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Anthropocentrism in Eugene Ionesco's Rhinoceros

Tracing Violence in Kobo Abe's The Woman in the Dunes

A Brief History of Storytelling in Video Games



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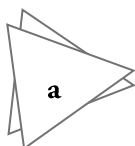
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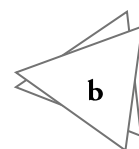


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# Submission Guideline

Threshold welcomes contributions of original (not previously published) works of interest in the disciplines of Translation Studies, English Language Teaching, English Literature and Comparative Studies, Game Studies along with related reports, news, profiles of eminent scholars, book reviews, and creative writings. You can also write a critique on the essays and articles in the current issue and the best work will be selected to be published in the next issue. The contributors are expected to submit their works for the coming issue no later than 30 Dey, 1401. Prospective authors are invited to submit their materials to the journal E-mail address: [thresholdsbu@gmail.com](mailto:thresholdsbu@gmail.com). The manuscripts are evaluated by editors of each section and at least two referees from the advisory board.

The name of the author(s) should appear on the first page, with the present affiliation, full address, phone number, and current email address. Microsoft Word is preferred, using Times New Roman font and the size of 11 with single space between the lines for the abstracts and the same font size and line spacing for the body of the paper. Graphics can be in JPEG format. Footnotes should only be used for commentaries and explanations, not for giving references. All papers are required to follow the MLA style for citations and references.

# Editorial

In the previous issue, when we were given the task of running ‘Threshold’, we convened a few meeting sessions to discuss how we could improve, what changes we could make, and what areas we could include which had not already been worked on. Our main aim was to provide a communicative space wherein editors and authors could exchange their thoughts, and whatever feedback given could increase the possibility of progress and teamwork opportunities. I am extremely delighted to see our joint efforts have come to a point where the outcome has become a more refined academic experience.

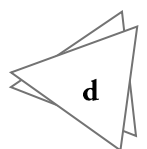
Three new sections have been added, namely “Events”, “Theory in Practice”, and “Game Studies”. The Events are those lectures, or presentations which have been given at Shahid Beheshti University or by its university professors, and for our next issues, we welcome reports written by those who have attended such occasions, accompanied by photos, good-quality videos, and audios they may have recorded. Some important results such reports may yield are learning together, knowing about areas we have not heard of, being inspired by the presenters, or learning the skills required to give better lectures ourselves. Lastly, the section, Game Studies, at first seemed so vague a topic, but fortunately we received a few works which have bridged the gap between literature and video games. We ask all those gamers sitting out there, who have also studied English Literature, to join us with their innovative works. Sadly, we haven’t received any submission on Cinema for this issue, but we are hoping to see your excellent works on films as well in the form of critical writings, essays, or reviews.

Finally, I would like to thank the editors for their accurate assessment of works, generally, the whole team for their generous support, and our layout and cover designer for creating and designing the lecture videos, and more appealing layout designs, and most importantly, all the authors and submitters, who have responded to the feedback on their works with patience, attention, and dedication.

Thank you.

**Hengameh Kharrazi**

**Editor-in-Chief**



# Literary Studies

In this issue of Threshold, I was thrilled to see the work being produced by our students in the field of English Literature. With so many exciting ideas and trends emerging in this field, it's an exciting time to be a part of this community. Many articles were submitted that ranged from some of the more innovative and modern theoretical aspects of literature such as disability studies, aesthetic perception, and the Anthropocene to covering various literary genres including classical mythological works and modern fiction. In the field of literary analysis throughout the world, one trend gaining momentum in recent years is the exploration of intersectionality in literature. This involves examining how different aspects of identity, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, intersect and influence one another in literary works. This approach has led to fascinating insights into how authors use their writing to comment on social issues and challenge dominant power structures. Another trend that has been growing is the use of digital humanities tools to analyze literary texts. By using computational methods to analyze large amounts of data, scholars are able to uncover patterns and connections that might not be immediately apparent through traditional close reading techniques. This approach has led to some exciting new discoveries about literary history and authorship. For students looking for topics to explore in their own research, there are many exciting avenues to pursue. Some potential areas of interest might include:

- The representation of marginalized groups in contemporary literature
- The role of technology in shaping our understanding of literary texts
- The impact of globalization on literature and culture
- The use of experimental forms and styles in contemporary poetry

No matter what topic students choose to explore, I am confident they will find a wealth of fascinating ideas and insights waiting for them in English literature and theory. I look forward to seeing the innovative work that the students produce as they continue to push the boundaries of this dynamic field.

Zeynab Amanipour



# Ocularcentrism: An Aesthetic Misconception



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The idea that aesthetic qualities are exclusively perceived through vision is a flawed preconception, as pointed out by Davis. This and other similar notions that suggest aesthetic blindness disqualifies disabled people need efficient justification. A comparison between people born blind and those who lost their sight reveals different aesthetic perceptions and experiences of their environment. However, both groups need to find their own way to connect with the world and perceive things around them through their other senses. Blindness does not necessarily produce an ocularcentric social aesthetic that disqualifies disabled people, since people born blind construct their perception based on their other senses from the outset. For them, able-sightedness has no actual meaning, for they have never had sight.

My purpose is to prove that blindness has different significance for the able-sighted and the visually impaired; therefore, we can consider the same degree of aesthetic perception for each group, but for visually impaired people, the visual sense can be equivalent to seeing-hands or seeing-imagination. Their perception is similar to that of the able-sighted in degree but different in manner and kind, and they are arguably not the disqualified minority in terms of aesthetic perception. To substantiate my point, it is appropriate to observe and compare the artfulness of born-blind artists and able-sighted ones, as is typically done in measuring aesthetic perception of deaf musicians and hearing ones.

It seems logical to accept that “aesthetic qualities may be perceived by haptic means, but vision remains paramount over all” (Bolt 102). However, the assumption that this aesthetic blindness disqualifies disabled people needs efficient justification. A blind sculptor shaping clay into figures, for instance, relies on the tactile sense to perform their job. What we see as outside observers is the artist striving to shape the material into what they have no idea about, but what actually happens is that they can see the

figure they want to create through their imagination. Blind artists can sketch and design their works of art, not through their blind eyes and lack of sight, but by their “seeing hands.” As Arnheim states, their creations are “the spontaneous graphic equivalent of the boundaries or elongated shapes of physical objects” (63).

Moreover, according to Freud, “seeing is ultimately derived from touching,” and the mouth is primary to all tactile organs. As infants develop their perception of the world through their mouths up to their second year, the sense of touch can be strongly accepted as paramount to all other senses with regard to aesthetic qualities. Born-blind and normally born infants both go through the experience in the early years of their existence, but when it is time to rely on different senses to perceive the world, they naturally find their own definitions of perception. For the former, it mainly happens through touching and imagining.

From a Kantian standpoint, Arnheim puts forward his idea of haptic means to relate to the outer world, stating that “the versatility of the hand not only endows the higher vertebrates with their supreme skill in manual operations and the making and handling of tools, it also enables the blind artist to create works of some complexity, worthy of the mind’s sophistication” (62). He continues, “as we have learnt to as much value to art of elementary shape as to the virtuosity of certain late styles, the sculptor and the sculptural taste of the blind deserves to be appreciated in their own terms” (63). Having the ability to perceive through the sense of touch is one of the purest forms of aesthetic perception, for this ability in a visually impaired person or artist enables them to make use of their sense of imagination even more than an able-sighted person or artist can do. Willingly or not, those with the ability to see are directed and influenced by the environment more than those born blind. The power of imagination in these seeing individuals becomes more reality-

oriented and far from personal. Hence, these imaginatively empowered disabled persons are already privileged in abstract arts in terms of aesthetic perception, or in poetry, for instance.

We can argue that no metaphoric or symbolic reading of texts about disabled people is appropriate. Many literary works, including Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, use blindness as a symbol of human folly, ignorance, deviance, and perplexity, while F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'The Great Gatsby' and Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird' use it to represent moral decay and injustice respectively. Since problematic representations of blindness are justified under the account of symbolism, Bolt argues that “the inferences go on and on, the symbolism takes us in many directions, the persistent defense being that the dramatic rendition of blindness is not meant to represent visual impairment and so is without real implication for people who have visual impairments” (100).

In conclusion, the ocularcentric social aesthetic should not disqualify those born with visually impaired eyes. With appropriate methods and instructional systems, visually impaired individuals can rely on their other senses and learn to communicate with themselves, others, and the world. This can significantly reduce the challenges they face in their perception of life. Those who become blind through accidents can also adapt to their condition based on their previous understanding and cognition built upon their lived experience. Visually impaired individuals are not disqualified in their understanding of life and beauty, but are simply different in their senses and means of communicating with the world. It is important to avoid exemplifying or symbolizing them as being inherently wrong or deviant. Literature can play a significant role in reforming problematic representations of disability, as Bolt suggests when he asks, “should we find a new way to depict human subjectivity

and the lack of morality that does not stigmatize people who have visual impairments?" (106). The answer to this question must be affirmative, and we must work to ensure that all individuals, regardless of disability, are included and valued in our society and cultural productions.

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# The Evolution of Women: from Andrew Marvell to Jonathan Swift



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## Abstract

The condition of women in England has changed over centuries and it is possible to say that their situation has become better. This paper aims to demonstrate how women are viewed in the 17th and 18th centuries based on a poem by Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress", and Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room". In the 17th century, women did not have the liberty to live the life they want and had little freedom over their lives. The view toward them is shown in Marvell's poem: they are seen as mere objects over which men have complete power and are allowed to treat them as they please. Whereas, in the 18th century, as there is a rise of individualism, they gain more freedom, as is illustrated by Swift's poem that a woman is seen as a human being, not as a mere saint or sinner. It is thus concluded that the conditions of women and how they are portrayed have evolved from the 17th century to the 18th century.

**Keywords:** Andrew Marvell, Jonathan Swift, "To His Coy Mistress", "The Lady's Dressing Room", Women, 17th century, 18th century.

## Introduction

The conditions of women during England's history have been a field of struggle. They have been seen as mere means of production or joy; they were either angels or devils. Nonetheless, there has been a progression in the way they are viewed from the 17th century to the 18th century. This article tries to show how the position of women has developed in the two centuries, referring to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room".

Marvell's love poems and pastorals dispose of old ideals of harmony by positing wittily unresolved or unresolvable oppositions, some playful, some painful, and "To His Coy Mistress" is one of the painful ones based on many feministic points of view ("The Early Seventeenth Century" 1256). For example, "The Definition of Love" or "To His Coy Mistress" often describe the relationship between flesh and spirit, physical sex and platonic love, or the idealizing of courtship and the ravages of time ("Andrew Marvell" 1696). The most famous of the century's *carpe diem* poems is perhaps "To His Coy Mistress," a balance of witty and artful couplets that is voiced by an urban and witty speaker. The quick switches from fantasy to reality raise questions as to whether this is a clever seduction poem or a probing of existential angst, as well as whether Marvell intends to endorse or critique this speaker's views on sex, love, and passion (1696).

Jonathan Swift was also a great satirist, but this did not last long. Swift read widely, reluctantly chose the church as a career, and took orders; this is when he discovered his astonishing

talent as a satirist ("Jonathan Swift" 2301). "A Tale of a Tub" and "The Battle of the Books", his powerful satires on corruption in learning and religion that were published in 1704, but reached their full expression only in their fifth edition in 1710, were written between 1696 and 1697 (2301). Swift, however, devoted most of his time to politics and religion in later life, and his prose was generally geared toward furthering a particular cause. One of his great satires, "The Lady's Dressing Room", focuses on the difference between women's interior and exterior selves. It is a discovery about women being human rather than simple objects of desire.

## Women in the 17th Century

In the early seventeenth century, women's position was viewed as second to men. They had to struggle for their freedom and therefore, had problems in many fields such as work and education. Marriage was one of the aspects of women's lives in which they experienced many inequities. They had to rely on their husbands or fathers and remain silent in public spheres. It was thought that God and nature provided both the gender hierarchy, with the man at the top, and the patriarchal role of the husband as the head of the family ("The Early Seventeenth Century: Topics"). As for virgins and wives, they were to keep their silence in public and follow their fathers and husbands unwaveringly, though widows had the freedom to make their own decisions ("The Early Seventeenth Century: Topics"). However, tensions developed when these norms met with lived experience, including domestic records as well as literary treatments of love, courtship,





marriage, and family relationships that revealed complexities and ambiguities from Shakespeare's *King Lear* (NAEL 8, 1.1139), to Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (NAEL 8, 1.1462), to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (NAEL 8, 1.1830), and more ("The Early Seventeenth Century: Topics").

