group as mentioned in the story, depicting a mother's selflessness, and having the primal interest in the child's well-being, while also highlighting the "pain of miscegenation as the mulatta unwittingly passes her tragic alienation onto her child" (Mayberry 15).

Jack ends the letter with a relief that there was nothing that could stop letters from "crossing the colour-line", and even if they couldn't meet in public, they could at least write to each other (Hughes 48). His longing to

connect with his mother and the simultaneous zeal to make a place for himself in the White world of opportunities demonstrate that "individuals with multiple identities do not necessarily disengage from their low-status group" but attempt to cope with the various roles and self-hoods (Chipeaux et al. 3). Though the son claims to have found a "good place" in the personal and professional spheres of his life and is on the verge of a promotion and matrimony, his home and family are pledged as the collateral. Thus, suggesting that the White garb and a higher social identity weren't merely a means to attain privileges associated with Whiteness, but a tumult of a dual selfhood, a mess of pottage, for which the Coloured Americans had to sell their "birth right", or their original identity group. (Johnson 100).

"Who's Passing for Who"

Published in Hughes' 1952 anthology, *Laughing to Keep from Crying,* this short story is often claimed as his "most discussed passing narrative" (Bennett 676). Unlike the aforementioned narrative of Passing, this story does not classify the character as a true Mulatto. Located in a speakeasy of Harlem, the story narrates the tale of the confusion that surrounded the act of putting up a racial masquerade where no one could decipher who was passing for whom, or as the title states, "Who's Passing for Who". The story begins with the acknowledgement that the narrator belonged to a minority race, thus suggesting that he was Coloured (Hughes 163). He refers to a Coloured social worker Caleb Johnson, who was considered a "bore" by the narrator's friends belonging to "Harlem's literary bohemia during the Negro Renaissance" (163). The narrator and his friends are met by Caleb in the company of White schoolteachers from Iowa who appear to be amazed at meeting Black writers and painters (163). Not only do the narrator and his friends put forth a fitting response to the White people's stereotypical image of the Coloured folk, but they also answer with a "bored nonchalance" to highlight their disregard of prejudice (164). However, along with their pride that many talented dark-skinned writers existed in Harlem, came the urge to "impress both Caleb and his White guests" by their literary knowledge (164). The narrator's response to the White guests serves as a rebuttal to the subtle racism projected by them. Thus, as per the norms of the Social Identity Theory, the Coloured artists' knowledge of being a "minority" highlights that they had understood the social stratification, and found themselves in an "inferior" social system, while the White guests who were astonished on meeting educated and talented Blacks, belonged to a "superior" section (Worchel et al. 10). Comprehending the hierarchy based on the unequal distribution of resources such as "power, prestige and wealth", which Tajfel and Turner describe as scarce and the pervasive ethnocentrism, the narrator and his friends form an "out-group

antagonism", hoping to not only counter the stereotypical belittlement but also to impress the superior group with competition (11). In addition to this, the first of the three major principles of the evaluation of one's group in comparison with the rest states, "Individuals strive to achieve or maintain a positive social identity" (16). In other words, people try to enhance their self-opinion and self-esteem, which can be noticed in the narrator's conceit while proudly displaying their knowledge of eminent writers and declaring themselves to be agreeable to all social groups and races (Hughes 163).

The focus of the story shifts from the "perverse nature" of the narrator and his friends to the source of the story's climax. When a Coloured man turns violent to an apparently White woman, one of Caleb's White guests begins to protest, only to realise that the victim was not only Coloured, but also the abuser's wife (Hughes 164). However, what made the White man from Iowa relent and apologise was the knowledge of the former, which is questioned by the Coloured artist who asks, "Don't you think a woman needs defending from a brute, no matter what race she may be?" (164). The painters disregard sprouts from both, the knowledge that the visitor only intervened owing to his assumption that it was a "Black man" harming a "White woman", and from his surrender on realising her true identity. Though the idea of a woman "needing defence" also paves the way for a feminist discourse, the focus of the critics lies on the social stature and the identity group of the dark-skinned woman, who was subjected to a "double burden of race and gender" (Belluscio 228). The fact that the question of a White woman's identity was put on a higher pedestal than that of a Coloured woman proves the discourse of "double jeopardy" where the society placed the latter at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Beal 168). In addition to this, the Coloured painter's disregard of the White man's support only for the women of his race highlights his disdain for discriminatory behaviours among social groups. The narrator, at the beginning of the story claims to be "too broad minded to be bothered with the questions of colour", and their response not only proves their previous assertion but also aligns with the second principle of self-reflection of groups vis-a vis the other, which states that positive social identity is perceived with a "favourable comparison" as opposed to the other group (Worchel et al. 16). Through social comparison of having the positive connotation of an impartial attitude, the narrator and his friends openly state their aversion to the White group, despite belonging to the "inferior" social group (16). On the other hand, the White man's discrimination, or the "ingroup favouritism" showcases a means to attain "positive distinctiveness for one's own group in the social situation" (Fraser et al. 529). This represents the competition between both the two groups to appear superior to the other.

The story further refers to Nella Larsen and James Weldon Johnson to bring to light the act of racial Passing. Attempting to "épater le bourgeois", or to shock the bourgeoisie, the narrator and his friends begin sharing the knowledge of the countless "Negroes passing for White all over America" with Caleb and his White friends (Hughes 165). The tables turn when the White couple claims to be passing as well, for monetary benefits. The response of the White couple can be correlated with the third principle of the Social Identity Theory of self-evaluation, wherein "When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group" (Worchel et al. 16) Thus, when condemned for their discriminatory behaviour, and with the simultaneous urge to trick the Coloured artists, the White couple shift their social identity and associate themselves with the same group as their counterparts. Not only does it take the "wind out" of the Coloured artists, but also makes them curse (Hughes 166). Bennett questions the hypocrisy of the narrator and points out:

> "Before the action begins, the prolix and witty narrator introduces his friends and himself as "too broad-minded to be bothered with questions of color." This statement sets up the dramatic irony that positions the narrator for his ultimate blunder: being fooled by the white Iowans. Although the narrator's bohemian world is meant to stand in contrast to the boring white folks from Iowa, Hughes eventually reverses the roles. The Iowans prove to be the tricksters, and the narrator must confront his own naiveté. That the narrator could not see through the Iowans' dissimulation" (677).

The narrator's previous claim is now depicted as false, and it also puts forth the idea that one couldn't ever decipher who had put on a masquerade and who hadn't. In addition to this, it highlights the confusion of the Black American artist, who, on one hand, didn't consider ideas of race vital in a social setting, but is shocked at not being able to recognise the people of his own group. This incident also connects the idea of a person Passing to the popular trope of the African-American trickster figure. Interestingly, the trickster is viewed as an archetypal figure "dangerously outside of societal boundaries" willing to "discombobulate the power figures" (Jeffries 292). Symmetrically, the marginalised Passing characters also serve to subvert the colour hierarchy by going against the authority of the White Americans and fooling them by attaining the opportunities otherwise reserved away from the Coloured citizen.

Similar to a trickster figure, who would "move about as a completely unstructured, chaotic free spirit", the Passing characters, upon their confession, create chaos and hysteria among the entire group (Jeffries 292). Making

everybody laugh and drop down their garb of "professionally self-conscious "Negro" manners" and become "natural" in their behaviour, the White couple proves that the narrator and his friends were passing as much as them (Hughes 165). The difference being, that the White couple was Passing to be of another race, while the Coloured artists were passing off as more civilised and proper, feigning their true identity and behaviour. The narrator claims to become "natural" in the sense that they could now talk and joke "freely like colored folks do when there are no white folks around" (166). By stating this, he renders his previous assertion of being unaffected by matters of colour, futile and false, since their behaviour clearly depicted the contrary. This resonates with the dual sense of the idea of "double consciousness", "the one created by racism; the other, by conflicting perspectives on life" (Bruce 306). This is reflected in the two forms of twoness demonstrated by the narrator in the story, first, is the knowledge of being a Coloured person in America, second, is the response created due to racism. Bruce points out that the difference between the senses lies in the element of one's will. It can be better explained as, "The merging of African and American selves was, or at least could be, an act of will, and Du Bois so treated it. The merging of selves created by American racism was not" (307). While living in America, with African roots suggested a conscious merging of the identities, the feigned behaviour in front of the White people suggests a subconscious garb of identity (Hughes 166). However, both the intentional and the unintentional forms of merging of identity created a form of "double consciousness" for the Coloured people.

Post the merrymaking, when the couple bids adieu to the Coloured artists, the woman confesses that they were actually White, pretending to be Coloured. She proclaims, "We just thought we'd kid you by passing for colored a little while, just as you said Negroes sometimes pass for white" (Hughes 166). Not only does it shock the narrator and his friends, but it also renders them confused about matters of Passing and being unable to decipher who could be Passing for whom. Confusions like this, are what paved way for "complexion tests" such as the "Paper Bag Principle" and the "One Drop Rule", where the former signifies a "degree of acceptance and inclusion (that is if one is fairer than the brown bag)" and the latter asserted that "the admixture of one race type and an inferior one results in a reversion to the "lower type"" (Kerr 272; Belluscio 94). Thus, proving that in addition to enforcing discriminatory laws, the Whites ensured that they weren't fooled by Coloured Americans wishing to pass to attain the fundamental necessities otherwise denied to them. This also suggests that not only did the change in a social group lead to intergroup conflicts, but it was also frowned upon by the members of the other groups, especially the "high-status" groups joined by members of the "low-status" groups (Worchel et al. 10).

Conclusion

This research article aimed at discerning the representation and the treatment of the Passing Mulatto vis-à-vis the works of the Harlem Renaissance writer, Langston Hughes. The short stories in question delineate the multifaceted experiences of the mixed-blood protagonists. It showcases how the Coloured American often indulged in the act of racial Passing in search of better opportunities, social upliftment, and to evade discriminatory laws and behaviour. "Passing", the short fiction investigated in the first section of the article, depicts how the garb of Whiteness often resulted in estrangement from one's roots, family, and heritage leading to the woes and isolation of both the Mulatto and the people they are forced to distance themselves from, to an extent of public ignorance (Hughes 46-47). The second section, discussing "Who's Passing for Who", explains that the masquerade also served to create confusion as one couldn't ever decipher the true race or colour of a person, especially when the Coloured people wanted to behave differently, or more as "sophisticated" and "civilised" people in front of the White gentry (165). Thus, suggesting that Passing isn't merely limited to the garb of Whiteness in terms of one's skin colour, but also extended to the social behaviour. It also depicts the antagonism of the White Americans towards Passing, since it assisted the Mulatto to subvert the social laws of discrimination, which denied the fundamental rights to the Black population by fooling their White counterparts. Thus, the Passing character is often compared to the African-American trope of the "trickster" figure (Jeffries 292).

Both stories depict that the colour-line is easily penetrable, or that it is possible to shift one's social identity conveniently. Through an analysis of the Social Identity Theory, one may infer that "individual mobility" may take place only when the "intergroup boundaries are perceived as 'soft' and 'permeable" (Fraser 673). In the case of Passing, the presence of a light skin colour ensures permeability and fluidity of members across the social groups. However, this shift has its drawbacks, such as the confusion of identity and selfhood, loss of one's heritage, and the antipathy of both the former group members and the group one aspires to belong to. On leaving a group, one may be called a "renegade" in addition to experiencing nostalgia for the previous social identity.

The quagmire of Passing also extends to the confusions associated with "Double-Consciousness", where Du Bois asserts that neither do the Black Americans hold the ambition to "Africanize America" by moulding the

country according to them, nor do they aim to "bleach" their "Negro Soul" by completely letting go of their identity (9). However, the act of Passing showcases a bleaching of identity along with a social shift, which may be due to the triple identity of the Passing Mulatto. Not only are the Passing Americans subjected to a duality on account of having African roots but residing in America, but also due to being Coloured Americans but masquerading to be White in appearance or behaviour.

This research article paves the way for further discussion concerning the Passing Mulatto, and scholarship on matters regarding the rationale and the consequences of Passing in a stratified society. Given the struggles associated with Passing, this research suggests that it wasn't an escape from discriminatory attitudes associated with race, but was a clandestine combat accompanied by conflicts of identity and alienation, and confusions of identification.

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Identity Crisis vis-à-vis Quest for Identity: Nissim Ezekiel's Preoccupations and Pursuits

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Abstract

This article analyzes a selection of Nissim Ezekiel's poems to locate the poet's reflections on identity crisis and his lifelong pursuit of identity. Ezekiel has been engrossed in the issue of identity throughout his life as the people of the Indian subcontinent have gone through critical phases fraught with violence, struggle, and suffering emanated mostly out of intolerance of differences in identity. Most of the people in this region were affected by the blurred line drawn by colonizers through the Partition of 1947, culminating in a sea of blood, as they identified themselves with a narrow category of identity. Ezekiel, a post-Independence Indian poet writing in English, has felt an acute identity crisis since his early life, so identity crisis and quest for identity have appeared repeatedly in his work. The article therefore focuses on Ezekiel's preoccupations with the crisis of and continuous search for identity that dominate his vast oeuvre of poetic world.

Keywords: Nissim Ezekiel, identity crisis, search for identity, sense of belonging, India

Ezekiel, a pioneering figure of poetry in the Indian subcontinent and beyond, is well-known to have brought a marked change to Indian poetry in English. Among many other themes, identity prevails throughout his rich oeuvre of poetry. For various reasons, the poet has been engrossed in the issue of identity, and the most important reason is that he, along with others in his community, has suffered the crisis of identity. Belonging to a community with a Jewish background in a country like India, where Hindus and Muslims dominate, Ezekiel has gone through critical phases at different times in his life. Shipwrecked, the Jews had settled in northern India much earlier, but through Partition, many of them went back to Israel. Others, including Ezekiel's family, took India as their own land—hence the history of the emergence of the Jews in the subcontinent. His background as belonging to Judaism, the fact that brought a sense of identity crisis into his mind, had an immense effect on his poetry, and he realized the crisis since his childhood. His poetry and other

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writings reflect his absorption in pursuing the realm of identity and, therefore, defining himself meaningfully.

Ezekiel seeks to make himself defined in his poetry, but it is not an easy task for him, as several of his poems reveal his acute sense of identity crisis. While searching for an identity, the poet adopts an artistic means, which is poetry. Although his poems speak of everyday details, everyday experiences of human beings, including their concerns for identity, he does not sacrifice the aesthetic standard in his poetic world. The presentation, he always believes, should be artistic as he writes, "The gentle, familiar, / Are all dissolved . . ." (Ezekiel 2005, 13). Ezekiel is a kind of poet who has never compromised with the artistic or aesthetic standard of poetry – that means, he has always taken the artistic value and presentation to be prior to other aspects of poetry. He describes familiar things and addresses everyday experiences in his poetry, but he likes to dissolve familiarity through his deft presentation. Aware of the abundance of pretension, artificiality, or false representations of individuals or institutions, the poet progresses with his prime object of knowing more about the world and self, discovering himself. As he offers his outlook on the search for identity in "In the Theatre":

> I act to end the acting,
> not to be known but to know,
> to be new, to become a form and find
> my relevance. (Ezekiel 151)

Throughout his whole life, Ezekiel strives to clarify his position on various aspects in his work, and this poem demonstrates that he does not like to represent artificially or does not dream of being saint-like, but knowing new things or discovering his own self in a new way remains his life's driving force. "To become a form" suggests that Ezekiel has an identity crisis, so he desperately strives to have a form, but the form should ensure his "relevance" to the world; the form should conform to what he is actually looking for. In his poems, he makes it clear that he wants to be identified with the world of humanity.

Identity is what introduces a person with some specific traits and qualities, and it straightforwardly answers the question of who a person is. Identity also refers to a sense that ensures a person's placement in the world – the sense with which the person feels attached to others in society. Zygmunt Bauman (2004) argues, "After all, asking 'who you are' makes sense to you only once you believe that you can be someone other than you are; only if you have a choice, and only if it depends on you what you choose; only if you have

to do something, that is, for the choice to be 'real' and to hold" (19). To have an identity requires an answer to the question 'who you are' – if a person is confident in saying who he is, he is identified as someone that he has aspired to be. Choice, in this respect, plays an important role because without making a choice of what one wants to be, one may not be happy by holding a forced or impulsive identity category. An individual constantly reproduces different images of self in various phases of life. People face various kinds of crises in the development stages of their lives, and the severe crisis that they face is related to identity. It is also argued that identity formation is a natural process in which people experiment with different images, resolve crises, determine who they are, and how they wish to be perceived by others.

There are two kinds of identity: personal identity and social identity. When a person is identified individually as a teacher, a doctor, or an architect, they establish a personal identity. Erik H. Erikson (1994), a German-born American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst, defines personal identity thus, "The conscious feeling of having a personal identity is based on two simultaneous observations: the perception of the selfsameness and continuity of one's existence in time and space and the perception of the fact that others recognize one's sameness and continuity" (50). Erikson's characterization of personal identity is interesting: he articulates that a person has to have consciousness of living on earth, maintaining communications with others. He also needs to have a perception of an image of the self. To have a personal identity also means, according to Erikson, to have recognition from others. Social identity, on the other hand, refers to a person's identity that associates him with a society – the social identity of a person impacts others. Erikson proposes eight stages of development, among which the adolescent period, according to him, is the most significant, because in this stage, individuals develop their sense of identity.

The people of South Asia went through a deep crisis of identity throughout the twentieth century – they desperately looked for a solution to the crisis of and confusion about identity, because they intensely suffered an identity crisis. Their search for identity – to have names, traits, qualities, and representations – continued as part of one of life's great objectives. Because of the crisis of identity, a whole community or an individual may suffer to an extreme level. We may take a look at how identity is intrinsically related to human life. Identity, so to speak, is understood in terms of two related senses:

> I argue that 'identity' is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed 'social' and 'personal'. In the former sense, an 'identity' refers simply to a *social category*, a set of persons marked

> by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable. (Fearon 2)

Society sets some rules that people follow and so receive some distinguishing attributes, which identify them as part of the society. An individual feels happy about some characteristics that impact their social life as well. In the face of numerous varieties in different layers of society, people strive to establish their personal and social identity, because without an identity, human beings are considered part of nowhere. Erikson stresses the significance of identity in human life as he puts forward his argument, ". . . in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity" (1994, 130). As far as the statement is concerned, individuals should have a sense of identity to exist as social beings. Without being identified with a category, a person's existence as a social being is almost impossible. When people experience an identity crisis, they suffer both psychologically and socially.

Identity crisis gets extremely acute if a person is treated badly by others who consider themselves superior and foster a dominating mindset. There is a time when individuals deeply explore the different ways of looking at themselves to commit to at least one category of identity. They fall into confusion about who they should be identified with, what they should belong to, and how they need to be perceived. Actually, this is the stage of an identity crisis in human life. In each stage of their development, individuals happen to meet crises, which are, as far as Erikson's theory is concerned, psychosocial. Their personal needs conflict with the ongoing trends and needs of society, so they feel crises in every phase of their development. In these circumstances, the victims suffer agonies of being identified in a narrow line – a fixed identity indeed creates anarchy in the modern world. People in different stages of their development, from childhood to adulthood, experience the crisis of identity. But identity, social or personal, makes people feel part of the world they live in. Ezekiel likes to be identified as part of his society, represented by people of different strata, as he writes in "One Meeting a Pedant":

> Forgive me, stranger, grant me but a strip
> Of silence for the taking off, a patch
> Of grass and not of words to roll upon.
> Give me touch of men and give me smell of
> Fornication, pregnancy and spices.
> But spare me words as cold as print, insidious

Words, dressed in evening clothes for drawing rooms.

I swear I will not argue any more.
Do not be combative, my heart; rest or ride
Superbly with the senses. Send out songs. (9)

The stark reality sometimes makes the poet sad, so he seeks quiet somewhere else, far away from the humdrum of city life, where he will not experience betrayal or corruption. He looks for some respite on a square of grass, wishes to have love, feelings, emotion, and also sensuality in his life. As a social being, he wants to live a kind of life that is not odd, a life that resonates with the lives of other people around him, maintaining all sorts of communications with men and women, and so on. Only cold words in print do not give him all the pleasure that he seeks. The last three lines of the poem suggest that the poet is conversing with himself, his heart, and he clearly mentions that he does not want to argue anymore. His final words demonstrate that he wants to live with the freedom of his senses. The lines in the poem exhibit that Ezekiel is a modern poet who wants to live among other fellow human beings in society. His identity as a modern poet is markedly reflected in the poem.

Loss of identity is as extreme as death, as Michael B. Green and Daniel Wikler argue in "Brain Death and Personal Identity," "*You* die if and only if your identity is destroyed. Hence we can clarify what it is for a person to die only if we clarify what is essential to a person's identity" (as quoted in Luper 2009). There might be different interpretations of losing identity and dying, but we may ascribe the psychological death of a person who strongly feels the crisis of identity in a world of so many people with definite identity categories. The above statement strongly emphasizes the necessity of identity in human life. K. D. Verma (1976) observes, "Much of the problem concerning the loss of individual identity, we have seen, arises from the devouring character of the modern urban society" (236). Urban society in modern times is responsible, as Verma's observation highlights, for the loss of individual identity. In urban society, the identity of an individual is shadowed by so many complexities existing among city people. City-dwellers, in general, go through surreal experiences, remaining in a constant fear of losing their identities. With the passage of time and with the advancement of human civilization, intellectuals have focused on identity in various ways. They also relate identity with people's inner world, "…modern identity is characterized by an emphasis on its inner voice and capacity for authenticity – that is, the ability to find a way of being that is somehow true to oneself (as quoted in Heyes 2007). Personal identity consists of a great many attributes that a person takes pride in, and the

identity of a person is rooted in their inner voice as well. Truth and beauty lie in people's hearts, and a true self represents the best in society.

Erikson, who coined the term 'Identity Crisis,' delves deep into identity and identity crisis in his seminal work entitled *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. The comment that "Erik Erikson…is chiefly responsible for the popularity of the words 'identity' and 'identity crisis' in contemporary thought," (Nisbet 1968) is justified as the terms are well-known to world readers for him. Both identity and identity crisis are now the focused concepts in different areas of study, including literature. Erikson has studied and researched extensively on identity and described various factors constituting the identity of individuals in many of his essays, including his famous book *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. Erikson (1994) defines identity:

> …in psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, 'identity consciousness'. (22-23)

Erikson casts light on the psychological aspects of people's identity formation process. They reflect on others' attributes, compare, and then judge themselves. The other people also do the same, and finally form an identity, and all this occurs in a reflexive state of mind. Here, William James's reflection that Erikson has quoted in the book is relevant: "A man's character is discernible in the mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments, there is a voice inside which speaks and says: '*This* is the real me!'" (as quoted in Erikson 1994, 19). People reach a mental state when they feel deeply and intensely, and then come up with the inner voice to identify the real image of the self. Erikson takes the liberty and claims that James means identity by the word character in his statement. When a person identifies himself, declares that he is someone, he tends to celebrate the moment as he considers it to be an achievement in his life.

Erikson gives a background to how the issue of identity comes into being, that is to say, its genesis. He also refers to Sigmund Freud, well-known as the founder of psychoanalysis, and William James, American philosopher and psychologist, who have made major contributions to the interpretation of the human psyche. Erikson calls identity a "problem" and then "a process" that is, he (1994) argues, "located *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*" (22). Erikson's argument fits in the existence of two identity categories: personal and social. People's real self, hence their personal identity, emerges when they reveal moral and mental attitudes through intense engagement. The people, on the other hand, are connected to a culture or society that gives them a collective consciousness, and it is their social identity. People's personal growth and collective identity are interlinked, and they cannot be separated from each other. Identity does not relate to anything static or unchangeable; rather, it changes with the flux of time and place.

Jacques Lacan, a major figure of psychoanalysis, slates the concept of stable or fixed identity. In pre-modern societies where identity was fixed, little thought was given to the issue because one would be born with a particular identity and die with the same, but changes have taken place over time as modern individuals undergo identity crises. Amartya Sen, an Indian philosopher, social critic, and Nobel laureate in Economics, also holds the view that a society should recognize multiple identities. "The illusion of unique identity," claims Sen, "is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse classifications that characterize the world in which we actually live" (2007a, 17). In the present world of multiple identities, a sense of limited identity, Sen believes, is merely an illusion. To get away from this kind of elusive stance on identity is necessary for a better human society. He (2007a) further asserts that "identities are robustly plural" (19). There is a marked similarity in the views of both Lacan and Sen when they reprove the fixity of identity. Ezekiel's position on identity, interestingly, is analogous to Lacan's and Sen's as well.

To explore the literary works of the writers in the South Asian region, Sen's views and ideas on identity, identity crisis, and identity formation process are ad rem, as he has in-depth knowledge about and an investigation into the outlook of the people of this region. From among a number of concepts Sen has developed and has been widely discussed, the most significant and relevant one is the issue of identity. While focusing on identity in world perspectives in general and South Asian perspectives in particular, he discards the concept of unique identity and advocates multiplicity or plurality of identity. As Sen (2007b) observes, "The hope of harmony in the contemporary

world lies to a great extent in a clearer understanding of the pluralities of human identity, and in the appreciation that they cut across each other and work against a sharp separation along one single hardened line of impenetrable division" (xiv). Sen thinks about global peace and harmony, in which case, he clearly takes a stand against the disunion of human beings along a rigid stance on a singular or solitary identity category. He believes that without a positive attitude to the pluralities of identity, harmony and peace in the contemporary world are at stake, because the opposite outlook, that is to say the tendencies of partitioning along the line of differences, create chaos and violence in society.

Identity issue is considered problematic as people remain in confusion about their identity, seek one, and then look for changes. On this note, Lacan (2006) observes that "a man's character can include an identification with a parental feature that disappeared before the time of his earliest memories. What is transmitted by the psychical pathway are traits that give the individual the particular form of his human relations, in other words, his *personality*" (72). An individual's identity is constituted in his relation to others, and it changes during different phases of socialization. The primary identity is formed by the features of parents, but people associate themselves with other categories as they develop relations with other people in society. In this regard, a person's intent to feel an affinity with others impacts their psychology. Lacan (2006) furthers argues, "All the 'primitive mind' sociologists scurry about trying to fathom this profession of identity, which is no more surprising upon reflection than declaring, 'I'm a doctor' or 'I'm a citizen of the French Republic,' and certainly presents fewer logical difficulties than claiming, 'I'm a man" (96). The process of identification in primitive times was very constricted as we find in the statement 'I'm a doctor,' but there is a deep and broad perception in the articulation 'I'm a man,' and a modern individual accepts the latter. Identity of individuals should be, as far as Lacan's views are concerned, more comprehensive and liberal. Homi K. Bhabha has outstanding contributions to the existing discourses on identity. Bhabha (1994) claims that there are:

> …two familiar traditions in the discourse of identity: the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature; and the anthropological view of the difference of human identity as located in the division of Nature/ Culture. In the postcolonial text, the problem of identity returns as a persistent questioning of the frame, the space of representation, where the image – missing person, invisible eye, Oriental stereotype – is confronted with its difference, its Other. (66)

It is a valuable reflection on how a sense of identity grows in people's minds in different stages of their lives. Bhabha writes about two traditions of identity – one is the philosophical tradition, and the other is anthropological. This tradition of identity, however, is deep-rooted in the natural process of receiving the traits of identity. The process is beyond the grasp of common people; hence is the justification of terming this tradition as philosophical. To understand the anthropological tradition of identity, it is important to know the difference between the binary opposition of nature and culture. In postcolonial perspectives, people try to understand the identity crisis, posing questions about how much space they have to speak, to enjoy rights, and to live with peace of mind, but they concurrently confront various images existing around them.

I explore Ezekiel's poetic world, fraught with the poet's pursuit for identity, drawing on Erikson, Lacan, Bhabha, and Sen's arguments and observations about identity, identity crisis, and identity formation. Despite the crisis Ezekiel undergoes in India, where he is treated as a minor in terms of religious background, he does not turn away from his commitment to the land. Since his childhood, he has acutely observes his surroundings and his experiences, both sweet and bitter, impact on his work. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (2006b) points out that Ezekiel, "possessed a quick, observant eye and could encompass a life in the space of a line" (9). Only great poets are able to display this quality in their work. Expressing something grandiose in a few words, or speaking of a big area in a small space, is not easy, but the great poets execute the task with ease – Ezekiel has this poise, as Mehrotra claims. Besides, he has a strong desire to see a better state of the country as well as its citizens. His poetry reveals his strong sense of belonging and patriotism, but it is a fact that the poet undergoes an identity crisis during his school life as his classmates from different backgrounds assault him, and he suffers the agony of being 'other'. Ezekiel (2005) recounts:

> I went to Roman Catholic school,
> A mugging Jew among the wolves.
> They told me I had killed the Christ,
> That year I won the scripture prize.
> A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears. (179)

A biased sense of identity dominated by awareness of a religious connection leads the school children to violent acts, and the sentience of being identified with a particular community causes tension to the child. This picture shows how agonized an individual remains in a society where the differences of identity create illogical fissures. But the poet discards narrow identity

categories like 'I'm a doctor,' and expresses his will in "A Time to Change," "These are merely dreams; but I am human / And must testify to what they mean" (Ezekiel 2005, 5). He refers to many entities with which individuals feel proud to have an affinity, but they need, as the poet suggests, to be testified to glean the meanings. When the poet states "I am human," we discover that he negates the process of identity formation through a narrow observation. Here Lacanian statement "I am a man" resonates with Ezekiel's pronouncement "I am human". In "Prayer II," Ezekiel (2005) writes "Let me dream the dream of Man" (55). Here, again, we discover the poet's assertion on a holistic approach to identity – if he dreams of anything, it is of the welfare of human beings. He does not want to be isolated from the society he inhabits.

As far as his Jewish background is concerned, Ezekiel is asked numerous questions about this on various occasions, and he focuses on this category of identity in both his writings and speech. As he describes in the poem "Background, Casually" how even the school children having different religious backgrounds are critical about the followers of other religions, he extends an elaborate discussion about this. In one of his interviews with Nilufer E. Bharucha, Professor of English literature and critic, in 1996, Ezekiel elaborates on his attachment with Judaism as well as his reference to religiosity in the poem "Background, Casually":

> I at any rate could not ignore the fact that some of my friends were Muslims, some were Christians, some were Parsis, and that I was Jewish. When we discussed this we came to the conclusion that we should remain what we were, without necessarily claiming to understand the other's religion. So I think I was very serious about this even in my school days. However, a deeper understanding of religions came much later when I was in college, when I read more and more about religions. (Ezekiel 12)

The above comment is insightful, and it suggests that his friends' belief in different religions makes Ezekiel contemplate the power of religions in society. The behavioural pattern of his friends, as per the dominance of religions, makes him think that religions play an important role in human life, but he realizes, as he grows up, that humanism should be the best platform for unity among all the people in the world. Inspired by the ideals of humanism, he shows respect to all religions. To him, every person should enjoy freedom to practise their religion, and no one has any right to interfere with others' religious practices. He explores religions in his later life in order to understand the key areas of different religions and their importance in human life. The

teachings and insights of religions have an impact on his work, but he promotes humanism through his poetry.

In modern city life, Ezekiel is confused about a web of complexities among people, institutions, ideas, and social structures – the poet cannot decipher why everything is turning complex. The overflow of information, proliferation of propaganda, people's excessive concerns about money and fame, and disintegration in human relationships enkindle discontent in the poet's mind. He, then, begins to feel an identity crisis intensely, because he tries to figure out how or in what form he should represent. In "Commitment," Ezekiel (2005) writes:

> …I wear
> A human face but prowl about the streets
> Of towns with murderous claws and anxious ears,
> Recognising all the jungle sounds of fear
> And hunger, wise in tracking down my prey
> And wise in taking refuge when the stronger roam.
>
> Truly, I wish to be a man. Alone
> Or in the crowd this is my only guide. (26)

As the above lines suggest, the poet is so disgruntled about the city reality – the artificiality of the people living in the city, their proclivity towards money and reputation, as well as their lust and crimes – that he searches his own identity as a human. To him, the world has turned into a jungle where people wearing human faces hang around, make strange sounds, and scare other people taking brutal looks. In such a state of imbroglio, the poet looks for his real image as a human being as he asserts that "I wish to be a man". By saying this, the poet actually gives an important message to the world that most of the people on earth have animalistic instincts deep within their hearts and thought processes – as far as the poet's reference to "jungle" is concerned – but they expose completely different images wearing "human face". Concealing the brutish shapes, the real natures, under the garb of civilization, with the masks of education, they act as humans – Ezekiel has also written about these masks in society, around him. Here arises a confusion to identify real images from the fakes, but Ezekiel continues his sincere efforts to search for a human identity through his poetry.

The poet's search for identity as a human being is deep as many of his poems reveal his concern, but we also find ambivalence in his poetry in defining a specific identity category. Examining his life in a number of ways,

the poet realizes that there is only one instance of certainty about identity, which is death. Edgington's (1987) observation about this realization is relevant here: "…to examine oneself, one must encounter one's own death and realize that its identity is definite, but the meaning of the knowledge…is uncertain" (140). Every person goes through, more or less, various phases of examination in life, but poets examine their lives, no doubt, more deeply and more subtly. In their poetic journey, they seek the meaning of life and a definite identity, but everything else, except the fact of encountering death, remains elusive to them. It may be argued that Ezekiel does not seem to come to a certainty about identity, but there is no doubt that he continues his search for meaning in life and having a definite identity.

Ezekiel does not stop his search for meaning in life, enriched with varied experiences and a passion for creativity. Evocative in nature, the poet contemplates, most of the time, about human life, nature, poetry, and society – he finds a wonderful connection between the greatness of poetry and the greatness of life. "Ezekiel's poetry should be viewed," Inder Nath Kher (1976) observes, "as a metaphoric journey into the heart of existence; into the roots of one's self or being which embodies both mythic and existential dimensions of life. This endless quest for meaning and identity, intertwined with the search for a poetics, provides Ezekiel with the sense of creative continuity" (4). Ezekiel launches "a metaphoric journey" through his poetics to locate what lies at the centre of existence, why humans struggle to achieve meaning in life, how they want to meet the end, and, above all, he wishes to discover his own self with an attempt to know the purpose of being born as well as the mystery of dying.

The poet, however, strives to form an identity that every human needs to exist meaningfully on earth. It is indeed Ezekiel's lifelong contention to establish a trend of poetics of his own and find an identity along with meaning in life. This search is linked to his passion for creativity. Verma (1976) asserts that "…it is only by existing in the *moment*, *the now*, that the imagination experiences eternity and identity" (235). Ezekiel puts emphasis on, as his poetics suggests, the present reality more than what might happen in the future – he discards the traditional trends of poetics, but highly values the legacy of his land and culture. Existing in the present moment meaningfully, the poet believes, leads the way to creativity and eternal identity. Ezekiel (2005) expresses his views on creativity, "Asked about his critics, / The poet moaned: They crucify me / Because I am creative" (274). The lines reveal an interesting position that Ezekiel holds – he values creativity above everything else for an artistic life. In defective societies, creative people are underestimated and

derided, but they are the true assets for any nation. Ezekiel seems to feel crucified when poets have to endure oblique looks for their creativity.

In his search for identity, Ezekiel launches a journey that is not smooth for him – he observes numerous incongruities existing in society, institutions, and individuals. He also addresses the incongruities in many of his poems, employing irony, satire, as well as various images. Introspective in nature, the poet gives a hint at disorder and chaos in society through his poems. He, therefore, becomes engrossed in the self, thinking whether he has examined his own life. Ezekiel (2005) writes in the poem titled "What Frightens Me":

> I have long watched myself
> Remotely doing what I had to do,
> At times a shamed but always
> Rationalizing all I do.
> I have heard the endless silent dialogue
> Between the self – protective self
> And the self naked.
> I have seen the mask
> And the secret behind the mask. (106)

The poet has watched himself, as the above lines suggest, over a long time, but it is not clear if he has been able to examine himself fully, as he mentions here that he feels ashamed for what he has done, and at the same time, he justifies his acts and thoughts. It is the poet's ambivalent state of mind that has been active. As a powerful voice of modern poetry in the history of Indian poetry in English, Ezekiel's ambivalence is widespread in his work. In his personal life, the poet goes through sweet as well as trying times, earning varied experiences about India and its people. He initiates dialogue with himself, both "protective" self and "naked" self, finds innumerable masks around him, among the people, known and half-known. The poet seems to remain in exile from his self because of the masks he encounters. Even if he is shocked by the artificialities around, the poet has some inspirational resources that he locates in his poetry. The objects of passion that Ezekiel aspires after are well placed in the poem "A Different Way":

> Whatever my theories,
> in practice I behave like a drug-addict
> whose drugs are work, sensuality,
> poetry, and the dance of the self
> in suitable as well as unsuitable company. (2005, 272)

It is an exceptional metaphor when the poet compares himself to a drug addict, but his addictions are not harmful as they are "work, sensuality and poetry". His passion for poetry, engagements with literary activities, writing, love, and responding to the demands of the senses are well reflected in his poems. Ezekiel has varied experiences in life, so he tries to incorporate them in his work. He meets many people in his life, but does not feel happy with all of them, as the last lines indicate, still he corresponds with both "suitable" and "unsuitable company". Instead of feigning, the poet reveals his inner thoughts in the poem.

Exploring twentieth-century India, Ezekiel draws on the identity crisis of modern human beings in general, and Indian people in particular. Loss of identity of men and women in the present commercial world is a concern for many poets around the world, and Ezekiel addresses the loss of identity of South Asian people. The poet observes the display of riches as well as the claustrophobic growth of slums, the nonchalance of elites to the suffering of the street people, and the pollution of the environment because of people's mindless activities. In the maze of such chaotic city life, many people experience the loss of identity, a fact that Ezekiel deeply feels. Post-Independence India goes through a transition, and post-Independence Indian people are in a dilemma about the past and the change. Ezekiel deftly explores the minds of the Indian people in this time, treats the diverse issues, including the issue of identity, emanated from the trying times, and shows his objective stance on humanity. The post-Independence period is crucial for Indian literature in English. There is a huge change in the English poetry scene in India during the latter half of the twentieth century. Rosinka Chaudhuri (2016) observes:

> This is a period in which some of the finest – as well as the most formative – English poetry was written in India. If, for Larkin, the 'Annus Mirabilis' was 1963…for Indian poetry in English that *annus mirabilis* was 1952, when Nissim Ezekiel published his first volume of poetry, called, appropriately, *A Time to Change* – an event that, like a pebble that created an avalanche, set in motion a train of publications of astounding quality in the succeeding years. (13)

The period that Chaudhuri refers to in her remarks is 1950-2000 when Indian poetry in English flourishes to an amazing height. Here the word "formative" used by Chaudhuri is justified – pioneering as well as internationally acclaimed poets emerge in India during this time as far as the legacy of Indian poetry in English is concerned. Ezekiel, in

this respect, is a key figure to change the direction as he propounds that a change in the English poetry scene in India is a compelling need.