The husband of the family was like the king and he ruled over his properties such as his wife and children. Because of the fact that women were considered inferior to men in many respects, men had the right to dominate them (Brabcová 21). Young women who wanted to get married had to consult their relatives for the choice of their partner, especially the ones who had property. But the girls from lower-class society had much freedom in their choices. It was the general understanding that love comes after marriage (21). However, there were documents of some marriages, especially the marriages which were concluded secretly, that had vocabularies such as love, flirtation, and attraction for describing them (22). Marriage was legally the only place women could express their sexuality without limitations. Infidelity and adultery for men were considered less inappropriate than for women (22). Girls had to keep their virginity until they get married, and afterward, it was the husband's duty to watch over them and keep them under control. Nonetheless, this was in theory. In practice, 25 percent of the girls were pregnant at the time of their marriage (23). The most important aim of marriage was to have children. The kingdom of the husband was not formed completely without children (23). Therefore, there was great pressure on women to get pregnant as soon as getting married. The only time women could experience social independence is when their partner dies, and they become a widow (23).

### Women in the 18th Century

The conditions of women in the 18th century in England became a little better than in the previous century, especially regarding the way

women were viewed in an institution such as marriage. Lawrence Stone has explained four reasons people got married in the 18th century: "the economic or social or political consolidation ... personal affection, companionship, and friendship based on the moral, intellectual and psychological qualities of the prospective spouse ... physical attraction ... romantic love" (Dobošiová 8). However, it is important to notice that the 18th century was the rise of individualism, and therefore people could choose their mate with more liberation. According to Stone, three factors caused such freedom: the nuclear families became more independent, the relationship quality between parents and children became higher and parents encouraged more neutral meetings between the two sexes (8,9). A matchmaker had four different options available to him or her in eighteenth-century society (23). In the first place, all choices were made by parents, relatives, and friends of the bride and groom without their consent (23). The second option was to choose the spouse based on the parents' choice, but then grant the children a right of veto based on one or more formal interviews after the two sets of parents had decided on a match (23). The bride was normally less likely to exercise this right than the groom and could only do so once or twice. Lastly, due to individualism, the third option was that children were required to make their own choices, with the understanding that the parent had veto power over the decision, and that the child would come from a relatively equal family (23). It was also a rare option in the eighteenth century, especially among the upper classes, for the children to make their own choices and merely inform their parents (23). Therefore, there were more opportunities for men and women to know each other better. Women had more chances to express themselves more freely compared to the 17th century. Although they were still considered second to men, they could seek more in their lives and their marriages.

### Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"

Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" is an example of how women are seen and treated as objects of desire in 17th-century society. Kamda Singh Deo in "A Feminist Reading of Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'", has mentioned that this is a poem that is written by a man for men, and for women who give in to patriarchy (45). The poem tries to impose gender rules, and a lady being coy is an example that is wrongly always attributed to feminine nature (45). The usage of the word "His" in the title shows that he is seeing her as not any person, but his property. Even the meaning of mistress according to Samuel Johnson's dictionary is whore or concubine (45). She also pays close attention to the words used in the poem, which may refer to something more patriarchal than they may seem at the first glance, saying that "there is a latent sense of the woman being 'doubly colonised' in the first few lines of the poem when Marvell relates his woman to the 'Indian Gange's side' and himself to the 'Humber' river. One can sense the eternal relationship that is established between colonised countries of the East and women, both perceived as the land of opportunities- an idea later developed into the concept of the eastern bride by Conrad in his novel *Lord Jim* (46).

Marvell is portraying the existence of the woman as a means to sexually satisfy himself and nothing more. Moreover, in the 17th century, the virginity of women was a very important issue that brought dignity and respect; here, however, the speaker in Marvell's poem tries to take it away from her, without any promise of marriage; thus, the mistress, by being coy is being in fact very clever, neither rejecting nor accepting him completely (46). As a matter of fact, the best weapon of a female is assumed to be silence (46). As the woman in the poem knows her situation well, she resorts to silence to frustrate her predator. There is no mention, in the poem itself, that she succumbs to his

demands, and a feminist critic would find this to be an accolade for women and an argument for self-assertion (46).

Marvell starts the first of three parts of the poem in a respectful, courtly manner. However, in the second part, when he sees no signs of acceptance from her, he becomes philosophical, meditating on time and life. In the third part, he uses words that show rape threat. This poem is not an expression of fervent love but of extreme lust which blinds the poet. Towards the end, he rejects all ethics and chivalry, and orally assaults the women by giving an elaborate account of inappropriate feelings-

"... then worms shall try

That long- preserved virginity...

Now let us sport us while we may

And now, like amorous birds of prey,

Rather at once our time devour..." (436)

This is no less than a rape threat in disguise of a glorified verse. "The juxtaposition of tear and rough strife with the image of the iron gates pertains to time, but beneath there is a deeper and more unsettling suggestion of violation, even of rape." (Hirst and Zwicker, 72) Marvell tries to strip her of her morality by forcing her mentally, if not physically, to indulge in sex with him. "Rough strife" is used interchangeably with rape. He attacks her "marble vault" and gets past "the iron gates of life" with his piercing words (47). Time in this poem has a masculine depiction as well and it seems like it just affects the mistress and not the speaker himself. So, to shield her from the horrible hurrying chariot of time, he has to eternize her by having intercourse (47).

Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room"

Swift's poem "The Lady's Dressing Room" is one of the important works of the 18th century. It is about a man named Strephon who explores his mistress's dressing room in her absence and

finds disgusting things such as sweaty smocks, dirt-filled combs, oily cloths, grimy towels, snot-encrusted handkerchiefs, jars of spit, cosmetics derived from dog intestines, and a mucky, rancid clothes chest. It is like a slap in the face because he always looked at Celia as a heavenly creature, but now he discovers that she is a human being just as he is. Chico in a book called *Designing Women* mentions “Strephon, in “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” plunges his hand into his beloved’s chamber pot, only to be trapped into thinking that women’s beauty covers excrement” (132). She also believes that Swift in this poem tries to unravel the dark, unwanted truth, ridding it of its seemingly beautiful appearance and showing the reality of civilization. Chico says the satires of Swift, especially “The Lady’s Dressing Room”, have long been associated with the production of bodily disorder, whether the satiric objects leave their waste behind or readers or spectators consume these poetic bits and feel nauseous afterward (134). He attempts to see straight, goes beyond the rosy exterior, and his satire tries to show intensely the gap between “a woman’s body and her public image” (133, 135).

Swift admits that there was an epistemological inquiry at the core of the dressing room: when a woman’s exterior is cosmetic and fake, how can one identify and judge her correctly? (137) Strephon’s actions propose a pervading key to examine the dressing room as a replacement for the woman herself (137). For Swift and his eighteenth-century readers, the dressing room offers a realist design of the female body as opposed to the consensual public image of women. Swift’s depiction of the female body is preferably construed by the authoritarian structure of his contemporary period as the right to invade women’s privacy and independence, or a criticism against their

indecent use of makeup and prosthetics, which influences the way the poem approaches these topics and its views on knowledge (137). In early-eighteenth-century Britain, gender differences and the daily actions of the female body were expected to reinforce the accepted social order; however, the same satirical works are given much freer space to emerge at times and reveal the inconsistencies of this dominant empirical knowledge (137).

### Conclusion

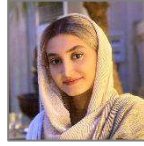
The women who were portrayed in Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” have changed a great deal compared to the woman in Swift’s “The Lady’s Dressing Room”. Marvell has shown a woman as an object who does not have a voice of her own. Her only function seems to be sexually pleasing the speaker. Although her silence can be interpreted as wise, she still does not have a voice and is also being threatened that if she does not give in to him, he will rape her. The point of view Marvell presents in his poem, suits the mindset of the 17th century. Women were viewed as objects to produce children and do the housework, and some of them are not even desired for such duties and are treated like the woman in his poem.

However, even though the woman in Swift’s poem does not have a voice of her own, she is seen as a human being in the end. Women were viewed as sinners or saints. Marvell showed the first one. Swift in his poem on the other hand, first presented them as saints. But as the protagonist gets to the lady’s room, he sees that she is neither a saint nor a sinner, but a human being who can be dirty and messy. The condition of women in the 18th century has improved generally, and Swift’s poem is demonstrating this fact as well.

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# Anthropocentrism in Eugene Ionesco's Rhinoceros



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## Abstract

Eugene Ionesco's well-known play *Rhinoceros* can be read as a narrative that evades anthropocentrism, because on one hand, it is an absurdist play that emphasizes man's meaningless existence and devaluates language. On the other hand, it brings animals next to human beings which is a postmodern tendency in animal studies. However, I argue that this play, in spite of its attempts, remains highly anthropocentric, as it is our inescapable mindset. First of all, the play merely introduces the rhinoceros as a character and gives no voice to it. The lives and interests of rhinoceroses remain unnoticed. Moreover, any man who turns into a rhinoceros becomes mute and loses its capability of speech, thus, language is an indicator of superiority. Secondly, Cartesian dualism of man versus animal exists strongly. Man stands in the center and the coexistence of man and animal is depicted as disastrous. Rhinoceroses are illustrated as destructors of man's properties. In this way, people's goal is to escape from this transformation. Thirdly, animals are overgeneralized in terms of their features and their consciousness is undervalued. Whoever transforms into a rhinoceros, acquires certain fixed characteristics which are in fact human. Finally, the rhinoceros is not a being by itself, but it is the metamorphosed human being which as a metaphor represents brutality. Therefore, the savageness of man is portrayed in the flesh of animals. In short, the play can be viewed as an advocate of man-centrism, for it contradicts key principles of theater of the absurd along with animal studies and above all, it embraces anthropocentric philosophies.





## Introduction

Eugene Ionesco is a playwright of Romanian origin who is regarded as one of the leaders of the theater of the absurd in France. The term “Theater of the Absurd” was first coined by Martin Esslin in his book of the same name, in which he characterizes such plays as illogical and out of harmony with reason. Although the playwrights of this genre employ diverse ideas, languages, and approaches to change the traditional modes of thought, Esslin adds that they all attempt to show the senselessness of life as well as the devaluation of human language and purpose (Esslin 18). In fact, they question the most fundamental aspects of human beings which have always been indicators of our superiority. Therefore, absurdist playwrights move away from the philosophical concept of anthropocentrism that has been dominating western mentality even up till today. Anthropocentrism is a viewpoint that separates human beings from all other creatures, and justifies man’s exploitation of them, for he stands at the center of the world.

Eugene Ionesco’s well-known play *Rhinoceros* is a narrative that is believed to evade anthropocentrism, for on one hand, it is an absurdist play that challenges man’s language and reason. On the other hand, it brings animals next to human beings which is a postmodern tendency in animal studies. As Derek Ryan explains in his *Animal Theory book* (2015), this field of study counters anthropocentrism by critiquing human exceptionalism as well. Animal studies, indeed, aim to analyze the relationship between animals and human beings along with exploring the lives of animals that have been undervalued or gone unnoticed. (Ryan 13) In contrast to critics of absurdist theater and animal studies, I want to argue that Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* in spite of its attempts to escape man-centrism, remains highly anthropocentric.

## Application

The play *Rhinoceros* recounts the story of the transformation of the people of a small provincial town in France into rhinoceroses. This transformation carries on until only one man is left who is the character of Berenger. Unlike the surface story, this narrative actually gives so much value to human beings.

First of all, the play merely introduces rhinoceros as a character and gives no voice to it. By the end of the story, we simply know that a herd of animals is living in the town. However, the lives and interests of these rhinoceroses are not heeded. Furthermore, any man who turns into a rhinoceros becomes mute and loses his capability of speech. For instance, in the second act, when one of the employees, Mr. Boeuf, is turned into a rhinoceros, his wife recognizes him and has to speak for him. Thus, the language is an indicator of superiority of man over animals.

Hence, secondly, Cartesian dualism of thinking human versus automated animals exists strongly. In his *Discourse on Method*, René Descartes describes animals as machines that have organs, yet they are incapable of reasoning and declaring their thoughts by using words as human beings do. Interestingly enough, in contrast to Descartes, Ionesco himself in an essay writes about the absurd as “that which is devoid of purpose ... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (Esslin 18). Nevertheless, personally I assume that in this play he reverses his absurdist approach, since he portrays those transcendental ideas, puts man in the center, and depicts the coexistence of man and animal as disastrous. Rhinoceroses are illustrated as irrational and destructors of man’s properties. In this way, people’s goal is to escape from this transformation. To examine these issues in the play, a comparison of the first and the second time that a rhinoceros appears in the first act would be helpful.

The play begins by demonstrating a café in which people including Berenger and Jean, an old gentleman, and a logician are sitting and chatting. Next to this café, there is a grocer's shop, in front of which a housewife stands holding a basket and her cat. All of a sudden, the sound of the rhinoceros' trumpeting is heard. The housewife drops her basket out of fear, but she holds onto her cat. All the people are shocked by this situation, except Berenger who reacts to its existence indifferently and without any bias. After a while, again a rhinoceros comes. However, this time it steps on the housewife's cat, and everybody in the café reacts in fury. The housewife herself burst into tears. One can view this situation as the portrayal of the value of animals, whereas if we look deeper, we find it quite anthropocentric. On one hand, in both scenes, the rhinoceros is a savage animal who destructs human possessions. On the other hand, the cat was cherished, for it was the property of a human being and it could serve the housewife. I do not think if the rhinoceros stepped on a stray dog, people of the community would react with such great concern.

Additionally, in the same act, we see that a logician and an old gentleman are sitting at one of the terrace tables and discussing logic. The logician intends to inform his companion regarding the concept of syllogism. Yet once he tries to clarify his ideas to the old gentleman, he has to exemplify with an animal paw so as to make it easily comprehensible:

“Here is an example of a syllogism. The cat has four paws. Isidore and Fricot both have four paws. Therefore Isidore and Fricot are cats” (Ionesco 18)

The logician could have used the leg as his example, however, it is offensive and degrading to human beings to separate one of their body parts and use it for exemplification.

Thirdly, animals are overgeneralized in terms of their features and their consciousness is undervalued. Whoever transforms into a

rhinoceros, acquires certain fixed characteristics which are in fact human. To give an example, we can look at Jean's metamorphosis, which is the only account of the process of becoming a rhinoceros during the whole play. Perhaps everyone goes through the same changes, and they are all categorized as humans who are suffering from the sickness of “rhinocerotitis”. No difference is observable between these rhinoceroses. Jean's transformation is described by his voice getting hoarse and his loss of perception. After all, what the play is ignorant of is the animal's ownership of consciousness and perception.

One can focus on Jean's emphasis on the worth of rhinoceroses and the fact that he is accepting the metamorphosis and rejecting humanism. However, we should not forget that he mentions such views while he is getting transformed. Not only he has no other choice at that point, but also he himself is experiencing what it's like to be a rhinoceros. And as the play goes on, the number of rhinoceroses increases, but it does not oppose man-centrism, since they remain overgeneralized and unknown as a herd.

Besides, in the last act of the play, we see that nobody has survived the sickness except Berenger and his coworker Daisy. In fact, by the end Daisy gives in as well and decides to be a rhinoceros, simply to feel a sense of belonging to a community, not because she cherishes them. Berenger who at first was indifferent to the existence of rhinoceroses is now their nemesis. He seems like a hero who has survived and now he wants to fight and destroy these savage animals. The sole character who could be considered as the symbol of the rejection of anthropocentrism, at last, embraces it. He even aims to repopulate the earth with Daisy whom he loves deeply, due to his fear of the disappearance of man.

Finally, rhinoceros is not a being by itself, yet it is a metamorphosed human being which as a metaphor represents brutality. Wherever there is

a rhinoceros, we notice people's terror of being killed or the destruction of buildings and firms. Moreover, this play is a critique of Nazism that arose in Romania. Rhinoceroses are symbols of Nazis who, during the Second World War, were considered as ugly beasts and devoid of any empathy. However, bit by bit the cruelty of the Nazism got accepted by the people of the society. Similarly, such an acceptance occurs in the play when the community members begin to see the rhinoceroses as beautiful instead of brutal creatures. Ionesco explains such beliefs as the result of a "veritable mental mutation" (Esslin 151). He adds "I don't know if you have noticed it, but when people no longer share your opinions, when you can no longer make yourself understood by them, one has the impression of being confronted with monsters -rhinos, for example" (Esslin 151). Therefore, Ionesco portrays the savageness of man under the cloak of animal flesh.

In short, Eugene Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros* can be viewed as man-centric since it contradicts

the main principles of the theater of the absurd which are the meaninglessness of man's existence and the devaluation of his language. Human reasoning, language, and consciousness are appreciated strongly during the play. As a result, the play embraces the anthropocentric philosophy of Descartes that regards man as superior to animals and depicts them as savages. Moreover, the transformation of man to the rhinoceros is a sickness that makes people mute, gets their consciousness from them, and changes their human appearance. Finally, key principles of animal studies are completely ignored. Rhinoceroses' lives remain undiscovered, and the coexistence of man and animal is rejected, for the group of people in the first act simply turns into a herd of rhinoceroses by the end of the last act.

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# Modernist Fiction Writing: A Study of Virginia Woolf's Ideology and Methodology of Character-Creating with Focus on *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)



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## Abstract

The debate surrounding the novelist's duty, methods of character creation, and the relationship between the two reached its peak during the Victorian era and the early twentieth century. Virginia Woolf voiced her concerns about the inadequacies of character development in contemporary literature and proposed alternative approaches. This paper focuses on Woolf's ideology and methodology of character creation, specifically examining the character of Clarissa in *Mrs. Dalloway*. Woolf's essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" serves as a reference to understand her fundamental criteria for crafting fictional characters. The analysis of *Mrs. Dalloway* highlights three key techniques employed by Woolf: Direct Thought (DT), Free Indirect Thought (FIT), and the "Tunnelling" Method. The paper aims to address several questions, including the role of fiction for modernists, Woolf's concept of character, her implementation of character creation in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the nature of her "Tunnelling" method, and how she effectively employed it in her novel. By delving into Woolf's ideas and techniques, this study provides insights into the significance of characterization in modernist literature.

## Introduction

"Ultimately it is the quality of characterization by which a literary story stands or falls" (Greg Johnson & Thomas R. Arp 146). Among fiction's fundamental elements, characterization has been said by many to be the most important. Arnold Bennet claimed its realness to be the only thing that shields a work of fiction from the ruthless arrows of forgetfulness: "If the characters are real, the novel will have a chance; if they are not, oblivion will be its portion" (1923).

Since the advent of the novel as a writing genre, there has been a hot debate on the novelist's duty, how she has to accomplish it,

and the relationship between her duty and her means. The topic reached its highest temperature at the end of the glorious Victorian age and the beginning of the twentieth century. Virginia Woolf warned in her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (1924) that “We are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature” (24). Modernist writers of the early twentieth century, discontented with the crudeness of the character-creating methods of the writers of the time, started to employ new tools of fiction writing like stream-of-consciousness that helped them create highly realistic characters.

The presented paper will mainly focus on Virginia Woolf’s ideology and methodology of character-creating in fiction, and try to illustrate her ideas by analyzing Clarissa’s character. To discuss Woolf’s ideology of character-creating, this study will refer to her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, where she writes about her idea of the most fundamental criteria in creating a fictional character. To talk about Woolf’s method of character -creating, the current paper will mainly analyze three of the major techniques Woolf used in writing *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925): Direct Thought (DT), Free Indirect Thought (FIT), and the Tunnelling Method. Broadly, this paper will try to address the following questions: What is the function of fiction for modernists? What is Woolf’s idea of character? How has she practiced her ideology of character-creating in *Mrs. Dalloway*? What is her “Tunnelling” method? And how has she taken advantage of it in *Mrs. Dalloway*?

### Modernism, Woolf, and the Matter of Character

From ancient times up until now, the character has been one of the most important elements of fiction. Accordingly, different categorizations of fictional characters have been proposed by literary figures to help improve fiction writing. Aristotle reduced the role of the characters to the “agents” of the action. Vladimir

Propp, therefore, defined characters as “spheres of action” within which he categorized their performance into seven general roles: “the villain, the donor, the helper, the sought-for-person and her father, the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero” (Propp 1968 qtd in Rimmon Kenan 2002: 36).

E. M. Forster, in his book *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), classified fictional characters under two categories: “flat” and “round”. Flat characters are simple characters who can be described in one or two sentences. Such characters do not have more than one or two “predominant traits”. Conversely, the round characters have multifaceted, impermeable personalities that are closer to humans’ three-dimensional real selves (67-82).

To avoid such reductions, Joseph Ewen proposed that the characters should be categorized along a continuum instead of in “exhaustive” categories. Accordingly, he suggested three axes for such a diagram: complexity, development, and penetration into real life. Thus, to seem as real as possible, a character should stand somewhere between the extremes of these axes and have some features of each (Rimmon Kenan 43).

Creating realistic characters is of utmost importance to modernist writers because it is the key to the representation of real life, which according to Henry James in his essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884), is the primary task of the modern novelist (56). Still, creating characters who sound and look real has been the perpetual struggle of the novelists (Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 11). Woolf claimed she had a solution to this problem. In her opinion, it is useless to try to create a character only by providing long descriptions of his physical, financial, and religious status. Instead, the





fiction writer needs to get into her character's mind, look at the world from his eyes, and bring his experiences on paper (*Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 15).

An offspring of the technological achievements of the late 19th century, as well as the ideas of theorists such as Freud, Marx, Darwin, and Nietzsche, modernism is believed to have been born in the 1860s in the capitals of powerful European countries such as England, Italy, and France. From there it found its way to the United States to be later challenged by Postmodernism in the 1960s. Literary modernism was led by James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Filippo Marinetti, and Guillaume Apollinaire, who tried to verbalize the change which had started earlier in other forms of art such as painting. To achieve such an end, they used modern narration techniques such as free indirect discourse and stream-of-consciousness (Milne 494&495). Virginia Woolf, in her 1925 essay *Pictures* which was later printed in *The Moment and Other Essays* (1947), pointed out that visual image acts as a stimulator for many modern writers such as Proust, Hardy, Flaubert, and Conrad (141).

In her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Woolf argued that after the Victorian age, fiction writers were divided into two groups: Edwardians (including Arnold Bennett, Herbert George Wells, and John Galsworthy) and Georgians (including James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster, T. S. Eliot, and Lytton Strachey). Woolf implicitly counted herself as a member of the second group by responding to Arnold Bennett's criticism that Georgian novelists could not create realistic characters, therefore, there were no great novelists among them (11).

Despite their different approaches to fiction writing, Edwardians and Georgians both agreed that the most crucial feature of a novel is character-creating. Arnold Bennett stated that "The foundation of good fiction is character-

creating and nothing else" (qtd. in Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 3-4). However, their character-making styles were different.

Although in the twentieth century the functions of the mind were being revealed to people by psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, fiction writing was still unable to show it to its readers tangibly. Thus, Woolf called for a new method of fiction writing in her essay *Modern Fiction* (1925), as she was simultaneously writing *Mrs. Dalloway*. The modern fiction writing method proposed by Woolf and Joyce took advantage of powerful psychological writing techniques like stream-of-consciousness, free indirect discourse, allusion, and symbolism, therefore, they were ideal for modern writers who wished to create highly realistic characters.

In *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, Woolf shows how her method of character-making works and how it is different from the one of Edwardians like Arnold Bennett. Woolf explains that to make a realistic character out of the protagonist of his book, Hilda Lessways (1911), Mr. Bennett started by describing "accurately and minutely" his character's house and the house she saw from the window. In Woolf's opinion, the problem with this style of character-making is that, although one might be able to write hundreds of pages describing the characters and their lives, she might never truly communicate what she means to say to her readers (17-18).

On the contrary, when Woolf (a Georgian) wants to make a realistic character like Mrs. Brown, this is what she does: First, she meticulously observes Mrs. Brown and her companion, Mr. Smith, in the opposite corner of a carriage going from Richmond to Waterloo. Then, she spends some time eavesdropping on their conversation and evaluating their appearances. Finally, she starts completing the portrait of her these fellow passengers using both her logic and imagination. What matters to

Woolf about Mrs. Brown is how she is and why she is the way she is (6-9).

According to Woolf, what helps masterpieces like *Pride and Prejudice*, *War and Peace*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Madam Bovary* outlive their times is that “if you think of these books, you do at once think of some character who has seemed to you so real (I do not by that mean so lifelike) that it has the power to make you think not merely of itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes” (Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* 11).

*Mrs. Dalloway* (1925): Incarnation of Woolf's Ideology and Methodology of Character-Creating

Virginia Woolf repeatedly doubted her power to make characters. In a letter to her sister, she confessed that “I utterly distrust my own insight into character. It is infantile” (S. Poirier 2). However, in the middle of her career, she seems to have found her way in the world of fiction writing as the Norton Anthology of English Literature introduces *Mrs. Dalloway* as “the first completely successful realization of Woolf's style” (S. Greenblatt 2081). Anna S. Benjamin, reflecting on the importance of *Mrs. Dalloway*, mentioned that the book is unique because Woolf was able not only to express her understanding of reality but also to include the presentation of the complexities of human life in this reality (214).

Suzanne Poirier, in her 1979 dissertation titled as *Characterization and Theory of Personality in the Novels of Virginia Woolf*, stated that the questions of characterization about Woolf's works need to be approached from different aspects such as the writer's interests, her standards, her ideology, and her methodology (3). However, the focus of the presented study is limited merely to Woolf's ideology and the methodology of character-creating.

As her ideology, Woolf clarified her idea of character-creating in *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* by saying that the important thing for a writer while creating a character must be the character himself: “I believe that all novels, that is to say, deal with character, and that it is to express character—not to preach doctrines, sing songs, or celebrate the glories of the British Empire, that the form of the novel, so clumsy, verbose, and undramatic, so rich, elastic, and alive, has been evolved” (9).