A sense of being an Indian poet in English is acute in Ezekiel's poetic career. He is well aware of the crises existing in the country, but does not think about turning a blind eye to Indian reality, so he continues to write poetry, keeping his commitment to the land intact. Amar Nath Prasad (2008) argues that Ezekiel's poems "present a very realistic picture of the city life with his urban background," and he "deals with urban sensibilities, a sense of alienation, and man's struggle to survive in an urban atmosphere" (13). The actual events that take place in his land, the actual picture of his landscape, and the people inhabiting around him are featured in his poetry. As a modern poet, Ezekiel deals with alienation, crisis, tension, and skepticism. But the poet shows his aversion too to the cruelties, corruptions, conflicts and discriminations existing in Indian societies. The poet wishes to have a deep affinity with reality:

When eyes are open let me see,
Let words be intimate with brain,
And let the road, the house or tree
Not sprawl across my life in vain. (Ezekiel 2005, 55)

There is nothing mystic or idealist in Ezekiel as far as the above lines, like those in most other poems, are concerned. The poet intends to see clearly what happens around him and respond with his conscious state of mind or with the words of logic. He does not want to deprive himself of the joys of living, so he searches for meaning in everything in life. Indianness is indeed a major theme for Ezekiel as he is deeply rooted in the Indian landscapes and culture. Through poetry, he launches an intense exploration into what makes someone an Indian. Indianness in Indian writing in English in general and Indian poetry in English in particular refers to social, cultural, political, economic, and spiritual identities of the Indians – there are many entities in Indianness. Ezekiel values the sense of Indianness in his writing as he thinks that India as a whole makes him what he has aspired to become – he has dreamt to be a poet, and he is happy that he is one, and to the lovers of poetry, a great one.

A sense of being an Indian influences the writers and poets, writing in English, of the country in various ways. They take liberty in using the language, incorporating the terms of their own culture. Ezekiel, in this respect, forms his own base in Indian poetry in English. Another acclaimed Anglophone poet from India, Agha Shahid Ali comments on the freedom in using English that the poets from India enjoy:

> We can do things with the syntax that will bring the language alive in rich and strange ways, and though poetry should have led the way, it is a novelist, Salman Rushdie, who has shown the poets *a* way: he has, to quote an essay I read somewhere, chutnified English. And the confidence to do this could only have come in the post-Independence generation. The earlier generations followed the rules inflicted by the rulers so strictly that it is almost embarrassing. They also followed models, especially the models of realism, in ways that imprisoned them. I think we can do a lot more. What I am looking forward to – to borrow another metaphor from food – is the biryanization (I'm chutnifying) of English. (as quoted in Mehrotra 2006a, 4)

Ali refers to the distinctive features of Anglophone poetry in various locations in India. Poets and writers in countries such as Australia, Canada, or even America and England cannot contribute the kind of syntax, phrases, or words that the Indian poets spontaneously do to their poetry, employing culturally-nuanced words or phrases. Salman Rushdie, in this regard, has shown the way how postcolonial writers or poets "chutnify" and "biryanise" English. According to Ali, the earlier generations of poets imitated the West, sometimes blindly, to write their own poems, but post-Independence poets are confident about their resources, knowledge, and capabilities to innovate and experiment. A post-Independence poet, Ezekiel writes poetry with his strong sense of Indianness, bringing in innovation in the language of his poetry.

Ezekiel is undoubtedly the monarch of modernity in Indian poetry in English. His ironic stance, self-deprecating voice and his special attention to the tinges of the city of Bombay and Indian landscapes make him an iconic figure in the history of Indian poetry in English. We find the poet speaking about what a person, including himself, has to aspire after in modern society:

> He has to silence no one but himself
> And walk occasionally on alien land
> To know the various lives and dreams of men,
> And show his deep affection for the world
> With words emerging from a contrite heart. (Ezekiel 4)

The above lines mark Ezekiel's modern outlook as the poet thinks that modern people live their everyday life in fear and anxiety, so they take recourse to silence most of the time. Silent observation of things happening in the world is more intense than the lines suggest. The poet also emphasizes exploring other places and knowing people, their lifestyle, and their dreams and aspirations, along with showing empathy to them during their distress –

Ezekiel shows his humanist position here. Modern people feel to atone for what they have done to themselves as well as to others, so they suffer privately. Ezekiel is a realist, and his realist position is revealed, along with many other poems, in the following lines:

> The stubborn workman breaks the stone, loosens
> Soil, allows the seed to die in it, waits
> Patiently for grapes or figs and even
> Finds, on a lucky day, a metaphor
> Leaping from the sod.
> If this is not a miracle
> Then I am God. (Ezekiel 5)

The poet gives a description of a life that a person, a representative of the common people in India, leads every day. A worker toils hard, breaking even stones to prepare land to grow crops – in the long process, he sows seeds in fertile fields, waits eagerly to have the best outcome. On one fine day, he discovers magic in his fields, the magic of luck that gives him a distinct sense of happiness. The poet explains this as a miracle, as a person achieves something valuable through the whole process. Ezekiel's identity as a realist is confirmed as far as the lines of the poem are concerned. Concrete particulars and real-life activities are more important to Ezekiel than other aspects of human life. In another poem titled "Tonight," the poet asserts that "The world is for the living, is there more?" (Ezekiel 2005, 94). Ezekiel casts emphasis on what he experiences from real life – concrete particulars are the raw material for his poetry. Nothing beyond "the living" is significant to the poet. In the poem "Conclusion," Ezekiel (2005) writes:

> That women, trees, tables, waves and birds,
> Buildings, stones, steamrollers,
> Cats and clocks
> Are here to be enjoyed.
> They remain and reflect
> The oblique light of mind,
> Directly, not from a distance,
> But like a mirror on the kitchen wall.
> To see things as they are is a habit,
> An acquisition in the blood
> That will not let the eye grow old. (96-97)

Ezekiel's position as a modern poet reflecting on the concrete particulars is secure as far as the above lines, along with those of many other poems, are

concerned. The poet does not want to leave anything from real life insignificant to treat in his poetry. He likes to deal with everything that he can see or experience in real life. We see him treat entities from tree to table, from bird to building, or from cat to clock in his poetry. He believes that they are the sources of light for him, and he likes to see the real world through these concrete particulars. Seeing the elements of day-to-day life, turning them into raw material for poetry, and treating them seriously are what poets should, Ezekiel believes, sincerely think of. Seeing things around and watching everyday life soothe the eyes, and having inspiration from the real-life incidents is always an enriching experience for Ezekiel. We discover Ezekiel as a distinct modern and realist voice as the following lines suggest:

> Bitten by bugs in her friendly bed,
> He sent her the next morning
> Instead of a bouquet of flowers
> A packet of the New Tik – 20,
> Which was the more practical gift
> And less expensive. (Ezekiel 2005, 275)

A strong realist poet, Ezekiel justifies his position in a great many ways, and the above lines are exceptionally powerful to demonstrate how avowedly the poet sides with reality instead of giving importance to emotion. A lover who is bitten by bugs in his beloved's house does a wiser act, according to Ezekiel, by sending her insect killers instead of flowers. The poet clearly mentions that the insect killer is indeed "the more practical gift". A romantic or a foolish lover puts up with the biting of bugs and meets her with a smile and a bouquet of flowers the next morning. Needs in real life, crises in practical life, and everyday necessities in human life are more important to the poet than artificial emotion. We find a more practical and realistic poet in Ezekiel as far as the above lines are concerned.

Ezekiel pursues identity throughout his whole life, exploring different strata of society and the psyche of the people. He observes deeply, finds peculiarities, comments on them, and keeps on searching the ways that may ensure that he is, above all identities, a poet. He expresses this desire in many of his poems. The poet goes through a number of phases of shock in his life because of the fact that he holds a different identity. He also observes that people living as part of the same nation face hurdles for their differences, but his concern for identity continues. The poet wants people to come out of narrow positions and overcome challenges so that they can live in society peacefully with their individual identities. Identity is sometimes dependent on cultural conditions, because people, as part of a culture, grow up observing and

practicing the distinct culture-specific rituals. His concern for identity is beautifully reflected in the poem titled "Tribute to the *Upanishads*":

> To feel that one is Somebody
> is to drive oneself
> in a kind of hearse –
> the destination is obvious.
> I don't want to be
> the skin of the fruit
> or the flesh
> or even the seed,
> which only grows into another
> wholesome fruit. (Ezekiel 2005, 205)

To feel like somebody, according to the poet, is to have a sense of pride or ego about identity. The person who feels that he is "Somebody" – it is important to mark that the letter 's' is capital here – takes pride in what he is as he comes to know where his journey ends. In his life, Ezekiel does not like to restrict himself to any narrow category. Conscious of the complexities in the world, he strives to associate himself with a broader entity. To him, to become "Somebody," avoiding the greater platform of humanity, is an act of selfishness. It is clear, as the above lines suggest, that Ezekiel never wants to be a "wholesome fruit" – rather, he wishes to be a human being discarding the narrow lines of identity. The poet's vision is humanist and wide-ranging. In the same poem, a few lines later, Ezekiel (2005) makes it clearer:

> For the present, this is enough,
> that I am free
> to be the Self in me,
> which is not Somebody –
> not, at any rate,
> the mortal me,
> but the Eye of the eye
> that is trying to see. (206)

An advocate of multiplicity of identities, Ezekiel emphasizes on wide-ranging categories existing in society – he intends to inhabit the society that hails people's freedom, including the freedom of choosing an identity category. The poet suggests that one needs to see, judge, and make a decision about how he should represent in his society. To strive to be "Somebody," or to strive to form a kinship with a particular community or group, or institution thoughtlessly is what Ezekiel likes to cast away. He, rather, gives importance

to searching his own self, knowing the self better, and identifying the self with the world of humanity.

In his poetic journey, Ezekiel has experiences that are both pleasing and shocking, but nothing stops his indomitable spirit from seeking a true self. He is concerned neither with failure nor with success – fear of failure does not deter him from his resolve. He has made a sincere attempt to continue his journey through his poetry. Edgington (1987) evaluates his poetic achievement:

> Nissim Ezekiel says through his poetry that his entire soul is alive, and all his work is a commentary on that life. There is no question of success or failure in Ezekiel's philosophy of life and death because the result is the same either way: we live and then we die. It does not matter. What does matter is whether or not we choose to accept the thought. (143)

These are fitting remarks about a great poet like Ezekiel, who depicts life as he observes in reality – each and every incident, small or big, about life has found home in his poetry. The poet reveals his own position in his work, that he has tried to remain conscious of his surroundings and used his experiences as raw material for poetry. He does not care about success or failure because he has learnt to accept whatever comes to life. To him, it is easy to understand the simple truth about life: to be born is to die. Belonging to the milieu of multicultural India, the poet undertakes a perilous poetic journey in search of a solution to or deliverance from identity crisis and strives to possess plural identities from an array of categories, but again Ezekiel (2005) emphatically poses a question in "Happening," "Is it enough for us to be what we are?" (163). The poet believes that to have an identity is not enough; rather, a person has to do justice to his identity that he belongs to and feels proud of. The poet indicates the responsibilities of the people for the well-being of others, for the welfare of the society they live in, and for the world they are part of. The thought-provoking question asked in the above line suggests that the concept of identity is deep and wide-ranging, and the quest for identity continues.

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Desi Food Culture and Diasporic Identity: Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, Lahiri's *The Namesake,* and Ali's *Brick Lane*

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Abstract

In this paper, I have examined the role of *desi* food culture in shaping diasporic identity through a comparative analysis of Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. The study explores how food operates as a dynamic cultural signifier within immigrant communities, functioning both as a marker of continuity with the homeland and a medium of negotiation in the host country. Drawing attention to the interdisciplinary frameworks of food studies and postcolonial theory - particularly Homi K Bhabha's concept of "in-betweenness" and Michaela Wolf's "mediation space" – I have critically investigated how culinary practices become mingled with the issues of gender, memory, adaptation and resistance in the diasporic life. Immigrant women play a central role in sustaining and transforming *desi* food tradition within domestic spaces. By analyzing the representations of Panjabi, Indian Bengali, and Bangladeshi Bengali cuisines, in this study, I have argued that desi food culture functions as a performative discourse that both preserves cultural memory and reshapes identity in the face of displacement and globalization.

Keywords: diaspora, in-betweenness; mediation space; food and food studies; culture; identity

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian-Canadian writer, writes on Indian Panjabi diasporic generations, Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian-American writer, writes about Indian Bengali diasporic generations, and Monica Ali, a Bangladeshi-British writer, concentrates on Bangladeshi Bengali diasporic generations. Mukherjee, Lahiri, and Ali, as South Asian diasporic writers, represent three distinct kinds of immigrants who migrate to three different countries. Mukherjee's Jasmine moves from Hasnpur to the USA and then Canada, Lahiri's Ashima and Ashoke from Kolkata to the USA, and Ali's Nazneen and Chanu from Bangladesh to England. The similarity of all immigrants is that they cook *desi* foods despite different challenges in

'diasporic space.' In the multicultural settings they taste diverse food items; but they make different kinds of *desi* foods at home. Mukherjee shows Panjabi foods and Lahiri focuses on Indian Bengali foods, and Ali concentrates on Bangladeshi Bengali foods. Indian and Bangladeshi immigrants consciously maintain close cultural ties with home by cooking *desi* foods to form and reform their identities. This study traces the shifting meanings of *desi* cuisines from a symbol of continuity to a catalyst of transformation.

In diasporic literature, food helps to negotiate identity, memory, and cultural belonging. Culinary practices operate not only as symbols of cultural continuity but also as tools of negotiation in the face of assimilation, generational tensions, and gendered expectations within diasporic narratives. Anita Mannur's seminal work, "Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture," gives a theoretical framework that culinary acts function as an "epistemological anchor for diasporic belonging" (Mannur 17), when diasporic people navigate the boundaries between homeland and host land. In Mukharjee's *Jasmine,* food is represented as minimal because Jasmine temporarily detaches from Indian culinary practices for self-reinvention and assimilation. Conversely, Lahiri's *The Namesake* centers on food as both intergenerational conflict and cultural preservation. Ashima's preparation of Bengali dishes represents an effort to sustain cultural memory. The shifting relationship of Gogol to Bengali food reflects his evolving diasporic identity. Ali's *Brick Lane* offers a more overtly political rendering of food. Nazneen cooks and evolves into an entrepreneurial pursuit, reflecting both her gendered agency and diasporic negotiation. Ali shows that food becomes commodified and preserves the cultural identity of the diasporic community. *Desi* food culture is neither merely nostalgia nor static; it is a dynamic narrative technique that reflects the multifaceted experiences of immigrants. Whereas *Jasmine* underscores the erasure of culinary memory, *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane* affirm its persistence and transformation.

This analytic research is a comparative study on the primary sources: *Jasmine*, *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane* focusing on diasporic people's practices of preparing and consuming foods and their in-between situations.. The analysis will be structured by postcolonial theoretical frameworks, particularly those that address displacement, hybridity and cultural negotiation. To analyze the concepts of '*desi* food culture,' from Homi K. Bhabha's perspectives of 'in-betweenness and third space' and Michaela Wolf's 'mediation space,' I have engaged methods which are interdisciplinary and qualitative in nature. Stuart Hall's theory on cultural identity and diaspora further shape the interpretation of food as a site of ongoing formation of identity. Secondary sources have been consulted for understanding the broader

areas of food studies and diaspora studies, such as, globalization, in-betweenness, hybridity and identity. Thematic motifs such as "home," "homeland," and "taste" are critically unpacked to understand how the diasporic subject experiences identity as both grounded and shifting. . The basic questions in this study are: first, what is the role of Indian and Bangladeshi immigrants? Second, how does gender work in the diaspora? Third, how is the concept of *desi* food and food culture related to literature and cultural studies? The methodology and the comprehensive analysis of the novels using theories direct the critical reading of Indian and Bangladeshi diasporic literature.

Desi Food Culture: Indian and Bangladeshi Perspectives

India and Bangladesh share deep historical, linguistic, and cultural bonds that shape their culinary landscapes. While each nation nurtures its unique identity, its cultural practices - particularly food-remain intertwined due to shared colonial legacies, regional proximities, and transnational flows. The term *desi* refers to the collective cultural essence of the Indian Subcontinent, referring to the people, products, and practices rooted in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nepal. The word *desi* is used widely by South Asians and South Asian Diasporas, who face discrimination, stigmatization, and racism abroad.

Food enriches social relations among different races and the cuisines of India and Bangladesh are considered as *desi* foods which the diasporic people disseminate in other parts of the world, so Marjorie L. De Vault writes in *Feeding the Family: The Social Organization of Caring as Gendered Work*, "What we eat, where we get it, how it is prepared, when we eat and with whom, what it means to us – all these depend on social (and cultural) arrangements" (DeVault 35). The arrangements of food represent the socio-cultural phenomenon of a race, and Indian and Bangladeshi immigrants make *desi* foods at home and in different programs.

Food influences South Asian immigrant women, as Mukharjee writes on Indian Panjabi, Lahiri on Indian Bengali, and Ali on Bangladeshi Bengali immigrant women who engage in homely activities and practice *desi* cultural identities. In "Women of the South Asian Diaspora," Sunanda Ray mentions:

> The South Asian immigrant women's contribution to the family is emotional, social and often financial too. The majority of the immigrant women came to the US when their husbands were either struggling to establish themselves in the initial stages of their careers

> or were going to graduate school. At that stage, many of the immigrant women support their families while others were single-handedly taking care of their families so that their husbands could spend more time and energy on their jobs and studies. Without the support system of an extended family, the husbands become totally dependent on their wives. (Ray 175)

Family is the main place for immigrant women and their husbands remain busy to develop their careers. In the patriarchal settings of South Asian countries men are not accustomed to cooking, and immigrant men depend on their wives or mothers at home. Mukharjee, Lahiri and Ali write about first generation immigrants of the 1060s. Immigrant women prefer to recollect the memories of home through cooking *desi* foods. Bob Ashley et al. write, "Cooking is a process whereby the raw materials given by nature are transformed into culture" (Ashley et al. 40). Food and cooking are principal means for the first-generation women to retain home cultural practices.

While Indian and Bangladeshi cuisines differ in ingredients, preparation, and religious influences, they converge in their emotional and cultural significance. Spices, rituals of cooking and the sharing of food are embedded in the social fabric of both nations. The culinary traditions continue to shape the identity of *desi* communities abroad, turning the act of cooking into a cultural performance that bridges past and present, homeland and host land.

Indian and Bangladeshi Diasporic Literatures: Mukherjee, Lahiri, and Ali

Indian and Bangladeshi diasporic literature plays a significant role in South Asian literary expression, representing the cultural, political, and psychological negotiations of identity in migratory contexts. These literatures foreground the tensions between belonging and alienation, continuity and rupture, and memory and transformation. Indian diasporic literature reflects multiple waves of migration - categorized as Pre-European, Colonial, Postcolonial, and Global or transnational diasporas. Early diasporic writers are V. S. Naipaul, Raja Rao, D. V. Desani, Santha Rama Rau, Dhalchandra Rajan, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Ved Metha etc., who portray the intellectual and spiritual dilemmas of cultural dislocation, often negotiating the colonial burden and the ambivalence of Western modernity. The tradition of Indian diasporic writing was expanded by some female writers, Bharati Mukharjee, Chitra Benerjee, Divakaruni, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, and Jhumpa Lahiri, who foreground gender, memory, and hybridity.

Bharati Mukherjee, as a first-generation immigrant, explores rootlessness, nostalgia, cultural conflict, disappointment, assimilation, resentment, and a sense of belonging. Jhumpa Lahiri, as a second-generation immigrant, portrays the lives of first- and second-generation immigrants in the USA. She focuses on issues like homesickness, cross-cultural encounters, identity crisis, conflict, generational gaps, cultural differences, disintegration, and racial identity.

In parallel, Bangladeshi diasporic literature has gained prominence, especially since the 1990s, with a growing number of writers articulating post-independence anxieties, dislocation, and transnational belonging. The prominent Bangladeshi diasporic writers are: Monica Ali, Zia Haider Rahman, Adib Khan, Tahmima Anam, Fayeza Hasanat, Dilruba Z. Ara, and others. Adib Khan, a Bangladeshi-Australian writer, plays a significant role in Bangladeshi diasporic literature, as Stefano Mercanti writes, "Khan's novels are the exploration of the difficulties of belonging to different cultural traditions" (Mercanti 124). Dilruba Z. Ara writes on the issues of women in *Blame*. Monica Ali has come to the forefront after the publication of *Brick Lane*, a short listed book for the Man Booker Prize in 2003. Tahmima Anam, a Bangladeshi-English writer, is well-known for her writings, *The Golden Age* (2007), *The Good Muslim* (2011), and *The Bones of Grace* (2016). Fayeza Hasanat writes about gender issues, love, diasporic identity, questions of identity and belonging in *The Bird Catcher and Other Stories* set in Bangladesh and the United States. Neamat Imam's *The Black Coat* and Zia Haider Rahman's *In the Light of What We Know* are remarkable representations of Bangladeshi diasporic literature.

Both Indian and Bangladeshi diasporic literatures thus intersect in their preoccupations with alienation, cultural negotiation, and hybrid identities, yet they also diverge in historical, political, and geographical inflections. The works of Mukharjee, Lahiri, and Ali form an important cross-section of this evolving transnational narrative, interrogating how migration not only displaces but also redefines the self in a globalised world.

Desi Food in Indian and Bangladeshi Diasporic Writings

Contemporary South Asian women writers from Bangladesh and India, and their fictions especially concentrate on diasporic women who stay at home, do homely chores, and prepare different kinds of *desi* foods. Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Monica Ali don't write under the influence of the colonizers or contemporary male writers. They write about complex global issues like globalization, migration, postcolonial feminism, cosmopolitanism,

war, violence, religion, and geographical space etc. Mukherjee and Lahiri represent the food practices of Indian cultures of Punjab and Kolkata, and Ali focuses on the Bengali Muslim food culture of Bangladesh. Mukherjee, Lahiri, and Ali write about Indian-Canadian, Indian-American, and Bangladeshi-British immigrants who migrated to the First World countries for a better future. First-generation immigrant women face oppression at home and bear the burden of preserving and disseminating *desi* culture through cooking food and socialization.

As far as gender issues are concerned, women normally stay at home, and they are treated as ideal in Indian and Bangladeshi cultures - men practice patriarchal norms. As Bob Ashley et al. in *Food and Cultural Studies* remark, "In planning meals, women employ a large and diverse amount of tacit knowledge" (Ashley et al. 130). Women, getting married to men residing in the UK and the USA to enhance the family status in society, pay attention to cooking *desi* foods. Sathi S. Dasgupta in *On the Trial of an Uncertain Dream: Indian Immigrant Experience in America* writes, "When South Asian women get married to total strangers and come to the United States, they face the fear and instability of a new relationship without the support they had in their home countries" (Dasgupta 140). When men come home from their jobs, they expect traditional *desi* food items for dinner. Women integrate the new culture through *desi* food preparation and sharing among foreigners.

The study critically focuses a constellation of postcolonial and cultural theories to explore diasporic spatiality and identity through the lens of food and kitchen practices in diasporic literature. There are some interrelated concepts of 'diaspora space,' 'third space,' 'mediation space,' and gastronomic identity - the frameworks illuminate the nuanced ways in which diasporic subjects negotiate belonging, difference, and hybridity through the everyday act of food preparation and consumption.

Avtar Brah's idea of 'diaspora space' focuses not only on geographical displacement but also on a dynamic site where multiple identities and power relations intersect. It provides the foundation as she defines it, not merely as a geographical displacement but as a site of intersectionality - a discursive and material space where political, economic, cultural, and psychic dimensions of migration and identity collide. In *Cartographies of Diaspora* Brah notes, diaspora space is one where "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed," (Brah 205) and where borders are not fixed but rather negotiable and capable of reconstruction. The kitchen becomes a privileged diasporic space - simultaneously private and political - where

identities are performed and inscribed through acts of culinary labor and memory.

In parallel, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of 'hybridity' and the 'third space' serve as a vital postcolonial framework for understanding the cultural negotiation. Bhabha thinks that the; 'third space' is not a synthesis of two cultural roles but rather a productive zone of ambivalence where a new, hybrid identity emerges. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha states, "the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the "third space" which enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha 211). The cultural encounter creates cultural hybridity, which results in "the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone" (Ashcroft et al 118) usually produced by the dominant culture. The third space, inherently liminal and unstable, allows for the re-articulation of cultural meanings in ways that resist essential binaries of home/host, self/other, or purity/impurity. In this regard, food becomes a potent medium of hybridity, representing both continuity and rupture.

Further extending Bhabha's idea and Michaela Wolf's concept of 'mediation space' - drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural production - emphasises the transitory and relational character of diasporic encounters. Mediation space, as Wolf suggests, is neither fixed nor purely oppositional; rather, it is a field of dynamic cultural transfer and reconfiguration, when new symbolic and social relationships are constantly re-"mixed" and re-negotiated (Wolf 112). The kitchen in diasporic narratives thus operates as a mediating site, linking the ethnic traditions of the homeland with the adaptive demands of the host land.

This intersection of space, culture, and identity is particularly evident in the realm of literary food studies, which positions food not simply as sustenance but as a cultural signifier and a narrative device. In *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* Wenying Xu states, "Food operates as one of the key cultural signs that structure people's identities and their concepts of others" (Xu 2). This symbolic dimension of food acquires further resonance in diasporic texts where culinary practices serve as sites of memory, resistance, and affect. Through nostalgic recollections of traditional meals or hybrid food inventions born of necessity, food becomes a material articulation of diasporic consciousness - a way of simultaneously preserving, transforming, and negotiating identity. Food items that can be considered a part of what Sara Jane Littlejohn calls "food narratives as they are connected to narrative, performative language, and ideology" (Littlejohn 1).

Gina M. Almerico defines, "Food studies is not the study of food itself; it is different from more traditional food-related areas of study such as agricultural science, nutrition, culinary arts, and gastronomy in that it deals with more than the simple production, consumption, and aesthetic appreciation of food. It is the study of food and its relationship to the human experience" (Almerico 2). Almerico explains that food studies are less concerned with food's physical composition and more with its cultural and social implications, investigating food's relation to the human experience. Food functions as a powerful gastronomic zone and an "emotional anchor" (Mannur 27), whereby issues such as– nostalgia, the resultant creation of hybrid dishes and hybrid identities, shocks of arrival as of return, attempts at cultural preservation through culinary recreation and fluidity of ethnicity.

In diasporic literature, food often functions as a gastronomic archive, encapsulating histories of migration, cultural trauma, and racialisation. It becomes a means of community formation, a kitchen turned into zones of gendered labor, intergenerational transmission, and political assertion. In *Food and Culture: A Reader*, Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik state, "Food touches everything. Food is the foundation of every economy. It is the central pawn in the political strategies of states and households. Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds and contradictions" (Counihan and Esterik 1). Food mediates between past and present, between memory and adaptation, and between belonging and estrangement.

Within these theoretical frameworks, diasporic food practices emerge as complex acts of cultural negotiation, situated in what Bhabha terms the 'in-betweenness' of identity and what Wolf articulates mediated encounters. The diasporic kitchen thus becomes a powerful symbolic and material site where hybrid subjectivities are both constituted and contested. Through culinary performances, the diasporic subject negotiates the dull pull of nostalgia and assimilation, reconfiguring identity within the fluid topographies of diaspora space.

Desi Food Culture and Identity in Diaspora: *Jasmine*, *The Namesake* and *Brick Lane*

The dream of the immigrants becomes ashes when they face the in-between situations of two cultures and two identities as "Identity is an essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes, and lifestyles" (Barker 220). *Desh* (motherland) and *Desi* culture, especially *desi* food, is a matter of desire to the first-generation immigrants like Jasmine, Ashima, and Nazneen, and their next generations adopt multicultural food practices for the

promotion of health, convenience, and variety. Mukharjee, Lahiri, and Ali demonstrate that food makes immigrants nostalgic and helps to form identity and inter-ethnic relationships.

Jasmine

In Mukherjee's *Jasmine*, Jasmine, a passive village girl, faces cultural conflict both in and out of her own culture. She always searches for a complete identity and transforms into a modern woman. She positively forms a new hybrid identity after migration and negotiation between two cultures. She assimilates with other cultures as she states, "I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane" (Mukherjee 175). She dreams of a modern life, and her husband, Prakash, motivates her to turn into a modern and ideal woman. In America, at the university, people who want to study any subject on Indian culture take help from her. They question the traditional Indian foods she cooks, and some like to eat Indian vegetable diets. Shweta Greg and Rajyashree Khushu-Lahiri in "Interpreting a Culinary Montage: Food in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*," mention, "food associated with an ethnic community becomes the quintessential marker of identity" (Garg and Khushu–Lahiri 80). Food is a symbol of individual identity and group identity and sharing food can bring different ethnic groups together. Jasmine minimizes her sense of identity crisis in America by cooking Indian food and serving Indian dishes to Du, her Vietnamese son, and Darrel, a young local farmer.

Jasmine becomes alone after the sudden and unexpected death of Prakash and she remarks, "I could remember my father's and my husband's cremations . . . I had left my earthly body and would soon be joining their souls" (117). The period preceding her immigrant rebirth is marked by starvation, both obligatory and deliberate. Following the sudden death of Prakash she recollects, "an image triggered the tears, the screams . . . the Kanjobal women left the room, Lillian stayed with me, brewing tea" (132). Tea is very special to Indians who make tea using *masalas*. Jasmine recollects and adopts American cultural identity through learning to cook American hamburgers and roasts from Lillian.

She negotiates with the new cultural identity and somewhat maintains Indian cultural identity while facing the processes of acculturation, transformation and assimilation. Food is intrinsically connected to the process of her identity formation. She changes Bud, Du and Darrel by serving Indian foods as she boldly states, "They get disappointed if there's not something Indian on the table," (7). Mukherjee shows cultural interaction and the

adoption of culture as Jasmine introduces Indian foods to others and mentions, "I took gobi aloo to the Lutherian Relief Fund craft fair last week" (146). The Panjabi food item 'gobi aloo' is very popular in India. Cultural identity is formed in a multi-cultural get-together, but the impact is temporary as Bud is never curious to know about India.

The Namesake

Lahiri in *The Namesake* intricately weaves food into the diasporic experience of Ashoke, Ashima, and their children, using culinary practices as markers of identity, memory, and cultural negotiation. Ashima's attempt to recreate Calcutta Street snacks using US ingredients "Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts" (Lahiri 1) symbolizes diasporic yearning for home and the creative adaptation required in exile. Ashima wants to be connected with the home through preparing *desi* snacks during her pregnancy, prepares traditional meals like lamb curry with potatoes and *payesh* "the biryani, a carp in yogurt sauce, the dal, the six different vegetable dishes" (39) during rituals such as Gogol's *annaprasan* (39), and organises feasts that blend religious observance with diasporic community bonding. Food functions as both a sensory link to the homeland and a site of cultural preservation.

Food determines immigrants' identity, - "the meanings surrounding food enable us to shape the identities which give meaning to people's sense of themselves as social agents, especially in respect of national identities forged in opposition to their others" (Ashley et al. 85). Ashima cries for home and asks other Bengalis for advice about the recipes for some dishes, for example, how she can cook *halwa* with wheat flakes. On Sunday, people from the Bengali community visit each other's houses to taste "tea with sugar and evaporated milk and eat shrimp cutlets fried in saucepans" (Lahiri 38). Food preserves culture and it connects or disconnects people.

Lahiri presents numerous scenes of banquet: Gogol's *annaprasan* and the final celebratory goodbye meal that Ashima prepares for her children and her significantly enlarged circle of friends. Apart from the transmission and renewal of cultural messages, such kind of communal feasts represent "victory" of a privileged section of the Indian diaspora, as they settle and grow "at the world's expense", or so to say, thrive at the expense of the hostland (Bakhtin 283). These ethnic foods and ceremonies help the diaspora to pass around the knowledge of gastronomic hybridization, as the new immigrant wives, "homesick and bewildered, turn to Ashima for recipes and advice" (Lahiri 38) on how to approximate the foreign atmosphere as well as the unfamiliar food items.

Indians are supposed to be vegetarians, but Indian Bengalis eat fish, meat, egg etc. In Gogol's 14th birthday his mother "makes sure to prepare his favourite things: lamb curry with lots of potatoes, luchis, thick channa dal with swollen brown raisins, pineapple chutney, sandeshes molded out of saffron-tinted ricotta cheese" (72). *Desi* foods make an affinity with their homeland and an effort to make a "mini homeland" in a hostland. The Bengali community cook and serve Indian foods in social programmes to feel a sense of belonging. Gogol, from second generation, "feels bored of eating the same everything" (55) and is very much interested in different foods as his parents order pizza or Chinese for them. He is torn between two kinds of concepts-assimilation of American culture and a connection with his family traditions. To celebrate Gogol's graduation, his parents throw a party and Ashima cooks Bengali dishes like rice, dal, and various cuisines.

Gogol's American friends primarily hesitated to eat, but they eventually enjoyed Bengali food items. Ashima also cooks peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and a slice of bakery cake on each of Gogol's birthdays. Therefore:

> In the supermarket, they let Gogol fill the cart with items that he and Sonia, but not they, consume: individually wrapped slices of cheese, mayonnaise, tuna fish, and hot dog. For Gogol's lunches they stand at Delhi to buy cold nuts, and in the morning Ashima makes sandwiches with bologna or roast beef. At his insistence she concedes and makes him an American dinner once a week as a treat, Shake'n Bake chicken or Hamburger Helper prepared with ground lamb. (65)

Gogol struggles with his cultural identity, feels disconnected from Bengali culture, and assimilates with American culture. Gogol tells his American friend, Ruth, about the Indian foods he'd eaten on Indian trains the time he traveled with his family to Delhi and Agra. He mentions, "the rotis and slightly sour dal ordered at one station . . . the thick vegetable cutlet served with bread and butter for breakfast. He tells her about the tea . . . poured it from giant aluminum kettles, the milk and sugar already mixed in" (112). When Gogol meets Maxine's family he learns to love the foods "the polenta and risotto, the bouillabaisse and osso buco, the meat baked in parchment paper" (137). Gogol assimilates with American cultures and when Maxine comes to his home, Ashima cooks *desi* foods, "samosas, there are breaded chicken cutlets, chickpeas with tamarind sauce, lamb biryani, chutney made with tomatoes from the garden" (148) to treat her.

After Ashoke's death, Ashima and her children observe a "mourner's diet" (180) for ten days, as they avoid meat and fish and "eat only rice, dal and vegetables, plainly prepared" (180). Food practices structures their grieving days, and each evening, they are "strangely hungry" and "eager to taste the blandness on their plates" (181). When everything else seems meaningless, food remains the only agreeable thing. Ashima, Sonia, and Gogol, by their deliberate rejection of certain foods, feel closer to Ashoke. The mourning period ends with a religious ceremony alongside a funeral banquet, where they prepare an "elaborate meal" of meat and fish, "cooked as his father liked them best, with extra potatoes and fresh coriander leaves" (181). With the house once again filled with the smells of familiar foods, they feel "as if it is just another party" (181) that celebrates the enlargement of Ashoke's life.

Brick Lane

In *Brick Lane,* Ali writes about Bangladeshi immigrants, Nazneen and Chanu. In *Post-Colonial Women Writers: New Perspectives*, Sunita Sinha states, "Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is the first novel to focus almost exclusively on the lives of Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlets" (Sinha 233). Nazneen moves to London, and Mamtaz gives "a tin plate of rice, dal, and chicken curry" (Ali 10). Ali gives the dominance of Bangladeshi cooking as Nazneen buys local yogurt from a nearby supermarket. The moment she takes a tub of yogurt from the fridge, she recollects her childhood days back in Bangladesh when her mother used to make fresh, "thick and sweet and warm" (62) yogurt at home. The plastic pot of the yogurt "from the plastic English cows" (62) compares unfavourably with the natural one of her mother's.

Immigrants resist a sense of isolation through cooking and consumption, which facilitate a mode of belonging at once to the original nation and the adopted land. Mannur terms such women as cultural brokers, "whose bodies and lives have been drawn by their labor within food preparation" (Mannur 137). Nazneen uses traditional ingredients to prepare her dishes and the ingredients are purchased from the local shop "stacked with kebabs, tandoori chicken, bhajis, puris, trays of rice and vegetables, milky sweets, sugar-shined ladoos, the faintly sparkling jelabees" (Ali 400), where the other diasporic members do their shopping, the same choice of dishes and cooking rituals definitely strengthen ethnic ties and this "establishes the 'communal' aspects of the experience" (Parasecoli 419). Food strengthens mutual relationships with other members of the community. Despite living in Britain for some time now, Nazneen remains strict to the influences of the host culture and rigidly practises Bengali culinary tradition. Apart from carefully prepared dishes, she attaches great importance to more formal norms relating

to the aesthetic role of food. She lays the tablecloth that she wants to be spotless and carefully cleans the glasses, rubbing them with some paper to make them shine.

Another scene that demonstrates the superiority of Nazneen's traditional culinary habits is the picnic in St. James's Park, London. The description of a wide range of the sophisticated dishes that Nazneen has cooked by herself is really impressive. In a family get together all members sat on the grass and Nazneen prepares,

> Chicken wings spread in a paste of yogurt and spices and baked in the oven, onions sliced to the thickness of a fingernail, mixed with chillies, dipped in gram flour and egg and fried in bubbling oil, a dry concoction of chickpeas and tomatoes stewed with cumin and ginger, misshapen chapatis wrapped while still hot in tinfoil and sprinkled now with condensation, golden hard-boiled eggs glazed in a curry seal, Dairylea triangles in their cardboard box, bright orange packets containing shamelessly orange crisps, a cake with a list of ingredients too long to be printed in legible type. (Ali 246)

The display of the dishes of *desi* foods is absolutely stunning and eye-catching. In no way can their picnic food be compared to that of the native British. Nazneem puts the food on paper plates, lays out plastic cups, and places them all on tea towels, which definitely enhances the aesthetic appeal of the meal.