If one aims to know a fictional character, it is enough to live inside his mind and read his thoughts for as long as only one day: “One line of insight would have done more than all those lines of description” (Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown 15).

For instance, in order not to deprive the reader of the joy of exploring it on their own, Woolf uses stream-of-consciousness instead of merely describing Clarissa's insecure personality:

[...] She had a perpetual sense, as she watched the taxi cabs, of being out, out, far out to sea and alone; she always had the feeling that it was very, very dangerous to live even one day. Not that she thought herself clever, or much out of the ordinary. How she had got through life on the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them she could not think. She knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now, except memoirs in bed; and yet to her it was absolutely absorbing; all this; the cabs passing; and she would not say of Peter, she would not say of herself, I am this, I am that.(6)

As her methodology, this study will focus on three techniques using which Woolf shaped and represented the character of Clarissa: Direct thought (DT), Free Indirect Thought (FIT), and the Tunneling Method (Nasu 27-35).

The direct thought technique of narration is one of the techniques intensively used by Woolf to illustrate Clarissa's inner reality. In such a technique, the author directly narrates a

character's thoughts using reporting clauses such as "she thought", "thought Mrs Dalloway" or "thought Clarissa". The second technique used by Woolf to fulfil her purpose in creating Clarissa is FIT. Unlike DT, the "thought" clauses are absent in FIT, and the reader gets to indirectly read the character's mind. According to Masako Nasu, Woolf mixed this technique with DT to represent the human mind as realistically as possible (31). In the following paragraph, the use of this mixture is discernible. The second line uses FIT by excluding the thinking verb from the sentence. If we had the DT version of the sentence, it would be something like: "The doors would be taken off their hinges, she thought.", but there is no thinking verb here; on the other hand, the fourth sentence benefits from DT.

*Mrs. Dalloway* said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning-fresh as if issued to children on a beach. (1)

Most importantly, Woolf called the particular method she invented in writing *Mrs. Dalloway* the "Tunnelling" method (S. Poirier 183). The "tunneling", says Nasu, implies the possibility of moving between past and present. By doing so, Woolf aims to fully "present human life as it is" (33&34). Woolf clarified her expectation from the method as: "The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (qtd. in Hungerford 165).

For Clarissa Dalloway, the bright side at the end of these interlocked "tunnells", the present moment, is the moment of revelation when she realizes how close to herself was her alter-ego, Septimus Warren Smith, who had committed suicide. What is unique about the tunneling method is that the present moment of revelation is presented to the reader only after all the

tunnels have been connected between the characters, thus involving the reader in the psychological and emotional relationships of the characters with each other (Hungerford, 166). The following passage is an instance of tunneling. Using this method, states Nasu, the author can capture the whole life of the characters in her works (35). In the following passage, the tunneling method has been used to connect the past, present, and probably the future of the characters together. The method illustrates the complexity of human relationships by simultaneously showing each character's train of thoughts about the same issue, i.e. Peter Walsh's arrival.

"D'you know who's in town?" said Lady Bruton suddenly bethinking her. "Our old friend, Peter Walsh.."

They all smiled. Peter Walsh! And Mr. Dalloway was genuinely glad, Milly Brush thought; and Mr. Whitbread thought only of his chicken.

Peter Walsh! All three, Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard Dalloway, remembered the same thing—how passionately Peter had been in love; been rejected; gone to India; come a cropper; made a mess of things; and Richard Dalloway had a very great liking for the dear old fellow too. Milly Brush saw that; saw a depth in the brown of his eyes; saw him hesitate; consider; which interested her, as Mr. Dalloway always interested her, for what was he thinking, she wondered, about Peter Walsh??

That Peter Walsh had been in love with Clarissa; that he would go back directly after lunch and find Clarissa; that he would tell her, in so many words, that he loved her. (78-79)

### Conclusion

The presented paper studied the character-creating method of one of the most renowned literary critics and writers of the Modernist movement, Virginia Woolf. Specifically, the current study tried to analyze Woolf's ideology

as well as her methodology of character-creating, taking help from one of the writer's best known works, *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925).

This paper referred to Woolf's 1924 essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* to talk about her ideology of character-creating. In this essay, she explained her opinion about the matter of character-creating in fiction. According to the essay, the only thing Woolf considers worthy of attention while creating a character is the character himself. She believes that the writer should not waste her time writing pages in the description of a character's outlook. Instead, she must pay attention to the character's inner side, through which the readers can learn things about his life. (17)

Regarding Woolf's Methodology, this paper focused on three techniques of writing used by Woolf to externalize the inner reality of her characters and create a realistic work. The first two techniques discussed were DT and FIT, using which the author was able to represent her characters' minds. The third technique the

current paper talked about was the "Tunnelling" method. Woolf invented this method to write *Mrs. Dalloway*, the "tunnelling" method. According to Woolf, the method is like connecting different caves in order to reach the daylight. It tries to reach a point of revelation or conclusion by delicately connecting scenes and characters (A. Hungerford 165).

Virginia Woolf attempted to contribute to the world of fiction writing by challenging the conventional ideas of the past literary writers such as Arnold Bennett. Woolf's persistence on the importance of the matter of character alongside her acute worldview (highly inspired by visual arts) and her mastery in writing are the factors which make her works unique and worth reading. Every creative writer would find it an adventure trying to understand and practice Woolf's methodology in their writings while bearing in mind that: "all novels begin with an old lady in the corner opposite." (Woolf, *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown* 2)

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# A Critical Review of David Bolt's Aesthetic Blindness: Symbolism, Realism, and Reality



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Disability studies, along with a vast range of works in the field from historical and artistic to philosophical, sociological, and beyond, seek to bring those aspects of disability to the surface that have been remained invisible, and focuses on reducing evidence of disability within an individual. By doing so, the tensions revealed by disability studies lead David Bolt to alert us as readers to shift the debate away from being "about" an individual's disability toward an understanding of disability itself. Needless to say, disability studies, according to Bolt, should nourish the voice of people with disabilities, not those who live with them, write about them, or hear about them. In this article I will highlight the fact that disability is gaining more recognition in storytelling because of the impact it can have on representation, potential and understanding. Disability is often used as a tool to create powerful narratives and communicate deep insights into life; it is as if disability is now becoming better and more widely acknowledged as a foundation upon which stories draw their capacity to represent, defy expectations, and cultivate meaningful understanding, and not considered merely as a subject to be studied for its own sake. (Bolt, 8) Therefore, due to disabled people's central role in the epistemology of disability studies, it is vital for us to gain knowledge from actual experiences.

David Bolt by taking *The Blind*, a play written by Maurice Maeterlinck, argues that throughout history, especially the 19th century "bittersweet blind figures or, more specifically, the bitter blind man and the sweet blind girl, were stock characters for many writers of the era." Speaking of the 19th century, blindness had been considered as unawareness of surroundings and was in line with ignorance in the Victorian age, and aesthetic qualities were perceived by exclusively visual means. Therefore, the ontological status of the characters becomes diminished as they take on a ghostly existence, an existence within human society, but ignored all the time. Consequently, he puts forward the

notion of aesthetic blindness, which is responsible for causing an ocularcentric social aesthetic to emerge. Ocularcentric social aesthetic is the idea that disability can be made socially invisible and others (non-disabled people) do not hold them in high esteem, thus creating a sense of exclusion based on aesthetics. This can lead to cases where non-disabled people may be afforded more privileges or attention because they are seen as more aesthetically pleasing and fit into traditional standards of beauty. In other words, aesthetic blindness disqualifies disabled people, (Davis, 578) and most notably, it is a visually impaired embodiment of reality, emphasizing "how something looks not how something is, especially when considered in terms of how pleasing it is." (Davis, 582) Accordingly, these values were particularly prevalent in what has been referred to as the "self-proclaimed 'Aesthetic movement' of England's yellow 1890s". (Gates Jr. 233)

Historically speaking in this regard, the most well-known aesthete of them all, Oscar Wilde, wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a book that is notable in part because the malevolence of the eponymous character is visible in his "picture but not in his face." In Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ocularcentricism can be seen in the idea that Dorian Gray's physical form becomes increasingly beautiful while his portrait slowly deteriorates. Through symbolism, Wilde explores themes related to vision and beauty, suggesting that people's true character is more accurately represented through their lives, which

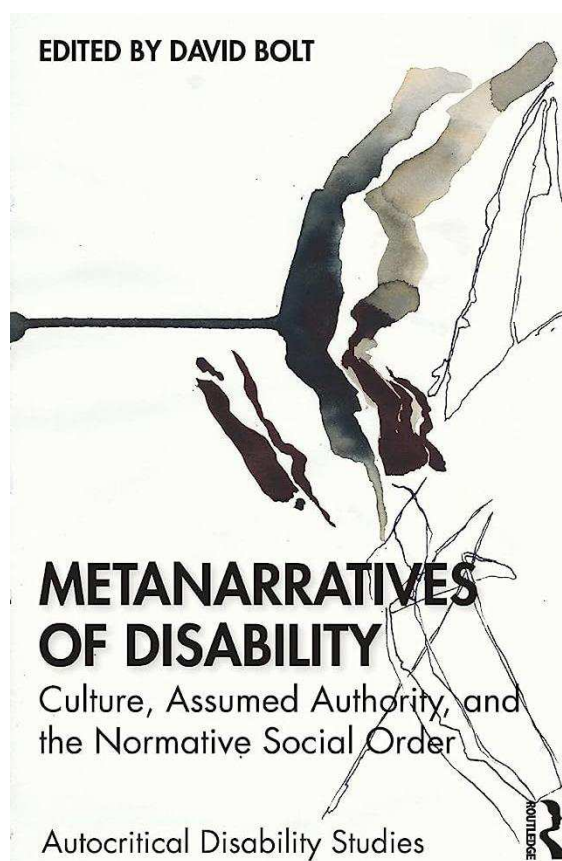
cannot be seen, than simply by their physical appearance, which is shown to people on the surface. Wilde thus establishes ocularcentricism as a key theme in his work and a significant part of *Dorian Gray's* story. In other words, the idea of aesthetic blindness, or focusing too much on outward appearances, has long been a problem in society and can be traced back to the history of England.

Moreover, throughout his essay and by bringing examples from some stories of great writers, Bolt declares that blind characters are understood as incapable of forming meaningful relationships, or knowing the truth because they cannot see. Therefore, an erroneous belief may emerge that they are not able-bodied or able-minded enough to shape interpersonal communications. In other words, sight is required to validate the very existence of "Self and Other" and thus fundamental to any connection between the two, to the formation and function of human society.

We can vividly see this notion in *The Blind*:

*["The oldest blind man says, "We've never seen each other. We ask each other questions, and we answer them; we live together, and we're always together, but we don't know what we are!... It's all very well to touch each other with our two hands, eyes can see better than hands"]*

He believes that people only come to know one another through sight, not by shared experience, talk, smell, sound, taste, touch, or any other sense. This belief is further supported when he says:



[*“We’ve been together for years and years, and we’ve never had a sight of each other! It’s as if we’re always on our own”*]

Here, it is noteworthy to mention two examples by other figures regarding how blind people are marginalized in literature or culture. According to Maya Slater’s late twentieth-century introduction to the play, “the blind people depend on the priest to see them to safety; the audience can see the priest is dead, though the blind cannot; so, the blind are without succor, although they do not know it.” (Slater, xv) Alternatively, in another example, Thomson, in her book *Extraordinary Bodies*, emphasizes the fact that we constantly seek to normate those who are not normal (Garland-Thomson, xii); Bolt also believes that this privileging of sightedness is introduced in the exposition and expressed by the characters throughout the play. Interestingly, the fact that the play stresses the sightedness of a dead-sighted character instead of her obvious blindness boldens up the visually disabled and is backed by the prominence of the dead-sighted character. Throughout the play, a dead-sighted character is made more important since she has acquired insight from the experiences she has not been able to directly witness. She is able to provide philosophical and spiritual guidance to the other characters due to her unique perspective. She is also seen as a source of wisdom, providing valuable moral guidance at times when it is desperately needed. Consequently, this character’s role in the plot increases significantly and her contribution proves invaluable. It is through her so-called limited viewpoint that everyone else starts to analyze their own lives and take stock of where they are going in life. By highlighting this dead-sighted character, Maeterlinck emphasizes the importance of living a life with both eyes open and looking beyond our present circumstances.

Referring again to *The Blind*, most of the references indicate the aesthetic quality of something in the play. For instance, there are

numerous references to the sun’s aesthetic qualities that show this obsession. The topic of discussion revolves around the sun, the heat is disregarded in favor of its brightness, much as the planets in our solar system. That is to say, the characters think of the sun in solely visual terms despite having non-visual modes of perception, which betrays the ocularcentric style of that most vivid decade. The youngest blind girl recalls having “seen the sun,” while the oldest blind man and woman both claim to have “seen the sun” when they were “very young,” but the third blind man born blind at birth laments having “never seen the sun”. When the first man born “blind dredges up the fact that they have “never been able to see”, the third man born blind evokes a perplexingly intense sense of artistic exclusion too by modifying the verb seen with the adverb never.