A Comparative Analysis: *Jasmine*, *The Namesake*, and *Brick Lane*

Mukherjee, Lahiri, and Ali show immigrants who are in the third-space of in-betweenness, hybridity, and mediation space of cultures and encounter diverse food items which form new identities. Stuart Hall remarks, "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 222). He further explains that "cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'; it belongs to the future as well as to the past" (225). Jasmine, Ashoke and Ashima, Nazneen, and Chanu eat *desi* foods to overcome the trauma of migration. They gradually go through the process of fusion not only in food, but also in communities by eating *desi* food and adopting foods from other cultures.

In *The Namesake*, Ashima makes Indian Bengali food, *jhal muri*, which is very famous as a street food, to recollect the memories of Kolkata. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen feels an affinity with and between the people in her community regarding the same culinary behaviours. The smell of the curry being cooked by neighbours reminds Nazneen of her early years at home. Food creates a tie among neighbours, and the Bangladeshi culture is that Bengalis borrow some spices or other necessary ingredients from their neighbours to cook traditional desi dishes. Ashima cooks *macher jhol* (fish curry) by grinding the spices by hand, and traditionally prepares the dishes. In "Meals, Migration, and Modernity," Krishendu Ray writes:

> Rice and fish become particularly potent symbols of Bengaliness precisely because outsiders, be they other Indians or Americans, are considered unable to appreciate them or incompetent in handling the bones. Rice and fish is considered a real insider delicacy . . . There is also a sense that you have to keep doing it – repeat the recipes over and over and keep eating rice and fish in the Bengali style. There is anxiety that it will vanish if it is not repeatedly performed . . . Through repetition, rice and fish become the quintessence of Bengaliness. (Ray 190-91)

Food is a maker of identity and immigrants get association with ethnic communities through *desi* food practices. In *Brick Lane*, Ali shows that Nazneen and Chanu invite Dr. Azad for a get-together for dinner and Nazneen prepares some desi dishes as ". . . there was the dal to make, and the vegetable dishes, the spices to grind, the rice to wash, and the sauce to prepare for the fish that Chanu would bring this evening" (Ali 8). In fact, both Lahiri and Ali show that rice, dal, and fish are common foods for both Indian and Bangladeshi Bengalis. Being associated with ethnic feelings, food makes Ashima and Ashoke's relationship stronger as "By now she has learned that her husband likes his food on the salty side, that his favorite thing about lamb curry is the potatoes, and that he likes to finish his dinner with a small final helping of rice and dal" (Lahiri 10). Rice, dal and lamb curry with potatoes are common *desi* food as Ali shows that Chanu "scooped up lamb and rice with his fingers and chewed" (Ali 23). Nazneen also cooks desi foods such as "rice and potato and cauliflower curry" (96). Lahiri and Ali also focus on making tea, drinking tea, and the fascination for tea.

Lahiri shows the changes in food habits in the second generation who eat sandwiches and ice cream, and drink juice and lassi. It is observed that immigrant' children are fascinated by adopting the culture of the new country. Gogol finds a sense of freedom and independence at the dinner table at

Maxine's house. "A bowl of small, round, roasted red potatoes is passed around, and afterward a salad. They eat appreciatively, commenting on the tenderness of the meat and the freshness of the beans. His own mother would never have served so few dishes to a guest . . ." (Lahiri 133). Ali shows that Sahana buys "lassi" (Ali 292).

Gogol and Moushumi are the consumers of foreign cultures, as through their numerous relationships with people from different ethnic backgrounds, they embark on a hyperreal "gastronomic tour" (Friedman 119). Food plays a revelatory role, along with its obviously aphrodisiac role as Lahiri describes, "a thin piece of steak rolled into a bundle and tied with string, sitting in a pool of dark sauce, the green beans boiled so that they are still crisp. A bowl of small, round, roasted red potatoes is passed around, and afterward a salad" (Lahiri 133). Gogol begins to appreciate the scarce food items served at Maxine's house

A celebration of their long and triumphant stay in America is marked by their final Christmas Eve party. Mannur rightly comments, Ashima's "final act of communion with the *desi* community is one that, unsurprisingly, centers on sharing food" (Mannur 147). Lahiri's detailed focus on food images, combined with the effortful exercise of cooking, lends a realistic charm to the novel, as the preparation of Ashima's special mincemeat croquettes is described:

> First, she forces warm boiled potatoes through a ricer. Carefully, she shapes a bit of the potato around a spoonful of cooked ground lamb … She dips each of the croquettes, about the size and shape of a billiard ball, into a bowl of beaten eggs, then coats them on a plate of bread crumbs, shaking off the excess in her cupped palms. Finally, she stacks the croquettes on a large circular tray, a sheet of wax paper between each layer. (Lahiri 274)

The party reflects the scenes of the banquet and serves to present what Bakhtin calls "the true epilogue," containing "potentialities of the new beginning" as they gain perspectives in their lives (Bakhtin 283).

Ashima matures into a transnational person and decides to divide her time between the homeland and the hostland. On her visits to India, she no longer feels the need to arm herself in the kitchen. Her job at the library brings her into contact with other foreign women of her age outside her Bengali group. She occasionally lunches at her house and goes shopping with her American friends on weekends. The binaries of "inside" and "outside" worlds

of Ashima create a relationship with the two cultures she inhabits. Nazneen undergoes a transformation from an obedient wife to an independent woman towards the end of the novel: "[Nazneen] took more rice. She took more dal. She offered more to her daughters" (Ali 402). Nazneen makes her daughters habituated with Bengali foods to manage the family easily in England after Chanu's shift to Dhaka.

Mukharjee's Jasmine survives in America through food practices. Prakash motivates her to become American; still, food plays a transformative role in her maturation. She brings cooked Indian food items to country events and makes the fusion of foods in multicultural settings. She never makes any attempts to correct the American friends' misconceptions about Indian culture, but she does give any reaction if her signature dish is called 'motor pan' by Darrel instead of *matar panir*. She later says, "it is matar panir. Matar for peas and panir for cheese" (Mukharjee 216). *Matar paneer*, a very delicious dish in India, has become popular in the world.

Lahiri and Ali write about common Bengali food items as - rice, dal, lamb curry with potato, tea, samosa, haleem, payesh etc and Mukherjee writes about Panjabi foods gobi aloo, *matar panir*, vegetables, and tea. All of them show cultural integration of the characters and the transformation of identity. For Bhabha, as Jonathan Rutherford notes, "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity that displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiative. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (Bhabha 211). Lahiri and Ali's characters have homesickness, and the same kind of missing home is not observed in Mukherjee's Jasmine, who has been fascinated with the American culture throughout her journey and accepts a fluid hybrid identity.

Conclusion

Food, as an essential part of culture, helps to form and reform the identities of Indian and Bangladeshi immigrants who use numerous ingredients, methods of preparation, and cooking techniques to make, serve, and consume diverse cuisines of the world. Mukherjee, Lahiri, and Ali depict the issues of immigrants, food culture, identity, and cultural distinctiveness. They focus on the distinguishing aspects of their native culture (the culture of the Other) within a clash of civilizations, which initially motivates a resistance to the foreign culture, only to stimulate, eventually, the development of a hybridized form of culture. Jasmine, Ashima, and Nazneen represent their own

cultural heritages by making *desi* foods. Cooking of *desi* recipes by diasporic women helps different diasporic generations to communicate and establish ethnic ties. In the book, *Food and Foodways in African Narratives: Community, Culture and Heritage*, Jonathan Highfield claims that ". . . the food people eat and the way it is prepared speaks volumes about their relationship to the culture, their place in society, and their interaction with the environment" (Highfield 157). In this paper, I have posited that desi food culture, as depicted in the works of Mukharjee, Lahiri, and Ali, plays an integral role in mediating the diasporic condition - bridging memory and identity, homeland and hostland, and ultimately shaping a dynamic, evolving sense of belonging rooted in hybridity and cultural negotiation.

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Surrealism as a Social Critique: Exploring Identity and Social Alienation through Selected Writings of Haruki Murakami and Shahidul Zahir

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Abstract

Shahidul Zahir and Haruki Murakami are the two most famous surrealist writers of our time whose works have bedazzled many readers. Although both authors come from different geo-social backgrounds having different aspects of narrating their stories, they took inspiration from Latin American literature (especially from Gabriel Garcia Márquez) and constructed their own versions of surreal literature to narrate stories of contemporary society. The authors not only share the same enthusiasm towards human emotion and surrealism, but have also written in the same genre for many years, and they also resonate with similar issues like identity crisis and isolation from society. As they delve deeper into their writings to establish the connection between identity crisis and social isolation and try to compare this to existing social norms, their narratives get even more intriguing as it forms a sublime effect on readers and leave them in awe. As individualism is a prominently relevant concept to discuss in modern literature, Murakami and Zahir have focused on these concerns repeatedly in their works. They have excelled in showing emerging issues of social detachment and the formation of an identity crisis in society. As a result, their works certainly create an assertive buzz and reflect the quality of people's lifestyles because literature is an important medium to critically look at the society's condition and evolution. The simple yet effective narration style, uncomfortably intriguing approach to individuals' psyche, and blending of almost unreal surreal elements into a believable format have given the readers an opportunity to peek into pressing issues like identity crisis and isolation in society without losing literary subtlety. On the other hand, it has made surrealism a gateway to discovering such entities. This paper aims to zero in on identity crisis and alienation or isolation in society through the unfolding of surrealism in their selected writings.

Keywords: surrealism, identity crisis, individualism, social alienation

Introduction

"He was still too young to know that the heart's memory eliminates the bad and magnifies the good, and that thanks to this artifice we manage to endure the burden of the past."
— Gabriel García Márquez, *Love in the Time of Cholera*[1]

Haruki Murakami and Shahidul Zahir are the most exquisite and spell-binding writers to dominate their respective areas of writing. Both of them are very good at telling the ordinary story of ordinary people extraordinarily. While they wanted to tell their stories in a surreal manner and to promote casual, easy-going life and their turnarounds, Murakami worked on the extremity of individuality in detachment and finding solace, while Zahir showed the whole society or prominently pieced characters who mainly depicted the same stories as Murakami.

The selected texts from Haruki Murakami are *'The Year of Spaghetti'*, *'Shinagawa Monkey'*, *'Confession of a Shinagawa Monkey'*, *'First Person Singular',* and *'Burn Burning',* and selected texts from Shahidul Zahir are *'Sting(kata)*', '*Why There is no Periwinkle Flower at Agargaon Colony (Agargaon Colonite Noyontara Fuul keno Nei)'*, and *'The Lumberjack and the Raven (Kathure o daarkaak)'*.From the selected texts taken from both authors and diving into their writing techniques and uses of surrealism, this paper aims to establish a link between the human psyche and its effect on daily lives when someone faces any form of abandonment from society, and forms of individual identity crises that keep on thriving in society to date.
It is important to notice that, while most of the texts taken from the authors are indeed written in the late 20th century, the validity and tones are adjusted in those texts to refer to regular people's lives, and their crises remain important and subtly relatable to the lives of ordinary people living in a society.

While Haruki Murakami is a Japanese writer famous for his stories written in both Japanese and English, Shahidul Zahir is a Bangladeshi author who mostly wrote his stories in the Bengali. But both of them share the same enthusiasm and passion to write and describe normal scenarios and people's livelihoods in a unique technique taken from Latin American Literature known

[1] Emma Welton, "Gabriel García Márquez in Quotes," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 18, 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/18/gabriel-garcia-marquez-in-quotes.

as Magical Surrealism. Now, magical surrealism or magic realism has been a part of our culture and literature from the early to the mid-20th century, which is also the booming period of this genre in the form of literature or art. Although magic realism is directly motivated by the surrealist movement of the early 20th Century, the poet and theorist of surrealism Andre Breton described surrealism as "pure psychic automatism" in his book Surrealist Manifesto, which was published in 1924. The main concept of Surrealism lies within the concept of delivering the imagery of the subconscious mind and its ongoing turmoil, and presenting it in the form of art. Surrealism got its proper exposure through Latin American Literature in the late 1940s. Famous authors like Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Juan Rulfo wrote about the life and legacy of Latin American people, which includes Mexico, Central America, South America, and parts of the Caribbean. The writers included usual stories and elements from their society and narrated the story based on the theme of hope, inspiration, loss, alienation from society, and its effect on the subconscious mind. Local Myths and folklore became their instrument for expressing subconscious entities through literature. So, the presence of magical elements in life was very subtly put and mostly shown as a normal incident. The difference between this magic realism and surrealism is that magic realism confirms the presence of supernatural elements as a normal incident, and surrealism mostly explains the situation as a dream-like situation or simply an illusion of the subconscious mind.

Given that Latin American literature was already quite established in adapting surrealism, and that too in their unique way, which also firmly established the genre of magic realism in a later era among readers. So, authors often find inspiration from it and promote those ideas with their unique writing has helped to enrich their cultural identity and progression in this genre. Also, capturing people's livelihood and their thought processes of those respective geographical residents in light of folklore and myths from the area made the interpretation of their psyche more approachable to readers and scholars.

Moreover, it is important to notice that people and their lives might differ according to their geographical residency, but surrealism broke that difference with mere indifference to hope and dream, as people live to dream to have finding solace and contentment in their lives. The journey of finding themselves and belonging somewhere has been pouring into the literature in many formats, as surrealism remains one of the most prominent ones to date.

Haruki Murakami and Shahidul Zahir, both writers, were severely inspired by the works of Latin American writers, as we can see the presence and pattern of magical elements in many of their writings, where a monkey

talks about stealing memories from women (Confession of a Shinagawa Monkey) or a magician capable of vanishing people and an entire place! (Dumurkheko Manush) But most of their writings contain a surreal perspective that expresses people's subconscious thinking laced with trauma, guilt, or the burden of unwanted memories.

And, because of the trauma, guilt, and unwanted encounters in life, people often dissociate their reality with their life and try to justify their current position as a bad dream or nightmare in real life. (Erikson's theory, Salvador Dali, and Sigmund Freud's interpretation of the subconscious mind.)

Selected texts from Murakami and Zahir will help us to achieve further exploration of surrealism and the human psyche, and their alienation from society.

This paper will explore the topics of the effect of time loops and natural elements in play, as well as identity crisis and social belongingness in people living in contemporary times. To analyze the texts, two prominent theoretical frameworks have been employed. The first one is the theory of identity crisis, which was given by the famous psychologist Erik Erikson. Erikson's theory explores how a person learns to cope with their identity from their childhood to adulthood and how a crisis is formed if anything occurs. Psychologist James Garcia also worked on Erikson's theory and further developed it to define the crisis in a better way.

Another major framework that has been used is the time-loop paradox theory, which is a very popular and established ground in many surreal literary works to date. Although there are no clearly selected formats for the authors to develop their stories, most surrealistic authors have some narratives developed using time-looping theory or paradox. Selected texts from Murakami and Zahir will shed light on this theory as to how people react when they encounter such situations. A time loop is a concept that serves as a literary device to show the trauma and suffering of people. Moreover, this paper follows author Gabriel Garcia Márquez's literary views and puts stress on surrealism to properly define the thesis topic as surreal literature's influence on people's lives and how it enacts their motivations. Social alienation and identity crisis often form from the trauma and bigotry people face while living in a society. This situation can arise from social conflicts, war impact, psychological deterioration, rejection from people, etc. All these suppressed trauma and burdened memories take a surreal literary form over time as writers describe those incidents, maintaining the notion of related feelings intact. Thus, the belief has been uplifted since the birth of stories and fables dealing

with imagination that help create magical situations. Surrealism is just another gateway to properly connect real life to magic and see the differences to depict human nature. This paper critically examines that point and scales down the narratives to realistic situations as much as possible. The critical analysis is divided into two parts. The first part thoroughly analyzes the identity crisis in people and how they react in given situations. The second part analyzes their situations with time looping, enacting with their lives, and how surrealism comes into play to form a literary work. Both parts are analyzed based on the selected literary texts of Haruki Murakami and Shahidul Zahir.

The selected texts from Haruki Murakami *are 'The Year of Spaghetti', 'Shinagawa Monkey', 'Confession of a Shinagawa Monkey', 'First Person Singular', and 'Burn Burning',* and selected texts from Shahidul Zahir are *'Sting(kata)', 'Why There is no Periwinkle Flower at Agargaon Colony (Agargaon ColoniteNoyontaraFuul keno Nei)',* and *'The Lumberjack and the Raven (Kathure o daarkaak)'*.

Literature Review

From the early ages of stories and fables, storytellers have always tried to provide impacts that create credibility and trust for their respective narratives. The authors used their imagination to elaborate on some current situations or foretold some old situations by reverberating suppressed feelings within many historical incidents. Nonetheless, their aim for the people was always the same, which was to provoke thinking and, to some extent, to evolve the capability of imagination of the audience. Thus, their narratives took different shapes from time to time as people like to tell their version of the story, but basic values and notions almost stayed the same in all their stories. In a sentence, it means that people always took solace in imagination and mixed it with their situational narratives. Thus, stories were born and histories were made. Now, surrealism plays its part from the mid-twentieth century, but some of its basic elements and realization have come from the very core of storytelling, and magical elements had their part in it too. Surrealism is basically a newly improved format of telling people's stories with a hint of little or close to real magical elements. One of the most influential pioneers of this literary format is the famous Latin American author Gabriel García Márquez, who described its relevance and effects on real life in many of his interviews. In one interview given to Paris Review, he depicted surrealism as an instrument to narrate a society and the people in it, - "It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes from the imagination, while the truth

is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality." [2]

Author Gabriel García Márquez always believed that people are living their lives with magical elements surrounding them. They just cannot see it that way or believe it to be a natural phenomenon that happens coincidently. But according to him, the truth is, -people always prefer to tell their story with the hint of something as surprising as surreal elements in it. So, almost every literary work of Márquez has some major surreal elements in it as he found it almost inevitable to write without.

Therefore, drawing inspiration from Márquez, newer authors began to expand their horizons to narrate people's stories using surreal elements to explain their ambition, heartache, or even tragedy. People living in a society have always tried to discover their options to cherish happiness in life and have good prosperity within. But there is none who did not face difficulties in his/her life that altered their pathways and shaped them to their ultimate form. Some might call it fate or destiny, and some might label it as things that were inevitable to get away from. The trauma and rejection or oppression they faced eventually shaped their memory and psyche to cope.

Nonetheless, as we see in history, incidents that shaped people's lives became the stories later and inspired or diverted people to choose wisely or act according to those. Famous psychologist Erik Erikson has tried to define these incidents by forming a *theory of persona* or how people choose their identity. Erikson's personality theory states that people in their lifetime go through many critical moments which shape their persona from their adulthood to adult life. Psychologist Justin T Sokol referred to Erikson in his paper named; "Identity Development Throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory" (published in 2009) saying,

> I shall present human growth from the point of view of the conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased
> sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an

[2] Peter Stone, "The Art of Fiction No. 69," The Paris Review, January 8, 2021, https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3196/the-art-of-fiction-no-69-gabriel-garcia-marquez.

> increase in the capacity 'to do well' according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him.[3] (02)

To understand the meaning of it properly, he further mentions Erikson, who proposed the theory of people going through eight developmental stages that span throughout the whole life cycle. Now, the important thing is that, throughout this time, each stage offers them or presents them with an inherent task or conflict that they must successfully resolve to proceed with development. Erikson placed a greater emphasis on sociocultural factors because he believed that these factors are, in fact, related to the development of the process of identity formation.

Now, it is important to remember that literature is just another format of humans looking into themselves with the help of a nourished, praiseworthy narrative to understand their capabilities and act accordingly. The sudden burst of emotion, however, suggests the level of appreciation within oneself, as it varies from person to person.

As Gabriel Garcia Márquez once said in his interview, "What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it."[4]

Both the authors have tried to stay honest with the pathways of the characters and consciously depicted them as normal people experiencing something quite unfathomable but eventful.

Murakami showed an extreme measure of identity crisis and loneliness in his works. In his work '***First Person Singular'***, the story follows the protagonist living with his wife but has a weird hobby of wearing gorgeous suits and going to a bar for drinking. He does this often to facilitate his fascination. And, even though he has a partner (his wife), he still feels lonely,

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[3]Justin T. Sokol, "Identity Development throughout the Lifetime: An Examination of Eriksonian Theory," accessed November 5, 2022, https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1030&context=gjcp.

[4]Emma Welton, "Gabriel García Márquez in Quotes," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 18, 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/18/gabriel-garcia-marquez-in-quotes

which he covers by wearing those fancy suits. Ultimately, one incident finally provokes his self-consciousness to emerge when he meets a lady in a bar who belittles him for some unknown shaming he had done before. It forces him to face the ultimate loneliness he was avoiding. The story ends by focusing on his consciousness finally becoming guilty.

> "The wind was really cold outside. I felt like I would freeze right now. I pulled the suit's collars up when suddenly a woman's voice came from an invisible place, 'you should be ashamed.'"[5] (245)

Loneliness and identity crises have taken a major portion of Murakami's writing style as he was greatly inspired by the lives of soldiers from the World War II and the Cold War. Another story written by him, *'Year of Spaghetti'*, shares the same grounds of loneliness and identity crisis. In this story, the protagonist dwells within himself and cooks spaghetti for a whole year. At first, it seems like a passion for him. But as the story goes further, it becomes clear that he was trying to avoid his loneliness in the form of cooking spaghetti as it is a food shared by many people and not one. The writer shows the loneliness subtly by saying,
"I want you to understand my position, though. At the time, I didn't want to get involved with anyone. That's why I kept on cooking spaghetti, all by myself. In that huge pot, big enough to hold a German shepherd, Durum semolina, golden wheat wafting in Italian fields. Can you imagine how astonished the Italians would be if they knew that what they were exporting in 1971 was really *loneliness*?" [6] (4)

One of the major works of Haruki Murakami to define identity crisis and loneliness is titled as *'Shinagawa Monkey'* and its sequel *'Confession of a Shinagawa Monkey'*. In the first story, the protagonist loses her name to a Shinagawa Monkey. The sequel, which is the confession, describes the monkey's ethical position behind the name theft. The monkey actually steals the name of the woman he loved in a platonic way. As a monkey cannot love some person physically, he chooses to love beautiful women in a platonic way and steal their names to remember them by. The story feels bizarre until this point, but it gets more fascinatingly miraculous or even magical when the

[5]Murakami Haruki, First Person Singular, [Harvill Secker, April,2021]

[6]Haruki Murakami, "'The Year of Spaghetti,'" The New Yorker, November 14, 2005, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/09/06/magazine20051121the-year-of-spaghetti.

readers discover that the woman who got her name stolen, could not remember her name in real life. Personifying a monkey and giving him a magical presence to embark on such journeys also deeply surfaces the issues of identity crisis in such a manner that leaves the reader astounded as well as sad.

Shahidul Zahir promotes the same vibe of loneliness and identity crisis in his story named *'Why There is no Periwinkle Flower at Agargaon Colony' (Agargaon Colonite Noyontara Fuul keno Nei).* In this story, the protagonist is a civil servant living in a government colony with his family. Now, even though he has offspring and his wife beside him, he still prefers to sit on his balcony and be alone to enjoy the serendipity all by himself after returning from work.

As the author describes the situation in his usual narration. He says, "**…** and then like every other day he sits on the couch by the balcony to enjoy the dying light of the day. He sits there till night, whereas his two sons and one daughter with his wife complete their school-works, watch TV and haul inside their tiny apartment. He stays in there embracing the dark of night. He observes the passing of daylight and how darkness becomes more achievable. He just observes the situation without any happiness or remorse; like a civil servant would feel so…" [7]

By formulating such loneliness, the protagonist dwells within his daily life as his only partners become the periwinkle flower pots on the balcony. After an incident of earthquake, his life ended tragically as he tried to save the flower pots from falling, but fell with them as well. Until this point, one can assess certain loneliness in the writings. But as the story progresses further, it explodes into more than just a story of loneliness. The soil from the spot where he died had grown periwinkle flowers which only grew there and there only for some mystical reason. This portion connects the reader with the story and shows the true meaning of loneliness by also showcasing the authors' literary prowess. No one wants to be alone and miserable and the periwinkle flower paid its homage to a dead soul by staying on that spot even after his death. Additionally, these works from both authors show the loneliness in human lives and their effect on society.

[7] ZahirShahidul, *Shahidul ZahirGalpasamagra: Granthita, Agranthita, AprakāśitaSamastaGalpa, SadyaSaṃgṛhīta (2018) CāraṭiGalpasaha* (Dhaka: Pathak Samabesh, 2019).

authority over themselves and slowly surfacing an identity crisis as the story progresses. People cannot get past the fact that they are experiencing something this much unique in their daily lives. From the text, it is clear that the incident happening in their vicinity has made their mind think like that. Although they try to seek forgiveness for the abolishment that occurred at that time, their consciousness still remembers it all. Thus, the phenomenon continues in an unfathomable way, though their daily lives are being passed by doing everyday work.

Almost the same form of repentance can be seen in Murakami's stories named ***'Burn Burning'*** and ***'First Person Singular'***. In ***'Burn Burning'*** the protagonist loves a girl who has a boyfriend with a bizarre hobby of burning down old barns in the month of December. And, though he suspects something fishy about the girl's boyfriend when she disappears, he cannot find any solid evidence that can be linked to him. So, as every December passes, he remembers the incident. He tries to find solace within by searching for any burning barns in December but his repentance never gets its heel. As the writer says, "I still run past the five barns every morning. No barn in my neighborhood has burned down. And I haven't heard about any barn burning. Decembers come again, and the winter birds fly overhead. And I keep on getting older." [9]

Murakami has shown his absolutely astonishing power of writing to establish such bizarre stories in a surreal format that only complements his prowess. Thus, whether readers find the true conclusion or not, it surely makes them sad but leaves a craving for more of it. On the other hand, readers are drawn to something magical but believable in Shahidul Zahir's story named *'The Lumberjack and the Raven' (Kathure o daarkaak),* where the poor lumberjack lives with his wife and does day-to-day work to provide for himself and his family. One day, a raven shows up in their lives, and they suddenly get a gold pot inside a tree. Although it has a good vibe, it is ruined when people from their village get to know about their sudden fortune. They ultimately have to leave their house empty-handed. Thus, the chronicle of the raven begins. Whenever they meet a raven, they get a good fortune in some manner, but ultimately have to lose it all anyway. The story seems like any other fable until the words of the surrounding people come into play. The narration provides a vague description of this incident in a detailed manner. This surely raises the question of whether it really happened or not. Thus, the author is successful in promoting the surreal theme. The time paradox is visible

[9] Murakami Haruki, The Elephant Vanishes [Vintage, 2017]

from the starting line of this story, where a vague statement starts the whole story as, "The elderly people of Dhaka city could remember that, the city became totally raven less when it might have happened for a long year or five years and it all started from the village named Boikunthopur."[10]

Where surrealism promotes the idea of "detailed" magical reality to make people believe the story, Zahir uses his extraordinary technique of vaguely detailed description which, in fact, feels more intriguing.

In the paper written by Varnika Raizada and Dr. Tanu Kashyap, they discussed loneliness and isolation in Murakami's *'Men Without Women',* where they labeled such stories as "deals in empty spaces and phantom spaces." [11]

They praised his idea of telling stories of the modern world, which also represents loneliness and isolation. Murakami mastered the art of telling lonely people's stories in a fascinating way that only he can do in such an intriguing fashion.

On the other hand, author Shahidul Zahir has received almost the same accolades in his effort to describe the human psyche, or identity crisis, and isolation from society. Although his writing style and narration differ significantly from Murakami but resonate with the same topic of identity crisis and isolation in society. In an interview, Shahidul Zahir precisely described that writing comes from within. "There is no satisfying explanation of why a person writes the way he writes rather than he writes because he likes to write and because it's in his blood to write."[12]

In an effort to write about the time-looping paradox, Zahir also added that he wanted to mix present, past, and future, thus breaking the space-time

[10] ZahirShahidul, *Shahidul ZahirGalpasamagra: Granthita, Agranthita, AprakāśitaSamastaGalpa, SadyaSaṃgṛhīta (2018) CāraṭiGalpasaha* (Dhaka: Pathak Samabesh, 2019)..

[11] VarnikaRaizada and Dr. Tanu Kashyap, "Loneliness and Isolation in Men without Women by Haruki MurakamiVarnikaRaizada ," Issue, June 30, 2020, https://issuu.com/tjprc/docs/2-67-1594279249-261ijmperdjun2020261.

[12] Kamruzzaman_ Jahangeer, "শহীদুল জহিরের সাথে কথপোকথন," bdnews24, March 26, 2008, https://bangla.bdnews24.com/arts/interview/1265.

continuum in his writings, as those mentioned times in his stories enact the same volatile vibe that he wanted to tell anyway.[13]

Thus, we see people of a vicinity forming collective amnesia in ***'The Lumberjack and Raven'*** or even getting delusional to not recognize their present, past, or even future in ***'thorn'(kata)***. Moreover, it is interesting to see that both maintained Erikson's theory of personality.

However, discoveries in many branches can still be made, and outcomes can alter previous discoveries. And, remembering such things, the aim of this paper still proves to be valid because, up to this certain point, the claims made in this paper appear to be justified and evenly established.

Identity Crisis and Time Loop in Play

As mentioned above, Haruki Murakami and Shahidul Zahair both showed their ultimate prowess when enacting a surreal story. And, although the difference in the geo-social environment has allowed them to write in their own fashion, but both embraced the inspiration from Latin American surrealistic literature and especially from author Gabriel Garcia Márquez, who is one of the most famous authors of this genre.

While their writing patterns might vary a bit, both of them embodied the philosophy of telling the story of people suffering from an identity crisis and showed the connection between them and an unwelcoming world. While the characters suffer from indecisiveness and ultimately form a complex identity crisis their confusion and dilemma get, even more, deeper when they even lose track of time and feel stuck in a time loop.

People always try to remember their good memories and are fond of dreaming about their good times. But the truth is, people are more moved by despair and the continuous motivation of improvement, which is pre-instilled within their instinct. Thus, sufferings make them quit or become a stronger version of themselves. Another major thing to notice is that the time loop is actually referred to as a safe checkpoint in video games, from where one can start fresh and redo their previously mistaken works. In another study made on

[13] Mozaffer Hossain, "শহীদুল জহিরের প্রবণতা ও স্বকীয়তা," Bangla Tribune (Bangla Tribune, September 11, 2022), https://www.banglatribune.com/762634

the mind and psyche, it is shown that positive feedback can alter and change memory cells where constant failure and despair result in the deterioration of brain cells and memory loss.[14]

Murakami and Zahir have tried to show the time loop as a purgatory for their characters where they suffer indefinitely, but somewhere deep within all these patterns, we find hope of reconciliation and a place for a contented mind. Sufferings might be the truth, but it is optional if one still hopes for redemption. So, the time loop paradox can be seen as a format or option to change which the authors provided to the characters and also to the readers subtly.

Conclusion

Both writers narrated the stories brilliantly, maintaining certain boundaries and criteria. Nonetheless, both followed their style of persuasion to narrate the stories, and they did use similar metaphors and strategies to proliferate eventual conclusions evident in their stories. Shahidul Zahir narrated his story in a vague, collective manner to describe his characters' experiences and show their confusion about the time loop and identity crisis. Haruki Murakami also showed the same point of identity crisis and looping within their memory in his stories, but his characters were conscious, and the whole experience was adamantly detailed only to cater to the needs of the characters and provide necessary backgrounds to certify his showing of identity crisis and time loops in humans. Understanding all these things with the help of Erikson's theory makes it more fascinating as we can fathom the depth and evolution of our society and personal endeavors with it. Now, we should not forget that it is achievable by using different techniques and other formats of analysis. But using surrealism has landed us on two major grounds here. The first one is the opportunity to understand and appreciate the subtle beauty of this genre and the prowess of both writers to enact such narratives filled with social and personal conflicts. The second one is that literature has always been the mirror of human desire and despair. People have always used magic and surreal elements as a cushion to be content in life. So, this is one of the closest points to discovering our unseen part of life. Surrealism is definitely

[14]Lisa Trei, "Psychologists Offer Proof of Brain's Ability to Suppress Memories," Stanford News, January 9,
2009, https://news.stanford.edu/news/2004/january14/memory-114.html.l

a much better fit to understand contemporary society and its desires. Influential and prolific writers like Haruki Murakami and Shahidul Zahir are perfect ensembles to discover such entities. As García Márquez said, "It's enough for me to be sure that you and I exist at this moment." [15] It only seems logical that people will dissolve into their own reality and form their own indecisive time loop in the situation that occurs to that extent. But there is still much to recover from other aspects too, and that remains to be seen. And we hope to see many discoveries in the future.

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Deconstruction and Dialogism in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*

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Abstract

This paper explores Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* through the intersecting lenses of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. Arguing that the play resists fixed meaning and singular authority, the study reveals how Stoppard destabilizes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by re-centering marginal characters and exposing the instability of language. Drawing on Derrida's concepts of différance, trace, and aporia, the paper shows how the play defers meaning and fractures identity. Simultaneously, Bakhtin's theories of dialogism, polyphony, heteroglossia, and the carnivalesque illuminate the plurality of voices and the subversion of hierarchical structures. Rather than offering resolution, the play enacts a "dialogic deconstruction," where meaning emerges through absence, contradiction, and ceaseless dialogue. In doing so, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* becomes not merely a postmodern pastiche, but a theatrical critique of logocentric certainty and monologic closure.

Keywords: deconstruction, dialogism, différance, aporia, polyphony, carnivalesque

Introduction

The twentieth century did not merely inherit Shakespeare; it dismantled him. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966) is less an adaptation of *Hamlet* than a counter-discourse. His absurd tragi-comedy reimagines Shakespeare's *Hamlet* not by retelling it, but by inhabiting its margins. The minor characters Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are brought to the center stage, only to remain lost in the fog of another man's tragedy. Stoppard, who never advocated the quest for a definite interpretation of his works, ironically started his career as a critic. Supporting the same idea, in an interview with Hudson, Itzin, and Trussler, when he was asked about an intended message or philosophy to be found in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, a kind of accurate interpretation, Stoppard replied:

> It's difficult for me to endorse or discourage particular theories – I mean, I get lots of letters from students, and people who are doing the play (*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*), asking me questions about it, which seem to expect a yes-or-no answer. It is a mistake to assume that such questions have that kind of answer. I personally think that anybody's set of ideas which grows out of the play has its own validity… (qtd. in Bareham 67)

However, critics never hesitated to tag different terms and philosophies to categorize *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.* The play has been examined in a variety of dramatic contexts: Absurdist Theater, Existentialist, Beckettian, Post-Beckettian, Post-Absurdist, to name a few (Meyer 3). It is true that all the approaches mentioned here analyzed the text successfully, but how close they were to the text's true essence remains questionable. It is because what Stoppard intended as a dismissal of fixed meaning was, paradoxically, taken by them as an invitation to impose one.

It seems quite clear that Stoppard was not attempting a regular parody of the Shakespearean masterpiece. His vision was quite complex. Though Stoppard shows us that language is often the source of miscommunication, he does not altogether discourage the readers and critics from reinvestigating his play. As we see in the play, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two marginal characters, are set to wander in the labyrinth of royal politics; they struggle really hard to make the meaning out of their absurd existence in a plot that is not written for them. But they still assume that there is a purpose for their absurd existence, as Guildenstern says,

> GUIL**:** We have not been picked out simply to
> be abandoned, set loose to find our own way. We are entitled to
> some direction I would have thought. **(**Stoppard 20**)**

In this paper, I set out to find the 'direction' Guildenstern refers to, and concluded that examining the void at the center of the text, rather than searching for a fixed meaning, while attending to the multiplicity of voices surrounding it, offers a promising critical approach. Two theoretical frameworks—Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism—provide the critical apparatus for this research. Through these lenses, Stoppard's work becomes not just a tragi-comedy, but a theatrical manifesto against logocentrism and monologism, proposing instead a world where meaning is suspended, identity fragmented, and every voice provisional.

Stoppard's protagonists in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* are not tragic heroes, nor antiheroes; they are figures caught in *différance* and dialogic fragmentation. From the opening coin toss that defies probability to their nameless death announced rather than shown, the play presents a challenge to meaning, coherence, and authority. As Derrida observes in *Writing and Difference* (1978), "There is no meaning outside the system of differences" (278), and this play exhibits this absence by denying its characters any grounding narrative. Simultaneously, Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogism in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981)— "The word in language is half someone else's" (293)—frames the play as a cacophony of borrowed voices, refracted meanings, and theatrical ghosts. French philosopher Jacques Derrida argued in his seminal work *Of Grammatology* (1976) that texts are full of hidden contradictions and that what we often consider the "main meaning" of a story is actually unstable (158). Stoppard uses this by flipping *Hamlet* on its head. Instead of focusing on power, revenge, or royal tragedy, he focuses on confusion, insignificance, and silence. On the other hand, in *The Dialogic Imagination,* Bakhtin comes up with the concept of dialogism, which, according to him, gives place for dialogue and preserves the freedom of speech, since every human being has the right to resist, agree, and disagree. Consequently, Dialogism opens room for the interaction of many voices without being interrupted and promotes one's point of view instead of the shared viewpoint. Stoppard sets us free from the Shakespearean monologue where events center on Prince Hamlet and neglects the life of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who belong, in fact, to the common people. However, it may be said without exaggeration that no English writer in the history of playwriting has created as many kings as Shakespeare did. But in the world of Bakhtinian Carnivalesque, as we find in his book *Rabelais and His World* (1984), the margin takes over the center, and the clown can become the king (124). Something similar happens when we see two marginal characters of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* become protagonists in Stoppard's absurd tragi-comedy, and Hamlet, the prince, is put in the backdrop. Both Derrida and Bakhtin challenge the notion of a singular, stable meaning—a challenge that echoes throughout *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in its fractured logic, layered voices, and destabilized narrative. By engaging Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction and Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, I argue that Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* subverts logocentric binaries and embraces polyphonic uncertainty, positioning itself not merely as absurdist theatre, but as a theatrical critique of fixed meaning and authoritative voice.

Deconstruction and the Breakdown of Binaries

Jacques Derrida's deconstruction interrogates the foundational assumptions of Western metaphysics, particularly its reliance on *logocentrism*—the belief in a central, stable origin of meaning, such as reason, God, or truth, often associated with the privileging of speech over writing (*Of Grammatology* 11). This metaphysical bias, deeply entrenched in philosophical discourse since Plato, sustains binary oppositions—pairs like presence/absence, reason/emotion, male/female—where the first term is valorized over the second. Deconstruction, however, reveals how these binaries are not natural or stable, but constructed hierarchies that depend on what they exclude (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 278). Contrary to common misunderstanding, *deconstruction* is not synonymous with destruction; rather, it is a mode of critical reading that seeks to expose the internal contradictions of a text and demonstrate how it "undermines the authority of its own assertions" (Norris 19).

Central to Derrida's approach is the concept of *différance*, a neologism combining the ideas of "difference" and "deferral," which describes how meaning in language is perpetually postponed and relational (*Of Grammatology* 62). There is no ultimate or self-sufficient signified; instead, every signifier refers to another in an endless chain, thereby displacing the notion of fixed origin. Another crucial term is *trace*, which refers to the residual presence of other meanings and absences within a word or concept; each sign bears the shadow of what it is not, marking it with the ghost of alternative interpretations (Spivak xvii). The trace thus makes meaning possible, but never pure, as it is always contaminated by the absence it tries to exclude (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 70). These slippages lead to what Derrida calls *aporia*—a moment of undecidability within a text where logical resolution collapses, revealing the inherent instability of the system (Derrida, *Dissemination* 3).

Deconstruction ultimately challenges the notion that texts are transparent or self-sufficient. Every reading becomes a re-reading, and every interpretation is provisional. As Derrida asserts, "There is nothing outside the text" (*Of Grammatology* 158), meaning that all meanings are constructed within language, not in reference to an external, metaphysical reality. Deconstruction is thus not a conclusion but a continuous engagement with the plurality, contradiction, and excess embedded in language itself (Culler 87). Through this lens, texts no longer function as vehicles for fixed meaning but

as sites of conflict and play, revealing that certainty, like presence, is always already deferred.

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* can be considered a deconstruction of Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* as the play covers all the key concepts associated with deconstruction. One of Derrida's targets of criticism was Logocentrism, an over-hasty, naïve devotion to logic, meaning, and clear definition. Logocentrism functions with binaries like speech and writing, love and sex, reason and emotion. The odd case of Logocentrism is that it prioritizes the first term over the second. But according to Derrida, the neglected counterpart also deserves our attention. Similarly, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, there was a binary between the central character Hamlet and the marginal characters like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, where the author neglects the latter part of the binary. But Stoppard broke the hierarchy and placed these left-out characters of Shakespeare in the center of the play, thus impacting the meaning-making process of the text. As Derrida observed in his notion of *Difference* that meaning is always deferred or delayed. This is partly why readers who expect to watch a modern version of Hamlet will get differences instead of similarities in Stoppard's tragicomedy. As mentioned earlier, the logocentric philosophers, beginning from Plato, had the tendency to prioritize speech over writing as an authentic medium of communication. But in Stoppard's play, speech fails to communicate as the dialogues are circular, confusing, and misleading. It is rather the dumb show that communicates better, even without using a single word. It delivers the Derridean message that what actually matters is the relation between terms, rather than the choice of one term over another (Ulmann 23). In this connection, it is necessary to quote from the player as he says, "We are tied down to a language which makes up in obscurity what it lacks in style" (Stoppard 77).

In his commentary quoted above, the player rebels against it by deconstructing linguistic value assumptions in three steps: It first recognizes linguistic logos as the preferred means of language communication (logocentricity). Then, it boldly accuses linguistics of failing at the very job it is supposed to do so well, thus removing it from the preferred position in the logocentric hierarchy. Finally, it relies on the images created by signifying chains of words via action and the dumbshow, rather than the words themselves (Meyer 84).

At the heart of Derrida's deconstruction lies the notion that meaning is never fixed, but always deferred—a concept he names *différance*. According

to Derrida, language is a system of differences without positive terms; meaning emerges not from presence, but from absence (*Writing and Difference* 278). This idea is reflected in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* from its opening coin toss, where heads appears ninety-two times in a row (Stoppard 14), defying probability and mocking rational logic.

The characters themselves suffer from ontological instability. They often cannot recall who is Rosencrantz and who is Guildenstern—"I'm Rosencrantz." "No, I'm Rosencrantz" (Stoppard 60)—exemplifying what Derrida terms the *trace*: the simulacrum of presence left by absence (Of Grammatology, 156). Their identities are deferred, their purpose never clarified. As Hooti observes, Stoppard refuses "a definite, logocentric text with a decidable meaning" (Hooti & Shosstharian 151).

We notice in Stoppard's play that doubt is dominant in the conversation among the characters. The protagonists do not seem to understand the plot, and their confusion becomes the plot. This focus on puzzlement is something that leads us to another Derridean concept known as *Aporia,* a rhetorical and philosophical impasse in which every attempt to determine meaning leads to contradiction or uncertainty. Language, which is meant to clarify communication, rather creates confusion in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Language itself collapses under scrutiny. In one scene, Guildenstern protests: "We are tied down to a language which makes up in obscurity what it lacks in style" (Stoppard 77). This reflects Derrida's aporia—a philosophical impasse where language exposes its contradictions. The Player's mockery of speech further undermines linguistic certainty: "Words, words. They're all we have to go on" (Stoppard 41). As Meyer notes, the Player deconstructs language by exposing its failure to communicate (Meyer 83).

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Tom Stoppard repeatedly confronts the failure of language to arrive at fixed meaning, particularly when characters attempt to understand or explain abstract human conditions such as death, purpose, or madness. One such moment occurs when Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player try to pin down the nature of Hamlet's mental state. Their effort, however, results not in clarity but in further confusion, exposing a deeper crisis of language and meaning. This moment is best understood through the Derridean concept of aporia. The exchange below demonstrates how aporia emerges within the play as characters struggle to define what cannot be definitively known:

GUIL: He doesn't give much away.
PLAYER: Who does, nowadays?
GUIL: He's – melancholy.
PLAYER: Melancholy?
ROS: Mad.
PLAYER: How is he mad?
ROS: Ah. (To GUIL.) How is he mad?
GUIL: More morose than mad, perhaps.
PLAYER: Melancholy.
GUIL: Moody.
ROS: He has moods.
PLAYER: Of moroseness?
GUIL: Madness. And yet.
ROS: Quite.
GUIL: For instance.
ROS: He talks to himself, which might be madness.
GUIL: If he didn't talk sense, which he does. (Stoppard, Act II 60)

The dialogue unfolds as a series of attempted definitions—"melancholy," "mad," "moody," "morose"—but each label is questioned, reversed, or rendered insufficient by the next speaker. Rather than clarifying Hamlet's state of mind, the characters engage in a circular movement of deferral, where meaning is never arrived at but only postponed. Their language becomes self-cancelling: Hamlet is mad *if* he does not make sense, but he *does* make sense, so he is not mad—but still somehow *is*. This is the hallmark of aporia: the characters stand at the threshold of understanding but are paralyzed by the instability of the very terms they use to make sense of things. In Derrida's philosophy, aporia is not merely confusion but a structural feature of meaning itself—it is the inevitable consequence of relying on language, which always defers meaning through endless chains of signifiers. In this scene, madness resists definition not because of a lack of effort or intelligence, but because the word "madness" does not contain any essential truth. It functions relationally—only in opposition to "sense," "melancholy," or "moody"—but even these terms are unstable. As a result, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and the Player are left suspended in a moment of epistemological uncertainty, caught between knowing and unknowing, assertion and retraction. Their aporetic condition is not incidental; it is intrinsic to the world Stoppard constructs—one where language gestures toward meaning but never arrives, and where certainty is the illusion that the absurd continuously unmasks.

The discussion so far demonstrates that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* enacts Derridean deconstruction by challenging the logocentric

privileging of fixed meaning and presence. Through its portrayal of linguistic instability and the deferral of meaning via différance, the play reveals how identities dissolve into traces—marks of absence and difference that undermine self-presence. The characters' failure to define madness illustrates aporia, a philosophical impasse where language reveals its own insufficiency and internal contradictions. By destabilizing binaries and exposing the limitations of language, Stoppard's play aligns with deconstruction's critique of metaphysical certainty and the instability of meaning itself.

Dialogism and the Chorus of Fragmented Voices

Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is more than a postmodern homage to Shakespeare—it is a riotous carnival of voices, perspectives, and conflicting truths. Intertextually woven with *Hamlet*, the play explores existential uncertainty through the lens of linguistic and ontological fragmentation. In light of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, Stoppard's work can be read not as a derivative or secondary text but as a polyphonic critique of fixed meaning, authoritative voice, and literary hierarchy. This section explores the play's polyphony, heteroglossia, and carnivalesque spirit, arguing that *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* functions as a dialogic theatre that decenters classical authority and allows meaning to emerge through a cacophony of competing, unresolved voices.

Bakhtin's concept of dialogism begins with a rejection of monologism—the notion that a single, unified voice can control and determine meaning. Instead, dialogism affirms that meaning arises from the interaction of voices within a social and historical context. As Bakhtin asserts, "the word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 279). In this framework, no utterance is isolated or absolute; it always responds to previous speech and anticipates future responses.

Stoppard's play operates entirely within this dialogic structure. From its first scene, where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern engage in a seemingly nonsensical game of coin-tossing, the play undercuts any illusion of singular authority. "Heads" keeps appearing, and yet neither character can make coherent sense of it. Their language loops and spirals, as if chasing meaning that never arrives. Confronted with a world that resists explanation, they turn to words not as tools of clarity but as survival mechanisms. "Words, words. They're all we have to go on" (Stoppard 41), Rosencrantz remarks in exasperation. The phrase captures the essence of their condition: language, rather than anchoring reality, floats uncertainly above it. In this vacuum of

authority and purpose, dialogue becomes their only recourse—a tenuous refuge where confusion is at least mutual, if never resolved.

In such a world, the author is no longer omniscient. Like Dostoevsky's novels, which Bakhtin described as polyphonic, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* presents "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 6–7). Each character's voice exists in its own right and is not subsumed under a unifying authorial ideology.

Bakhtin defines polyphony as "multi-voicedness," a situation where each character's voice is autonomous and irreducible to a singular truth. This is precisely what Stoppard offers. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not exist merely to serve Hamlet's narrative, as they do in Shakespeare's play; instead, they become fully fledged, if confused, agents in their own absurd story. Their dialogue does not converge toward consensus or climax but meanders, evades, and self-destructs. It is a chorus of philosophical stammering: "What's it all about? Can't you see? We're actors—we're the opposite of people!" (Stoppard 80).

This confusion of identity reaches a comic yet philosophically rich moment when the characters bungle their own names:

> ROS: "My name is Guildenstern, and this is Rosencrantz."
> GUIL**:** "I'm sorry – his name's Guildenstern, and I'm Rosencrantz." (Stoppard 18)

What seems like a trivial mix-up becomes emblematic of Bakhtin's dialogic instability. The utterance here is not a confirmation of fixed identity, but an act caught in a web of previous assertions and ongoing responses. In this exchange, neither name can settle into authoritative truth. The characters' voices do not resolve confusion but participate in its perpetuation. Their identities, like their lines, are provisional—always already shaped by others and open to reversal. The joke works because it dramatizes a deeper crisis: in a dialogic world, meaning is relational, and the self is not self-contained but constructed in the space between conflicting voices.

Even the Player, who appears to hold some meta-theatrical control over the events, fails to offer closure. His declaration, "It's what the actors do best. They die well," is both a recognition of theatrical convention and a parody of tragic resolution (Stoppard 83). In this sense, every voice in the play undercuts itself, exposing the limits of language and reason. The polyphonic

structure ensures that meaning is always in flux—each utterance refracts others rather than replacing them.

Closely related to polyphony is Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia—the coexistence of diverse speech types and discourses within a single text. Heteroglossia resists homogeneity by embedding language in specific social, historical, and ideological contexts. As Bakhtin notes, "every utterance must be understood in the context of other utterances" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 293).

In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the clash of languages is palpable. The elevated, introspective diction of Hamlet's soliloquy is juxtaposed against the fragmented banter of the two protagonists. When Hamlet delivers his iconic "To be or not to be" speech, Stoppard does not foreground it but buries it in the background—literally staging it as background noise to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's mundane concerns. "Is he alone?" asks Guildenstern. "No." "Then he's not talking to himself, is he?" (Stoppard 55). The sacred monologue is carnivalized into idle chatter.

Furthermore, the Players function as a vessel for heteroglossia. Their performances incorporate high tragedy, low comedy, burlesque, and parody. Through them, Stoppard stages a discourse of pastiche. As the Player explains, their job is not to mirror truth but to manufacture spectacle: "We're actors… We're the opposite of people" (Stoppard 80). This conscious embrace of artifice exemplifies Bakhtin's claim that heteroglossia acknowledges alternative meanings, opens room for negotiation, and challenges the monologic illusion of totalizing truth.

Bakhtin's idea of the carnival originates in his reading of Rabelais. For Bakhtin, carnival is a cultural and literary space where hierarchy collapses, seriousness is mocked, and death itself becomes laughable. "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it… it is a second life" (*Rabelais and His World* 7). In literary terms, carnival embodies parody, grotesque realism, and the subversion of authority.

Stoppard's play is imbued with carnivalesque inversion. The grand philosophical themes of death, destiny, and identity are not solemnly handled but tossed about in games, puns, and slapstick. Death, especially, is demystified. While Hamlet's death in Shakespeare is heroic and tragic, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's deaths are absurd, arbitrary, and offstage. As the final line proclaims their fate— "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are

dead"—the audience is not moved to tears but to shrug or laugh (Stoppard 126).

This comedic undercutting of death represents what Bakhtin calls grotesque realism, where the body is not idealized but mocked and exaggerated. By rendering the sacred profane, Stoppard joins a long tradition of carnivalesque writers who challenge dominant ideologies through humor and excess.

Role reversal is another carnivalesque strategy at play. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the prince's perspective dominates. In Stoppard's world, Hamlet is reduced to a side character, and the minor courtiers become the focus. Stoppard inverses the roles, making the existential questioning of two minor characters the center of his play. This inversion mocks the elitism of canonical tragedy and reclaims literary space for the voiceless, confused, and powerless. It is a democratic gesture, a refusal to bow to literary aristocracy.

Every word in Stoppard's play is haunted by its Shakespearean precursor. But this haunting is not reverent—it is dialogic. As Bakhtin writes, "the word in language is half someone else's" (*The Dialogic Imagination* 293). *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* speaks in the borrowed cadences of *Hamlet*, only to recontextualize, distort, and ultimately parody them.

This intertextual strategy ensures that the play is always already in conversation, not only with Shakespeare but with the audience's expectations and cultural memory. It deconstructs not by demolishing the source text but by reframing it. The result is a text that is at once familiar and strange, reverent and rebellious. It encourages, as Bakhtin insists, "an active understanding," one that resists passive consumption and instead engages the reader or viewer as a participant in meaning-making (*The Dialogic Imagination* 280).

In staging a world where answers are elusive, language unstable, and identity fluid, Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* embodies the essence of Bakhtinian dialogism. It refuses to speak from a position of authority and instead fosters a polyphony of perspectives. It welcomes the grotesque, the parodic, and the absurd as valid modes of philosophical inquiry. It reclaims marginal voices, deflates tragic grandeur, and revels in the interplay of language.

What makes *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* enduring is not its answers, but its refusal to provide any. The play embraces uncertainty,

replacing resolution with an ongoing exchange of perspectives. In line with Bakhtin's view of meaning as dialogic and unfinalizable, Stoppard offers a world where no voice dominates, and truth emerges, if at all, through continuous interaction. Identity remains unstable, authority is decentered, and language never fully secures meaning. The play resonates because it keeps the conversation open—inviting reflection rather than resolution.

Dialogic Deconstruction: A Synthesis

In an age where singular meaning falters and texts echo with voices beyond the author's command, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* emerges as a powerful dramatization of philosophical uncertainty. Central to this reading is the synthesis of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism. Though their methods and terminologies diverge—deconstruction rooted in French Poststructuralism and dialogism in Russian literary theory—both thinkers challenge the authority of fixed meaning, embrace multiplicity, and prioritize relational structures over hierarchical ones. When read together, they illuminate how Stoppard's play functions as a site of "dialogic deconstruction," where language is unstable and voices are irreducibly plural.

Both Derrida and Bakhtin foreground the relational nature of meaning, resisting the notion that it can be finalized or self-contained. Derrida asserts that "meaning is not a presence but a complex structure of deferrals, differences, and traces" (*Of Grammatology* 71). Meaning, then, is never complete or immediate—it is shaped through a network of absences and relations. Bakhtin similarly contends that meaning cannot exist in isolation. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, he writes, "The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent" (Bakhtin 293). Language, for both, is dialogic and differential rather than expressive of a solitary, original voice.

Stoppard dramatizes this unstable semantic terrain through the fractured discourse of his protagonists. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern engage in verbal games and rhetorical loops that lead nowhere. In Act I, Guildenstern remarks, *"Words, words. They're all we have to go on"* (Stoppard 41). The irony of this line lies in its simultaneous acknowledgment and critique of language's insufficiency. Their speech oscillates between performance and desperation, illustrating Derrida's différance and Bakhtin's contextual dependence. Meaning for them is always out of reach—constructed, contested, and deferred.

A shared resistance to authoritative discourse and monologic closure also aligns Derrida with Bakhtin, though they approach it differently. Bakhtin emphasizes the plurality of social voices—*heteroglossia*—and argues against a univocal center of truth. "There is neither a first nor a last word," he writes, "and there are no limits to the dialogic context" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 170). Derrida, too, critiques the idea of authorial mastery. In *Writing and Difference*, he notes that the writer is "inscribed in a network of a language which is not his own" (94). Both thinkers displace the figure of the author or sovereign voice, replacing it with a web of competing discourses and perspectives.

Stoppard's characters inhabit precisely this web. They are suspended between Shakespeare's canonical script and Stoppard's own postmodern commentary. Their names are often confused, their identities blurred, their agency undercut. The Player, a figure of theatrical meta-commentary, declares: *"We're actors. We're the opposite of people"* (Stoppard 63). This inversion undermines any claim to authenticity or essential identity. It echoes Derrida's critique of presence and Bakhtin's interest in carnivalized, subversive speech. The voices in the play do not cohere into a unified worldview; rather, they jostle, interrupt, and relativize one another.

The intertextuality of Stoppard's play further supports a synthesis of Derridean and Bakhtinian frameworks. Derrida argues that texts are always already inhabited by other texts, writing, "Each element… is constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system" (*Of Grammatology* 46). Bakhtin likewise observes that all language is fundamentally responsive and anticipatory: "The text lives only by coming into contact with another text" (*Speech Genres* 162). In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, the protagonists exist only because Shakespeare once wrote them, yet they are reanimated here to question their own narrative, fate, and language. Their utterances exist in perpetual response—to Hamlet, to the audience, to each other—and never stabilize.

The theme of death and absence in the play, moreover, illustrates how Derrida's *trace* and Bakhtin's dialogic openness intersect at the limits of meaning. Derrida's notion of the *trace* describes a sign's internal relation to absence, writing that "The trace is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence" (*Margins of Philosophy* 313). Meaning is haunted by what it excludes, by what is no longer there or not yet present. Bakhtin, while more optimistic, also emphasizes that final meaning is unreachable, for "truth is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (*Problems* 110). In Stoppard's play, Rosencrantz and

Guildenstern confront death not as a definitive ending but as another unknown variable. Their deaths occur offstage in *Hamlet*, and in Stoppard's version, they inch toward disappearance without understanding it. The final direction—*"The lights go down. A man in black walks across the stage"* (Stoppard 126)—symbolizes a silence that is not closure but continuation, an ellipsis in the dialogue.

Reading *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* through both Derridean and Bakhtinian lenses thus enriches our understanding of the play's philosophical and theatrical structure. Derrida alerts us to the deconstruction of presence, the instability of signs, and the hauntings within language. Bakhtin reveals how the play's structure is dialogic, resisting finality and accommodating contradiction. Together, they make visible the complex, layered dynamics of a text that refuses unity or explanation. To read the play solely through Derrida risks ignoring its social, responsive, and polyphonic nature; to read it only through Bakhtin might miss the linguistic instabilities that undermine all referentiality.

Ultimately, Stoppard's characters do not fail to understand because they are intellectually weak—they fail because language itself is never sufficient. They live in a world where every utterance is a response, every identity a performance, and every truth provisional. Their tragedy is not that they die, but that they speak into a void, where even death is deferred.

Conclusion

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* is not merely a theatrical footnote to *Hamlet*, but a radical reimagining of meaning itself—fractured, deferred, and dialogically unstable. By bringing Derrida's deconstruction and Bakhtin's dialogism into critical conversation, I have argued in this paper that Stoppard does not seek to offer answers, but to foreground the conditions under which questions become unanswerable. Derrida's notions of différance, aporia, and trace illuminate the linguistic and ontological voids that haunt the play, while Bakhtin's emphasis on polyphony, heteroglossia, and the carnivalesque reveals how meaning emerges, if at all, from the clash of irreducible voices. In this dialogic deconstruction, language is not a bridge to truth but a performance of uncertainty. Stoppard's protagonists do not speak to affirm identity or purpose—they speak to mark absence, to keep the dialogue open. Their voices, however confused or marginal, resist silencing. As such, the play becomes a theatrical space where inherited certainties dissolve and the margins confront the center. Meaning, like identity, is always already on the move. In the interplay of deconstruction

and dialogism, we find not resolution, but resonance—a chorus of uncertainty that, paradoxically, defines the enduring brilliance of Stoppard's drama.

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Rebellion and Death: The *Cause* and *Effect* of Alienation in *Bartleby, the Scrivener* and *Moby-Dick*[1]

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Abstract

This paper examines Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby, The Scrivener*, exploring how Ahab and Bartleby represent alienated workers of Melville's era, echoing the Marxist aspects of workers' alienation. From the Marxist perspective, this paper analyzes how Melville depicted Ahab's and Bartleby's alienation and their rebellion against the exploitation of workers in the capitalist society, in which workers suffer psychosomatically. While scholars analyze Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* from a Marxist perspective, they fail to recognize Captain Ahab as a "Proletarian Ahab" like Bartleby, since *Moby-Dick* introduces Ahab to readers as the "Captain" of the *Pequod*. However, I argue that Captain Ahab thinks and acts as an alienated worker, similar to Bartleby, and rebels against capitalism. Moreover, the texts *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* suggest that Captain Ahab's monomaniacal vengeance arises significantly from his previous forty years of cruel proletarian experiences, which led him to seek vengeance against Moby Dick, that represents the Capitalists. Likewise, Bartleby refuses to work, recognizing the lawyer's exploitation of workers. Therefore, from the Marxist perspective on alienation, I will argue that Captain Ahab and Bartleby represent workers' psychosomatic conditions, aligning with the workers' alienation—physical, mental, and spiritual—under the yoke of capitalism that produces workers' tragic deaths in Melville's era.

Keywords: proletarians, exploitation, alienation, rebellion, death

Introduction

One of the theorists says, "Literary text acts as a kind of mirror" (qtd. in Delbanco 10). This quote indicates the function of a text or novel that works like a mirror that reflects the person who stands in front of it and other things around the person in a room. Similarly, as a mirror, Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* also reflect Melville's mind, besides his proletarian experiences of the capitalist world that he expresses aesthetically in his narratives. Regarding

[1] This article is produced from the author's MA thesis.

Moby-Dick, Andrew Delbanco states, "Surely no text written by an American has been as powerfully reflective as *Moby-Dick*" (10). That means *Moby-Dick* vividly reflects or portrays Melville's contemporary world in America, including the history, society, and ideologies of the owners and workers through the context of the text's stories, characters, and genre. Delbanco's quote haunts my critical mind repeatedly, making me think about what scholars missed in discussing what *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* might have reflected on—especially when I read earlier and present scholars on Melville's writings. Among the earlier scholars, C.L.R. James, from a socio-political and historical perspective, argued that Melville's writings are related to the social movement, which expresses social and political ideas, relating the "work, author, and the period" (115). Moreover, Bruce Franklin presented Melville as a proletarian artist and said that *Moby-Dick* flows from Melville's experience of proletarian life (295), exposing "the essence of capitalist society" (289). From the capitalistic view, he also related Bartleby's denial of working as a crime with "a mild, quiet version of Melville's own crimes of desertion and mutiny: it too is a refusal to work" (300). Aligned with James and Franklin, Michael Paul Rogin, saw the text *Bartleby* as a social critique, "not as realistic story but as psychological parable" (198) and the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick* as "a ship of workers" (111), and for Rogin, Ahab is not one of them, though he is "above the commerce" (112). The noticeable thing is that though James, Franklin, and Rogin see both texts, *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby,* as stories about workers, they do not see Ahab as a proletariat like Bartleby. Instead, they are busy showing Ahab and Bartleby as symbolic characters, *Moby-Dick* as a metaphorical novel, and *Bartleby as* a parable of the workers. Similarly, though the present scholars analyze the characters of Bartleby from a Marxist view and Ahab from a psychological perspective, emphasizing upon their loneliness and individualism, they also fail to see Ahab as a proletariat who suffers from alienation like Bartleby. For example, according to Yoshiaki Furui, "The novel's foregrounding of Ahab's solitude can be best understood by reading *Moby-Dick* in terms of Melville's engagement with individualism," because the mid-nineteenth century has been dubbed "the age of individualism" or "the golden age of individualistic thought and expression in American society" (600). This implies that Furui missed seeing that Captain Ahab's solitude or individualism comes from his previous experience of alienation of his proletarian life because, according to him, Melville, through the character of Ahab, portrayed the picture of individualism of his era in America.

From the Marxist view, in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*, Melville, the proletarian author, depicted workers' physical and mental suffering and struggle, exploring the workers' exploitation and alienation in such a way that

perfectly echoed the concepts of alienation in Marx's classic theoretical work in "Economic Philosophic Manuscript of 1844" through which Marx discusses the *cause* and *effect* of Capitalism in the life of the proletarians. The term "alienation" generally means a state of isolation from anything or anybody, including an activity in which the person is involved. The literal meaning of alienation is *estrangement*—it means separation from oneself or being disconnected from others or society. More specifically, in his *1844 Manuscripts*, Karl Marx defines alienation as proletarians' or workers' feelings of separation from their product, labor, other workers, and finally, from themselves in the political-economic mode of production in capitalist society. However, from the Marxist aspects, though scholars focus on Bartleby's eccentric behavior as the *effect* of labor exploitation and alienation, they do not see Ahab's eccentric monomaniacal madness to kill Moby Dick as significantly as the *effect of* his previous experience of labor exploitation and alienation because they see Ahab as the Captain of the ship *Pequod*, not a worker like Bartleby. In the last twenty years, while scholarship has mainly discussed Moby Dick's biting Ahab's leg off as the cause of Ahab's monomaniacal vengeance from the psychological perspective, including his eccentric behavior, individualism, and loneliness, I argue that Ahab's monomaniacal vengeance is the effect of his previous experience of labor exploitation and alienation because before becoming Captain Ahab, he worked for forty years in the whaling industry as a proletarian. However, to me, from the Marxist view, both Bartleby and Ahab represent the worker's psychosomatic situation in the socio-political-economic reality of the capitalist society of the Melville era, and their psychological and behavioral disorders are the effect of their alienation caused by labor exploitation that produces Ahab's and Bartleby's rebellion against Capitalism. So, their tragic death is also the product of Capitalism.

Causes of Workers' Alienation from a Marxist Perspective

In the remainder of the introduction of this paper, and to establish my claim, in this article, I will use Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* as primary sources, Marx's theory of alienation described in his *1844 Manuscripts*, and other scholarship used in this article as secondary sources. Before establishing my claim by examining the texts *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* to show how Bartleby and Ahab are alienated and as alienated workers behave eccentrically to produce their tragic death in the mode of production in their capitalist society, let us focus on the core messages of Marx's theory of alienation.

Marx discussed the causes of workers' four types of alienation *in 1844 Manuscripts*, keeping capitalism at the center. According to him, the

production processes in capitalism make workers totally "self-alienated" or "alienated self-conscious" (114) —physically, mentally, and spiritually. It indicates how workers feel alienated in the production process. Based on Marx's discussion *in 1844 Manuscripts*, the causes of workers' four types of alienation can be summed up with the idea of capitalism, private property, objectification of labor, and commodity fetishism as follows:

According to Marx, capitalism is the root or first cause of workers' alienation from the products they produce because capitalism creates two social classes: property owners and propertyless workers (Marx 70). It implies that in a capitalist society, the capitalists own the property and the production, not the workers. Consequently, the workers feel alienated from their products.

In addition, the second kind of alienation of the workers is feeling alienated from their labor. According to Marx, private property is another essential reason workers become alienated because, in capitalism, private property owners possess not only the product but also the workers. Since "Labour is the essence of private property" (Marx 80), in a capitalist society, private property owners value only the workers' labor and money, not the workers. Consequently, though private property is the product of workers' labor, they feel alienated from their product and their labor (their talents, skills, and muscle power) because these belong to their owners, who buy them with wages.

Moreover, the third type of alienation of the workers is their alienation from other workers. In Marx's view, in the production process of capitalism, private property owners transform workers from men into "strange and inhuman objects" (Marx 87), separating them from their production and labor and other workers. It denotes that in the production process, workers are classified and separated from other workers to do the same labor repeatedly to produce what the production owners want. Therefore, in this production process, the "worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities" (70). This means the workers feel themselves as "objects" or "goods" in the production process since the owners give the most value to the production, workers' labor, and money. In addition, workers realize that capitalists use them and their labor as tools, classifying their work and separating them from other workers to produce private property or production. Therefore, the workers feel that in the production process of capitalism, they are turned into commodities and devalued as humans. Moreover, they feel they become the objects of their products, alienated from their products and labor, and from other workers as workers—without human dignity, rights, freedom, and potentialities of their creativity.

Finally, workers' fourth type of alienation is alienation from the self or alienated self-consciousness. In capitalism, commodity fetishism leads workers to turn into such an object—valueless in the production mode—that they feel totally alienated not only from their product, labor, and other workers in the production process but also from themselves in the capitalist society. This kind of alienation is equal to death at physical, conscious, and spiritual levels. This happens because, in the political-economic capitalist mode of production, consumers become obsessed with the product, not with the workers, though capitalists squeeze workers' talents, skills, and labor to produce the best product. According to Marx, "Man's species-being" consists of body, mind, and spirit, but the spirit is the essential nature of man (Marx 77). Similarly, as humans, willpower, freedom, and rights are essential for the workers. In capitalism's political-economic mode of production, workers do not belong to their willpower, freedom, and rights. Consequently, they cannot think freely or act with their creativity using their hearts and minds like the artists. Whatever they have to do, they do according to the owner's will. Therefore, being alienated from their products, labor, and fellow workers, as human beings in this capitalist production process, the workers also feel alienated from their willpower, freedom, and rights. Thus, in this state of self-realization, the workers feel total alienation because they neither own the products they produce nor their labor or other workers, feeling incapable of doing something creative according to their own will. In other words, in this reality of capitalism, being captivated by the political-economic mode of production, workers feel totally "alienated from self" or become "alienated self-consciousness being" (Marx 114)—meaning a total object or machine.

The workers feel self-alienated because this kind of realization of self-alienation appears: "The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an 'external' existence, but that it exists 'outside him,' independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien" (Marx 72). It infers workers' feelings of total alienation— physically, mentally, and spiritually—from their product, labor, and fellow workers and their potentiality of becoming or doing something creative. Consequently, some workers become frustrated, depressed, and finally hostile against this kind of alienation, while others accept it. With these Marxist aspects of alienation, when we read the texts *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*, we find the same kinds of alienation in the life of Ahab and Bartleby, who represent other workers in the texts.

Workers' Alienation in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*

Melville, the proletarian artist, depicted his proletarian experiences and workers' experiences, psychosomatic conditions and alienation in his literary works: *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *Mardi* (1849), *Redburn* (1849), *White-Jacket (1850),* and later in *Moby-Dick* (1851) and *Bartleby* (1853). Concerning Melville's literary art, Franklin says that Melville is a proletarian artist and his "creative imagination was forged in the furnace of proletarian experience" and through "the eyes of a class-conscious worker" under the imperialism of commercial empire in the nineteenth century (287). This implies that in his writings, Melville used his proletarian experiences to write about workers' suffering and alienation in the farms, city life, and factories, as well as the whaling industry on the ocean of his time. For example, his *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* vividly portray the psychosomatic conditions and alienation of the workers through the passive, mystifying, eccentric, lonely, depressed, and mentally and physically sick characters who face the hardships of daily life on the land and in the whaling industry under the yoke of the capitalist society.

Pointing out the bourgeoisie's injustice towards the workers, Shashank B. Mane says that in the novella, *Bartleby,* "Melville attacks the bourgeoise, their methods of earning money, their treatment to the working class and the deplorable conditions of the working class in the mid-nineteenth century in America" (120). Here, Mane wants to say that through the characters in *Bartleby*, Melville depicts how the capitalists earn money and treat the working class. In the lens of Mane, *Moby-Dick* also portrays the same picture of the owners and workers. In these two texts, Melville presents workers as human, contrasting with how capitalists treat them as objects or tools to produce their products, who suffer psychosomatically in the reality of capitalism's political-economic mode of production.

In general, *psychosomatic reality* refers to a physical sickness produced or aggravated by psychological factors. Nevertheless, in this paper, I use the phrase psychosomatic reality as an effect from the Marxist view to show how psychological factors cause physical illness and how physical illness also affects the mind, causing alienation and psychological disorder of workers—especially Ahab and Bartleby in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*. However, based on the Marxist theory of alienation discussed above, let us take an in-depth look at *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* to show how Bartleby and Ahab represent workers and are alienated.

Workers' Alienation from Their Product

Moby-Dick and *Bartleby* present how workers in a capitalist society work hard to produce products, but do not own their production and consequently feel alienated from their product. Since the working-class characters in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* sell their labor for wages in a capitalist society, they do not own their products. For example, Ishmael as a sailor, Quequeeg as a harpooner, and many other mariners and sailors in the *Pequod* in *Moby-Dick* and the scriveners in the *Bartleby* are the workers who use their labor (talents, skills, and manual work) to produce the product (whale oil and other products and copies for the lawyer). However, they do not own their production because the capitalist bought their labor and talents with wages or "lays" (*Moby-Dick* 70). From the Marxist view, it shows that as a sociologist, Melville portrays workers' alienation from their product in the capitalist society through the characters of owners and workers in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*. In other words, the owners' characters in the texts earned money and treated the proletarians as a means of capitalist production, in which the characters of workers felt alienated from their products. After all, they are deprived of their products (hunted whales and whale oil or benefits) because they do not own their production or even see or know where their products actually go.

Workers' Alienation from their Labor

In *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*, Melville depicted the possessive attitude of private property owners and workers' alienation not only from the product but also from their labor by portraying the characters of owners and workers. In *Moby-Dick*, Peleg and Bildad are the "owners" of their private property, the *Pequod* (Moby-Dick 68), and possess the workers who work physically and mentally using their talents, skills, and muscles to hunt whales and earn profit for the owners because they hired them based on different "lays" (70). As the owner, they hired Captain Ahab, the captain's mates, harpooners, and mariners based on different percentages of *lay* to gain profit by hunting the whales. The narrator in *Moby-Dick* indicates that Ahab is not the owner of *Pequod*, like Peleg and Bildad, because he is hired. As a captain, Ahab will "receive certain shares of the profit called *lays*" (70). This proves that Ahab is not the owner but the captain of the *Pequod*. However, since the owners paid hired workers with different percentages of *lay*, they owned the *Pequod*, the production of the workers, and the workers' labor too. This means workers do not own the product (the hunted whales) or the annuity and their labor because they sell them.

Similarly, in *Bartleby*, the lawyer expresses that he owns the law office, scriveners, and their productions. Regarding the lawyer, Barnett says, "The lawyer's possessive attitude towards the entire world of his law office exemplifies still another Marxian contention: that a factor contributing to the alienated character of work is its belonging not to the worker but to another person" (382). From the Marxist view, Barnett demonstrates the lawyer as the owner of the law office—the private property—his workers, and their labor. I agree with Barnett because the lawyer, as the owner, wants to control Turkey's behavior by giving a coat (*Bartleby* 7) and uses the possessive pronoun "my," thinking of Bartleby as his hired clerk (14). Moreover, in the absence of Bartleby in the office, the lawyer unlocked Bartleby's desk "by his own property rights" (Barnett 382) because he, as an owner, claims, "The desk is mine, and its contents too, so I will make bold to look within" (*Bartleby*17). Later, when Bartleby refuses to leave the office, the lawyer, with his property rights, questions Bartleby, "What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?" (24). From the Marxist view, all these quotations from the text show the possessive attitude of the lawyer who owns his private property—the law official and the scriveners. This demonstrates how the scriveners feel alienated from their production (copying and typing) and their labor (neat and clean handwriting) because all things belong to the lawyer who bought their labor with wages. In other words, in capitalism, scriveners are first alienated from their product, and second, they are alienated from the labor because their labor is sold with cheap wages—which means their labor becomes the property of the private property owners.

Alienation from Other Workers

Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* also present workers' alienation from other workers in two ways: First, their work is classified, and second, therefore, they cannot interact socially. For example, as captain of the *Pequod*, Ahab's job is managerial, which separates him from the work of the other crew members. Consequently, Ahab remains lonely and alienated in the cabin day and night. Concerning Ahab's loneliness and monomaniac vengeance against Moby Dick, Furui says, "While it is evident that Ahab is physically and emotionally separated from the other crew members aboard the *Pequod*, what is less obvious is that he also remains isolated from Moby Dick, which is the very object of his obsessive revenge" (603). Here, Furui argued from a psychological perspective, drawing other scholars' attention to show how Ahab feels lonely and obsessed with revenge for both being separated physically and emotionally from Moby Dick and other crew members.