As a result, Bolt subverts the fact that every piece of knowledge is based on your visual-ability. By bringing one epistemological maxim, he states how nonsensical it is to accept that seeing is believing. In other words, seeing is believed to be necessary rather than merely sufficient. Therefore, reality highly relies on visual experience; if it is not visually perceivable, it is as if you were blind, and you could not grasp any notion of reality. Aside from this, you could not have any sense of what time or place is if not visually apprehended. This notion echoes any number of passages from *The Blind* again:

[*The six blind man: “We must be very far from home; I can’t understand any of the sounds here.”*]

*Third man born blind: “I’ve been smelling the smell of dead leaves for ages!”*

*The six blind man: “Does anyone remember seeing the Island in the past, and can they tell us where we are?”*

*The oldest blind woman: “We were all blind by the time we got here.”]*



Despite the priest having explained their voyage to them, it is clear that the blind characters are unaware of every aspect of it. Their sensory information is wholly insignificant. Furthermore, the fact that spoken information has not been added shows a lack of both communication and learning. The young girl, who is blind, responds as follows when the first guy born blind inquires about her origins: “I couldn’t say. How could I explain? It’s too far from here, way across the sea. I come from a big country...I could only show you by making signs, but we can’t see any more”

Ultimately, as Bolt asserts, disability should be viewed not as a human deficit, but rather as a form of natural variation. In this manner, he firmly refutes those who try to defend themselves by hiding behind symbolism walls. He calls this defense purely problematic due to its corruptive essence and believes that we have invalidated them because they try to clean up the crime scene. By representing them symbolically, we are genuinely attempting to give them a clean justified polished guise, which is far from their true identity. He claims that instead of a thorough comprehension of embodiment, aesthetic blindness relies on false preconceptions of visually handicapped people as lost or confused ones. Mitchell and Snyder define disability as ‘a narrative prosthesis’ (Mitchell and Snyder, 48) to indicate the way ‘stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure’ to embody their own social and political dimensions. Accordingly, this defense in the

name of symbolism is troublesome in that people with visual impairment are typically undermined to represent the metaphysical confusion of humanity. This is because the tenor of symbolic blindness depends on the stereotypical assumptions of its vehicle, meaning the characters will be depicted as “blind to convey a philosophical point” (Davis, 689). Siebers also notes how disability is routinely used to fix the inferior status of minority cultures on a symbolic level. (Siebers, 98) This is because disability functions ‘according to a symbolic mode different from other representations of minority difference. It is as if disability operates symbolically as an ‘othering other’ that secures inferior, marginal, or minority status, while not having its presence as a marker acknowledged in the process. (Bolt, 12)

From my point of view, there is no room to justify using, or in better words, misusing disabled people's names under the notion of teaching the audience a lesson or presenting these different people as a symbol. Elaborated enough, it is a sign of one's biased outlook to see any trace of difference as the others. In other words, we human beings are not allowed to consider disabled people the best source to teach a lesson, just due to their difference and unfamiliar nature. There should be an end to such viewpoints insisting disabled people to normate themselves and become one of the abled ones, or otherwise, their deficit will be forever put in the spotlight.

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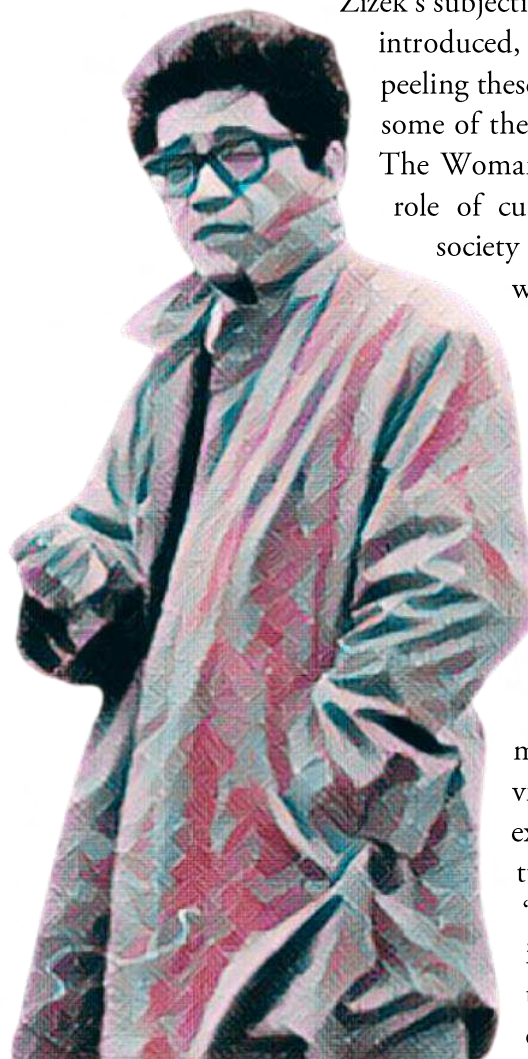
# Tracing Violence in Kobo Abe's *The Woman in the Dunes*



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Kobo Abe's 1962 novel *The Woman in the Dunes* and its subsequent movie adaptation by Hiroshi Teshigahara in 1964 have been the subject of many scholarly articles and interpretations. The novel's various aspects have been scrutinized and compared to the works of Kafka, Beckett, existentialist and absurdist thought and have been read in the context of post-war Japanese society or as commentary on the state of Communism and so on; yet an important element of the novel has not been sufficiently emphasized upon: the role of violence. This article will examine various layers and forms of violence and their interactions present in the novel based on the theories of Johan Galtung, the Norwegian sociologist and the pioneer of peace studies and Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian philosopher. Galtung's direct, structural and cultural violence, along with Žižek's subjective and objective violence, will be introduced, compared and paralleled; by peeling these layers of violence, we will reach some of the core issues Abe puts forward in *The Woman in the Dunes*, particularly the role of cultural violence in the Japanese society of his time and his relationship with it.



According to Galtung, violence “is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (“Violence” 168). This definition of violence is broad and encompasses cases which one might not instantly identify as violent. Galtung brings the example of a man dying of tuberculosis in current age “despite all the medical resources in the world”, and considers even this event violent. He then goes on to suggest a “violence

triangle” comprised of three categories of violence, namely direct, structural and cultural violence. Direct (also referred to as personal) violence is distinguished from structural (indirect) violence as such: If a traceable actor is present, it is a direct act of violence, otherwise the violent act is structural (170). The third and final layer, cultural violence, is the least visible category, for which Galtung explains: “By ‘cultural violence’, we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence — exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) — that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence”, it makes them “feel right” (“Cultural Violence” 291). Complementing the triangle is the “violence strata” image, which puts cultural violence at the bottom, followed by structural violence in the middle and direct violence on top, which is visible even to the unguided eye (294). Alongside these three categories, Galtung introduces a typology of violence based on the four classes of basic needs: Survival needs, Well-being needs, Identity needs and lastly, Freedom needs.

Žižek uses the term “subjective violence” which corresponds closely to Galtung’s direct violence, and “objective violence”, which is itself bifurcated into “systemic” and “symbolic” violence, the former corresponding to Galtung’s structural violence and the latter—loosely—to cultural violence. According to Žižek, “Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent” (Violence 2) . The reason that subjective violence is for many the only form of identifiable violence is precisely because of the traceability of the actor.

Žižek’s notion of symbolic violence is not too dissimilar to Galtung’s cultural violence. He goes on to define it as being embodied in language and its forms, what Heidegger would

call “our house of being.” As we shall see later, this violence is not only at work in the obvious—and extensively studied—cases of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms; there is a more fundamental form of violence still that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning (1)

Žižek, following Hegel, posits that “‘objective’ excess—the direct reign of abstract universality which imposes its law mechanically, with utter disregard for the concerned subject helplessly caught in its web—is always supplemented by ‘subjective’ excess, which is the irregular, arbitrary exercise of whims.” He then uses Balibar’s opposite, but complimentary modes of violence as an example: the “ultra-objective” or systemic violence is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism, which automatically creates excluded and dispensable individuals ranging from the homeless to the unemployed. The “ultra-subjective” violence on the other hand, gives rise to ethnic, religious, in short racist, fundamentalisms. (13, 14)

The very imposition of a culture is considered to be an act of direct violence (Galtung, “Cultural Violence” 291), and this is the first instance of identifiable violence in the course of the novel: Jumpei Niki, a teacher and an amateur entomologist looking for new insects away from Tokyo, is tricked, under the guise of hospitality, into spending a night with the villagers living close by. He is led into one of the houses situated beneath a sandpit only accessible through a rope ladder, only to slowly realize that he’s been trapped, destined to live with the widow in the shack, and to shovel away the hostile sand forever. This entrapment, itself violent, is then accompanied by the villagers supplementing him with a shovel and a can, to make him ready for his duties in his new life; an absurd way of life he not only fails to understand but aggressively rejects and tries to escape from.

This is only the start of his torment though, As life standards are significantly lower than what he's been used to, or what is possible in the world of the novel: most of his time is spent shovelling away the sand, which makes him tired and weak, water is scarce, the sand seeps into the food and for compensation; he is only given some tobacco and alcohol every week. His well-being has been compromised, and he has been rendered "miserable", which is classified as direct violence in Galtung's table of typology of violence (292). Following the same table, we can identify desocialization and resocialization as endangering Niki's identity needs: Niki is dissocialized after getting trapped in the dunes along the woman and being cut off from all other social contact, then forcefully re-socialized in accordance to the culture of his new community. Also, repression and detention (locking people in, as opposed to expulsion, locking people out) are jeopardizing his freedom needs. In fact, this reshaping/ reduction of identity is essential to the subjugation of his will and his dehumanization: "His sand-induced pain renders his soul irrelevant and focuses attention to his body . . . the boundaries of Niki's self are reduced to those of the body" (Marroum 92). One can draw parallels between this process and the disciplining of a subject into "docile bodies": "[D]iscipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (Foucault 138).

Like direct violence, cases of structural violence are abundant in the course of the novel. "*Exploitation B*" is for Galtung the case where the underdogs or victims, "may be left in a permanent unwanted state of misery, usually including malnutrition and illness" and it threatens the subject's well-being needs, as opposed to "*Exploitation A*" where the underdog is in the danger of death—hence threatening their survival needs ("Cultural

Violence" 293). This mode of violence is absent in Niki's situation, since the villagers need him alive.

"A violent structure leaves marks not only on the human body, but also on the mind and the spirit". Impeding consciousness formation and mobilization are introduced as two conditions for effective struggle against exploitation. The first condition is fulfilled in the novel by "Segmentation", which is defined as "giving the underdog only a very partial view of what goes on": Niki is unaware of anything that goes on the world outside the sandpit he's imprisoned in, and by "Penetration", defined as "implanting the topdog inside the underdog" (294). The implantation of the topdog (villagers) inside the mind of the underdog (Niki) is carried out in a more subtle and technical manner by the village's fire tower that perceives everything. Marroum compares the fire tower to the Panopticon: "Both the Panopticon and the fire tower are intended to achieve the goal of perfect surveillance over those who are enclosed in its walls—or, in the case of the village, those who are enclosed in its sand pits and who are outside it—by means of a visible and unverifiable power". She posits that "This mode of power is dissimilar to the verifiable and routinized one exercised by the old man and his three companions when Niki was in the sandpit (98)", referring to one of Niki's failed attempts at escaping the dunes. Interestingly enough, it's not only Niki who's anxious under watchful eye of the fire tower, but even other villagers; the very villagers who meet Niki in person and are forces of violence and subjugation, are themselves victims of another, greater force.