Like Ahab, other workers feel lonely and alienated or separated from other workers. For example, in the chapter "Breakfast" in *Moby-Dick*, the narrator Ishmael says,

> The bar-room was now full of the boarders who had been dropping in the night previous, and whom I had not as yet had a good look at. They were nearly all whalemen; chief mates, and second mates, and third mates, and sea carpenters, and sea coopers, and sea blacksmiths, and harpooneers, and ship keepers; a brown and brawny company, with bosky beards; an unshorn, shaggy set, all wearing monkey jackets for morning gowns. (37)

Here, Ishmael presents the actual scenery of workers' classification or division of labor in the whaling industry. Regarding the types of work in the whaling industry, Paula Kopacz mentions a list of labor that goes with the different divisions of labor mentioned above. The working list of the whaling ship is:

> Loading of supplies for the voyage, manning the sails, navigating the ship, looking out on the mast-head for whales, lowering for a whale, harpooning the whale, taking a Nantucket sleigh-ride, using the lance, cutting off the blubber, mincing it into small pieces, boiling out the oil, extracting the precious ambergris, stowing whale oil below deck, and cleaning up the greasy mess—processes that make the whale ship at sea most like the mill factory at home. (80-81)

All the work mentioned in the quote is tedious manual work in the whaling industry. I agree with Kopacz and want to say that workers on the *Pequod* do the same work repeatedly, risking their lives because they are poor wage slaves, though they do not own the whales or make the same profit as the owners of the *Pequod*. However, because of this kind of classification of works and division of labor, workers feel alienated from their production, their labor, and other workers.

In addition, observing the silent whalers in the bar room during their breakfast, Ishmael, to his surprise, says, "I was preparing to hear some good stories about whaling; to my no small surprise, nearly every man maintained a profound silence. And not only that, but they looked embarrassed" (*Moby-Dick* 37). This quotation suggests that Ishmael, with his curiosity, was waiting to hear from these expert whalers about their bold, exciting, and dangerous experiences of the sea. However, he is surprised to see them eating breakfast silently. This implies the effect of alienation of the whalers in the division of labor in the whaling industry year after year. In other words, these workers

faced alienation from their product, their labor, and from other workers by division of labor in the whaling industry in such a way that affected them very badly. Therefore, after years, when they stepped from water to land, they felt a void in themselves with frustration, mentally tired in such a way that made them eat silently instead of talking, laughing, and sharing their stories during breakfast.

Similarly, in *Bartleby*, scriveners feel alienated from other workers because the lawyer classified scriveners' jobs to get a super production (neat and clean and correct copy) from the scriveners. For example, the lawyer says, "Where there are two or more scriveners in an office, they assist each other in this examination, one reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair" (*Bartleby* 9). It shows that in the lawyer's office, scriveners do different types of jobs: "copying," "examining the typing," "reading proof," and "holding the original copy." Moreover, the lawyer divides the times and scriveners between Turkey and Nipper. Turkey works in the morning and Nippers in the afternoon, while Gingernuts works like a table boy, and Bartleby works day and night, totally separated from other workers. In the Marxist view, these all classify the workers and separate them from each other in the mode of production. Moreover, the text *Bartleby* also shows that the scriveners never interact positively as social human beings. It might happen because the lawyer exploits his workers by separating them from each other and alienating workers from their products, labor, and others in the production process. This makes the scriveners feel like objects of their labor.

Alienation from Self or Becoming Alienated Self-Consciousness

In *Bartleby* and *Moby-Dick*, Melville also demonstrated how workers realize the "alienated self-consciousness" or "self-alienated," creating the characters of Bartleby and Ahab, who represent the workers in a capitalist society. Regarding Bartleby's alienation, Mane says, "In the short story *Bartleby*, Melville portrays the cataclysmic or ruinous effects of capitalism on the working class. The story focuses on the effects of industrialisation upon the individual worker; how the capitalistic system turns a human into a nonsensical babbler" (121). It indicates the destructive effects of capitalism, which turns workers into machines in the mode of production in the industry or capitalist society. Bartleby realizes how capitalism alienates the scriveners in the lawyer's office from his Self-Consciousness. Similarly, Captain Ahab, from his previous forty years' proletarian experience of alienation in the mode of production in the whaling industry, knows the psychosomatic condition and suffering of the workers. Therefore, both Bartleby passively and Ahab directly

became hostile and rebellious, and they rejected becoming wage slaves by becoming commodities or objects in the mode of the political-economic production process in capitalism. In contrast, the characters of Turkey, Nippers, Gingernut, and Ishmael, along with other workers in *Moby-Dick*, accept their "self-alienation" and turn into commodities in the political-economic capitalist mode of production.

The three scriveners in *Bartleby*, Turkey, Nippers, and Gingernut, accept silently the cruel reality of capitalism and their alienation as wage slaves under the domination of the lawyer who exploits them. For example, the lawyer valued "his (Turkey's) morning services" (5). Moreover, despite Turkey's "strange, inflamed, flurried, flighty recklessness of activity" (5), the lawyer kept him in his office because Turkey was quick and steadfast to "accomplish a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched" (5), he wrote a neat, swift hand (7), and "always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers" (7). These specify that the lawyer, owner of the private law office, values Turkey's skills and talents to increase profit through his law chamber's business, but not him as the scrivener. Moreover, the lawyer never worried about the eccentricities of Turkey and Nipper; instead, he feels fortunate owing to Nipper's "peculiar cause—indigestion—the irritability and consequent nervousness" because Nipper was mainly observable as the proxy of Turkey's for half of the day (8). All these lawyer statements toward his scriveners stipulate the capitalistic attitude of gaining profit and valuing workers' labor. In the Marxist aspect of alienation from the self, the noticeable thing is that except for Bartleby, other scriveners in *Bartleby* accept the cruel reality of capitalism and obey the lawyer as wage slaves or turn into self-alienated beings under the commodity fetishism of capitalism.

From the Marxist view of alienation, it can be said that Melville created the characters in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* in such a way that they represent both owners and workers in the capitalist society, workers' psychosomatic conditions, and the four types of alienation discussed above. The experience of alienation in the capitalist society affected Bartleby and Ahab so badly that Ahab rebelled directly, and Bartleby passively rebelled against capitalism, performing their daily activities like machines, not humans.

The Effect of Alienation is Bartleby's and Ahab's Rebellion Against Capitalism

Bartleby and Ahab represent the alienated workers of Melville's era who reject turning into objects in the political-economic mode of production

by accepting their tragic deaths. It is understandable when we accept the characters Bartleby and Ahab as symbolic characters, as fifty years ago, Michael Paul Rogin saw Melville's *Bartleby* and *Moby-Dick* as parables and metaphors that talk about the workers (111, 112, 198). Aligned with Rogin, I want to discuss the symbolic characters Bartleby and Ahab, who represent the alienated workers protesting until their deaths against the mode of political-economic production of capitalism.

Both Bartleby passively and Ahab directly rebelled against capitalism. For example, Bartleby rebelled against the lawyer passively until his death, repeatedly saying, "I would prefer not to do" (*Bartleby* 10). This repeated statement by Bartleby seems very eccentric, but from the aspect of Marxist alienation, it is Bartleby's passive rebellion against how the owner exploits the scrivener. Regarding this act of Bartleby, from the Marxist view, Barnett says, "All three of the scriveners employed in the lawyer-narrator's office illustrate the aspect of alienation that Marx delineates, but only Bartleby comes to understand the situation and reject it" (379). This means Bartleby, as a worker, realizes the lawyer's capitalistic attitude to gain profit, exploiting the workers, his fellow scriveners' psychosomatic reality as the effect of alienation, and his own alienation in the political-economic mode of production in capitalism. Therefore, like other scriveners, he does not accept becoming alienated from his product, labor, and others, turning into an object like his fellow scriveners. Instead, he accepts death as passive hostility and rebellion against the demanding condition of capitalism that not only turns workers into objects but also produces the death of the workers.

Like Bartleby, Ahab is also a worker who expresses his monomaniac vengeance against Moby Dick. Critics might argue that Ahab is the Captain of the *Pequod*, and he is not a worker like Bartleby or Ishmael. Then, how can he rebel against capitalism like Bartleby? However, to understand and accept Ahab as a worker, I want to draw readers' attention to what Mark Edelman Boren says about Ahab. Boren invites readers to understand Ahab's monomaniacal vengeance that eats Ahab in two ways: through text and the description of Ahab by the narrator, because sometimes in the text, like the narrator, Ahab also narrates about himself. For example, Ahab talks about himself and his forty years of bitter proletarian experiences to Sartbuck in the chapter "The Symphony." Therefore, in his discussion, Boren suggests that to understand crazy Ahab and his monomaniac vengeance in *Moby-Dick*, readers should see Ahab through his entire textual existence in the novel, not only through the eyes of Ishmael but also through the text and Ahab's context in the text and his words that show "'Ahab is Ahab.' That means Ahab is not Ishmael" (2). Based on Boren's suggestion, when we analyze the text *Moby-*

Dick, we see the text portrays Ahab's two natures: "Captain Ahab" throughout the novel and "Proletarian Ahab" only briefly in the chapter "The Symphony," in which Ahab regrets because of his forty years of proletarian life.

Scholars focused on "Captain Ahab" throughout the text, in which Ahab controls the *Pequod* and all upon it as a captain. Therefore, they missed seeing Ahab as a worker and analyzing Captain Ahab's regression of forty years of proletarian life. To me, Captain Ahab's monomaniacal attitude is not only the cause that Moby Dick chew up his leg but also effect of his alienation caused by his forty years bitter experience of proletarian life. In other words, it can be said that Captain Ahab, from his previous proletarian experiences, is furious with Moby Dick, who chewed his leg up and represents the capitalist. Now, let us focus on how the text presents Ahab's rebellion against Moby Dick and capitalism.

In contrast to Bartleby, Ahab directly expresses his rebellious mind against capitalism. For example, in the chapter "The Quarter-Deck," Captain Ahab expresses his rebellious mind against capitalism when, after knowing Ahab's monomaniac vengeance against Moby Dick and manipulating the crews to join his obsession to chase Moby Dick as a game, Starbuck protests to Captain Ahab. Starbuck protests, saying, "Captain Ahab, … I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? It will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market" (132). Here, Starbuck, the first mate, clearly tells Ahab that he came to hunt the whales, not to kill Moby Dick according to his commander's will. Moreover, he asks Ahab to realize what is the benefit or value of killing one white whale in the Nantucket Market after burning many barrels of oil if they do not hunt whales?

However, in response to Starbuck, Ahab says, "Nantucket market! Hoot! But come closer, Starbuck; thou requirest a little lower layer. If money's to be the measurer, man, and the accountants have computed their great counting-house the globe, by girdling it with guineas, one to every three parts of an inch; then, let me tell thee, that my vengeance will fetch a great premium *here!*" (*Moby-Dick* 132). In this quote, Ahab expresses his rebellion against capitalism, saying, "Nantucket Market! Hoot!" Moreover, with his statement, "My vengeance will fetch a great premium *here*!" Ahab invites Starbuck to come down to his level to understand the reason for his monomaniacal vengeance against Moby Dick, and the valuable of it is more than hunting many whales to sell at the "Nantucket market." Furthermore, three times the use of exclamatory signs in this quotation expresses Ahab's rage against Moby Dick and the "Nantucket market," indicating the heavy

layers of his previous forty years of proletarian experiences in the heart of the whaling industry, where the capitalists treated and exploited him to hunt whales, particularly Moby Dick, that took his leg.

Moreover, in the chapter "Ahab and Starbuck in the Cabin," Ahab directly expresses his rage against the owners. For example, when the *Pequod* is in the China Pacific, Starbuck informs Ahab about the ship's oil leak and asks to stop the ship to fix the leak, warning Ahab, "What will the owners say, sir?" (*Moby-Dick* 347). In response to Starbuck's question, Ahab says, "Let the owners stand on Nantucket beach and outyell the Typhoons. What cares Ahab? Owners, owners? Thou art always prating to me, Starbuck, about those miserly owners, as if the owners were my conscience. But look ye, the only real owner of anything is its commander; and hark ye, my conscience is in this ship's keel.—On deck!" (347). Here, Ahab emphasizes again his monomaniacal vengeance against Moby Dick. He neither cares about the ship's oil leak nor the owners. His only purpose is to chase Moby Dick and kill it. This quotation implies that Ahab does not like Starbuck's capitalistic attitude and rebukes him when Starbuck does not see Ahab as the real owner of anything on the deck as the commander.

From the Marxist view, a close reading of *Moby-Dick* helps to see how Moby Dick is personified and represents the capitalists in Melville's era. For example, in the chapter "Moby Dick," like Bartleby and Ahab, Moby Dick is also a very complex and mysterious character because he is personified with "Murderous monster and ferocity, cunningness and malice" (144), "ubiquitous" (146), "immortal" (147). All these characteristics of Moby Dick represent the characteristics of a capitalist who possesses power like the Almighty in the capitalist society. In the Melville era, capitalists were so powerful to the workers that no one could destroy it. Ahab wants to destroy it, but Moby Dick consumes Ahab. Like Rogin, I, too, see that Melville metaphorically portrayed the characters of Ahab, who represent the workers, and Moby Dick, who dominate in the sea like the capitalists on land. However, the way Ahab, with his monomaniacal vengeance against Moby Dick directly, and Bartleby, with his eccentricity and passive hostility, rebel against the lawyer and produce their death, it can be said that they did it out of the effect of their alienation described in Marxist theory.

Conclusion

I do not know whether Melville, as an avid reader in America, read Marx's original writings or his writings for the *New York Magazine* for ten years, since both were contemporary writers. Nevertheless, in his novel *Moby-Dick and the novella Bartleby*, Melville depicted the causes of workers' physical, mental, and spiritual suffering and struggle, and the alienation and tragic death of the workers as the *effect* of capitalists' workers exploitation in such a way that echoes the concepts of alienation in Marx's classic theoretical work in *1844 Manuscripts*. Therefore, from the Marxist view, it can be said that as a proletarian artist and sociologist, in his *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby*, Melville portrayed how the workers live poorly in psychosomatic conditions and face tragic death inhumanely in the poor socio-political-economic conditions and their social status in capitalist society, which turn workers from human beings into objects. Through the workers' characters—particularly Ahab and Bartleby—he also tried to draw his readers' attention to see workers not as wage slaves but as humans, like the capitalists. Moreover, as human beings, workers have freedom and free will. Therefore, they should be treated with human dignity when they follow their owner's commands or instructions to produce products.

Finally, it can be said that Melville will remain a classic American author for his proletarian writing skills in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* and his subtle critique of American capitalism, which turns human beings into objects. Melville was such a proletarian author who empathized and sympathized with his fellow working-class people because he knew the cruel reality of capitalist society. Indeed, he wanted to bring about constructive changes in America through his writings. His contemporary critics failed to think this way. Moreover, Melville's literary creations *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* can surely open various new spaces of study—such as, alienation and false consciousness from the Marxist or Melville as a romantic proletarian author in the aspect of romanticism, if future scholars revisit Melville's *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby* and evaluate them, looking at Ahab as "Proletariat Ahab besides Captain Ahab," and think about how false consciousness functions in Ahab and Bartleby and how Melville portrayed the proletarian reality using the romantic tools.

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Reading Blake Through Burke's Screens: Dramatism in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

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Abstract

William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* presents a dichotomous vision of human perception, morality, and divine creation. In this paper, I employ Kenneth Burke's concepts of Terministic Screens and Dramatism to analyze how Blake's poetry not only reflects but actively constructs and mediates reality. Burke argues that language functions as a filter that shapes perception. Based on this idea of Terministic Screens, I argue that Blake's contrasting poems, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger", serve as rhetorical screens that define innocence and experience. By applying Burke's Terministic Screens, I demonstrate how Blake's imagery, symbolism, and diction selectively direct the reader's understanding of creation's dual nature–both gentle, as depicted in "The Lamb", and fearsome, as portrayed in "The Tyger". Furthermore, through Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, I examine how Blake dramatizes the process of creation by positioning the divine creator and the act of questioning within a rhetorical framework. My analysis reveals how Blake's linguistic and rhetorical choices not only distinguish innocence from experience but also interrogate the complexities of divine intention. By reading Blake through Burke's rhetorical lens, my study contributes to both literary and rhetorical discourse, illustrating how language functions as an instrument of perception, persuasion, and philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: dramatism, terministic screens, dramatistic pentad, rhetorical discourse, philosophical inquiry

William Blake (1757–1827) is an exemplary Romantic poet celebrated for his poetic brilliance and his ability to intertwine human nature with both the natural and divine realms. As a Romantic poet, Blake responds to the shifting social and political movements of his time by exploring their impact on morality, perception, and creative expression. His poetry, though simple and rhythmic in structure, is rich with symbolism and multilayered

meanings as they offer multiple possible interpretations. Through vivid imagery and symbolic language, Blake dramatizes the complexities of human experience, particularly the tension between innocence and experience, inviting readers to reflect on the moral and spiritual conflicts that shape both human existence and divine intention. His linguistic and rhetorical choices do more than describe reality; they construct and mediate it, making his work an ideal subject for rhetorical analysis.

Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) is one of his most renowned works, illustrating the tensions between purity and corruption, joy and suffering, and faith and doubt. Originally published as two separate books, *Songs of Innocence* (1789) presents a pastoral, childlike, and joyful perspective, while *Songs of Experience* (1794) shifts toward a darker, more anxious tone, confronting the harsh realities of the world. By juxtaposing these contrasting poetic voices, Blake offers a more nuanced critique of the societal norms, spiritual beliefs, and the complexities of human nature. His poems not only reflect the tensions between purity and corruption but also raise questions about the nature of divine justice and human agency. His poems and poetic terms function as screens that allow his readers to view human experiences in the real world through symbolism and metaphors.

I have applied Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories, particularly his concepts of Terministic Screens and Dramatism, to analyze how Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* construct and mediate reality. According to Burke, language is more than a tool for communication; it is a filter that shapes perception and directs understanding. By viewing Blake's contrasting poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" through Burke's theoretical lenses, I examine how Blake's poetic language functions as an instrument of perception and persuasion by revealing the intricate balance between innocence and experience.

In the exploration of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, scholars have employed a variety of theoretical frameworks to analyze the complex relationship between language, perception, and morality. Romantic readings of Blake often highlight his focus on imagination and his critique of reason, especially within the context of the Industrial Revolution, as Romanticism seeks to engage with the emotional and imaginative response to industrialization and societal change. Psychoanalytic literary critics, on the other hand, delve into the unconscious desires and psychological tensions expressed in Blake's vivid poetic imagery, often interpreting his work through Freudian or Jungian lenses. For instance, Serenah Minasian explores the psychological duality in Blake's work, writing, "Part One would be the dream

and Part Two would be the nightmare that is truly reality" (7). This duality, present throughout Blake's poetry, underscores the tension between innocence and experience and provides fertile ground for further theoretical exploration.

Feminist theory has also been instrumental in examining Blake's representations of gender and his subversion of traditional patriarchal norms. Scholars have noted his awareness of the social implications of gender roles and his critique of the restrictions placed on women. Charles Moffat, for example, observes that Blake, being deeply conscious of the natural environment, recognized how gender roles were socially constructed. He writes, "Blake believed it was the ignorance of the older generation that socially conditions children to become a specific gender role. He saw this as chopping off their wings and their sexual freedom" ("William Blake's Ecofeminism"). Anne K. Mellor further comments that although Blake understood the social injustice "involved in treating women as property or slaves," he struggled to transcend the traditional gender roles assigned to women in his time (154). In Blake's poems, female figures often take on nurturing, supportive roles such as mothers, lovers, and emotional caretakers, which highlight the gendered limitations imposed on women, even within his broader critique of societal structures.

Marxist critics have also contributed to the discussion of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* by focusing on his critique of capitalism, social inequality, and the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Laura Ellen Rutland emphasizes this point by stating, "Blake is piecing together working-class Protestant thought and more middle-class and upper-class aesthetic forms in an attempt to protest church and state abuses without losing the imaginative richness of the religious language that he loves and knows to be familiar to people of all social classes" (10). These approaches offer important insights into Blake's social and political commentary but often overlook the rhetorical dimension of his work, specifically, how Blake uses language to shape the audience's perceptions and provoke critical reflection on power, creation, and morality. Rutland further underscores the inseparable connection between language and history, stating, "For Blake, symbolic actions produce history. One cannot talk about language without talking about history, and one cannot talk about history without talking about language" (11). This insight highlights the rhetorical force of Blake's work and the crucial role that language plays in his broader critique of societal structures.

In my paper, as a rhetorician, I offer a unique contribution by applying Kenneth Burke's concepts of Terministic Screens and Dramatism to Blake's contrasting poems "The Tyger" and "The Lamb" to explore how language,

through symbols and metaphors, shapes perception. Through Burkean screens, Blake's poetic vision is not merely a reflection of innocence or experience, but a deliberate act of linguistic construction, framing the world in ways that direct the reader's emotional and philosophical responses. By focusing on the rhetorical act in Blake's poems, my analysis brings new clarity to the moral and existential tensions by providing a fresh perspective on his engagement with creation, power, and human agency. I also examine how Blake dramatizes the human condition by positioning divine creation and poetic voice within a rhetorical framework. By using Burke's screens to read Blake's poetry, I highlight how language functions as an instrument of perception and persuasion and how linguistic and rhetorical choices define human experience.

Since my paper examines how literary language shapes perceptions of innocence in "The Lamb" and experience in "The Tyger", I argue that Kenneth Burke's concept of Terministic Screens serves as an effective theoretical framework for analyzing Blake's use of imagery, symbolism, diction, and the underlying tensions in these poems. Burke's concept of Terministic Screens explores how language filters and shapes human perception. As he states, "we must use terministic screens, since we cannot say anything without the use of terms" (121). He further explains, "even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" (115).

Kenneth Burke posits that language is not a neutral medium but a filter through which we perceive and interpret reality. By selecting specific terms, writers emphasize certain aspects of reality while simultaneously deflecting others, thereby constructing a particular perspective. In his concept of "Terministic Screens," Burke uses the metaphor of a screen to illustrate how language frames perception by filtering meaning based on the writer's context, ideology, and intent. This implies that language does more than describe reality as it actively constructs it by highlighting and selecting certain elements and obscuring and deflecting others. The way we speak or write about concepts like innocence and experience shapes our understanding of reality and influences how we relate to the world. By applying this framework to Blake's poems, we can see how his poetic choices guide readers to perceive innocence and experience through specific rhetorical and symbolic screens.

Additionally, while Terministic Screens serve as my primary analytical tool, I have also incorporated Burke's Dramatistic Pentad to explore the dual nature of existence in Blake's work. Burke describes Dramatism as a method of analyzing human motives and relationships by examining how

individuals present themselves through language and action (135). The Dramatistic Pentad, comprising scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose, offers a framework to understand the dynamics of Blake's symbolic world. According to Burke, "for there to be an act, there must be an agent. Similarly, there must be a scene in which the agent acts. To act in a scene, the agent must employ some means, or agency. And it can be called an act in the full sense of the term only if it involves a purpose" (135).

Moreover, the "dramatistic pentad can be used in exploring every action, including action by statement" (Booth 12). By using dramatistic pentad, I have investigated how Blake's use of poetic language, including symbols, metaphors, and other literary devices, makes meaning and shapes readers' perception, how the actions are framed through language, and how these dramatizations reveal deeper philosophical inquiries into innocence and experience. With these theoretical lenses in place, I now turn to an analysis of "The Lamb", a quintessential representation of innocence that frames divinity and creation through a gentle and nurturing perspective.

"The Lamb", one of the most widely read poems from *Songs of Innocence*, embodies Blake's exploration of innocence, creation, and divinity. Divided into two stanzas and written in a simple, childlike tone in a pastoral context, the poem poses profound questions about the nature of existence and the identity of the Creator. Blake uses a gentle and nurturing screen to depict the world as harmonious and innocent, just like a child. He begins,

> Little Lamb who made thee
> Dost thou know who made thee
> Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
> By the stream & o'er the mead;
> Gave thee clothing of delight,
> Softest clothing wooly bright;
> Gave thee such a tender voice,
> Making all the vales rejoice!
> Little Lamb who made thee
> Dost thou know who made thee

The opening stanza invites readers into a seemingly simple inquiry in a childlike tone: "Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee". However, through a Burkean screen, this question becomes a profound act of rhetorical framing. The tone is childlike, which sets the speaker as a curious and innocent child who is eager to know who creates the "little Lamb". By using language, Blake displays the selection of innocence and purity and the

deflection of complexity and doubt. The innocent child narrator lists the basic needs, such as food and clothing, that fulfill a life. The selection of such words offers the readers a screen that filters other materialistic needs out of the frame and only brings what "making all the vales rejoice".

Moreover, the imagery of "softest clothing wooly bright" and a "tender voice" reinforces this innocence by associating the lamb with vulnerability, purity, and divine care. The ambiguity of the Creator's identity, which is left unanswered in the first stanza, not only sustains the poem's innocence but also subtly leads Blake's readers towards a theological understanding. Blake's rhetorical choices guide the audience to perceive innocence as a divinely sanctioned, ideal state of being, and corruption free: in a word, innocent. The repeated question in the last two lines of the first stanza emphasizes a continued curiosity of the child narrator and his urge to look for a divine creation rooted in gentleness and nurturance. This constructs a screen that filters perception through an idealized innocence and also prepares the reader to find answers in the next stanza.

In the final stanza of "The Lamb", Blake shifts from questioning to declaration. He writes,

> Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
> Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
> He is called by thy name,
> For he calls himself a Lamb:
> He is meek & he is mild,
> He became a little child:
> I a child & thou a lamb,
> We are called by his name.
> Little Lamb God bless thee.
> Little Lamb God bless thee.

The transformation from inquiry to statement is interesting. This rhetorical shift can be understood through Burke's concept of Terministic screens, as the speaker's language now actively selects innocence as a reflection of divinity while deflecting any moral ambiguity. There is no confusion, no blurriness, and no ambiguity in the childlike inquiry. The child narrator says twice: "Little Lamb I'll tell thee/ Little Lamb I'll tell thee", to invite innocence in the form of the lamb and the readers to reveal the divine truth. By drawing a parallel between the lamb and creator in "He is called by thy name, / For he calls himself a Lamb", the child narrator establishes a screen that frames innocence as a divine attribute. This screen also filters the idea of the creator as innocent.

Though the child narrator does not mention Christ, Blake's target audience, the Christian English readers in the Romantic era, perceive the creator as Christ, the God. As the child narrator says, "I a child & thou a lamb, / We are called by his name", he blurs the boundaries between creator and creation, nature and human, animal and divine. The symbolic merging of "a child" and "a lamb" emphasizes purity, humility, and divine sacrifice, which are the essence of Romantic poetry. It also celebrates the oneness, wholeness, and unity between the creator and His creations.

Finally, the closing benediction: "Little Lamb God bless thee/ Little Lamb God bless thee", solidifies the rhetorical framing of innocence, holiness, and divine grace. The curious child narrator becomes the agent who claims his agency to bless the little lamb and embrace its spiritual energy. Reading the poem through Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, the act of creation unfolds within an innocent, pastoral scene. The divine creator, as the agent, performs the act of creation within this serene setting, intending to celebrate divine grace and unity.

From the narrator's point of view, throughout the poem, analyzed through Burke's Dramatistic Pentad, the child narrator, as the agent, moves from a seeker of knowledge to a revealer of divine truth. The act of revelation occurs within a pastoral scene of nature that symbolizes simplicity, innocence, and spiritual purity. The agency of the narrator suggests authority derived from spiritual insight to affirm the connection between innocence and divine grace. The purpose is twofold: to understand the origins of innocence and to affirm its divine connection through the symbolic image of the Christian God as the Lamb. Using Burke's Dramatistic Pentad preserves the essence of the poem in which the Lamb, the child, and the creator become synonymous and one.

Blake's deliberate linguistic choices ultimately construct a worldview where innocence, symbolized by the lamb, is not just protected but divinely cherished, reinforcing a screen that elevates spiritual simplicity over intellectual complexity. The rhetorical power of the poem is in its ability to shape readers' perception that innocence is not merely an abstract quality but a divine essence intricately tied to the divine creator. Blake's use of dramatism emphasizes that the act of questioning and the act of revelation are not separate but interconnected as both contribute to a holistic, sacred understanding of innocence. Similarly, by intertwining the creator with the creation, Blake suggests a harmonious, innocent unity between the divine and the mortal.

While "The Lamb" embodies innocence and gentle divinity, "The Tyger" presents a contrasting exploration of creation, evoking a sense of awe

and fear that challenges the simplicity seen in "The Lamb". One of the most anthologized English poems, "The Tyger" is also a symbolic poem. It consists of 6 stanzas and 24 lines. "The Tyger" from the *Songs of Experience* is considered to be the most famous and greatest song. It refers to the "fearful power of worldly experience" (Hussain, 2005). The Tyger is the symbol of God's power in creation, but it can be related to Satan or the devil, (Tarihoran, 2016). The idea is complex and ambiguous. Anita Kontrec, while discussing the ambiguity in the symbolism, emphasizes, "The tiger is the one being close to the Good and Evil and his energy can bring into existence or lead to destruction, therefore he is the one who spreads hope and fear, but perhaps above all that we are the ones who remain fascinated with his strength and beauty" (78). Hence, the tiger in "The Tyger" is the symbol of both beauty and destruction. The complexity in ideas and understanding are poetically embedded in the stanzas. Unlike "The Lamb", "The Tyger" begins with an inquisitive and fearful tone. Blake writes,

> Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
> In the forests of the night;
> What immortal hand or eye,
> Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In the first stanza, Blake employs a powerful and familiar rhythm and immediately draws attention to the awe-inspiring and terrifying nature of the creature. Written in trochaic tetrameter, "The Tyger" carries a rhythmic quality similar to a nursery rhyme like "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," establishing a familiar screen for Blake's readers. While the rhyme creates a childlike tone similar to "The Lamb," the poem's complexity emerges through its rhetorical questions and striking word choices. The repetition of "Tyger" also emulates the style of nursery rhyme and heightens the intensity of the question the narrator asks at the end of the stanza. The use of "burning bright" and "forests of the night" contrasts light and darkness, evoking the duality and complexity of the creation. Unlike the lamb, the tiger is a complex creature that embodies both beauty and danger. The narrator asks "what immortal" to refer to the divine creator and sets the stage for a deeper inquiry into the divine creator's role in crafting such a terrifying yet captivating creature. He continues in the second stanza,

> In what distant deeps or skies.
> Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
> On what wings dare he aspire?
> What the hand, dare seize the fire?

Blake's use of language constructs a Terministic screen that guides the reader to perceive the "Tyger" as both a creation of immense power and a symbol of mystery and danger. The phrase "In what distant deeps or skies" immediately establishes the vastness, while the term "fire" draws readers' attention to the sharp flame in the Tyger's eyes. The fire is both useful and destructive. It is a complex metaphor in itself. The question "Burnt the fire of thine eyes?" directs attention toward the Tyger's gaze and its intense quality that symbolizes not only the creature's power but also the potential for destruction. Blake dramatizes the act of creation by portraying the Tyger as both terrifying and magnificent, with the divine creator as the agent of this awe-inspiring act. This dramatic positioning invites deeper reflection on the nature of the creator. In the third stanza, the narrator introduces yet another screen through which readers perceive the Tyger's magnificence and, in turn, the power of its maker:

> And what shoulder, & what art,
> Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
> And when thy heart began to beat.
> What dread hand? & what dread feet?

The narrator continues questioning the Tyger's making process. The question "what shoulder, & what art/ Could twist the sinews of thy heart?" invites the reader to imagine the force and skill required to shape such a powerful creature. The body parts, such as "shoulder" and "heart," symbolize both the physical strength and the emotional core of the Tyger. The "shoulder" represents an image of strength and labor, while the "heart" implies the essence of life and emotion. The juxtaposition of both qualities reinforces the complexity of the Tyger, which eventually justifies the central theme of *Songs of Experience*. All these symbolic references construct a terministic screen that frames the Tyger's creation as not only physical but metaphysical and dramatizes the act of creation in a more complex way. Blake further intensifies the tension surrounding the creation of the Tyger by invoking images of industrial and forge-like processes as the narrator speaks,

> What the hammer? what the chain,
> In what furnace was thy brain?
> What the anvil? what dread grasp.
> Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

The use of the words "hammer," "chain," "furnace," "anvil," and "grasp" invokes the imagery of a blacksmith crafting a powerful creature. Applying Burke's Terministic screens, Blake's choice of industrial imagery transforms the Tyger from a mere wild creature into a product of industrialization, which

largely influenced the Romantic poets and writers. By describing its creation with tools used for metalwork and the imagery of a furnace, Blake directs the reader's attention toward a more complex idea of industrialized creation. This metaphorical forging of the Tyger connects the divine and the terrifying, which underscores the duality at the heart of Blake's exploration of existence itself. Blake continues to explore the tension between creation, innocence, and experience as the narrator asks,

> When the stars threw down their spears
> And water'd heaven with their tears:
> Did he smile his work to see?
> Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

The imagery of stars throwing down their spears and watering heaven with their tears introduces a cosmic and divine element of sorrow. The question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" brings forth the screen of innocence through which Blake's readers once viewed the meek and gentle lamb. This contrast between the two creations suggests that innocence and experience are inherently tied together, prompting Blake to question the divine intentions behind creation. His question is not only rhetorical but also revelatory, exposing Blake's concern with the duality of creation and the complexities of divine intention. By highlighting this duality, Blake's rhetorical strategies emphasize the complex relationship between innocence and experience, creation and destruction, light and dark. The cosmic and divine questions presented here suggest that creation is not a simple or easily understood act; rather, it involves contradictions that are both beautiful and terrifying. Matović writes, "What can be recognized in that combination of beauty and destruction is a mutual relationship between innocence and experience, the same one that brought such a being into existence in the first place – the monumental tiger from Blake's poem." (28)

As the poem ends, with the repetition of the first stanza, the questioning begins anew, suggesting that the tension between innocence and experience is an ongoing and unresolved cycle that is a fundamental part of the human condition. Živković writes, "This general idea in Blake's poem is being accomplished by means of a cyclic composition, considering the fact that the first and the last verse in Blake's poem *The Tyger* are identical. The unity of content and form is thus accomplished in Blake's poetic structure, which symbolizes Blake's cognition of the providence of the cyclicity of nature found in the metaphysical vision of the tiger" (237).

Both "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" describe creation, but the linguistic and symbolic choices direct audience perception differently. The "lamb" is gentle, simple, pastoral, whereas the "Tyger" is fiery, complex, and powerful. The contrast reveals how perception of the world is shaped by the terms we use. This shows a Burkean insight into language's power over reality. Through Burke's terministic screens, we can see how Blake's use of language constructs contrasting perceptions of innocence and experience, with "The Lamb" symbolizing divine purity and "The Tyger" embodying the darker, more complex aspects of creation. The rhetorical strategies employed in both poems, framed by Burke's dramatism, highlight the tension between these dualities and suggest that creation itself is a complex and multifaceted act. By engaging with these contrasting visions of the divine, Blake challenges readers to confront the inherent contradictions within existence. Through this lens, Blake's poetry emerges not just as a reflection on innocence and experience but as an invitation to explore the complexities of creation and the human condition.

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Enhancing Professional Writing Skills through English for Professional Purposes (EPP) Instruction: A Case Study of Undergraduate EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of teaching professional conventions in English as a Professional Purpose (EPP) to undergraduate students. This investigation involved whether learners could effectively incorporate their professional learning conventions in style, grammar, and clarity into their writing tasks or in their oral performance through guidance. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) lays the major theoretical framework of this research, where learners require scaffolding in their zone of proximal development (ZPD). This theoretical perspective aligns with this research's focus on guided instruction and feedback to enhance learners' professional writing skills. A mixed-method case study was adopted to get qualitative insights through observation, role play, behavioral analysis, and quantitative data through writing tasks and survey responses. Analytical and observable approach was adopted to analyze their writing tasks, such as memorandum, complaint letter, and cover letter. In addition, behavioral patterns such as role playing through interviewing were observed and recorded during the course, which they undertook over six months to assess their learning outcomes. In the role-playing, learners alternated the role of interviewer and interviewee after receiving adequate guidance on how to conduct and respond to interviews. Additionally, a survey questionnaire was designed to accumulate learners' perceptions regarding how effectively they incorporated and applied their learning into their professional setting throughout the course. The result indicated significant improvements in several writing genres along with strong acquisition of professional communication skills. The study contributes to both the field of pedagogy and ESP (English for Specific Purpose) by emphasizing the value of explicit and feedback-oriented instructions in preparing learners for real-world professional communication.

Keywords: EPP Instruction, guidance, professional, writing, EFL learners

Introduction

In this competitive, globalized world, the importance of communicating in English has been increasing. It has surpassed all other languages in the world in global communication. That's why the significance of learning communication etiquette and norms in business settings has been growing fast among the non-native English-speaking countries. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) addresses the adaptation of English in multiple contexts. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) are two directives where individuals use diversified English for different purposes (Evans & St. John, 1998). English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) is also referred to as English for Professional Purposes (EPP) focuses on equipping learners with the communication skills necessary for professional environments. From elementary to tertiary level education usually learners are taught English for their academic needs, whereas in tertiary level education EPP course is though directly offered in many institutions, but at other levels of education partly serves this purpose. In Bangladesh, EFL learners struggle a lot to use these two domains of English for respective purposes, where the importance of conducting this study.

Professional writing is a genre of writing where individuals produce texts to meet specific professional needs in workplace contexts. English for Professional Purposes (EPP) is a specialized course which is usually offered in different universities in Bangladesh to assist learners to grow professionally before transitioning in their workplace. In professional writing usually colleagues, concerned authorities transfer their message on various modes of communication like letters, applications, notices, emails etc. where particular professional standards must be incorporated to make them more acceptable and formal. It emphasizes on clarity, conciseness, practicality based on the needs of specific organization. Different professional writing like memorandum, cover letter, business letters, job application letter, email etc. are issued in different institutions for various needs that adhere to institutional goals. As learners have been writing in an academic context for academic purposes, they struggle a lot to transfer their academic English to professional English, though both carry similarities. Here, learners who undertook the course English for Professionals in their undergraduate they write for academic purposes, but their writing is completely professional.

Evans & St. John, (1998) in their model have specified the two major categories of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (ECP). English for Professional Purposes (EPP) covers English for Medical Purposes, English for Business Purposes which fall under

the ECP. In most tertiary institutions in Bangladesh, English for Professional Purpose and English for Professional share the same goals and contents.

The significance of the study lies in EFL learner's adaptation from academic writing skills to the professional standards. By examining their performance in professional writing and role play simulations, the researcher provides insights into how instructions and guided feedback can help learners to equip the necessary professional communication skills. Most stakeholders agreed that graduates who are entering the workforce are found underprepared for the writing demands in their own professions (Knoch et al., 2016). Knoch et al. (2015) in their research paper investigated the reasons why undergraduate students cannot improve their writing after undertaking their degree and found that students received very little feedback on the language aspects of their assignments from lecturers who generally focused on the subject content when marking.

It has evaluated how effectively learners can integrate professional writing conventions into their assigned tasks through the completion of this EPP course. Moreover, it has examined whether learners can apply those professional skills to their oral simulation task or not. It has analyzed the role of guided instructions and feedback in shaping students' formal behavior and written communication. Furthermore, it has explored learners' perceptions on the effectiveness of the EPP instructions in preparing them for real-life professional communication.

Though previous studies focused on instructor's perspective on ESP or on curriculum implementation very few have directly examined how EFL learners integrate professional conventions in their oral and written performance through a structured EPP course. This adds a new perspective on holistic understanding of EPP's instructions in preparing learners for workplace communication.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do EFL learners incorporate professional writing conventions into their written and oral tasks through the instruction and activities provided in the EPP course?
2. What are the learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of the EPP instruction in preparing them for professional communication?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical foundation of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), where knowledge is constructed through scaffolding with the help of peers, teachers, and instructors within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Here in this study, learners refine their writing, such as a complaint letter, memorandum, and job application letter, through the instructor's guidance and feedback, which helped them develop professionally. Vygotsky argued that learning can occur effectively by engaging learners in real-life assignments and simulation tasks like oral performance if a real-life context is created. In Bangladesh, undergraduate learners who have prior experience in academic writing have very limited access to professional writing. By providing targeted instructions, feedback, and modeling, instructors acted as more knowledgeable others (MKO), which assisted learners to internalize more professional norms and gradually scaffolded them to perform tasks more autonomously. Scaffolding served as a key instructional strategy that facilitated learners' development both in written and oral tasks.

Effectiveness of EPP instruction in Developing Professional Writing

Different researches on EPP have investigated the effectiveness of the guidance on developing their workforce excellence by incorporating professional norms and etiquette. Several studies have highlighted the importance of integrating role-playing, such as simulated interviews, which improves learners' exposure to professional communication in English in real-life contexts.Moreover, it develops communicative competence, which enables learners to communicate both verbally and non-verbally. Interviewing, which is one of the vital simulated role-playing activities, allows students to speak confidently and to express themselves freely in English. Teachers always need to provide feedback with appropriate corrections by taking notes to show them once the activity is done without embarrassing the student who made the mistake (Cisneros Gallardo & Reino Huaraca, 2022).

Relevant Studies

Herida & Enriquez (2020) conducted a study on the senior high school students' perceptions of English for Academic and Professional Purposes but did not focus on university-level EFL learners' application to writing or oral performance. Rahman (2022) provided an overview of the current condition

of ESP in Bangladesh, but it was neither evaluative nor learner-focused. In the subsequent year, another researcher, Younus (2023), investigated the challenges and prospects of professional development for English language teachers at the tertiary level in Bangladesh but did not emphasize students' performance or the course impact. Abbot, Lee, and Rossiter (2018), in their research paper, evaluated the effectiveness of professional learning communities in adult ESL programs but did not evaluate EPP or undergraduate EFL learners in Bangladesh. Tawalbeh in 2015 examined how instructors perceive their professional development programs but did not examine learners' outcomes. While Bangladeshi researcher Hamid (2007) conducted a study on Bangladeshi English teachers' perceptions of their professional practice, it did not address how students apply professional norms in oral or written tasks, which are central to the current study.

Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of ESP instructions on various levels of students, but very few have focused on EPP. Moreover, limited research has investigated how Bangladeshi EFL undergraduates incorporate their professional learning norms into their real-world context. Besides, several studies explored writing tasks, but few have examined learners' applicability of their professional learning conventions to their oral performance. Additionally, limited research has been conducted on the role of guided instruction and feedback in shaping students' professional behavior and learning, which addresses the research gap of this study. Ayon (2013) conducted a study on the effectiveness of two advanced ESP courses at a private Lebanese English-speaking university to determine whether their acquisition of essential skills through collaborative learning efforts could prepare them for the required workplace or not.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches to evaluate whether EFL learners could effectively incorporate guided English for Professionals conventions into assigned professional writing or not. Both analytical and observational methods were taken into consideration for in-depth data collection and analysis. Primary data were collected from assigned written tasks on professional topics like complaint letters, memoranda, and job

applications in academic settings. Moreover, guided observation with some specific criteria was conducted directed to observe an assigned professional genre like interviewing, whether they are able to exhibit appropriate professional standards like greeting, gesture, posture, small talk, clarity, coherence, questioning, answering, maintaining professional tone, etc. A rubric was circulated ahead of interviewing, where they received sufficient instructions and guidance for focusing on specific norms. During this role-playing, learners alternated their roles of interviewee and interviewer, and the observer here was not a passive recipient but actively observed and documented their performances based on the evaluation rubric and criteria.

Participants

In this focused group research 54 EFL learners attended their English for Professional course in two consecutive semesters. All the participants here shared common needs to learn professional English for their future career pursuit alongside academic English and their English proficiency ranged from intermediate to higher intermediate, which was determined by the instructors by their previous academic records and performances. For completing the course effectively, learners here demonstrated their highest enthusiasm and participation. The instructor at the beginning of the course investigated their needs in learning professional writing and equipping them with professional behavior. All the enrolled learners voluntarily performed their structured writing assigned task as a part of their course progress alongside the oral performance, which simulates their job preparation. To receive a comprehensive understanding of their progress in their job interview a rubric-based assessment tool was given to them in advance to focus more on these professional norms. Participants were not informed ahead whether their writing tasks and simulation performance would be considered for research purposes, considering all ethical guidelines, but in the survey they were informed in advance.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to assess the effectiveness of EPP instruction to adapt from academic to professional one. Data were accumulated on three areas: learners' assigned tasks, oral performance, and their perception through a survey questionnaire.

1. Quantitative Analysis on Written Assignments: Three writing genres were assessed to measure whether learners could effectively apply appropriate

formal vocabulary retaining formal and polite tone with sufficient clarifications after receiving constructive feedback from their previous writings on the same genres. The scores were extracted from cover letter writing, complaint letter writing and memorandum writing for which they had received explicit instructions and feedback before taking their mid-term examinations.

Data Analysis and Discussion

This section highlights the findings of the study in relation to its research goals. It highlights whether EFL learners are able to effectively incorporate professional writing norms into their written and oral tasks after completing the English for Professional Purposes (EPP) course. In addition, it explores how well learners could prepare themselves effectively during the EPP courses for real-world professional communication. Data were collected through mid-term written scripts, guided classroom observations of oral performances, mock interviews, and a reflection-based perception survey. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were combined to provide a comprehensive understanding of learners' progress.

The discussion has been organized thematically on 3 key areas: (1) performance in written assignments (2) application of professional standards in oral communication tasks and (3) learners' perceptions of the EPP instruction during the course. Each section has critically examined the results in light of the theoretical framework and previous studies highlighting both achievements and areas for improvement.

1. Performance in the Written Assignment

1.1 Scores on Writing Performances:

Genre	Total Marks 20	Excellent (85–100%)	Adequate (50–84%)	Poor (Below 50%)
Cover Letter	8	6-8	4-5	0-3
Complaint Letter	8	6-8	4-5	0-3
Memorandum	4	3-4	2-3	0-1

Table 1: Rubric on their performance

1.2 Learner's Performances:

Genre	Assessment Criteria	Excellent	Adequate	Poor
Cover Letter	Appropriate formal vocabulary, Formal tone, Vocabulary, Clarity, Politeness	87.5% (24)	5.09% (1)	7.41% (2)
Complaint Letter	Appropriate formal vocabulary, Formal tone, coherence, Clarity, Politeness, Professional	62.96% (17)	29.63% (8)	7.41% (2)
Memorandum	Appropriate formal vocabulary, Formal tone, Clarity, Politeness, organization, brevity	51.85% (14)	40.47% (11)	7.68% (2)

Table 2: Learner's performances based on the rubric

1.3 Interpretation of Written Assignments:

To assess written assignments, 27 mid-term scripts were thoroughly analyzed. The exam carried 20 marks, requiring learners to produce three genres of professional writing tasks: cover letter (8 marks), complaint letter (8 marks) and memorandum (4 marks).

In the cover letter, among 27 participants, 24 successfully integrated professional norms such as appropriate formal vocabulary and formal tone with clarifications, which illustrates the highest success rate (87.5%) as "Excellent." The results demonstrated that through getting explicit instructions and guidance on cover letters, they effectively internalized and applied professional standards in the cover letter genre. This result aligns with the findings of Anson and Forsberg (1990), who found that, through sufficient scaffolding and real-world examples, learners can effectively transfer their knowledge from academic to professional contexts. This high success in cover letters illustrates that if learners receive guidance and formative feedback, they are able to succeed in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Moreover, it indicates that as the instructor acted as more knowledgeable other (MKO) by breaking down the genre's conventions and reducing support gradually, that could make them autonomous as well.

In complaint letter writing, learners were guided and provided with constructive feedback during their class activities. When their performance on the same genre was later assessed, whether they could fully apply all the instructions and integrate all the standards, 17 (62.96%) participants among 27 were found to be receiving an "excellent" rating. It demonstrates that the majority could effectively integrate taught professional norms, such as appropriate formal vocabulary, while retaining a formal, polite, and professional tone when making a complaint. However, 8 participants (29.63%) demonstrated partial adherence to the conventions, which suggests more practice and reinforcement to integrate all of these criteria properly. The variation of the result suggests that though scaffolding helped learners, some still required mediated practice to completely integrate professional norms. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD explains that in the potential development stage, learners require more time and assistance until meeting the genre's requirements.

In memorandum writing, learners were expected to demonstrate appropriate formal vocabulary with a formal and polite tone through clarification and proper organization. Despite receiving adequate guidance and feedback, only 14 participants (51.85%) among 27 received an excellent rating, indicating that only this group could meet the expectation set for the task. Nearly half of the participants (11) fell into the "adequate" category, indicating partial mastery over the professional conventions and possibly struggling with precision, form, and clarity. The remaining (2) participants (7.41%) were rated as "poor," which indicates they were not able to grasp the functional purposes and formal features required in their memorandum writing. The result suggests that learners may find the genre of memorandum writing more challenging for its distinct features, precision, and some more stylistic features in comparison to other common academic genres. It further suggests that learners may require additional guidance and scaffolding to achieve full command of memorandum writing. Bhatia and Bremner (2014) argued that because of implicit rhetorical rules, institutional genres like the memorandum often are challenging to novice writers. This result reflects Vygotsky's (1978) idea that learners improve from assisted to independent activity at different rates based on the complexity of the task. Therefore, they require extended scaffolding in less familiar rhetoric genres, which aligns with Vygotsky's idea.

2. Qualitative Analysis of Role-Playing Activity (Interview Simulation)

Students participated in this simulation task as interviewers and interviewees, which was documented based on the criteria of the given rubric.

In this session, participants were observed based on the rubric and were given constructive feedback on their performance. The rubric was shared with learners in advance to guide their preparation. The task carried 10 marks for each individual. A total of 26 participants took part in this task by forming 13 pairs for the activity.

2.1 Professional Interviewing Role-Play Rubric: (10 Marks)

Criteria	Description	Marks
1. Professionalism and Preparedness	Demonstrates professionalism by being well-prepared (attire, knowledge of company/job role, punctuality),	2 marks
2. Body Language, Posture, and Interview Etiquette	Maintains positive body language (e.g., eye contact, posture, gestures) and shows engagement.	2 marks
3. Response Structure and Clarity	Providing well-structured questions and clear responses	4 marks
4. Communication Skills, Professional Tone & Language	Communicates clearly and effectively, uses appropriate vocabulary and tone. Active listening and clear, direct response. Uses a polite, respectful, and formal tone throughout the interview. Avoiding slang or informal language.	2 marks

2.2 Role-Playing Performance Evaluation:

Marks Range	Score Explanation	Performance Level	Percentage
9-10 marks	Outstanding performance by demonstrating high professionalism, effective communication, adhering to professional norms in both the interviewee's and interviewer's role.	Outstanding performance	(34.6%) 9
7-8 marks	Good performance with minor issues in communication or professionalism.	Good performance	(53.8%) 14
5-6 marks	Adequate performance but several areas need to be improved (lack of preparation, unclear responses or poor etiquette).	Adequate performance	(11.5%) 3

3-4 marks	Needs significant improvement in several areas (lacks structure, poor body language)	Needs significant improvement	0%
0-2 marks	Unsatisfactory performance with major issues in professionalism, communication or interview etiquette.	unsatisfactory	0%

2.3 Interpretation of Role-Playing Performance:

The table shows that 34.6% of students (9 out of 26) demonstrated outstanding professionalism, which indicates that they are capable of adhering to professional norms both as interviewers and as interviewees. Moreover, it indicates that a significant portion of students could follow the instructions provided to them before taking part in the simulation task. In addition, 53.8% (14 students) performed well, indicating that they need to improve their professional communication by addressing minor issues, but they were observed as good communicators and professionals.

Furthermore, this table also demonstrates that 11.5% (3 students) met basic expectations but demonstrated multiple areas for improvement, which requires better preparation and adherence to the instructions along with clear and well-structured responses. The result demonstrates that though learners received sufficient instructions, some learners embraced challenges on fluency and confidence, which aligns with the findings of Gallardo and Huaraca (2022). In their study they found that in real communication learners suffer from anxiety and fear of making mistakes in their performance.

The results suggest that the majority are within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as they performed well and are capable of further progress with additional scaffolding. The presence of anxiety and fear supports Vygotsky's (1978) claim that it requires social interaction and repeated engagement in authentic situations for internalizing communicative behaviors.

3. Survey Analysis: Learners' Perceptions of the EPP Course

Section 1: Background Information

In the first section of the survey, 72.2% of students recognized that they had no experience in professional writing, whereas 27.8% had some prior experience which suggests that the majority of students required undertaking their EPP course for founding their basics in professionalism. In line with this, (44.4%) identified them as having an intermediate, (33.3%) as upper-intermediate and 22.2% reported themselves at an advanced level in English proficiency which also indicates that they require more improvement to achieve overall proficiency in English.

Section 2: Effectiveness of the EPP Course in Applying Real-Life Contexts

In the second section, when students were asked about whether they could differentiate between academic and professional writing a significant majority (94.5%) agreed which indicates their clear understanding of the learning objectives. To comply with the inquiry whether different writing genres like memoranda, complaint letters, cover letters, CVs, press releases, meeting minutes, and invitation letter are very useful in developing their professional writing skills, nearly all participants (88.9%) perceived them as effective and relevant, which demonstrates that students had a strong willingness to develop various writing genres. Moreover, all the participants (100%) expressed their ultimate confidence in applying the professional standards in real-life context which they have gained throughout the course which suggests the effectiveness of the course in establishing professional norms and etiquette. Furthermore, overwhelmingly 88.9% of the respondents believed the EPP instructions would be highly relevant for their future careers which imply its real-world applicability and utility.

In addition, 94.4% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the instructions during the course made them feel more confident in handling workplace communication, showing the course's success in bridging academic knowledge with practical needs. The survey responses highlighted positive perceptions regarding the course's effectiveness as majority opined that the course provided them with professional essentials to improve their workplace communication skill. However, a significant participant acknowledged that maintaining professional tone with appropriate vocabulary and clarity with proper synchronization is challenging to them when they write or communicate. It indicates that more efforts and dedication should be invested with some additional assistance and practices.

Impact of Guided Instruction and Feedback

Regarding feedback, 100% of students agreed that constructive feedback helped them receive proper guidance, which highlights the significance of feedback in skill development. In addition, whenever they were asked about types of feedback which were effective to them, 50% preferred the instructor's written feedback, 22.2% preferred one-on-one discussions which suggests that written feedback is more effective in developing writing. The study demonstrates that guided instructions and feedback develop professional language as constructive feedback helped them to know about the error, correct the errors, to act in a professional setting. Learners who receive explicit guidance and instructions can demonstrate greater improvement than those who solely depend on self-assessment.

Learners' Perception of their Role-Playing Task

When asked whether the rubric-based role-playing task helped them to structure their oral simulation task, 94.4% replied that it helped them to understand key aspects of a professional interview. In the rubric-based role-playing task, learners alternated their roles as an interviewee and interviewer, which provided them the opportunity to apply professional rules and etiquette in real-life contexts. Several key aspects, such as preparedness, greetings, body language, eye contact, clarity, professional tone, etc., were marked separately in a major category by a rubric. The survey results indicate that, though students at the beginning struggled to maintain fluency and confidence, continuous feedback led to notable improvements. This result aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory, which highlights that learning occurs through social interaction and support in the ZPD. The role of scaffolding in this interview also supports the idea of Vygotsky.

Section 3: Interview Role-Play Evaluation

In preparing the simulation task, the majority of participants agreed that it helped them to be prepared for real-life communication, most specifically in asking and responding to job-related questions (33.3%) and gaining confidence in speaking English professionally (27.8%), which indicates that this kind of authentic communication helps learners not only to grow professionally but also to boost their interpersonal communication skills. This result implies the effectiveness of the EPP instructions during the course to prepare individuals ahead of professional entrance.

Noticeably, 94.4% reported that the rubric-based evaluation helped them clearly understand the essential criteria of a professional interview. It signifies the importance of structured assessment tools in enhancing learning

outcomes. However, 50% of the respondents agreed that still managing nerves and speaking fluently was the most challenging part for them. It indicates that though huge preparation helps them to be prepared, real performance anxiety still impacts their performance. These results suggest that though preparation and practice are helpful still until reaching a real-life professional setting, complete removal of psychological issues would be challenging.

In addition, when the participants were asked about additional speaking-based skills to include in future versions of the course, the highest number of students **(**44.4%**)** suggested extending networking and professional relationship building, followed by negotiation, public speaking, and leading meetings in the instructions. It suggests that students are aware of the broader spectrum of professional communication to expand their skills. Unlike many other studies, this study emphasized a holistic view of how Bangladeshi learners adapt with professionalism both in writing and oral performance.

This study not only supports Herida and Enriquez's (2020) findings that EPP instruction improved learners' awareness of professional writing conventions but also echoes Knoch et al.'s (2015) argument that tertiary-level learners often do not receive sufficient feedback on linguistic and stylistic aspects of writing, which limits their development in professional genres.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study provides valuable insights on the importance of undertaking EPP instructions during the course for undergraduate students at any institution to shape students' future performance towards their professional life. The results indicate that to improve students' professional communication skills, EPP guidance is highly effective. Students felt that the course effectively boosted their communication skills; besides, the instructors' observation on their oral performance through guidance made them more prepared and confident for their real-life communication.The findings of this study will assist future teachers in implementing appropriate strategies in the classroom to teach EPP courses by finding the difficulties that learners embrace while transitioning. Educators can also apply effective teaching methods, refine their strategies, and redesign their coursework, which will help them to prepare better professionals. Moreover, this empirical study will provide necessary guidelines for the curriculum developer and policymaker to adopt necessary adjustments in course contents, assessment strategies, and instructional approaches to make teaching-learning more effective.

Furthermore, many employers express their concern about the graduate's lack of professional communication, which can be bridged by the appropriate guidance in teaching and constructive feedback, both in their written and oral performance, to meet the workplace's requirements.

This study had some limitations, including the lack of broader participants from EFL learners, for which this finding may not be generalized to all EFL contexts. In addition, there was no follow-up assessment of whether, after the completion of the course, students could retain their knowledge or apply it in their employment or internship program. Moreover, this study only examined a few professional genres; it did not assess other professional writings like email writing, meeting minutes, reports, or other documents, which might narrow the scope of professional communication. Overall, this study highlights the relevance, practicality, and effectiveness of EPP course building academic knowledge and professional demands.

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Gamified Grammar Pedagogy: A Study on Tertiary Level Approach to English Language Learning

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of gamified instruction in enhancing grammar learning among tertiary-level English Language Learners (ELLs) in Bangladesh. Recognizing the limitations of traditional, rote-based grammar instruction in sustaining student engagement and retention, this paper explores gamification as a dynamic alternative. Employing an ethnographic qualitative methodology, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires to understand participants' perceptions and experiences from 27 university students and 5 faculty members who participated in and/or facilitated gamified grammar activities using digital tools such as Mentimeter, Google Classroom, and Kahoot!. The goal of the study is to explore how gamification approaches to learning impact learners' motivation, understanding, and usage of grammatical rules within real-life scenarios. Findings are that gamification significantly impacts increasing student learning engagement and grammar retention, with users reporting greater motivation and improved ability to use grammar in communication situations. However, infrastructural issues, limited digital access, lack of training, etc., were perceived as major impediments to effective implementation. The study contributes to filling a research gap by contextualizing gamified grammar pedagogy within Bangladesh's higher education system and offers practical implications for integrating game-based strategies in English language teaching.

Keywords: gamification, grammar learning, English language classroom, tertiary education, retention

Introduction

Grammar learning is one of the cornerstones of English Language Learning (ELL), and it plays a fundamental part in preparing students' communicative ability, academic achievement, and career development.

Traditional teaching of grammar, which focused on memorization and strict rule-governed adherence, did not engage learners actively. This lack of interaction resulted in low retention and lack of application of grammatical rules to real life, which are significant problems with tertiary-level ELL students (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Chung, 2017). As learning environments kept evolving, innovative methods became essential to render learning grammar more interactive, engaging, and relevant.

Gamification, applying game design elements such as rewards, leaderboards and challenges in non-gaming contexts, has emerged as a prominent and transformative approach in education (Deterding et al., 2011). With the incorporation of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, gamification presents an interactive learning process that induces effort, motivation and retention of learned information (Hamari et al., 2014). Role-playing, real-time quizzing, and cooperative game-like setting give ELL students an opportunity to acquire grammar in the context, bridging the gap between theory and practice (Vygotsky, 1978; Krashen, 1985).

While it has potential, gamification as a grammar learning tool for ELL, particularly in less developed countries, like Bangladesh, is hugely underexplored. There are institutional, technical and cultural problems serving as barriers to its effective implementation. These vary from low access reliable internet and devices, digital literacy rates and specifications of well-crafted content that accommodates curriculum goals (Bourgonjon et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017). All focus on more general skills for instance speaking, vocabulary, with minimum attention to grammar, which is generally considered difficult and unengaging; conventional methods do not interest and bridge the gap of grammatical knowledge and communicative competence. Few delve deeply into the acquisition of grammar, which is often considered challenging and less appealing to students. While gamification has been extensively studied in global contexts, there is little that has been done on how it is implemented, its effectiveness, and its challenges in English Language learning (ELL) classrooms in Bangladesh, especially in the tertiary context.

This paper, hence, aims to examine how gamification enhances engagement, motivation, and the retention of grammatical competence through appropriate application, while also identifying the challenges associated with its adoption. This study fills the gap by exploring how cultural, technological, and institutional factors influence the use of gamification in Bangladeshi higher education. The research gap in this study also highlights

areas related to gamification in English Language Learning (ELL) classrooms that have not been adequately addressed in the existing literature, particularly in the context of Bangladesh and difficulties in gamification implementation, especially in settings with minimal resource, laying the foundation for further investigations into the long-term effects of gamification in language acquisition. By addressing these concerns, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on gamification in education and offers practical insights for improving grammar instruction in ELL classrooms in Bangladesh. Therefore, this study aims to find the answer of the following research questions:

1. How effective is the gamification program in enhancing grammar learning in ELL classrooms in Bangladesh?
2. What challenges do educators face in implementing gamification in ELL classrooms in Bangladesh?

Literature Review

Gamification in Education

Gamification has emerged as an innovative approach in educational settings, particularly in language learning. Deterding (2011) defines gamification as applying game design elements like leaderboards, rewards, and points to non-entertainment goals, aiming to enhance motivation and user engagement by leveraging the motivating aspects of games. Gamification boosts motivation through a balance of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, with extrinsic rewards like points or badges and intrinsic enjoyment of the activity (Deterding et al., 2011). Progression, represented by levels or badges, fosters accomplishment and maintains engagement (Nicholson, 2015). Rewards like leaderboards and points encourage consistent effort, reinforcing language practice and proficiency (Deterding et al., 2011). Instant feedback in gamified systems enables quick error correction and reinforces correct usage, enhancing retention and learning speed (Hamari et al., 2014). Gamification has gained popularity as a technique in educational settings because of its capacity to increase student engagement, motivation, and learning results. Specifically, its use in language learning has yielded encouraging outcomes (Deterding et al., 2011). In the context of tertiary-level education, gamification has been explored as a method to improve grammar instruction in English Language Learning (Kapp, 2012; Nicholson, 2015).

Gamification has shown significant benefits across academic fields, improving retention, offering real-time feedback, level development, and collaboration, crucial for language learning (Borges & O'Neill, 2018). It also created positive learning environments, and boosted engagement (Anderson & Rainie, 2014). Studies by Hamari et al. (2014) found that gamified learning environments increased motivation, academic achievement, and retention of vocabulary and grammar. Additionally, by promoting repeated practice in various contexts, gamification enhances retention without overloading pupils (Gee, 2003; Deterding et al., 2011). These methods, using stages, challenges, and rewards, support language learning by enhancing student participation, repetition, and practice outside of the classroom by outperforming the traditional methods in motivation and engagement (Seaborn & Fels, 2015), providing a more dynamic and interactive learning environment (Caponetto et al., 2014). Time-based tasks, tests, and role-playing are examples of gamified components that keep students interested and involved in their education (Anderson & Rainie, 2012). These skill-level-appropriate exercises encourage sustained attention and keep learners from becoming bored (Keller, 2010). According to Surendeleg et al. (2017), this enables ELL students to take chances and advance their grammar abilities without worrying about failing.

While traditional approaches remain important in education, gamification offers a dynamic option that can considerably improve grammar learning for ELLs, especially when used intelligently and in combination with other teaching strategies. Gamification is a potent and successful strategy in a variety of educational environments, including language learning. According to Anderson and Rainie (2012), gamification has grown in popularity in educational settings in recent years, with supporters suggesting that it provides significant benefits over traditional teaching methods.

Grammar Learning in Tertiary Level Education through Gamification

Studies conducted in various fields, including language learning, have emphasised its advantages, difficulties, and consequences (Gee, 2003; Deterding et al., 2011). According to Viberg et al. (2018), who investigated gamification in language learning, game-based resources enhanced feedback, involvement, and the development of a friendly, competitive atmosphere. Particularly for non-native speakers at advanced study levels, learning grammar is frequently seen as a complicated component of language learning, impacting their communication skills and academic performance. Opined by Chung (2017), tertiary-level English Language learners often have trouble remembering and using complex grammatical structures like conditionals, phrasal verbs, and tense modulation. Tertiary-level ELL students face

grammar learning problems such as complexity, fear of mistakes, and a lack of context. English language learning (ELL) requires grammar teaching, especially at the tertiary level where students must be able to utilize the language effectively for social, professional, and academic reasons (Ellis, 2006). Fear of failing can impede practice and language production, especially in academic contexts (Ellis, 2015). Norris and Ortega (2000) suggest that students may be unable to use grammar effectively in communication if they receive instruction that solely focuses on rules without providing contextualized practice; gamification can provide a promising answer by making grammar training more entertaining, interactive, and contextually relevant, thereby overcoming these language acquisition barriers.

Apart from instant rewards like points, levels, badges, and leaderboards and attainable goals inspire learners, another advantage of gamification is its ability to provide instant feedback, which enables students to swiftly fix mistakes, enhancing language acquisition (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Grammatical problems become more relevant and interesting through gamification, which links theoretical knowledge to real-world, context-driven events. According to Norris and Ortega (2000), contextualised learning aids students in internalising and flexibly applying grammar principles. Students are more likely to persevere and acquire grammar when it is taught in interactive, game-like settings, and engagement is associated with intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore, gamified systems' active recall, spaced learning, and repetition promote long-term memory and make it possible to apply grammatical rules more successfully (Gee, 2003; Deterding et al., 2011). Therefore, better recall of grammatical principles and their application in real-life situations result from this positive, stress-free atmosphere (Surendeleg et al., 2017). Because motivation and engagement lead to more successful language learning experiences and increased proficiency, students are more likely to attain better learning outcomes (Keller, 2010; Anderson & Rainie, 2012).

Teaching- Learning Strategies

Diverse learning styles can be accommodated through differentiated training that uses a range of instructional strategies, including digital games, simulations, and competitive activities (Tüzün et al., 2009). In addition to making grammar instruction more interesting, these techniques enhance critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Gamified assessments can assist students in accomplishing both GTM and CLT learning objectives by offering rapid feedback and encouraging them to improve their grammar. Effective grammar instruction in the English language classroom requires

interactive and engaging strategies that promote understanding and application. A combination of inductive and deductive approaches helps students grasp grammar rules by either discovering patterns in texts or receiving direct instruction (Ellis, 2006). Role-plays and real-world conversations are examples of communicative activities that support the practical application of grammar and are consistent with the tenets of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Contextualized instruction utilizing authentic materials improves comprehension, supported by Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes meaningful exposure to language. Additionally, collaborative learning fosters peer interaction and reinforces the use of grammar in communication (Vygotsky, 1978). Personalized learning experiences are made possible by corrective feedback in conjunction with technology like grammar-checking software and artificial intelligence tools (Truscott, 1996).

Digital tools such as Mentimeter, Kahoot, and Duolingo are some of the essential software and apps for gamifying English language learning (ELL). To increase student motivation and engagement, these platforms incorporate game aspects including competition, meme, feedback, and prizes (Deterding et al., 2011). Kahoot transforms quizzes into competitive games, boosting motivation through instant feedback, while Duolingo uses badges, levels, and points to reward language abilities (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Surendeleg et al., 2019). With live polls and quizzes, Mentimeter promotes engagement and improves learning by providing immediate feedback (Deterding et al., 2011). Wang (2022) also found in his studies that Mentimeter's live quizzes, word clouds, and interactive polls helped students actively participate in discussions, especially in speaking and vocabulary activities. However, not every student or institution, especially those from less fortunate socio-economic backgrounds or institutions with limited resources, has access to dependable internet or personal devices (Severino & Karcher, 2016). According to Bourgonjon et al. (2013), a lot of gamified resources, including premium apps or subscription services, are expensive and can be out of reach for certain students or organizations. Also, disparities in digital literacy, language barriers, technical difficulties, and the high expense of tools limit the efficacy of gamified learning (Gee, 2003; Bourgonjon et al., 2013; Severino & Karcher, 2016; Liu et al., 2017). To guarantee fair and successful learning experiences, these obstacles need to be removed.

The integration of technology in English Language Learning (ELL) at the tertiary level has significantly evolved across Asia, particularly in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. In Singapore, where technology-driven education is prevalent, Al-Fadhli and

Khalfan (2020) found that Mentimeter enhanced students' motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency in second-language classrooms. Moreover, institutions like the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) have adopted AI chatbots and Mentimeter, fostering high student motivation and language proficiency, although the cost of advanced tools poses a barrier for some learners (Lim, 2020). In Indonesia, the interactive nature of gamified learning tools, particularly for practising grammar and vocabulary, has been well-received by students, leading to increased engagement and participation (Wahyuni, 2021). In Malaysia, universities like the University of Malaya and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia integrate LMS platforms like Moodle and gamified tools such as Kahoot!, resulting in high student engagement, albeit with some issues related to teacher preparedness (Tan & Lee, 2020).

In Bangladesh, institutions like Dhaka University, BRAC University, and North South University have incorporated platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, Kahoot!, and Quizizz into their English courses, allowing students to engage in interactive, gamified learning. While these tools have enhanced student motivation and vocabulary retention, challenges such as digital accessibility, teacher training gaps, and infrastructure limitations persist (Chowdhury, 2020). However, infrastructure limitations, accessibility issues, and teacher preparedness remain significant challenges across few regions (Kumar & Ghosh, 2019; Wahyuni, 2021), for example Bangladesh. However, there have been encouraging outcomes in improving language acquisition from the use of technology in ELL at several tertiary institutions in Bangladesh and other Asian nations. Even though urban institutions in Bangladesh have made significant progress, more work has to be done to close the digital gap and give students in rural areas fair access to technology.

Theoretical Framework

a. Input Hypothesis: A key component of his Monitor Model, Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) highlights that language acquisition happens when students are exposed to "comprehensible input"—language that is just a little bit beyond their current skill level, or i+1. The i+1 principle, for instance, is preserved by language learning games that modify difficulty in response to a student's answers, guaranteeing that learners are continuously exposed to a little more complex grammatical structures in an interesting and approachable way. The gamification of grammar instruction in tertiary education can establish a learning environment that promotes implicit grammar acquisition by integrating the Hypothesis with game design components. In addition to minimizing emotional barriers to learning through

entertaining and motivating components, comprehensible input (i+1) is integrated into interactive and engaging contexts. Through interactive game-based activities, grammar rules are presented in real-life scenarios that are contextualized and meaningful to the learners. For example, gamified lessons may incorporate role-playing games or impromptu speaking that immerse students in scenarios where they must use grammatical structures to navigate challenges or complete tasks. Thus, gamification offers a useful way to apply Krashen's theory (1985), encouraging a low-stress, learner-centered setting that improves grammatical structure acquisition in English Language Learning (ELL).

b. Sociocultural Theory: The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) places a strong emphasis on the value of social interaction and scaffolding in the educational process. This theory states that students learn best when they work together with others, especially more experienced classmates or teachers, to acquire new information and abilities. The method of scaffolding involves giving students supportive frameworks to help them finish tasks they are unable to execute on their own, then progressively reducing that support as their ability increases. By encouraging group projects and peer interactions—two factors that are critical to learning—gamification reinforces Vygotsky's notion. Students frequently collaborate in groups during gamified grammar lectures, taking part in group challenges or competitions that call for problem-solving and communication skills, thus encouraging collaborative learning. By encouraging students to exchange techniques, learn from one another, and support one another while playing, these activities foster a social learning environment. Gamification supports Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) by fostering peer interaction, collaborative learning, and scaffolded advancement, which creates a rich environment for language learners' social and cognitive growth.

c. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Through interactive, meaningful tasks, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) encourages students to utilize language in real situations, highlighting the value of communication as the main objective of language learning. CLT places more emphasis on the development of communicative competence than traditional methods, which emphasize rote memorizing of grammatical rules. In this approach, language is learnt through its actual use in communication. By incorporating grammar teaching into communicative challenges that mimic real-life experiences, gamification supports CLT. By making grammar instruction more engaging and relevant, this method raises student engagement, which benefits long-term language acquisition and retention.

Thus, by transforming grammar instruction into an interesting, interactive experience, gamification successfully complements the CLT approach.

Methodology

This research examines how gamification can be applied to the teaching of grammar and whether it fosters a deeper understanding and retention of grammatical rules among English language learners at the tertiary level. The research design for this study is ethnographic which is a qualitative approach, as the primary aim is to explore and understand the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of English Language learners towards the use of gamification in grammar instruction. This design is chosen to capture in-depth insights into the subjective experiences of students and teachers, allowing for the exploration of factors that influence their engagement with learning and teaching through gamified grammar activities. The study intends to give a comprehensive understanding of how gamification affects language acquisition and engagement by conducting interviews, watching student-teacher interactions, and engaging participants in the classroom setting. The data were collected from 27 students through convenient sampling from one university in Bangladesh, and 5 teachers through snowball sampling from two universities in Bangladesh who have experience or interest in gamification. Teachers shared their valuable insights on how gamification is implemented in the classroom, its perceived effectiveness, and the challenges they face when applying this method to grammar instruction. The students were enrolled in a tertiary-level and had been currently or previously exposed to gamified English language learning environments.

Individual interviews were conducted with each participant to explore their personal experiences with gamification. The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions that aim to uncover students' perceptions of the gamified activities, the challenges they faced and the benefits. Classroom observation was used to collect data in order to efficiently record student-faculty interactions, levels of engagement, and classroom dynamics during gamified activities. Overall engagement with the learning process was also observed. Questionnaires were used to find out participants' opinions and attitudes (refer to Appendix). The questionnaires were thoughtfully created to complement the goals of the study and guarantee that the information gathered would yield accurate and significant insights. Classroom observation was used to collect data in order to efficiently record student-faculty interactions, levels of engagement, and classroom dynamics during gamified activities. In this

study participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Consent forms were provided to all participants. Participants' identities and responses have been kept confidential, data has been anonymized to ensure privacy, and all personal information has been securely stored.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and analyzes the empirical findings from students, teachers, and classroom observations regarding the implementation and impact of gamification on grammar learning in Bangladeshi tertiary-level ELL classrooms. The discussion is integrated throughout, explicitly connecting the findings to the established literature review and theoretical frameworks.

Engagement and Motivation: A Transformative Shift

There was a stark contrast between student and teacher perceptions of traditional and gamified grammar classes. All 27 student participants unequivocally described traditional grammar instruction as "boring," "monotonous," and focused on "repetitive learning" through lectures, textbooks, and worksheets. They reported low concentration and motivation in these settings. On the other hand, gamified courses were consistently described as "dynamic," "fun," "interesting," and "enjoyable."

Students explicitly credited this shift to the intrinsic nature of gamification: "The competition, challenges, and rewards motivated me to learn more," one student stated. Another student answered in-depth, "Learning grammar in a gamified class is much more interesting because it learns grammar in a humorous and easy way. The focus is mainly on communication and actual usage." Teachers backed this modification. One teacher characterized the conventional class as having "less interaction" and being "monotonous" due to "text-based and repetitive materials," while gamified classes stimulated "remarkable attention" in students, making them "more present in the moment." Another teacher witnessed gamification "transform the experience by making grammar learning dynamic and engaging," fostering "active participation, collaboration, and creativity." All the instructors reported that students were "more active and responsive," with "greater motivation and enjoyment," competitive elements reinforcing a "sense of accomplishment." Classroom observations also vivified this high energy, with students

demonstrating "high levels of enthusiasm and collaboration," actively discussing answers and learning from peers while engaging with Mentimeter quizzes and word games.