The second condition is fulfilled by both "marginalization, keeping the underdogs on the outside" and "fragmentation, keeping the underdogs away from each other" (Galtung, "Cultural Violence" 294). Niki is marginalized because he is not a part of the community of the villagers, serving only as a tool to help keep their



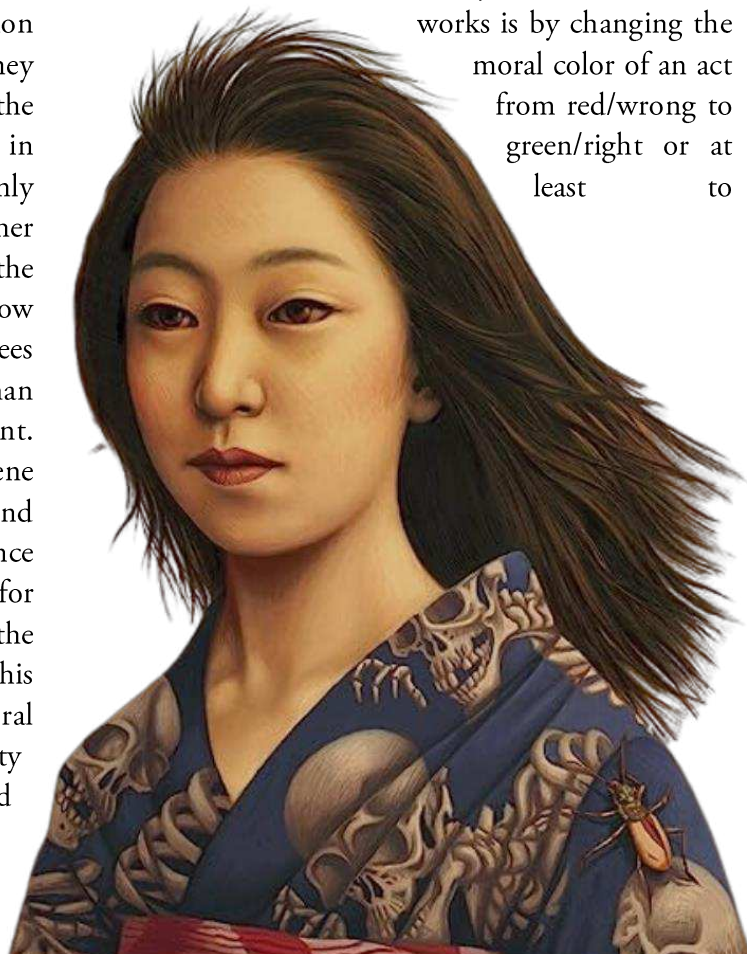
society intact, and also on a broader level, all the residents of the sandpits are fragmented and kept apart from each other. The woman informs Niki about other people who were lured to help the village, some of whom died, while some others still lived and shovelled sand, whether forcefully or having lost their hope of escape, in a state of surrender.

Violence begets violence and all this pressure on Niki leads him to contribute to the cycle of violence in his reactions against the sand community. At one point, he tries to make his way out of the pit by threatening the villagers, tying the woman up and not letting them rescue her if he's not let out. He jumps and grabs the rope they have sent down for the basket, and as they pull him upwards out of the pit, there is a momentarily feeling of liberation, until they suddenly let go of the rope and he falls back to the sandpit. The full extent of the villagers' power is revealed to him during this event. Not backing down, he frees her under the condition that she does not return to work, but as they soon learn, her well-being is of no concern to the villagers; they stop supplying them water in order to break their resistance. They're only permitted to live if they shovel the sand. Another instance of Niki's direct violence against the woman is, while begging the villagers to allow him a short walk outside the sandpits, he agrees to engage in sexual intercourse with the woman in front of the villagers, without her consent. The woman's rejection culminates in a scene where Niki is chasing and grabbing her around the house, trying to rape her as their audience cheer for him. The two wrestle and fight for some time until Niki gives up, and the disappointed audience leave him alone with his shame. Niki's actions are undoubtedly immoral and atrocious, but it is visible how this atrocity was given birth to by the prior direct and structural violence he was subjected to.

Contrary to Marroum's claim concerning Niki's becoming the active agent of his fate,

(102), or Abe's intention of building a social order formed freely among individuals themselves (Iles 35), Niki's refusal to finally escape the dunes at the end of the novel signals his total subjugation. The villagers have finally tamed him to a point where he stays and practices their culture. After all, the ending of the novel makes it clear that he has indeed not returned to his old life, having been declared missing. He has become another gear for the Sisyphean tradition of the village. He can of course prefer this new life to his old life, if he wishes so, in case that he has found a new meaning or *raison d'être* in the sand community, but here the aspect of Žižek's symbolic violence of "imposing a certain universe of meaning" is brought to attention: no matter what meaning or symbolic significance presents itself to Niki, he is still objectively and by all means subjugated and violated.

"One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to



yellow/acceptable; an example being 'murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself wrong'. Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent" (Galtung, "Cultural Violence", 292). The unnamed titular woman in the dunes is the perfect example of someone so deeply under the influence of the cultural violence of the village: She has taken granted her lifestyle, living with the bare minimum necessary to survive, unable to leave even for a walk and fully accepting the various forms of direct and structural violence that she shares with Niki, never complaining even though the living conditions of the sand village had previously taken the life of her husband and child. But she is not merely an innocent victim of this cultural violence, but a proponent of it herself: She is a force of subjugation and imposition of culture, along with the villagers outside the sandpit and the fire tower; perhaps even a more effective one. During the course of the story, there are many instances of quarrel between her and Niki where she tries to persuade him to understand the way of life down there through distant and disinterested dialogue.

Galtung relates the three types of violence as such: "Direct violence is an event; structural violence is a process with ups and downs; cultural violence is an invariant, a 'permanence'", asserting that it remains "essentially the same for long periods, given the slow transformations of basic culture" (294). "Generally, a causal flow from cultural via structural to direct violence can be identified. The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all" (295). The woman in the dunes is dulled into viewing her fate as something normal, as—one might presume—the rest of the sand community, all the way up the council and the watcher atop the fire tower have accepted their

roles as necessary for the wellbeing and future of their tradition.

Towards the end of the novel, Niki—possibly as a part the process of cultural assimilation—starts sympathizing with the plight of the villagers and understands them as victims of the policies of the outside world:

[F]rom the standpoint of the villagers, they themselves were the ones who had been abandoned. Naturally there was no reason why they should be under obligation to the outside world. So if it were he who caused injury, their fangs should accordingly be bared to him. It had never occurred to him to think of his relationship with the village in that light. It was natural that they should be confused and upset. (Abe, ch. 29)

As the woman explains to him, the sand they shovel and fill the cans with is then transported away and sold to companies during a supposedly illegal business procedure of which the villagers feel no remorse about; this disregard—even hostility towards the outside world—stems from the fact they consider themselves as victims of the outside world and in particular, slaves to a system that subjects them to daily labour (Mohammad Jafari and Pourjafari): "If we let the government office have their way we'd be lost in the sand while they're fiddling with their abacuses" (Abe, 152). This causes a bewilderment in the part of Niki: "this means you exist only for the purpose of clearing away the sand, doesn't it?" (31). According to Mohammad Jafari and Pourjafari, "Here, Niki is the speaking mouth for the writer, who believes that the organizations cripple the individual and prevent him from personal growth and self-recognition" and that he felt that "not only the past and traditions, but society itself is structured to control human beings" (George 446).

The cultural violence present in the dunes which breeds various forms of direct and structural violence is itself a by-product of a larger structural violence of a system, nurtured

through an even more complex underlying culture. Looking at the problem this way will reveal that way of life imposed on the villagers could only result in the outcome at hand. Žižek tells the story of a Russian intellectual named Nikolai Lossky, who had enjoyed the life of a bourgeoisie; he was startled at the outbreak of Leninism and the subsequent violent attitudes towards him and his family by the members of the working class around him, that he “couldn’t understand who would want to destroy his way of life. What had the Losskys and their kind done? His boys and their friends, as they inherited the best of what Russia had to offer, helped fill the world with talk of literature and music and art, and they led gentle lives. What was wrong with that?” (Chamberlain 23,24) He explains that while Lossky was a sincere man who helped the poor, there was a deeper systemic violence in the works that had enabled him to live comfortably (Žižek 9):

In their benevolent [,] gentle innocence, the Losskys perceived such signs of the forthcoming catastrophe as emerging out of nowhere, as signals of an incomprehensibly malevolent new spirit. What they didn't understand was that in the guise of this irrational subjective violence, they were getting back the message they themselves sent out in its inverted true form. (10)

Following the reasoning that Niki is Abe’s mouthpiece, we can conclude that *The Woman in the Dunes* is—among other things—criticizing how society with its underlying culture and traditions influence violence build-up in all layers. This goes hand in hand with Abe’s own general distaste for how nations erect walls around themselves on the basis of “pseudo-culture”: “I feel nothing but repugnance for the pseudo-culture which tries to legitimize the walls surrounding nations by insisting on a particularism of customs and habits which is in fact no more than a mere ramification of culture” (qtd. in Mohammad Jafari and Pourjafari). The inherent systemic violence of the nation’s politics works to produce microcosmic violence strata inside the sand community. The national authority’s mismanagement of the situation in the sand village is partly to blame for the cruel culture that the sand community has developed, a culture which then proceeds to blindly eat up all the outsiders as an act of vengeance. Niki and the Losskys are similar in that they’re blamed for the plight of the lower class, even though neither of them had directly harmed the lower class in a tangible way.



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# Virginia Woolf's 'Three Guineas' Critique



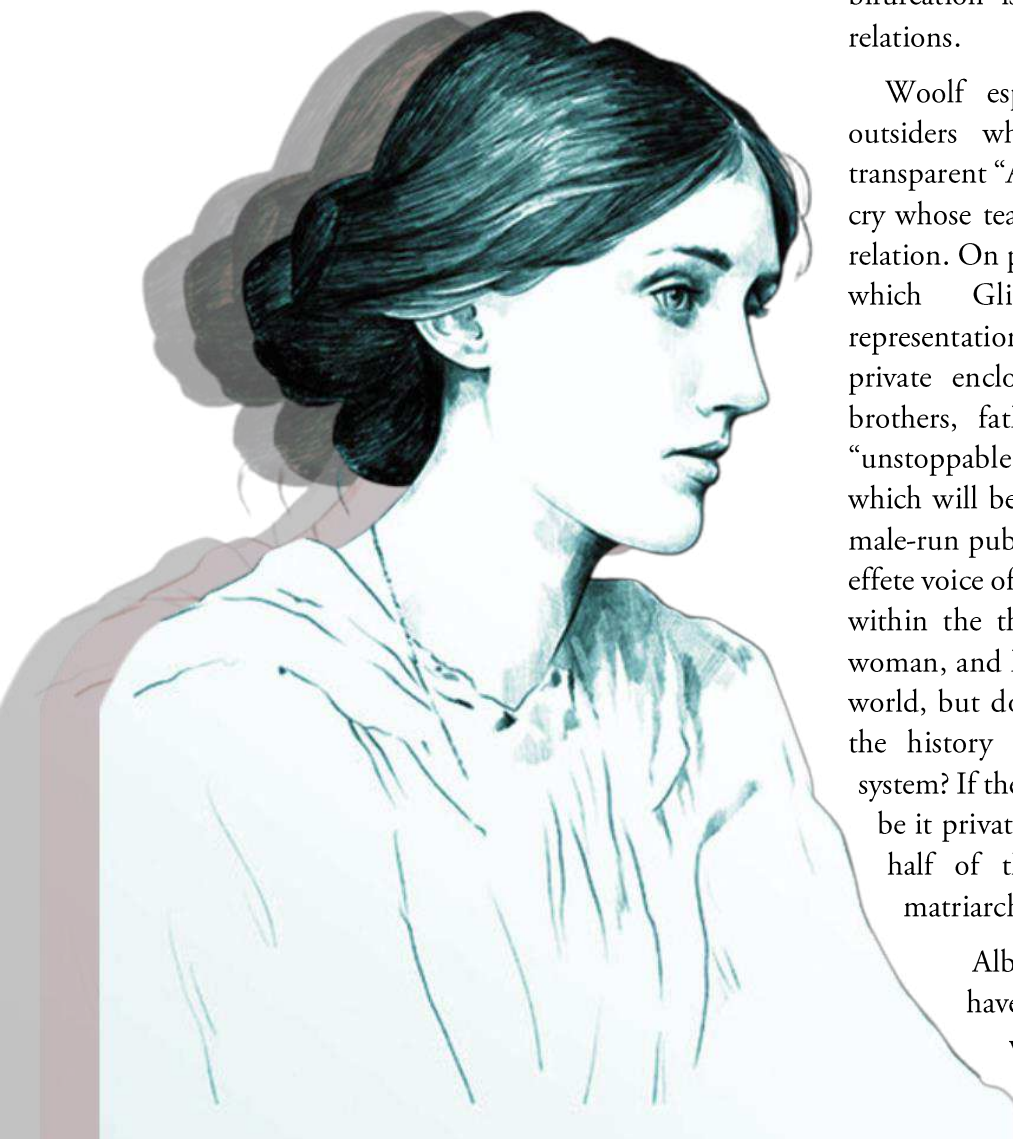
Hengameh Kharrazi

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Virginia Woolf's account of 'Woman Stance' has lent itself to Edward Glissant's right to opacity; the fact that she claims her war prevention help is different from the educated men's expectation of women's share in "principles of Justice, and Equality, and Liberty" can be suggestive of her insistence on a new human outlook. This time let women stop infiltrating all changes or decisions through the already-worn-out systems of men; if they were to yield the desired outcome, it could have deterred war of all kinds, spanning from gender-induced rows to politico-national Fascist proclivities. The adage "Different strokes for different folks" leads men to their own path escorted by law, nature, property, God, college, and women to their own unguarded way. The question is whether this bifurcation is a chasm or a prospect of new relations.

Woolf espouses a society of women as outsiders who do not conform to men's transparent "Absolute of history", it is a feminine cry whose tears are shed for creating a space of relation. On par with "the thought of hybridity" which Glissant puts forth, Woolf's representation of stifled women's voice in the private enclosure of the house of husband, brothers, fathers, has turned out to be an "unstoppable murmuring" (Glissant, Treatise 8) which will become a nuisance in the ear of the male-run public sphere. It is expedient to let the effete voice of a coven of women to gain strength within the throat of a more colossal body of woman, and hear Her new form of being in the world, but does this raise of voice not reiterate the history of men's monolithic full-voiced system? If the feminine voice echoes their needs, be it private or public, will it not just compel half of the male-society to bend to its matriarchal fixity?

Albeit Woolf believed she does not have a country and her country is the whole world, as she stated, "For the outsider will say, in fact, as a



woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (Woolf, 99), her maternal hand is just stretched towards women of other nations. Although she has dispelled the patriotic zeal of her male counterparts in England waging war on other nations on account of a communal Britishness, she walks side-by-side with single-root identity of her fellow women. Supposing a person from England has formed a homogenous English membership, excluding Irish or Scottish citizens, and then claiming the rights of all? What is required is “identity-rhizome” as Deleuze introduced which is a compound of different points, each linking to the other. Some may feel threatened by the notion of multiplicities with the whole-identity of a country as it could be an indication of a hierarchical merging which creates each time a survivor who has been able to rule out the rest. However, Glissant is inviting them to a chaos-world which can house all people’s claim to all sort of rights.

Woolf’s departure from the single-root base of patriotism proves to be a promising step in the Poetics of Relation as it embraces all other nations in her indifference; she is mostly charged with apathy in regard to her country as she is not sharing the same patriotic emotion, but what emotion is deeper towards one’s country in comparison to her imagined England which will not be territorialized within the confines of its ancestral dignity. “The desire to impose “our” civilization or “our” dominion upon other people” (Woolf 100), in her view, has triggered off war and that is more appealing than her call for indifferent approach to nationalistic fervent or war-mongering whims. She has extended this indifference to her relation with men not merely in respect to their war-seeking instinct, but also their viscous circle of Law, professions and administration of education:

“We, daughters of educated men, are between the devil and the deep sea. Behind us lies the

patriarchal system; the private house, with its nullity, its immorality, its hypocrisy, its servility. Before us lies the public world, the professional system, with its possessiveness, its jealousy, its pugnacity, its greed” (Woolf 70)

She seems to have chosen between two forms of tyranny, that is within the totality of a private house leading male figure and those of the public. Nevertheless, she has another suggestion and it is a woman in the public, not the public of men but a public sphere attuned to women’s rule. Glissant defines opacity as reluctance to be reduced into any forms of labelling; and Woolf’s woman stands above all such appellations, behavioural codes like those represented in men’s special dress code, she pointed out. The sociopolitical repercussions of such stance can be double-faced, though. Glissant’s division of cultures into atavistic and composite can help understand Woolf’s initiative for her society of outsiders: either within the totality or outside, but the truth is that one common thing still remains and that is the tug of war, and the question of which end of the rope is dragged more into the opposite side. She has let go of the atavistic remnant of her ancestors in favour of multiplicity, she has also rebuked the monolingual history which is simply know how to speak manly, but has used the same arborescent thinking, which according to Deleuze and Gayatri, holds the assemblage by a centrifugal hierarchical binary.

In Virginia Woolf, this centre is women. She said, “if we join, we lose our difference. We won’t merge our identity in yours. we won’t repeat the same score, like a gramophone whose needle has been stuck is grinding out with intolerable unanimity”; some may accuse her of opacity which is construed as something which resists understanding in fear of “false identification with the other or being reduced to pseudo-universal categories of the other”. But in another place, she found common grounds to cooperate with men’s society, “for our common

ends— justice and equality and liberty for all men and women—outside your society, not within.” Does this mean that she wants to penetrate into the totality created by men within the sociopolitical realm as she demands the need to “penetrate deeper” if middle-class educated women are required to prevent war? The female centre is even split and working-class women’s stance in this outsider society has become even suspicious as they have some common characteristics with working-class men whose professions make a difference in disturbing the economic wheel of state if they stop working. Deleuze’s remarks here align with that of Glissant in his disfavoring an arborescent tree-like growth which is sprouting from the seed into tree-trunk and branches, which is a linear deterministic growth based on a pre-drawn map, and in men/women case, it could emerge as taking back what men have usurped unfairly.

Deleuze suggested “an entirely different schema, one favoring rhizomatic, rather than arborified, functioning, and no longer operating by these dualisms” (328) to show centre is not necessarily to be there to be able to pull together all the other components. Glissant’s archipelagic thinking reinstates the same centrifugal detour: “Every archipelagic thought is a thought of trembling, of non-presumption, but also of openness and sharing” (Glissant, *Treatise* 143), and this is what Virginia Woolf suggests in *Three Guineas* to men. If you want to succeed, let us in, although in our own way. Relinquish all the money you have and spare a guinea or two for the sake of women. The moment she suggests deepening into the systems assembled together by men, Woolf understood it will be wasting women’s time to repeat the men’s history. Glissant in his ‘*Rhetoric of Relation*’ nicely said “It is no longer through deepening a tradition but through the tendency of all traditions to enter into relation that this is achieved” (Glissant, *Relation* 95), so Woolf wisely understood the same tradition if stirred, it will stink.

The problem which arises in her theories is the outlook of *Outsiders* as looking at everything from outside and forming her female community based on the long-lasting traditions of her male kinship. Although she refuses to join, but still, she is acknowledging the centre. It involves two problems: first, its constant look at what men do and her society becomes a counter-public as it is constantly dependent on what men have taken possession of, in order to de-possess it in response; second, her women’s stance may remain in the infancy of differences and just exist as an enclosure within “an impenetrable autarchy (Glissant, *Relation* 190)” which is farther in perception from what Glissant’s claim to opacity manifests, opacity as a “texture of the weave” (*ibid.*).

“The idea has come to me that what I want now to do is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea. Waste, deadness, come from the inclusion of things that don't belong to the moment; this appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner: it is false, unreal, merely conventional.” (Deleuze 329)



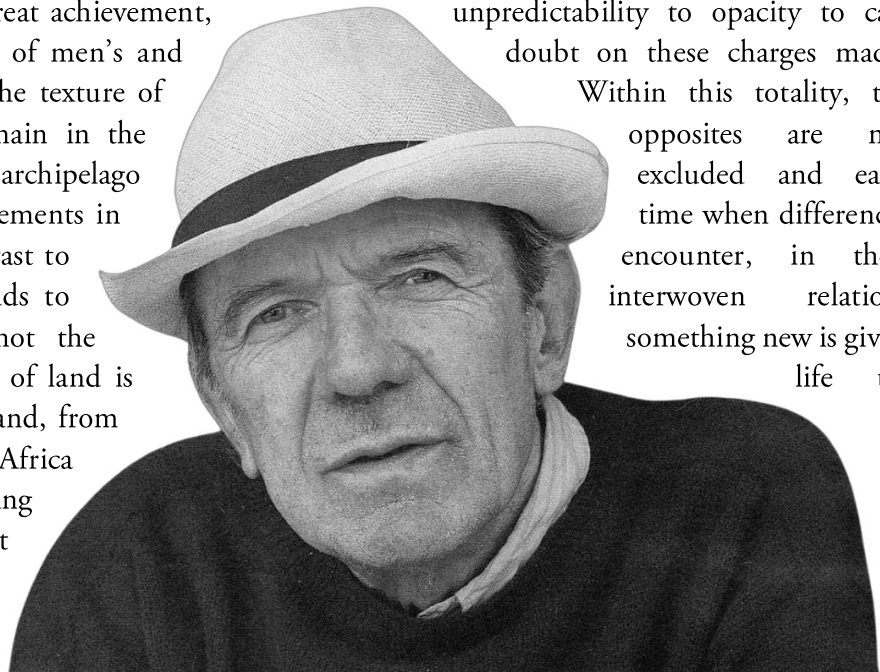
Her idea of Heideggerian ready-at-hand existence in relation to men's world can be seen when she reprimands middle-class educated women whose strike is not able to disturb men's machinery if they put down their tools. Ready-at-hand in Heidegger is when objects fail to function well or broken and as a consequence of their mal-function, their use and practicality grow in importance. Her tool shall malfunction so that she can grow in importance. Although what Woolf has wished is a great achievement, for keeping the heterogeneity of men's and women's societies all within the texture of the weave, she does still remain in the texture of the weave. Glissant's archipelago is placing all heterogeneous elements in relation to each other in contrast to the "totality-earth" which tends to exclude everything that is not the community; a massive stretch of land is the ugly sameness, a plot of land, from the farthest extremity of North Africa to the South, although having different territories, they abut one another tightly and they are just marked by some hypothetical demarcation.

Glissant's creolization is bridging the distances but each land plot has a dependent cluster of islands, as explicated in these words, "Everything is in everything, without being forcibly mixed together" (Glissant, *Poetics* 21).

The importance of this thought in Woolf is that the fabric gets threadbare without women if they stop working or cease to exist; like the fabric of weave, each thread has a say in the overall make-up of the fabric not in danger of being diluted like when a water has been so sweetened with sugar and it needs to be diluted to weaken the effect of sugar; too much sugar is lessened, if need be, to reduce its flavour. Territories can be diluted by changing the borders, enlarging or dwindling different countries in random proportion, having said that, archipelagic layout does not let any dissolution or demarcation.

There are some accusations leveled against Glissant and his claim to opacity. It is acknowledged that his assemblage of all heterogeneous elements is still working within the same totality. Although the idea of opposites has not been collapsed, but they are creolized or realized "by the grasping of the opposites in their unity or of the positive in the negative" (Prabhu 79). Alongside all these distrust in Glissant's opacity, he introduced an element of unpredictability to opacity to cast doubt on these charges made.

Within this totality, the opposites are not excluded and each time when differences encounter, in their interwoven relation, something new is given life to.



He believes that totality is always on the brink of generalization, i.e., a totalitarian exclusion aiming to cross out what is not the community. But why not think of a totality as the weave of the world, the quality of which is enhanced by the quality of all particularities sewing its tightly-twisted thread fabric.

In this sense, firstly, is Woolf's reluctance to judge the manly war-instinct not the same as pulling a thread out? Isn't her refusal to join caused by her fear of dilution but she has lost the chance of relation? Secondly, in the final stage by building her theory around discarding men's 'erroneous' systems, she didn't acquiesce in the composite culture which allows women to bring their own thoughts to make a hole in the domineering male apparatus. She herself seems to be that needle stuck in the gramophone,

repeating the same score by clinging to the same universal image of women who are suffering and deprived of the rights men unfairly denied them of. What's the use of zooming out the image of usurped rights of women as relic of the past images, the unconscious trace which itself has become an Absolute truth. Glissant says, "But if it puts up this resistance by being closed in on itself, and this is the crucial point, then it is doing the same thing, neither more nor less, than its oppressor" (Glissant, Poetic 64).

Thirdly, Woolf, here, is writing as a physician towards the end of her essay. In Foucauldian sense, labelling each action with a form of disease is to exclude those who are not the community. Woolf adopted a physiological approach to treating men's society and she sees it in light of 'infantile fixation' as the root cause of later adulthood-mentally-driven acts of jealousy or superiority: "it is clear that the general acceptance of male dominance, and still more of feminine inferiority, resting upon subconscious ideas of woman as "man manqué," has its background in infantile conceptions of this type" (Woolf 116); so whatever male action or female inaction is seen, it has a root in the deep unconsciousness of a mind which hides itself from sight. Woolf recounts the story of a father who does not want her daughter or earn her own living and he wants to give her allowance by himself. Woolf's analysis is illuminating here: "He wished to keep his daughter in his own power. If she took money from him, she remained in his power; if she took it from another man not only, she was becoming independent of Mr. Jex-Blake, but also, she was becoming dependent upon another man" (Woolf 121). If we take this case as a universal example, as the absolute truth of such fathers, does it not mean that all fathers not letting their daughters earn their own living are unquestionably jealous? Glissant says, "Generalization is totalitarian: from the world it chooses one side of the reports, one set of ideas, which it sets apart from others and tries to

impose by exporting as a model" (Glissant, Relation 20), and therefore, as such judgments are not the quality of the people themselves, they may prove to be faulty. The purpose of such delving into men's or women's psyche should help us know that their insularity should not lead to prescription of same unconscious intents for all, which has its fixed origin in certain causes or symptoms; but, it ought to remind us that we do not know completely, "as Édouard Glissant writes, it is the experience and the thought of opacity that "distracts me from absolute truths ... saves me from unequivocal courses and irreversible choices." (O'Byrne 197)

The mind's claim to opacity is its refusal to be known. So, all psychological delineations of male or female actions are made feasible by the unwanted contradictions, slips, blunders, confessions they make. Those real intents behind their deeds which are only seeping out unobtrusively; We put all these slips together to draw a conclusion of what the real cause of their actions is, thus having an a priori of causes and symptoms which just signal ugliness and sameness. The a priori of ugliness and sameness does not let the diseased disorder to fade away, and if resolved, the remnant trace will be sealed on the forehead of these men or women.