These findings firmly corroborate the literature on the limitations of traditional, rule-based grammar instruction (Chung, 2017) and the potential of gamification for engaging and motivating (Deterding et al., 2011; Hamari et al., 2014; Seaborn & Fels, 2015). The students' characterizations of traditional classes as disengaging receive direct resonance in the critique of methods that fail to hold attention, leading to inefficient retention and application (Norris & Ortega, 2000). This shift to enjoyment in gamified settings supports Anderson and Rainie's (2012) and Caponetto et al.'s (2014) arguments that gamification renders learning more interactive and dynamic.

Those specific motivators that students identified – competition, challenges, rewards (points, leaderboards), and a sense of achievement – align perfectly with the game design elements that were identified by Deterding et al. (2011) and motivational models that combine intrinsic enjoyment and extrinsic rewards (Deterding et al., 2011; Nicholson, 2015; Keller, 2010). This increased engagement provides the requisite foundation for more effective learning, supporting Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis as it sets a receptive state for comprehensible input (i+1) through enjoyable interaction. Furthermore, collaboration and peer interaction observed on tasks resonate with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning through social interaction.

Tools, Activities, and Theory Alignment

Both teachers and students reported using various digital tools and activities. Mentimeter was the most referenced platform, used for live grammar quizzes (MCQs, fill-in-the-blanks), polls, and word clouds. Google Classroom was used for submission of grammar exercises with game-like features like adjustable deadlines and leaderboards. Other tools that were cited were Kahoot! for competitive quizzes and Duolingo for organized practice. Students particularly enjoyed tasks on application in context rather than rote memorization. As one student noted, "I use the grammar rules when I am having conversations and giving speeches now because the games made us practice like that." Teachers developed activities like using Kahoot for "quick grammar reviews" and creating "dialogue based on specific grammar structures."

The choice and implementation of these tools and activities clearly demonstrate the theoretical foundations underpinning effective language learning. Mentimeter is able to provide feedback and real-time quizzes with "comprehensible input" (i+1) according to student response, directly applying Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) through gradual challenge and instant correction. Collaborative word clouds and interactive polls are also encouraging an active environment that alleviates anxiety, facilitating intake. Leaderboards and adaptable deadlines in Google Classroom apply Deterding et al.'s (2011) game mechanics (points, status) to facilitate engagement and monitoring of progress.

Above all, activities like role-playing and impromptu speaking are at the center of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). They force students to use grammar functionally for real communicative ends, bridging the gap between knowledge and ability that Norris and Ortega (2000) described. As the students' feedback on the use of tenses in a restaurant complaint illustrates, these activities make grammar "relatable and easier to apply in real-life situations." Cooperative games also embody Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory in that they provide scaffolding through peer collaboration and teacher support within a social environment. The sequencing commonly seen in these activities, starting with the simpler and progressing to more challenging, echoes the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). This multifaceted approach with readily available tools like Mentimeter and Google Classroom answers the literature review's invitation for innovative solutions that make grammar learning interactive and practical (Anderson & Rainie, 2012; Borges & O'Neill, 2018).

Effectiveness: Retention, Application, and Feedback

Both students and teachers reported significant benefits regarding grammar understanding, retention, and application. Most students stated gamification helped them understand grammar rules better. Teachers saw that "interactive and repetitive nature of games" made "reinforcing learning" easier. In the words of one teacher, games provided "gigantic exposure to vocabularies" and enabled students to "learn from errors and reward systems" and be motivated to "do better in the next level." Nicknaming in the course of games was also seen to "reduce anxiety and enhance class participation," indirectly by enabling more practice. Practical application was emphasized by the students. One of the students stated explicitly, "I use rules of grammar when I am speaking and making speeches." Others highlighted ways in which activities made rules "more applicable."

Teachers confirmed this, reporting increased ability to apply grammar in communicative activities following practice by gamification. The classroom observation noted students to be "focusing on winning games but also eager to justify answers and learn from others," demonstrating active processing and application. Also, for the purpose of instant feedback, another student participant stated: "The scores and leaderboard encourage me to play more aggressively because I know immediately what went wrong and try harder the next time." This was indicated as an important strength across the board. Students "appreciated instant scores," which enabled them "to gauge their progress", "see which grammar rules they had mastered," and "immediately correct their errors." Teachers employed means like Mentimeter and Kahoot! specifically for their capacity to provide instant feedback, considering this as crucial to "fast error correction" and maintaining momentum.

These findings provide strong evidence for the literature on gamification's positive impact on learning outcomes (Kapp, 2012; Hamari et al., 2014; Nicholson, 2015). The retention gain observed is in line with conceptualizations that assign salience to the role of active recall, spaced repetition, and active practice in establishing long-term memory (Gee, 2003; Deterding et al., 2011). This reinforcement is facilitated by the gamified environment, through interactive and repetitive practice without boredom (Surendeleg et al., 2017; Keller, 2010). The most important finding addressing practical application directly addresses the core fault of conventional methods discussed in problem statement and literature review (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Ellis, 2006; Chung, 2017).

By placing grammar practice within authentic, communicative tasks like role-plays and emergent speech (CLT principles), gamification allows students to internalize framework for flexible application, transcending decontextualized rule knowledge. The students' statements about the use of grammar in speech and conversation illustrate this successful transfer. The power of immediate feedback is a foundation of effective gamification (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hamari et al., 2014) and CLT. Evidence attests to its role in offering immediate error correction, dissolving misconceptions, prompting further effort, and allowing learners to track improvement – all of which are crucial in both understanding and retention. This creates the "iterative learning process" described by Hamari et al. (2014), with incentives directly linked to learning improvement.

Challenges and Implementation Barriers

Despite interest and promised benefits, significant barriers were reported, typically technological and logistical. Technological infrastructure was the most frequently cited restriction by teachers and students alike. Students identified "technical issues, for instance, connectivity or unfamiliarity with tools" and "limitation of access to smartphones." A student explicitly quoted: "I had problems with network connectivity in the Kahoot quiz, which was frustrating."

Teachers related to this, stating "technical issues occur a lot", blaming these on the "absence of tech support, and the proper resources." Slow internet, costly subscription and limited access to reliable devices (smartphones, tablets, computers) were the general issues. Along with all these, both instructors and students mentioned unfamiliarity with the gamified tools as problems. The classroom observation recorded some students "struggled to use the gaming app as a first-time user," requiring teacher guidance. Teachers also mentioned the "lack of training" for themselves and varying levels of student digital literacy.

The teachers particularly mentioned the cost barrier in terms of premium aspects of well-known tools. Cost of subscription of some software like Kahoot was emphasized, as one teacher noted: “It is no longer possible to continue using it because of the costly subscription fee without the institution's support.” Another instructor said: “The time required to explain the game rules and ensure that everybody understood it, took up extra time.” Seamlessly integrating gamified activities within curricular boundaries and ensuring that they met definite learning objectives was also noted to be an issue. Another instructor noted problems saying, “Weak students have difficulty understanding or achieving the tasks given in class, and there is a need for better differentiation.”

These findings directly correspond to issues expressed in the literature review regarding implementing gamification in developing contexts like Bangladesh (Bourgonjon et al., 2013; Severino & Karcher, 2016; Liu et al., 2017). The technology constraints – irregular internet, no computer, high costs of tools – correspond to "infrastructural constraints" and "digital accessibility" constraints defined as significant challenges (Kumar & Ghosh, 2019; Chowdhury, 2020).

The issues of digital literacy and training also reflect Bourgonjon et al. (2013) and Liu et al. (2017) calls for varying levels of digital competence to impact effectiveness. The issue of cost, particularly for subscription-based services like Kahoot!, is an indicator of the "resource limitations" that were

discovered to impede equal access (Bourgonjon et al., 2013). The time it took to set up, describe rules, and accommodate varied student needs in game-like activities reflects the pragmatic "teacher preparedness" and "curricular integration" concerns reported in the literature (Tan & Lee, 2020). The danger of duplication underscores the need for well-designed, varied gamified content as reported by Keller (2010) and Anderson and Rainie (2012). These issues collectively highlight the variance between gamification promise and the conditions of the Bangladeshi tertiary context, confirming that cultural, technological, and institutional considerations significantly impact its deployment (Liu et al., 2017).

For the first research question, there is evidence from the findings that is strong in support of the effectiveness of gamification in this context. It significantly enhances the level of student interest and motivation over that of the conventional methods, making learning grammar an interactive and thrilling process. This is achieved through competition, challenges, rewards, and engaging instruments such as Mentimeter and Kahoot!. The provision of immediate feedback is a vital driver of this effectiveness, enabling prompt error correction and progress monitoring.

Supporting answer to research question 2, the principal challenges are infrastructural and technological in character, i.e. unreliable internet connection, limited student access to devices (tablet/smartphones), lack of institutional tech support, and the prohibitively high cost of high-end tools or subscriptions, e.g. Kahoot!. Poor digital literacy among teachers and students as well as inadequate training in the use of gamified software and designing effective activities is a serious hurdle. A few pedagogical and logistical challenges include time required for activity preparation and rules clarification, difficulty in incorporating gamification smoothly with lesson targets, as well as managing diverse student requirements (e.g. lagging students struggling to cope with the tempo or intensity). Synthesis of findings and discussion reveals that gamification has promising potential to revitalize grammar education in Bangladeshi tertiary ELL.

While gamification has been investigated globally in the context of ELL, its immediate use in teaching grammar at the tertiary level in a developing world setting like Bangladesh was commonly under-researched. By implementing game mechanics like challenges, rewards, competition, and immediate feedback through tools like Mentimeter, Google Classroom, and Kahoot!, it can significantly improve students' enjoyment, motivation, and participation, directly countering the disengagement caused by conventional strategies (Seaborn & Fels, 2015). More importantly, it ensures improved

understanding, enhances active and repetitive repetition in low-anxiety settings (Surendeleg et al., 2017), and above all, enables the use of grammatical rules in functional communicative settings (CLT) by eliminating the theory-practice divide (Norris & Ortega, 2000). This effectiveness is also well facilitated by Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis via engagement of i+1 input, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory via collaboration and scaffolding, and CLT principles via contextualized, communicative practice. However, the realization of this potential is subject to the surmounting of great impediments.

The Bangladeshi situation provides huge barriers, primarily weak technology infrastructure (uncertain internet, absence of devices), tool expense too great, low digital literacy, and deficiency of teacher training (Bourgonjon et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2017; Chowdhury, 2020). Time, curriculum integration, and addressing diverse learners' needs logistical complexities further complicate implementation. These challenges highlight that gamification is not a matter of plug-and-play but is context-dependent, resource-sensitive and support-sensitive. These issues can be addressed by institutional investment, specific training, blended learning strategies and finding cost effective or open-source options, if necessary. It is imperative to unlock the full transformative potential of gamification in Bangladeshi higher education grammar teaching. This study, in closing a vital knowledge gap and providing detailed grounded understating offers rich evidence and advice for instructors, institutions, and policy-makers looking to innovate ELL practice in Bangladesh and beyond.

Conclusion

This study explored how gamification affected tertiary level English language learners' acquisition of grammar, specifically in the context of Bangladesh. The results show that adding game-based components to grammar training greatly improves student motivation, engagement, and grammatical structure retention. Gamification makes grammar learning more efficient and pleasurable by giving students clear input (i+1) emphasizing the significance of interactive, scaffolded, and feedback-driven learning; it also encourages group learning, and utilizes positive reinforcement. Traditional approaches to grammar teaching, involving sometimes reduced exercises and rote memorization, proved weaker in keeping students engaged and fostering practical application. On the contrary, gamification creates a student-centered and more interactive learning space by activating interactive learning through

digital technologies like Mentimeter, Kahoot!, Google Classroom, etc. The research did also reveal, however, that gamified teaching presents a number of challenges such as low digital literacy, technical issues, integration into the curriculum, and uneven access to reliable devices and the internet from both students' and teachers' sides. The findings indicate that although gamification has tremendous potential to enhance the grammar education of English language learners, its implementation will require pedagogical and infrastructural challenges to be addressed. Educational institutions need to invest in teachers' training, technological resources, and blended models of learning to achieve highest potential of gamification. Policymakers can strategize to integrate gamified pedagogy into national curricula. Further research is also recommended to investigate the long-term retention capacity of gamification as a pedagogical tool for teaching English. Altogether, this research points towards gamification being an innovative and effective method for transforming the study of grammar into an exciting, interesting, and worthwhile learning experience for English language learners at the tertiary level in Bangladesh.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Questionnaire for Students

1. Can you describe your experience of learning grammar in a traditional English language class vs a gamified class?
2. What gamified activities or tools have been used in your grammar classes?
3. Do gamified activities affect your effectiveness in learning grammar, e.g. any moments where you felt more or less engaged? If yes, please specify.
4. How do you think gamification helps (or doesn't help) you understand and apply grammar rules in real life?
5. How does feedback during gamified activities (e.g., immediate results, and scores) impact your learning process?
6. Can you describe any challenges you've faced while using gamified activities for grammar learning?

Appendix B

Questionnaire for Teachers

1. Can you describe your experience of teaching grammar in a traditional English language class vs a gamified class?
2. What specific gamified activities or tools have you implemented to teach grammar?
3. How did students respond to these activities?
4. How do you perceive the effectiveness of gamified grammar learning on students' engagement?
5. How does gamification influence the understanding and retention of grammar rules among students?
6. What challenges have you faced when implementing gamified activities for grammar teaching?
7. What additional support or resources would help you implement gamification more effectively in your classroom? Please specify.

Culturally Responsive AI in ELT: Bridging Socio-Cultural Divides in AI-Driven Language Learning Environments

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Abstract

This study examines socio-cultural dynamics in AI-driven English Language Teaching (ELT) across non-Western contexts, guided by socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Drawing on interviews and focus group discussions with educators and learners from non-Western regions, it reveals how AI tools, often designed around Western-centric norms, clash with local pedagogical values, marginalize multilingual practices, and exacerbate socio-economic inequities. Socio-cultural theory frames AI as a cultural artifact mediating learning through social interaction, yet participants highlight mismatches between AI's individualistic design and collectivist classroom traditions. Critical pedagogy further illuminates power imbalances, as algorithmic bias in natural language processing privileges standardized English, erasing regional dialects and cultural narratives. Stakeholders advocate for participatory design practices, urging co-creation of culturally responsive tools with local communities to address these tensions. Hybrid models blending AI with human support and offline functionality emerge as practical solutions for resource-constrained settings. The findings call for policies prioritizing infrastructure equity, cultural localization, and critical digital literacies to empower marginalized learners. By centering stakeholder voices, this study challenges techno-deterministic narratives, positioning AI as a socio-technical process requiring cultural humility and ethical engagement.

Keywords: socio-cultural theory, critical pedagogy, AI in ELT, cultural responsiveness, hybrid model

1. Introduction

Considered transformative, AI-based tools, such as adaptive learning platforms, chatbots, and automated writing evaluators, aim to provide more individualized learning experiences in English language teaching (Holmes et al., 2023). However, below this technical optimism is a contradiction: AI-driven ELT tends to consider language learning a universal, context-free concept, thus neglecting the socio-cultural reality of learners and teachers.

Although these technologies profess to democratize education, their very epistemology, design, and implementation often work from a Western-centric epistemology that tends to privilege standardized varieties of English and pedagogical standards which may even be at odds with local educational practices (Matsuda, 2020; Zhao et al., 2022). Such malalignment leads to urgent questions concerning equity, cultural relevancy, and agency in AI-mediated education.

According to the socio-cultural theory, learning is mediated by cultural tools and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). AI systems tend to treat language learning as a neutral task that can be accomplished through algorithmic means. For instance, natural language processing (NLP) models used in grammar checkers and essay scorers are biased toward Inner Circle English dialects, which affects World Englishes and multilingual communities that engage in translanguaging (Bender et al., 2021). The assumption that students in these regions will interact with AI systems as independent individuals overlooks the fact that, in societies like those of sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, learning is often a collective process, with teachers occupying an authoritative role (Warschauer et al., 2022). As a result, the students would be alienated from the learning process because their needs would not be met.

Most of the studies on AI in EFL focus on the technological aspect, such as the enhancement of students' performance or engagement (De Freitas et al., 2020). Most studies do not focus on the lived experiences of teachers and students from non-Western countries, especially from marginalised communities in terms of socio-economic status or cultural background (Selwyn, 2021). The latter is often the case because most of the digital technology tools that are designed and developed by tech corporations normally overlook and exclude people outside their target market. According to Freire (1970), education that is not based on the lived experiences of people ceases to be education but rather cultural invasion.

By emphasizing the perspectives of teachers and students in multilingual, non-Western contexts, this study tackles these issues. The study aims to challenge the "one-size-fits-all" narrative of AI in education by emphasizing qualitative insights from non-Western regions (Williamson, 2023). In addition to investigating avenues for participatory design that validate learners' identities and communicative practices, it critically analyzes how socioeconomic disparities, linguistic hierarchies, and cultural attitudes

toward technology mediate the impact of AI (Gutiérrez, 2020). This study addresses the following research questions:

1. *How do socio-cultural factors shape the integration of AI in ELT?*
2. *What strategies can educators and learners propose to design AI tools that respect cultural diversity and promote equity?*

The significance of this work lies in its dual contribution to theory and practice. By examining how AI influences power dynamics in language learning, it theoretically strengthens socio-cultural and critical pedagogy frameworks (Shumar & Baker, 2023). Likewise, it provides food for thought for developers and educators about how they can usefully and ethically design inclusive tools that align with the values of their local pedagogy. In terms of policies, there is an effort to equitably deploy AI in under-resourced contexts, while ensuring that the promises of technology do not exacerbate existing inequities (UNESCO, 2022). This study reframes AI in ELT as a socio-technical activity that calls for ethical participation and cultural humility, as opposed to a decontextualized response, by privileging the narratives of stakeholders over technical specifications. It suggests for the field to stop prioritizing efficient paradigms of pedagogy, and instead adopt pedagogies that value multilingualism, foster critical digital literacy, and give voice to marginalized communities to influence how language education is developed in the future.

2. Literature Review

The incorporation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English Language Teaching (ELT) is perceived as a technological and pedagogical revolution (Holmes et al., 2023). Advocates posit that AI tools, such as adaptive learning platforms, chatbots, and automated writing evaluators, can provide better personalized learning assistance in countries with teacher shortages and high student numbers (Zhao et al., 2022). However, idealism often fails to consider the socio/cultural aspect of language learning and further reduces education to a transaction between machines and humans. As Crawford (2021, p. 17) cautions, “the neutrality” of AI is a fallacy because the cultural assumptions integrated into the development of AI systems shape the ways in which learners use language and technology. The future of AI technology, and its role in ELT, is a threshold that depends on what it can do and what society is willing to accept.

A central concern in the literature is the dominance of Western epistemologies in AI, primarily in the design of AI tools. For example, NLP models will be trained on corpora with a bias towards Inner Circle English varieties such as British English or American English and unintentionally present a hierarchy of those varieties over speakers of World Englishes or local dialects and communities (Matsuda, 2020). Moreover, studies show how computerized grammar checks and essay marking systematically penalize variation in standard English, pathologizing multilingual learners' translanguaging and code-switching practices on a daily basis (Bender et al., 2021). This type of algorithmic bias encourages what Freire (1970) described as the "banking model" of education, where knowledge is deposited in passive learning and cultural dialogue is viewed as more or less irrelevant. It raises ethical questions about which voices are prioritized in AI-mediated pedagogy (whose other voices are being erased).

Socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) provides a framework and refers to sociocultural tools and interactions in relation to learning. AI is not positioned in absence of social context in socio-cultural theory but is a cultural tool inclusive of cultures, and by extension, influenced by the context it emerges from. For example, East Asian classroom educational norms express collectivist learning practices that might be at odds with the orientation of AI to learning as individualized, while linguistic hierarchies of postcolonial South Asia might, through their emphasis on standard varieties of English encoded into AI tools (Warschauer et al., 2022), enhance some tensions in that context. By centering the interactions to technical, culture and social practice, socio-cultural theory pushes researchers to consider how the affordances the AI tools provide are consistent or inconsistent with situated pedagogical ambitions.

The assumption that AI adoption is inherently a good or clearly beneficial move is equally problematic. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) also puts these assumptions into relief and it is fundamentally about power relations in education. Freire is against systems that treat learners as passive beings who merely take knowledge in through a passive practice of unquestioningly taking on knowledge. Ultimately, Freire believes education should enable people, especially marginalized communities, to critically interrogate and, then, act to replace oppressive systems. In the case of AI in English language teaching (ELT), critical pedagogy reveals how algorithmic systems simply reproduce systemic inequalities (e.g., privileging learners in technological privilege, or ignoring the stories and voices of learners whose cultures have been shaped by, but not defined by or similar to, non-Western cultures, etc.), rather than

facilitate more inclusive spaces or environments. The Moroccan educators' dissatisfaction with chatbots and the lack of recognition of terms used specifically in Darija or Amazigh reflects Freirean concerns about education and its role in poverty and cultural oppression (Matsuda, 2020).

There are also important differences, both in access and outcomes, related to AI. Wealthy institutions in the Global North explore next-generation AI tools while countries in the Global South with insufficient resources lack the infrastructure (e.g., no high-speed Internet or no devices) required to engage significantly with AI (Selwyn, 2021). This digital divide will intensify ongoing inequities in education and to exclude learners situated in marginalized or disenfranchised communities from innovations and expansions in literacy interventions that could inform their language skill development. Even where there is access to this technology, problems related to broader social and economic conditions will in still contribute to the effectiveness of that individual in managing and navigating those AI forms of engagement. For instance, a student with poor digital literacy may not effectively troubleshoot an error message in a chatbot dialogue and the resultant gap in achievement will be consolidated (De Freitas et al., 2020).

However, there is a growing scholarship advocating participatory approaches to AI design in ELT. For example, Gutiérrez (2020) states that culturally responsive pedagogy must now include the development of technology and asserts that educators and learners should create tools that fit their linguistic repertoires and cultural identities (Gutiérrez, 2020). This relates to Shumar and Baker's (2023) push for "critical data literacy" in which stakeholders interrogate the origins of AI-generated content and the politics of those generative tools. Also, UNESCO (2022) notes policy frameworks and procedures to ensure the intended consequences of deploying AI technologies address (and not amplify) systemic inequities. Overall, there seem to be very few participatory models of AI development and deployment, especially as the majority of AI tools are produced by corporate entities striving for global scalability and not local competence.

A major gap within the literature is the lack of qualitative studies focusing on the lived experience of educators and learners in non-Western, multilingual contexts. The field is primarily dominated by quantitative studies that measure factors like test score increases and engagement, while socio-cultural factors such as race, class, power and privilege inform how educators take up such innovative work with AI tools (Williamson, 2023). When

qualitative studies are used, they are most often drawn from predominantly White participants in privileged settings, thereby leaving important, marginal voices out of the literature. As a result, this perpetuates a homogenizing discourse by failing to acknowledge the array of voices, pedagogical practices, learner identities, and cultural values manifested in contexts around the world.

This study addresses the gaps by highlighting educators and learners voices in non-Western, multilingual contexts. Using qualitative stories to center the study, it combines socio-cultural theory and critical pedagogy to examine how the integration of AI in ELT mediates cultural identity, equity, and agency. The next chapter describes the methodology that was used in exploring these dynamics in detail.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative, interpretive study design to investigate socio-cultural dynamics in AI-enabled English Language Teaching (ELT), specifically within non-Western, multilingual contexts. Qualitative inquiry seeks to privilege what participants experience, and then how they culturally interpret their expressed experience and what situated knowledge they rely on more so than what researchers can quantify (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study valued the stories of educators and their learners to investigate how socio-cultural dynamics shape ways of perceiving the integration of AI and define potential approaches for designing culturally responsive tools.

3.2 Context and Setting

This study encompasses six non-Western, multilingual contexts: Bangladesh, Nepal, Morocco, Vietnam, Dubai, and Japan. These particular cases illustrate the complexity of AI integration in contexts where English is treated as a foreign language alongside local languages, and where local cultural attitudes toward technology and modes of working are not necessarily the same. For example, in collective contexts in East Asian classrooms, the emphasis on academic independence in AI may not match existing educational norms class, while in South Asian post-colonial sites, their linguistic hierarchies shaped by a standardized English in intervention and AI tools may exacerbate tensions (Warschauer et al., 2022). These varied contexts will allow

for a broader consideration of the role AI might play in the ELT world. In this respect, the project may offer more than an understanding of AI's role in relation to ELT than that offered by current perspectives from the Global North.

3.3 Sampling & Participants

To recruit 11 educators and 33 learners (secondary to tertiary level) from across the six regions, purposive sampling was used. The sampling strategies of age, gender, institution and prior experiences with AI tools were developed to ensure a diverse participant representation. Educators were prioritized as they were playing the role of mediating the integration of AI, and learners described how the integration of these technologies were coalescing with their identities and learning practices. Three focus groups were also held with educators and learners (6-8 per group) to encourage discussion of educators and learners' shared or contested views within a collaborative discourse.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) – structured to solicit narratives in 3 thematic pillars: personal experiences negotiating AI ultimately in ELT; cultural tensions experienced with AI integration; and visions for what equitable and inclusive design in AI should entail in regards to linguistic representation. The interviews and FGDs utilized open questions that provided space for participants to narrate their own concerns and communicate issues most relevant to their contextual situation (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was adopted to ascertain patterns within participants' narratives. The initial coding was inductive and allowed themes to emerge from the data, and subsequent drafts utilized deductive categories taken from extant literature; for example, algorithmic bias, cultural mediation, and equity (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Furthermore, we maintained reflexivity through the processes of transcribing and peer debriefing, recognizing the positionality of the researcher and any biases when interpreting the participants' accounts.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines were rigorously followed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants with explicit assurances of confidentiality and withdrawal rights. Moreover, data were anonymized and records were assigned pseudonyms to protect identities.

4. Findings

This section presents the study's findings through a synthesis of participant narratives in relation to socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). Themes are organized around the two research questions that guided the study.

4.1 Perceptions of AI Integration in ELT

4.1.1 Cultural Tensions in AI Adoption

Across the six region groups, a prominent theme emerged, which was the dissonance of AI tool design and local pedagogical values. Participants repeatedly said AI was "foreign" in terms of the Western focused values imposed and was at odds with their cultural and educational practices.

Mismatch Between Individualism and Collectivism

In Japan and Vietnam, educators critiqued AI's emphasis on self-directed learning, which conflicted with collectivist classroom cultures prioritizing teacher guidance and peer collaboration. A Japanese high school teacher, *Yuki* (35, female), explained:

> "Our students thrive on group work and teacher-led discussions. When AI gives instant feedback, they feel isolated. It's like talking to a machine that doesn't understand our *wa* [harmony] culture."

Similarly, Vietnamese university lecturer *Lan* (42, female) noted:

> "Students here expect the teacher to correct mistakes directly. If an AI flags an error but doesn't explain it, they get frustrated. Learning isn't just about answers—it's about relationships."

These insights align with socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes mediation through social interaction, yet many AI tools reduce learning to a transactional exchange.

Algorithmic Bias and Linguistic Erasure

Participants in Morocco and Bangladesh mentioned how AI platforms marginalized regional dialects and cultural contexts. For educator participants in Morocco, there was frustration when interacting with a chatbot that failed to recognize Darija (Moroccan Arabic) or Amazigh terms. A secondary school teacher, *Amina* (38, female), shared:

> "The AI chatbot only responds to formal English or textbook French. But our students code-switch between Darija, Amazigh, and English daily. The tool feels irrelevant to their reality."

In Bangladesh, learners reported AI tools mislabeling culturally specific expressions as errors. A university student, *Rahim* (20, male), recounted:

> "I wrote about Eid celebrations using words like 'Sehri' [pre-dawn meal during Ramadan] and 'Roza.' Grammarly corrected them as 'incorrect.' It's like the AI erased my culture."

These experiences respond to broader critiques of algorithmic bias in natural language processing (NLP), with training data favouring Inner Circle English varieties (Bender et al., 2021).

Power Hierarchies and Resistance

Educators in Dubai and Nepal observed resistance to the adoption of AI as a result of structural power dynamics. In particular, Nepali teachers emphasized their reverence for human knowledge and expertise, making feedback from an "artificial" intelligent being feel unnatural to them. A curriculum designer, *Dr. Bhattarai* (50, male), stated:

> "Teachers here are seen as mentors, not just knowledge deliverers. If an AI challenges their authority, it creates tension. Students ask, 'Why trust a machine over our teacher?'"

Dubai-based learners from low-income backgrounds described AI as "a luxury for the privileged." A secondary student, *Fatima* (16, female), observed:

> "My parents work long hours. If I struggle with an AI app, there's no one to explain it. The rich kids get tutors; we just give up."

These narratives underscore how socio-economic and cultural hierarchies mediate AI's perceived legitimacy.

4.1.2 Equity Concerns and Access Gaps

Socio-economic disparities emerged as a pervasive barrier to AI integration, particularly in Nepal and rural Vietnam. Participants highlighted uneven access to devices, internet connectivity, and digital literacy.

Infrastructure Challenges

In Nepal, educators described stark contrasts between urban and rural schools. A government school teacher, *Gita* (33, female), shared:

> "In Kathmandu, some schools have smart classrooms. But in rural areas, students share one mobile phone for four siblings. How can we talk about AI equity when basic infrastructure is missing?"

Similarly, Vietnamese learners in rural provinces criticized unreliable internet access. A student, *Minh* (18, male), remarked:

> "If the village Wi-Fi goes down, I lose all my progress. My city friends stream videos; I download lessons once a week."

Digital Literacy Divides

Participants in Dubai and Bangladesh emphasized how gaps in digital literacy exacerbated inequalities. A Bangladeshi educator, *Farida* (40, female), noted:

> "Many of our students haven't used a computer before. Asking them to navigate AI apps without training is setting them up to fail."

These findings echo global critiques of the "digital divide" in education (Selwyn, 2021), highlighting how AI risks deepening existing inequities.

4.1.3 Opportunities for Personalization and Innovation

Despite challenges, participants acknowledged AI's potential to enhance engagement and accessibility when aligned with local needs.

Flexible Learning and Immediate Feedback

Vietnamese learners praised adaptive platforms for offering flexible practice outside rigid classroom schedules. A university student, *Linh* (22, female), shared:

> "The AI app lets me learn at my own pace. I can repeat pronunciation exercises until I get it right, which teachers don't have time for."

Moroccan educators saw value in AI-driven analytics for identifying learner struggles. A teacher, *Hassan* (45, male), stated:

> "The platform shows where students need help. We use that data to adjust lessons, even if the AI itself isn't perfect."

Gamification and Engagement

In Japan, gamified AI tools were praised for motivating reluctant learners. A high school student, *Kenji* (17, male), noted:

> "I play vocabulary games on my phone like it's a video game. My friends and I compete for high scores—it's fun!"

However, participants stressed that such benefits were contingent on addressing cultural and infrastructural barriers.

4.2 Proposed Strategies for Culturally Responsive AI Design

4.2.1 Localizing Content and Language Support

Across all regions, stakeholders demanded AI tools that reflect local languages, cultural references, and communication styles.

Multilingual and Contextual Integration

Bangladeshi educators advocated for integrating Bangla transliteration features and localized examples in grammar exercises. A focus group in Dhaka proposed:

> "If an AI teaches prepositions, why not use examples from Cox's Bazar or the Sundarbans? Our students deserve to see their world reflected in learning materials."

Vietnamese learners called for chatbots that recognize regional accents and idioms. A student, *Linh,* argued:

> "English apps should accept 'teacher, why you no come yesterday?' as valid, even if it's not textbook grammar. That's how we speak!"

Cultural Representation in Content

Moroccan teachers emphasized the need for culturally relevant scenarios in AI-generated texts. A focus group suggested:

> "Use stories about our festivals, landscapes, or family traditions. Don't just recycle American or British examples."

These proposals align with calls for decolonizing English language education (Matsuda, 2020), advocating for tools that validate learners' identities.

4.2.2 Participatory Design Practices

Participants rejected top-down AI development models, urging greater involvement of educators and learners in design processes.

Co-Creation with Local Stakeholders

Moroccan educators stressed the importance of collaborating with local experts. A teacher, *Amina,* proposed:

> "Let us design the questions and examples. We know our students better than Silicon Valley engineers."

Nepali participants advocated for "cultural sensitivity audits" involving linguists and community leaders. A student, *Anita* (24, female), explained:

> "Test the AI with our proverbs, stories, and communication styles. If it fails, fix it."

This aligns with participatory design principles (Gutiérrez, 2020), which prioritize stakeholder agency in shaping technology.

4.2.3 Addressing Equity Through Hybrid Models

Participants proposed hybrid approaches blending AI with human support to mitigate access gaps.

Community-Based AI Access

Japanese educators suggested "AI clubs" in schools to provide shared access for underprivileged students. A teacher, *Satoshi* (52, male), proposed:

> "Use class time for group AI activities, so everyone gets equal practice. Teachers can guide discussions afterward."

Offline and Low-Bandwidth Solutions

Dubai-based learners recommended offline AI features, such as downloadable exercises. A student, *Omar* (19, male), suggested:

> "Even if the internet dies, let us keep practicing with pre-loaded lessons."

Such strategies echo UNESCO's (2022) recommendations for equitable AI deployment, prioritizing context-specific solutions over universal fixes.

4.3 Cross-Contextual Insights

While experiences differed by local context, three key themes emerged across group contexts:

1. **Cultural Relevance:** All groups demanded AI tools that validate local languages, identities, and pedagogical traditions.
2. **Equity as a Prerequisite:** Technological innovation was seen as meaningless without addressing infrastructural and socio-economic barriers.
3. **Agency in Design:** Participants rejected passive roles as "users," insisting on active participation in shaping AI's role in education.

There were some major differences related to collectivist vs. individualist orientations. Japanese and Vietnamese participants prioritized group learning while Moroccan and Nepali participants involved the larger community of content creators principles in their responses.

To sum up, the results show a dichotomy where AI in ELT is seen as both creative and exclusive, empowering and alienating. While acknowledging its promise, stakeholders call for drastic changes in design paradigms to address issues of equity disparities, cultural prejudice, and participatory ethics. As one Bangladeshi teacher, *Farida*, succinctly stated:

> "AI can help, but it must *listen* to us first. Otherwise, it's just another colonial tool."

5. Discussion

This section provides an analysis of the study's findings interpreted using socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). It connects the participant stories to a larger conversation about AI in education, analyze how socio-cultural factors may mediate the integration of AI in English Language Teaching (ELT), evaluates the actions of key stakeholders in designing a culturally responsive engagement with ELT, and discusses implications for practice, policy, and future research.

5.1 Cultural Tensions in AI Integration: Theory and Practice

5.1.1 Dissonance Between Individualism and Collectivism

The findings of the study reinforce the importance of socio-cultural theory in understanding AI adoption in ELT. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that learning is mediated through social interactions as well as the cultural tools that shape our interactions, but many AI policy documents advocate for social situativity that mistakenly emphasizes individualized, algorithmically-generated feedback rather than social dialogue. Participants from all 6 regions described AI as a "foreign" entity introducing Western-centric norms that conflicted with underlying pedagogical values in the local cultures. For example, participants from Japan and Vietnam expressed concern that the standards required in AI were individualized when those countries held collectivist classroom cultures that emphasized teacher instruction and collaborative work among peers. A Japanese teacher, *Yuki*, noted:

> "Students here thrive on group work and teacher-led discussions. When AI gives instant feedback, they feel isolated. It's like talking to a machine that doesn't understand our *wa* [harmony] culture."

These perspectives challenge the techno-deterministic assumption that AI can universally enhance education, instead highlighting the need to adapt tools to local pedagogical epistemologies (Warschauer et al., 2022).

Similarly, Moroccan learners reported that chatbots failed to recognize Darija (Moroccan Arabic) or Amazigh terms, rendering the tools irrelevant to their daily communication. A teacher, *Amina*, explained:

> "Our students code-switch between Darija, Amazigh, and English daily. The AI feels like a guest who refuses to learn our language."

These tensions exemplify the algorithmic bias that exists within natural language processing (NLP) that privileges varieties of Inner Circle English (Bender et al., 2021). Participants like Rahim (Bangladesh) described feeling as if their culture was erased from existence when their AI reported that words such as "Sehri" (the pre-dawn meal during Ramadan) were "incorrect. "This connects to Freire's (1970) critique of educational as "banking education," where knowledge is just deposited in passive learners instead of co-constructed in dialogue.

5.1.2 Power Hierarchies and Resistance to AI Authority

The research also shows how power relations in classrooms mediate the adoption of AI. The resistance of some Nepali educators to AI encroaching on the teacher's power and authority aligns with Freire's (1970) critique of the "banking model" of education, where knowledge is deposited into students who are passive learners. A Nepali participant framed AI as a threat to the teacher-student mentorship relationship, stating:

> "Teachers here are seen as mentors, not just knowledge deliverers. If an AI challenges their authority, it creates tension."

This reflects a global concern about the role of AI in displacing human agency, especially in contexts where educators occupy a highly regarded position culturally (Selwyn, 2021). Similarly, Dubai-based students described

AI as "a luxury for the privileged," echoing critiques of digital divides that further exacerbate socio-economic differences (UNESCO, 2022). In a way, this also points to digital divide concerns and highlights the need to build AI tools that augment, not replace human capability, especially in contexts where educators occupy a highly regarded position culturally.

5.2 Equity Concerns: Access, Infrastructure, and Digital Literacy

5.2.1 Uneven Infrastructure and Socio-Economic Barriers

The gap patterns identified by participants in Nepal and rural Vietnam resonate with Selwyn's (2021) insight into education and the "digital divide". The stark contrast between urban and rural settings is epitomised by Gita's fact that in Nepal, "students have to share one mobile phone for four siblings" which further illustrates how capacity constrains access for already marginalised communities and excludes them from access to the affordances of AI tools. Minh in Vietnam described how unreliable connectivity in rural areas forces learners to use AI by "once-a-week downloads" which undermines the apparent flexibility of AI options, rather than having real-time access.

These findings disrupted narratives about AI as a democratizing tool and instead revealed the way it further perpetuates systemic disadvantage. Moreover, as UNESCO (2022) cautions, when thinking about fairer AI, simply making advanced technologies available to people does not address the foundational barriers of device access and connectivity and will not lead to equitable outcomes.

5.2.2 Digital Literacy as a Hidden Curriculum

Additionally, the research found gaps in digital literacy, notably in Bangladesh and Dubai. Farida (from Bangladesh) noted that many students only had rudimentary computer skills which was prohibiting their ability to navigate AI, "setting them up to fail." This resonates with critical digital literacies frameworks (Shumar & Baker, 2023) which posit that some degree of technological proficiency isn't innate but comes from outside socio-economic privilege. Without interventions or unique support, AI has the potential to privilege learners who have had prior exposure to digital tools, further increasing achievement gaps.

5.3 Culturally Responsive AI Design: Participant-Driven Innovations

5.3.1 Localizing Content and Language Support

Participants' propositions for culturally responsive AI design provide implementable solutions for reconciling global technology with local contexts. Calls for multilingual support, from Bangladeshi educators identifying the need for Bangla transliteration to Vietnamese learners requesting local accents, echoed Matsuda's (2020) request for a decolonization of ELT. AI tools have the potential to acknowledge learners' identities if their local dialects, cultural references, and ways of communicating are included in design.

An example is Rahim 's experience having AI label his Eid-related terms as "wrong." Participant suggestions to incorporate local examples (e.g. "Cox's Bazar" in Bangladesh or "Amazigh traditions" in Morocco) directly address this issue through the lens of Gutiérrez (2020) as it relates to her framework of equity-oriented pedagogy.

5.3.2 Participatory Design and Co-Creation

The emphasis on participatory design—evidenced in Moroccan teachers' calls to "design the questions ourselves" and the request from Nepali stakeholders for "cultural sensitivity audits"—represents a growing movement towards democratizing technological development, and represents a challenge to the corporate-centric model for AI design that prioritizes stakeholder agency over top-down models (Williamson, 2023).

The focus group conversations were clear that co-creation must include not only educators but also learners and community leaders as well. As *Anita* (Nepal) stated:

> "Test the AI with our proverbs, stories, and communication styles. If it fails, fix it."

Such strategies align with Shumar and Baker's (2023) advocacy for "critical data literacy," where stakeholders interrogate the politics of AI-generated content.

5.4 Hybrid Models and Policy Implications

5.4.1 Blending AI with Human and Community Support

The hybrid model proposals participants shared—like the Japanese "AI clubs" for access sharing and offline elements developed in Dubai—provide practical responses to access inequities. These examples support UNESCO's (2022) call for critical contexts in the deployment of AI, providing

flexibility instead of universal solutions. For example, Satoshi's proposal to use AI as a form of group activity ("so everyone gets the same practice") is an example of striking a balance between technology and socio-cultural values. Omar's proposal of downloadable lessons is another example of convergence with low bandwidth in mind, while retaining functionality. These voices are important in advocating for a move away from thinking of AI as a decontextualized solution and toward an understanding of AI as a socio-technical process that requires cultural humility and ethical accountability.

5.4.2 Policy Recommendations for Equitable AI in ELT

The results of this study point to the need for the following policies:

a. To provide access to AI to marginalized communities, governments and institutions must invest in connectivity and devices.

b. Regulators should impose requirements on the developers of AI systems to include regional languages, dialects, and examples for use in educational materials.

c. Policymakers should design opportunities for educators, learners, and local experts to collaboratively design AI systems.

These actions correspond with UNESCO's (2022) global recommendations regarding the ethical use of AI in education to provide inclusivity and accountability.

5.5 Limitations

The qualitative structure of this research allows us to engage with participant narratives at a deep level and yet, there are some limitations. First, the small, purposive sample size and specific focus on six regions outside of the West limits how generalizable the results are for wider contexts. Second, in relying on self-reported data, there is the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants expressed socially legitimized views instead of their actual experienced reality. Steps were taken to mitigate bias through the use of anonymous respondent claims and repeated member-checking but bias will always exist in some form. Finally, the study relied on stakeholder perceptions and not on direct technical audits of AI tools. This is justified by the study goals of understanding lived human experiences rather than technical audits,

but it still means gaps remain in understanding the technical mechanisms that underpin perceived biases.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how social and cultural contexts influence the embedding of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in English Language Teaching (ELT) in six non-Western sites: Bangladesh, Nepal, Morocco, Vietnam, Dubai, and Japan. By prioritizing participants' realities, the findings indicate that AI can only be effective in a language education environment not on its own based on its technical features, but rather it must fit within culturally sensitive values that are about equity and allowing constituents to be co-creators of knowledge. Participants identified that AI tools developed through a Western-centred approach rarely match behaviors found in a collectivist focus, marginalized multilingual learners through potential algorithmic biases, and questions teacher agency. For example, Japanese educators challenged AI's focus on self-directed learner responsibilities, which negated aspects of their collectivist classrooms, while Moroccan learners labelled chatbots useless if they could not recognize even single word Darija or Amazigh terms. These findings deconstruct a techno-optimistic narrative of AI as a panacea, reframing it as a socio-technical process shaped by cultural humility and ethically engaged pedagogy.

Participants suggested three strategies for making AI meet its promising potential and the limitations of culture and infrastructure. First, they called for localizing content more, including region-specific languages, dialects, and culturally relevant situations in their designs. Second, they recommended using participatory design methods and encouraging that both educators and learners contribute to the creation of the tools. Third, they supported hybrid models of combining AI and human support, like offline capabilities for low-bandwidth environments, or teacher mediation in collectivist contexts. This movement towards a participatory design aligns with UNESCO's (2022) peacemaking call for contextualized AI, valuing the flexibility of contextualization more than prebuilt solutions.

In order to support equity and cultural awareness in AI-driven ELT, policies and institutions need to develop infrastructure equity, mandate culturally relevant localization in the AI development work, and encourage participatory governance in processes. Educators can include critical digital

literacies so that learners can challenge the biases of AI, and developers can audit algorithms for linguistic diversity. Additionally, future studies could examine the longer-term impact of AI on learner identity and assess hybrid pedagogies in spaces where resources are constrained.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Educator Interview Open-ended Questions:

1. How do you currently use AI tools in your English language teaching?
2. What challenges or opportunities have you encountered when using AI with your students?
3. How well do you think AI tools align with your local pedagogical values (e.g., collectivism, teacher authority)?
4. What changes would you suggest to make AI tools more culturally responsive for your learners?
5. How do socio-economic or infrastructural barriers affect AI access in your context?

Learner Interview Open-ended Questions:

1. How do you use AI tools for English learning outside the classroom?
2. Have you ever felt that an AI tool misunderstood your cultural background or language use?
3. What features would make AI tools more relevant to your communication style or regional dialect?
4. How do you handle technical challenges (e.g., internet access, digital literacy) when using AI?
5. Would you prefer AI to work independently or with teacher guidance? Why?

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

1. Share a time when an AI tool felt irrelevant to your cultural context.
2. How can AI better support multilingual learners who code-switch or translanguaging?
3. Should AI developers collaborate with local educators? How?
4. What hybrid models (AI + human support) would work best in your school/community?
5. How can AI address—or avoid worsening—existing socio-economic gaps in education?

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Participant Information Sheet

Title: Culturally Responsive AI in ELT: Educator and Learner Perspectives
Purpose: To investigate how socio-cultural factors shape AI integration in English language teaching.
Procedures:

- Semi-structured interviews (30–45 minutes) or focus group discussions (60–90 minutes).
- Audio recording and transcription (with consent).

Confidentiality:

- Data will be anonymized using pseudonyms.
- Recordings destroyed after publication.

Voluntary Participation:

- You may withdraw at any time without penalty.

Contact:
Consent Statement:

I confirm that I have read the information above and agree to participate in this study.
e-Signature: _____
Date: _____

Appendix D: Coding Scheme Example

Thematic Categories and Sub-Codes

Theme	Sub-Codes	Extract
Cultural Tensions	Collectivist vs. Individualist Design	"Students thrive on group work, but AI isolates them." (*Yuki*, Japan)
	Algorithmic Bias in NLP	"Grammarly flagged Eid terms as incorrect." (*Rahim*, Bangladesh)
Equity Concerns	Infrastructure Gaps	"One mobile phone for four siblings in rural Nepal." (*Gita*, Nepal)
	Digital Literacy Barriers	"My parents can't help me troubleshoot AI apps." (*Fatima*, Dubai)
Participatory Design	Localization of Content	"Use examples from Cox's Bazar, not just Western cities." (*Bangladeshi Focus Group*)
	Co-Creation with Stakeholders	"Let teachers design the questions—we know our students best." (*Amina*, Morocco)

Appendix E: Data Anonymization Protocol

All participant names in the study are pseudonyms. Identifying details (e.g., location, school type) have been altered or omitted to protect confidentiality. Transcripts were stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher.

Language Identity Crisis in English Medium Instruction: Challenges in Bengali Language Learning Among EMI Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This qualitative research paper explores the difficulties that students in English Medium Instruction (EMI) of the Bangladesh educational system incur in learning Bengali, as a subject content, especially the problem of effective communication in Bengali as a subject in the classroom. This study discusses the case of student difficulties with mother tongue acquisition as teachers use Bengali to teach EMI classes in a particular society, with semi-structured interviews in five Bengali teachers in three geographical locations (Chittagong, Dhaka, and Sylhet). Five Bengali language teachers from three different regions of Bangladesh took part in this research where English medium schools are prominent: Chittagong, Dhaka, and Sylhet. The research is based on the Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky, the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), and the Language Maintenance Theory which help grasp the complexity of linguistic and identity challenges that students might have to encounter. Key findings reveal large differences in teacher views of issues pertaining to students with four out of five teachers indicating issues concerning vocabulary selection and general challenges in the Bengali subject among the EMI students. Another noteworthy area of concern was communication confidence, where students were found to be adamant to communicate in Bengali owing to the lack of exposure to the academic discourse of the Bengali language. The paper extends to the insight into the delicate linguistic dynamics in the multilingual educational environments and can inform the creation of a more accommodating language policy that should equip children with English proficiency and the need to retain the language of their mothers in the changing environment within Bangladeshi education.

Keywords: English Medium Instruction, Bengali language learning, mother tongue maintenance, Communication Accommodation Theory, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Introduction

The accelerated growth of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Bangladesh is an important change in the educational context of the country, which, in the wake of the current trends of globalization and the use of English as an international language, is associated with internationalization of higher education and professional life (Akter & Mitul, 2020). The English medium schools in Bangladesh are around 500 and focus more on teaching English as the main language of study whilst receiving either a British or international curriculum (Chowdhury, 2021). Nonetheless, this educational system poses exclusive difficulties to those students whose first language is Bengali language especially when they expose to Bengali language teaching in such majorly English-speaking educational settings.

A common phenomenon of EMI in non-English speaking countries has created some interest among academics, as scholars point to the opportunities and challenges related to this form of education (Clegg & Simpson, 2016). At the Bangladesh level, EMI schools have a rather complicated linguistic demand that compels students to function between their native language (Bengali) and the academic language (English) that is predominant, hence developing what researchers refer to as a linguistic identity crisis (Shaila & Fan, 2024). This poses a greater challenge especially when attending Bengali language classes because teachers carry out their communications and convey their instructional contents in Bengali hence leading to communication accommodation gap between the teachers and the students who are more comfortable with English.

In earlier studies, several problematic questions on the issue of introducing EMI in Bangladesh have been indicated as a problem of expressing the idea in English by students, challenges with delivery of the content by teachers, and the macro implications on the academic performance (Rahman et al., 2019). There is scanty literature, however, that focuses on the reverse effect, that is how EMI students fare with learning their own language. This absence in the literature is especially prominent due to cultural and linguistic significance of the Bengali language in Bangladesh and the possible long-term consequences regarding the maintenance of the language and the preservation of identity (Milošević, 2019).

The multidimensional nature of language learning and use is a salient feature that should be invoked, in as far as the theoretical conceptualization of these challenges is concerned. The Sociocultural Theory that was developed

by Vygotsky offers a basis of acknowledging how a language is influenced by the social interactions and cultures in which people live in (Newman, 2018). On the same note, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) provides information on how people adapt themselves to the way they communicate depending on social contexts and intergroup relationships (Giles & Gasiorek, 2015). The Language Maintenance Theory also sheds more light on linguistic communities that either maintain or lose their native languages in multilingual schools (Tawalbeh, 2019).

This study addresses three primary research questions: (1) What specific challenges do EMI students face when learning Bengali as a subject in their schools? (2) How do teachers perceive and accommodate these challenges during Bengali language instruction? (3) What are the implications of these challenges for language maintenance and cultural identity among EMI students in Bangladesh?

Literature Review

English Medium Instruction in Global and Local Contexts

English Medium Instruction has become an international trend with many universities and schools all over the world having adopted English and use it as a primary language of instructions in order to increase internationalization strategies and train individuals to work in the global market (McKinley et al., 2023). According to research, the application of EMI varies widely in various contexts and various ways in different countries have their own peculiar problems which pertain to language backgrounds and education policy, as well as culture.

In Bangladesh the concept of EMI has become dominant, especially at the level of private institutions or in private-educational institutions specifically, where EMI is seen as a road towards better job opportunities and competitiveness in the international market (Bandara, 2024). Nevertheless, the literature has repeatedly reported the difficulty of students transferring to the EMI educational setting, with particular concern raised about their problems with understanding the content, academic achievements, and linguistic identity formation (Hossain, 2020).

EMI in Bangladesh has also shown the existence of intricate relations between language policy and practice where bilingual patterns of language use

in practice can be observed in institutions even with English-only language policies. The pragmatism involved with respect to strictive adhering to monolingual instruction in multilingual settings is cleaved in this linguistic versatility, as the different linguistic backgrounds of students imply the demand of an accommodative approach to teaching (Rahnuma, 2021).

Theoretical Frameworks

a. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory:

The Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky signifies the fact that social interaction and culture are the two most paramount aspects of cognitive and linguistic development (Vygotsky, 1978). Based on this model, acquisition of knowledge takes place during meaningful exchanges with those more knowledgeable, who act as culturally mediated in activities. Such major ideas as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding presented by the theory offer a great understanding of how language learners can obtain proficiency with the help of participation in the context provided (Newman, 2018).

Trying to apply the theory of Vygotsky in the environment of EMI education, it can be said that the development of the language of students is influenced by their social life in educational institutions where the language spoken is mostly English (Vygotsky, 1986). The theory implies that those who do not receive a sufficient amount of exposure to Bengali-medium instructions would be negatively affected in developing age-appropriate proficiency in a mother tongue because their ZPD of the Bengali language proficiency would be underdeveloped, lacking the social experience of speaking (Vygotsky, 2016).

b. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT):

One example is the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the theory introduced by Howard Giles, which deliberates individuals changing their styles of communication, to either come closer to their interaction partners or avoid them (Giles & Gasiorek, 2015). The theory says that there are three major accommodation styles which include convergence (changing communication to suit people), divergence (showing differences) and overaccommodation (over-adjusting communication to the point of being patronized).

CAT gives insights into the EMI situations in which teachers in Bengali language experience communication difficulties when they work with students who feel more comfortable working in English (Zhang & Giles, 2018). According to the theory, effective accommodating actions by teachers and students are the key to successful communication, and the incompatibility with each other can result in the failure to communicate and low learning efficiency (Hoffman & Zhang, 2022).

c. Language Maintenance Theory:

Language Maintenance Theory studies the reasons behind the predilection or abandonment of native languages by linguistic groups regarding an environment with several languages (Tawalbeh, 2019). The theory points out some important determinants on language maintenance such as demographic determinants, institutional backing, economic and social perception towards the language.

The study of languages in schools underlined the importance of schooling as a factor that contributes or impedes the development of the native language (Ahmad & Rahman, 2019). Research shows that learning systems which fail to target mother tongue development can lead to language shift especially among younger generations whereby they have fewer formal studies of their native language (Ozfidan, 2017).

Mother Tongue Challenges in EMI Contexts

Past studies have reported different problems that are related to the maintenance of mother tongue in cases of EMI. According to studies, EMI school pupils tend to be weak in terms of their native languages because of the lack of scholarly exposure and academic teaching (Milošević, 2019). All these difficulties might take different forms such as problems with academic vocabulary, declining writing and reading skills, and lack of confidence when it comes to the formal communication.

Mother tongue interference in the second language still remains a researched phenomenon, whereas little consideration has been given to the opposite case, namely, how a strong second language use can inhibit first language skills (Irene et al., 2023.). Studies state that learners who have been mostly taught English could face the problem of having difficulties when they are asked to immerse themselves in academic material in their native language, and some researchers call this process subtractive bilingualism (García & Li, 2014).

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative research design included a phenomenological approach implemented in providing perceptions of teachers and their experiences along with Bengali language challenges among EMI students (Levitt et al., 2017). Phenomenological approach was selected in order that the experiences and perceptions of the particular authority who have lived experiences and observations of students who learn the Bengali language in direct context with the EMI students could be captured.

Participants

The study involved five Bengali language teachers from three different regions of Bangladesh where English medium schools are prominent: Chittagong, Dhaka, and Sylhet. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience teaching Bengali as a subject in English medium schools. The demographic characteristics of participants are presented in Table 1.

Teacher	School Type	Location	Experience (Years)	Region
Teacher 1	English Medium School	Chittagong	4	Chittagong
Teacher 2	English Medium School	Chittagong	10	Chittagong
Teacher 3	English Medium School	Dhaka	9	Dhaka
Teacher 4	English Medium School	Dhaka	1	Dhaka
Teacher 5	English Medium School	Sylhet	4	Sylhet

Data Collection

Each of the participants was interviewed with the use of semi-structured interviews where data were collected. The interview guide was based on probing the feeling of the teacher about the weaknesses of the students in the learning of the Bengali language, such as word choice, sentence structure, understanding, participation, spelling, and speech. The interviews were carried out in Bengali as it helps the participants to discuss the views freely and exhaustively.

The interview questions focused on seven key areas:

1. Students' ability to select appropriate Bengali words
2. Sentence construction skills in Bengali

3. Comprehension of ordinary and complex Bengali vocabulary
4. Student engagement during Bengali lectures
5. Spelling accuracy in Bengali
6. Willingness to communicate in Bengali
7. Overall challenges with Bengali as a subject

Data Analysis

Theme analysis allowed investigating the data collected in the interviews (Braun and Clarke, 2019). The analysis involved: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report.

The theoretical premises of Sociocultural Theory of Vygotsky, Communication Accommodation Theory and Language Maintenance Theory were applied in the form of analytic tools to interpret the findings and to be able to see more clearly on the pertinent mechanisms that fuel the problems that were observed.

Findings

The interview study-based assessment demonstrated the notable trends in the perceptions concerning the issues with Bengali language acquisition among EMI students. The seven main themes that have been identified because of the analysis represent several crucial themes around which the data are organized concerning the levels of Bengali proficiency and engagement.

Vocabulary Selection Challenges

Majority (four out of five) of the teachers (Teachers 1, 2, 3 and 5) concurred and strongly agreed that there are challenges involved on the part of students when picking the right Bengali words in the course of communication. Teacher 1 noted that students often experience problems in choosing the proper Bengali words in situations of communication, which indicates the basic problem of lexical access and retrieval in the language being native. This evidence corresponds to the theory of Vygotsky about the importance of social interaction in vocabulary acquisition since EMI students do not actively study formal Bengali terms during classrooms and learn through minimal exposure to it in terms of classroom discourse (Newman, 2018).

However, Teacher 4 remained neutral as to vocabulary selection issues, which may belong perhaps to the differences in the student population or in the methods of teaching in various institutions. The described difference in teacher perception might suggest that the problem of vocabulary is not universal in all EMI settings and it could be determined by the background and policies of the institutions, teaching strategies (Watson & Garcia, 2021).

Sentence Construction Difficulties

Teachers showed divergent attitudes to the sentence building skills of students in Bengali. The weaknesses mentioned by the teachers were that the students found it difficult to frame complete sentences and Teacher 5 mentioned this too. Teacher 3 was neutral, and Teacher 4 did not agree that there was something wrong with sentence construction.

This difference indicates that difficulties in the construction of sentences can be situation-specific and depend on such factors as the level of support of the Bengali language at home, prior educational situations, and personal linguistic backgrounds (Cummins, 2017). According to the Communication Accommodation Theory approach, such challenges might be an indication of students acclimatizing to English-speaking mainstream communication practices, exhibiting challenges meeting the accommodation of Bengali syntactical formulations in instructions (Zhang & Giles, 2018).

Vocabulary Comprehension Patterns

There was quite a trend noted as far as vocabulary comprehension is concerned, and not all teachers agreed. The teachers in the leadership roles 1 and 2 concurred that the students have anxiety in comprehension of both ordinary and more elaborate vocabulary Bengali words, whereas the Teacher 3 did not agree with this criterion. Teachers 4 and 5 as well rated that among their pupils, comprehension was not a significant topic.

Such a difference in perception can also be conditioned by regional variations, or institutional differences, or variations between student populations (Forbes, 2022). The fact that no similarities were realized in Chittagong (Teachers 1 and 2), where the understanding problem was repeatedly mentioned by the educators, but in Dhaka and Sylhet teachers encountered different experiences could indicate the regional influences on language maintenance and development.

Student Engagement Variability

Variations were also quite high as regards to teacher perceptions on how their students have been engaged in Bengali lectures. Teacher 1 agreed that students seem to be disengaged whenever there are lectures in Bengali, but Teacher 3 disagreed with the same. Teacher 2 and 4 did not agree to disengagement being an issue and Teacher 5 assumed a lesser pronounced stance.

This difference in perceptions of engagement can be indicative of varying pedagogical strategies, classroom experiences or school cultures (Dayal & Sharma, 2022). On the sociocultural level, student engagement is highly tied to how they view the social relevance of the learning activity, as well as its social worth. Students having a lower engagement level will regard Bengali as more irrelevant to their learning and professional success (Zhou & Rose, 2022).

Spelling and Writing Challenges

There was divided concurrence among teachers on spelling problems. Teacher 1 strongly responded that the learners have serious spelling errors, Teacher 2 responded that there are serious spelling errors, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, and Teacher 5 did not concur with the view that spelling is always an issue. Such a difference can possibly occur due to emphasis on writing instruction as well as assessment procedures and level of student preparation in different institutions.

Further problems with orthographic knowledge and formal writing skills in Bengali and inability to spell correctly may be traced behind the spelling errors mentioned by some of the teachers and must be taught and practiced systematically (Moncada-Comas, 2022). Students in the EMI classrooms that have little formal training in writing in the Bengali language are likely to place problems with the normal spelling rules and norms in academic writing.

Communication Confidence Issues

Majority of teachers affirmed that the pupils show incertitude or reluctance to talk in Bengali. The highlighted challenge was observed by Teachers 1 and 2 and 5 and was rejected by Teachers 3 and 4. This trend indicates that lack of confidence in communication might be one of the major

factors affecting most EMI situations, which might be an indication of the lessened familiarity with more formal patterns of Bengali discourse.

Students might avoid communicating in Bengali because they are afraid of making mistakes, they do not have many options in vocabulary or are unaware of the rules of communicating in a formal register. Such a finding allows joining the discussion that the transition toward a world language is associated with a considerable maintenance deficit until a critical stage of active linguistic usage is reached (Ahmad & Rahman, 2019).

Overall Subject Challenges

Though some parts saw a difference, four out of five teachers (Teachers 1, 2, 3, and 5) replied that the students have a lot of issues with Bengali as a subject in general. The only teacher, who did not agree with this general evaluation, is Teacher 4. This agreement implies that although issues may be different in various contexts, an overall phenomenon of EMI students having difficulties with learning the Bengali language is well-known to educators.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

The results of this research are important considering the three philosophical frameworks utilized in it. In the Vygotsky Sociocultural Theory sense, these struggles of EMI learners are dependent on the decreased chances of effective and meaningful social connections in Bengali within the academic settings (Vygotsky, 1978). The concept of Zone of Proximal Development implies that students need proper scaffolding and guided involvement to acquire the skills of Bengali language that cannot be provided in EMI settings because the classroom communication is organized mainly in English (Newman, 2018).

It is possible to state that Communication Accommodation Theory could assist in describing communication breakdowns that can be observed between Bengali instructors and EMI learners (Giles & Gasiorek, 2015). In the case where the teachers instruct in Bengali language when the students are more comfortable in English, they must both join in accommodation strategies to enhance the communication process. The identified challenges in this study mean that the adopted accommodation privileges might not be sufficient and

can cause students to learn less effectively and to become less engaged (Hoffman & Zhang, 2022).

With the help of the Language Maintenance Theory, these issues create a picture of the greater concerns they may have on the preservation of the Bengali language in Bangladesh (Tawalbeh, 2019). That which transpires amongst EMI students can lead to language shift patterns especially when these learners continue to be taught very little Bengali during their studies (Ozfidan, 2017).

Pedagogical Implications

The difference between the teacher perceptions indicates that more reliable and uniform ways of teaching Bengali the language in EMI is necessary. Based on the findings one can offer a number of considerations related to pedagogy:

a. **Scaffolding Strategies:** The teachers should be able to devise the proper scaffolding that would help them connect the mostly-English-speaking language history of students with the needs of learning Bengali language (Cummins, 2017). This can include the stepwise implementation of Bengali terms, extensive visual aids, and clear teaching of difference in register between spoken Bengali and formal Bengali.
b. **Coded Switching Treatments:** Strategic code-switching between Bengali and English can enable understanding as well as decreasing tension among students when using Bengali to learn the language (García & Li, 2014). Nevertheless, these methods demand planning, so that gradually the support in English is reduced as students become competent in Bengali (Dayal & Sharma, 2022).
c. **Engagement Enhancement:** The problem of student disengagement necessitates new pedagogical practices that can tie Bengali language learning to the student interests and plans (Forbes, 2022). This may entail integration of modern Bengali literature, multimedia materials and project-based learning tasks which will illustrate the essence of Bengali proficiency.

Policy Implications

The findings have significant implications for language education policy in Bangladesh. The challenges identified suggest a need for:

a. **Reform of Curriculum:** EMI schools might have to intensify their Bengali language curricular depending on the situation so that there is sufficient strengthening of mother-tongue proficiency (Milošević, 2019). This may take the form of allocation of more class time, formulation of age relevant materials, and setting of clear standards of proficiency.
b. **Teacher Training:** Bengali language teachers in the EMI1 environment need some form of special training to teach with limited contact of students in the area of academic Bengali. Professional development tools need to revolve around accommodation practices, scaffolding, bilingual pedagogical practice (Clegg & Simpson, 2016).
c. **Assessment Practices:** EMI schools assessment practices that exist to assess the Bengali language learning are likely to face a revision as the assessment practice of these schools might consider the linguistic background and language difficulties of students. Alternative assessment techniques which acknowledge multilingual skills of students and facilitate the prospect of Bengali can be required (Shaila & Fan, 2024).

Cultural and Identity Considerations

The problems as found in this research pose critical concerns on cultural identity and language retention by EMI students in Bangladesh. These problems in Bengali language acquisition can be a part of losing links between Bengali literature, cultural knowledge, and markers of national identity that exist in the language (Ahmad & Rahman, 2019).

In terms of a multilingual identity, EMI students can become complicated with both English and Bengali languages, each of which plays a particular role in their lives (Zhou & Rose, 2022). Educational strategies to support positive multilingual identity development relate first to demonstrating the value given to two language use; and second, to assisting students to effectively make use of their multilingual repertoire.

Conclusion

The results of the present research indicate that the situation with learning Bengali language as EMI students in Bangladesh is challenging indeed, which answers the three research questions concerning the opinions of the teachers and their theoretical discussion. Concerning the unique problems

that EMI students face as they learn Bengali, the researcher indicates the problematic selection of vocabulary, issues on sentence construction, confusion in the understanding of complicated terms in Bengali, inaccurate spelling, and lack of confidence in communication as main hurdles. This arises due to their limited exposure to administratively institutional Bengali discourse in school set ups that mostly work on English and so the students fail to access and use their mother tongue skills efficiently in classroom situations. The theoretical frameworks used cast lights upon these challenges in many ways: The Sociocultural Theory proposed by Vygotsky depicts how the lack of meaningful social interactions between Bengali during instances of EMI restricts the Zone of Proximal Development towards the proficiency of their mother tongues by students, whereas the Communication Accommodation Theory shows the communication breakdowns that occur when the Bengali teachers try to reach their EMI students on the levels which are comfortable to the students using the English discourse patterns.

Regarding the interpretation of the teachers in adjusting them during the process of teaching the Bengali language, the study shows a wide disparity in the way the teachers understand and adjust these issues with a particular teacher finding it very difficult whereas the other meets few difficulties within her students. This variation implies variation in terms of institution, region, and pedagogy that can determine the performance of the students on one hand and the readiness of the teachers toward multilingual classrooms. It has a radical impact on language retention and cultural identity of EMI students as the issues revealed above jeopardize maintaining the linguistic competence and cultural ties within Bengali language. These results should make it clear that extensive changes are required in the sphere of education, and curriculum reconstruction is essential to establish sufficient cover of the Bengali language in addition to specific programs of teacher selection which will assume bilingual ideas of education and altered assessment patterns that consider multilingual proficiencies. The article highlights the necessity of reasonable education policies based on excellence in English and, at the same time, the preservation of the Bengali language and the maintenance of cultural identity to be able to achieve success not only in the global opportunities but also in the cultural heritage of the country.

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Delhi's Last Mushaira in 1845: A Translation of *Delhi ki Aakhri Shama* of Mirza Farhatullah Baigh Dehlvi by Meenakshi Jauhari

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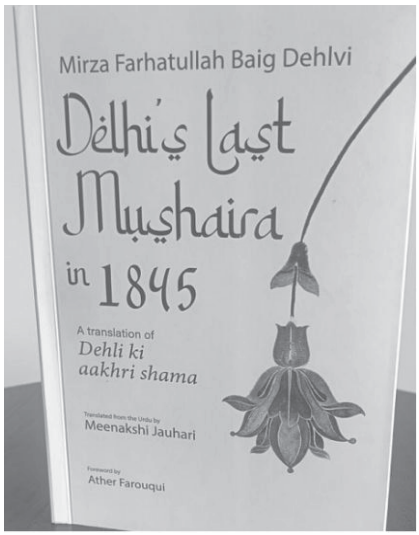
The city 'Dehli' as it was called in the text, and the present-day Delhi have several myths and legends associated with its origin. One of them is derived from Dhillu or Dilu, a king who built a city at the present location in 50BCE which was named after him, while another one talks about the city's name based on a Prakrit word "loose" (dhili), which was used by the Tomars to refer to the city.



Mirza Farhatullah Baig Dehlvi's immortal classic, *Delhi's Last Mushaira in 1845* is a portrait of a historical-fictional Mushaira in the Mughal city of Delhi in the mid-Nineteenth century, a point of inflection in the history of the city of Delhi. This was the time when the Mughal Badshah Bahadur Shah Zafar was left with no real powers and no real empire to rule over. Already in his mid-sixties when he came to the throne in 1837, Zafar was a Badshah merely in name, and the British had gradually usurped more and more of his powers, removing his name from coins, ending the long-standing tradition of giving the Emperor the ceremonial gift or nazr and finally, taking control of Delhi. However, Bahadur Shah's court was the nucleus for cultural and literary luminaries of the period. Among its brightest stars were the celebrated poets Mirza Ghalib and his equally famous adversary Sheikh Ibrahim Zauq, Poet Laureate of Delhi and the Badshah's teacher. Also illuminating the Lal Qila were several other notable intellectuals—Maulvi Imam Bakhsh Sehbai, Maulana Mamluk Ali, and Mufti Sadruddin Aazurda, Sadr Amin (chief judge) of Delhi

As Jauhari writes in her introduction, the great Uprising of 1857, which was to forever change its civilizational fabric, was still twelve years

away in the future, and the decade was pregnant with all kinds of possibilities for a Delhi suffused with the excitement of achieving greater heights.

When in the 1920s, Farhatullah Baig crafted this historic-fictional mushaira, the British influence had irrevocably altered the city, and Baig no longer knew the Delhi that met his eye. He wanted to hark back to the era of fullness, a time when poetry was in the very air one breathed, and was everyone's province - regardless of class, caste, occupation, and education. It was a time when reciting ghazals of a living poet was the greatest tribute, and when dead poets mingled freely with the living, in a manner of speaking, through the medium of their poetry. Baig's writing draws from a profound sense of nostalgia and a desire to return to the 'old' Delhi of the mid-Nineteenth century.

This translation of *Dehli ki aakhri shama* is the first complete translation of the Urdu critical edition published by Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind), which takes the readers through the streets of the Nineteenth century Delhi, acquainting them with the greatest classical Urdu poets. Baig's portrait of Delhi (in the guise of a royal mushaira) was first published as an essay in 1927 in the quarterly *Urdu*, the predecessor *Urdu Adab,* published by the Anjuman, which is now in its 103rd year of publication. This essay took many forms and was widely read and enjoyed. It was even staged as a play, and finally, in 1991, Rasheed Hasan Khan put together an authoritative version collated from the numerous versions in circulation then. The critical edition of *Dehli ki aakhri shama* put the journey of Baig's singular work in perspective, and gave an insight into his creative process, what seeded the thought in his mind, and more.

Baig's mushaira is, thereby, the portrait of a city and a way of life that now solely exists in the collective memory of 'Dehli-wallahs'. It was a powerful urge to record the city's older face in photographic detail, so that the images could perhaps be restored to future generations that would come in some unseen and uncertain future.

It is noteworthy that Baig's historical-fictional mushaira brings together a large number of poets from across the spectrum of society. The Qila princes rub shoulders with humble working-class poets; ustads of rekhta are seated alongside a bright-eyed college student; Ghalib's French student recites his ghazal, as does an octogenarian poet; and, somewhat unexpectedly, there's a soldier too, proudly attired in his military uniform. The poets are not all from Delhi. There is a poet from Secunderabad in the Deccan, one from faraway

Madras, and yet another one from Rampur. And so, we see poets of all hues, classes, ages, and from various regions seated together in the glorious democracy of a poetry symposium. One of the stars of the evening is the seventeen-year-old Nawab Mirza Khan Daagh Dehlvi, accompanying the heir Apparent, Mirza Fakhru.

The mushaira progresses through the night, the mood waves rising and falling and then inching up again as the ceremonial lamps circulate from one poet to the next. Each poet has a signature style of delivery that is part and parcel of the performance. Some recite their ghazals in tarannum, singing them like a song; some prefer taht ul-lafz, literally spoken or recited poetry; still others explain the couplets as if giving a lesson to their pupils. The poet Muhammad Ali Tishna arrives naked and inebriated, and remains so until his exit from the mushaira after having recited his ghazal. His state of undress is as much a part of the mehfil as is the regal attire of Mirza Fakhru.

Baig's mushaira of 1845 ends with a moving nazm by the royal teacher, Sheikh Mohammad Ibrahim Zauq, just as dawn is breaking. It is the end of the last mushaira of Delhi.

But the mushaira lives on…

As a sher of Lucknow's poet Amirullah Tasleem reads

"javaani se zyaada vaqt-e piirii josh hotaa hai

bhaDaktaa hai charaaG-e sub.h jab KHaamosh hotaa hai"

which translates as

Old age has more passion than the years of youth bygone

The night lamp flares with brilliance in the hush of dawn.

Similarly, this translation by Jauhari takes a fresh view of this timeless work, enlarges the scope of the conversation Baig started about a century ago, forging a unique covenant with the Delhi that was. It utilises recent historical sources, enabling the reader to gain a rich perspective of the time and the place the mushaira is set in. It is in line with Baig's objective to showcase their finely textured world and way of living, complete with all its mores and manners. All of Baig's original footnotes have been included in this translated edition, and wherever Baig employs the first person in the notes, it is explicitly called out.

Jauhari says the translation was a process of weighing between tracing the Urdu text to be faithful to Baig's vision and telling, and making it compatible with contemporary readers' preferences. She has tried to retain the formality that characterised the spoken language of the period without overburdening the narration with unnatural frills. Also, Baig's writing has a flow, and then occasionally, he dives into the depths with a deftness that keeps the reader engrossed while ensuring they don't lose their mooring. In her translation of ghazals and couplets, as the poetic motifs in Urdu poetry do not carry over to English in a seamless way, Jauhari calibrated and balanced the voice, thereby changing her literary choices dramatically from one day to the next. She has sought to explore and expand the English language metaphors to be a mirror of the original. She has, along with the English translations, also included the transliterated Urdu ghazals with a transliteration table for the non-Urdu speakers, adding that the joy of a ghazal is in reciting it aloud! Also included in this translation are the word sketches of the master poets of Nineteenth century Delhi, which is a great aid to an initiated reader. The translation is like a love letter from history to the city of Dehli and its timeless soul. It is a story of a city that has long gone but still shines brightly in literature and the hearts of Dehliwalas.

Meenakshi Juahari has been writing fiction and poetry for more than three decades. Her poetry anthology "The Fish Who Flew" was published in 2019 by the Writers Workshop, Kolkata. Her translations and works have been featured in literary journals such as *Indian Literature*, the Sahitya Academi Journal, *The Little Magazine*, *Gulmohur Quarterly,* among others.

Note: This book was published by Amaryllis, an imprint of Manjul Publishing House.

Available:

https://www.amazon.in/Delhis-Last-Mushaira-1845-Translation/dp/9355438931/ref=sr_1_1

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Note to Contributors:

Critical Insights is a Journal of the Department of English Language and Literature, Notre Dame University Bangladesh. It is a double-blind peer-reviewed scholarly journal published in English in the Fall of every year. We accept submissions in Studies in Literature, Cultural Studies, ELT, and Applied Linguistics. All submissions should be written in English for publication in *Critical Insights* and not published earlier in any other journal. Submissions are welcome from the academic community in Bangladesh and abroad.

Submission Guidelines:

- Manuscripts have to be written following the MLA 9 for Literature, and Cultural Studies, and APA 7 for Applied Linguistics, and ELT.
- Please use 12-point Times New Roman font, and the writing should be double-spaced.
- Manuscripts should be sent along with abstracts, texts, figure captions, and references in a
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- Abstracts should be between 150 and 200 words. There should be five keywords in the abstract.
- Please use American spelling and grammar.
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The Competence to See and the Courage to Act