Woolf's account of womanhood seems to exist in bondage to male rule. She assumes the knowledge of knowing men and their mental complications, yet on the other hand she is not familiar with their biological instincts as she is 'biologically' different, so she knows where to place her society of outsiders: outside any productive relation, assuming the role of a doctor to either heal, quarantine, hospitalize, prescribe. Her medicinal thinking is following a straight line of diagnosis-prescription, treatment as transparent Rule of Medicine for men, and her woman stance is the opacity, the retreat into just women's instinctual motives on the pretext that men's manly choices are alien to her, so it

winds up setting women's instincts as the transparency and the Rule of instinct.

Her Woman is the 'man manque', that is, a person failing to live up to the expectations of men's institutions and wants to create her own world to fix the same flawed origin. Outsiders' starting point is the central pivot punched into men's world. Should her Outsiders need to change, they need to wander around as a nomad stripped of any form of origin. This does not mean they should let go of their identity, it is not even finding oneself within the other, but in relation with the other. Glissant's Errantry resembles "the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation.

The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation" (Glissant, Relation 18), and the existence of women's society should not be defined in contrast to male's history of domination which itself suggests "an enclosed errantry" (Glissant, Relation 208), meaning that women are just wandering idly around the same male rules for formation of their own community. There should be an end to "a centred mode, that is, the original breath comes from a centre and extends to its peripheries" (Glissant, Poetics 61), an instead, there should emerge the exterior movement to the interior, to hold together the diversity they have found not on a fixed hegemonic central point but to stitch them with the force of relation.

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# Creative Writing

Welcome to Threshold's Creative Writing section. Here, you will discover an array of literary works that offer a glimpse into the minds of various authors, each with a unique style and voice. Whether you seek inspiration, entertainment, or simply a break from the mundane reality of ordinary routines, we hope you find it within the pages.

As you wander through the pages, allow yourself to be transported to another dimension, guided by the words of the contributors who have poured their hearts and souls into their works, while sharing their thoughts, dreams, fears, and joys with you through written poetry and prose.

The world of creative writing is a vast and diverse one and so is our collection. Perhaps you will find yourself immersed in a short story, hanging onto every word as the plot unfolds and twists, or maybe you'll be moved by a heartfelt poem that speaks to your own experiences. You may even discover something entirely new, an experimental piece that pushes the boundaries of traditional storytelling.

We believe there is something for everyone here, whatever your tastes may be. As you read on, keep in mind that creative writing is not just about being entertained for a moment or escaping reality. It has the power to reconstruct lives, challenge beliefs, and inspire actions. The poems and stories you will find in this section are more than just words on a page; they represent reflections of the human experience, capturing the essence of what it means to be alive.

We encourage you to take your time while reading each and every piece and allow the emotions and ideas to seep into your consciousness. Perhaps you'll find yourself nodding in recognition or laughing out loud, or maybe you'll be left with a sense of wonder or longing. Whatever the case may be, we hope that our collection leaves a lasting impression on you as it did on us.

This section of the journal remains an invitation to literary explorers. It is a space where the words on the page have the power and potential to transport the reader to unknown worlds, evoke emotions, and linger long after the last line is read. This may be evidence of the beauty of the written word and an emblem of the human experience but thank "you" for presenting the most precious part, thank you for reading what we wrote, and we hope that what you read sparks your imagination and inspires you to create something of your own.

Nava Eghdami

## Painter's Ruse



Ali Montazerzadeh

*Master of Arts, Shahid Beheshti University*

What is a paint, but wicked whims of the painter—  
Who whispers sweet nothings to thy innocent eyes.  
Yet, thou, welcome the seduction, as it tempts thee.

The Brush, being their dull Harpe of enticement,  
Stirs forth; sometimes with a taste of honey or vinegar.  
Row of impure colors, twirls around the pure ones to —  
Either relieve thee, or wound thy senses mortally.

The Edges, ah the edges; perchance thy vice?  
Thou can see the surface, but not yet far beyond,  
Thy gaze, facing Medusa, is routed on Perseus'—  
Shield. Thee see the Subject, but a different kind!

The Canvas, thy confinement, captivates thee,  
To find, in the desert, filled with mirages, the Lines.  
Disseminating into whirling drab atoms,  
What rule of the thirds or, multitude of Cubic, illuminates.

O' Steeled Figures! Harken to the screams and cries,  
There, is Icarus, whom Sober denizens leave be.  
Averting their iron sockets, from the drowning flesh,  
Matters worth brass fluctuates around, overruling grace.

Trickster, fiend, thy cursed name be Painters,  
Though unmasking the masks of believers.  
O' fuddled Seeker, thy dim expression begets,  
Light matters not for plants, for they alone, mourn.  
Anyhow, pluck out the leaves on thy laurel, and,  
Plant them in the frame, for the merciful plants sob,  
Icarus, though not saved, shall suffer no more.

# Kindness, Like a Boomerang, Always Returns



**Nava Eghdami**

*MA Student, Shahid Beheshti University*

I looked around myself to see,  
But all of doors were closed on me!  
I was colorful, I was shining  
And I was just looking for a silver lining.  
My eyes were closed, and the world was black!  
Life was fading away, without a way to bounce  
back!  
And then, out of the blue, I faced a fact;  
Not a scientific one, but more like an act.  
It was so beautiful, so tangible;  
Not only valuable, but also expandable!  
It happened, when I gave a candy to a child;  
I saw it when she smiled!  
And when a boy helped a man;  
Helped him cross the street, while he could just,  
ran!  
Also, when the teacher taught us to be strong;  
To stop the bullies, and right a wrong!  
Another example was as someone was feeding a  
pet;  
Which was neither mandatory, nor a debt!  
What was its name? Oh, I just recalled,  
If you're curious too, Kindness it is called!

## Met Him in the Mirror



Narges Nematpour

*B.A. Student (English Literature) Shahid  
Chamran University of Ahvaz*

Caught myself earlier today  
 In my dad's old clothes  
 Locked eyes with the mirror  
 And, then, my body froze.  
 I was attired in his wristwatch,  
 His stylish jacket,  
 His haircut,  
 His mannerism,  
 His authenticity and honesty  
 In this seeming world of modernism.  
 Having on, too,  
 His leather belt in the color gray  
 And his favorite fragrance.  
 We became the same person, I'd say  
 Noticeable at first glance.  
 For half of my age, he was with us  
 Too pity that for the other half  
 I was left with his assets only  
 And similar hazel eyes.  
 As I had his clothes on,  
 I tried to play his role  
 Pretending he just arrived,  
 Everything's normal,  
 He's alive,  
 And home is home.  
 Put my hands in the pockets  
 To imitate his greeting line  
 But I found something there  
 That once used to be mine.  
 As far as I can recall,  
 He never did anyone wrong.  
 He was a trustworthy man, indeed,  
 For keeping my gloves  
 For this very long.

## Turmoil



Negin Sadat Ghaderian,

*Software Engineering BA from Shahid  
Beheshti University and currently studying  
Cognitive Science MA at The Institute for  
Cognitive Science Studies.*

Like the waves, just as tides arise  
My words tumble and then incline  
Like a storm brewing in the skies,  
Your face dulls, clouds take its shine  
The turmoil, I see in your eyes  
Your lips quiver, then form a line  
Your curls fall, as well as mine

As night descends on my Haim,  
The shore once bright, begins to fade  
As the moon takes place in your eyes,  
I whisper softly to persuade  
The dark to give way to sunrise  
Once again, the sea shall embrace  
The broken shells left, without a trace

I wish I could take back, replace  
The sunset darkening your face  
I wish I could turn back time  
To sunlight warmth in your embrace  
I wish I could take back the crime  
Of making you dislimned:  
I've never had anything so beautiful; be mine.

## Missing

Missing someone never really goes away  
You carry it everywhere  
Until your shoulders give way,  
Or time lends a hand  
Then suddenly,  
you see it's not impossible to bear.

## Drenched



M. Reza Izadi

The shirt's drenched in sweat  
Knees shaking, eyes swelled  
Packing his stuff, he walked out  
He walked out, doesn't matter where to

The shirt's drenched in blood  
Hand's bruised, pants wet  
His mind's full of waste  
His heart's losing the race

Let him walk, let him see the world  
He'll come back, the world does spin  
And even if it won't, his feet will get welts  
Then, look at him cry, look at him keen

For the shirt will be taken off  
And new ones will come  
Sharp edges will be dulled off  
And the flesh will get numb

Then, you'll see his shirt, ironed and cleaned  
Heart's beating strong, not a brief moment late  
Feet standing, walking, how very straight  
Though, he does still bleed and sweat,  
the shirt doesn't betray any single drip.

## The Best of Me



Mohsen Rasooli

I never thought I'd die alone  
I laughed the hardest, who'd have known?  
I'm telling no-one I'm in hell  
I don't know how to get well  
What is in the dusk of life has left?  
A sorrowful traveler, he was bereft  
Deeming that I were better dead  
How shall I kill myself? I said  
I'll paint the beginning of a certain end  
Guess I have one more bullet to spend  
Revolver in hand cocked, easy to roll  
My canvas in back, will meet my soul  
My canvas, I wrote on it THE Best OF ME  
Will they get my point? Who cares, let them be  
With madness they must be acquainting  
Let this be my last painting.



## The Storm



Amirhossein Abbasnejad

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Sand scattered upon the barren desert was the only thing he could see. He had walked for God-knows how long, but now he could finally see the great dune stretched along the coastline. He scaled it and marvelled at the blueness of the ocean, and then he looked at the clouds above, which casted a gloomy shade upon both the ocean and the desert. He realised that he had reached the juncture at last. He slipped down from the top of the dune and trudged along the coast, exhausted. He could feel the cool water touch the soles of his feet and decided that the temperature had certainly risen from before. After a few minutes of walking along the shore, he saw a plume of smoke in the distance and hastened towards it.

He scaled the dune once more, for the source of smoke was on top of it. It was coming out of the chimney of a decaying cabin facing the ocean. The rot on the blackened planks was so dreadful that he thought it could be seen even from the other side of the dune. He stepped onto the porch, and the planks underneath squealed.

He walked to the door and knocked, but no one answered. He knocked again and received no answer once more. His fatigued and weary legs could barely hold him, so he knocked a third time. The door opened, and behind it stood the proprietor of the cabin. He beckoned him to come in.

The first things that caught his eye as he entered were the two four-paned windows at the back of the cabin. They faced the desert and its countless little sand hills. A shiver went down his spine as he remembered the many hours he had spent roaming that accursed land.

As he stepped onto the floor of the cabin he realised that the interior of the cabin was in no better condition than its exterior. The planks on the walls had turned greyish yellow, and a black, slimy substance clung to everything. The only light illuminating the dingy cabin was coming out of the two windows, and it only lit up the centre of the room. The corners, where the shadows crept, were black voids absorbing everything that came toward them. He looked around in that dim light and saw that the cabin had no proper pieces of furniture, and the ones that it had were all as rotten and ghastly as the cabin itself. There were two rocking chairs facing the two windows at the end of the cabin. Behind the chairs, a hideous rug was sprawled on the ground. As he stared at the rug, he felt as though he could hear the worms slithering about underneath it. He shivered at the thought and moved on. As he walked to the chairs he saw that there was also a little table in the right corner of the room with shadows drifting about on it. Beside it, he noticed, was an old fireplace made out of cobblestone, which, he decided from its condition, had been left unused for many years. Above the fireplace, on the wall, a huge circular mirror hung. It had not been cleaned for so long that when he looked at himself in it, he only saw a silhouette instead of his reflection. When he looked at the chairs again, he saw that the proprietor had walked to one of the rocking chairs and had sat in it, so he decided to do the

same. As they sat silently, they gazed into the endless desert and at the horizon, where the dim clouds met the grains of sand and faded into each other.

After a few minutes of gazing, or perhaps hours, for he could not tell, the proprietor started to rock his chair back and forth. The rotten planks beneath his chair started to creak, and they creaked like the arthritic knees of a marathon runner, who wouldn't stop running.

Some time passed, and the sound of squeaking planks started to irritate him terribly.

"Would you stop that please?" He pleaded helplessly.

The proprietor continued to rock the chair, and the sound of squeaking grew louder.

"Would you stop it?" he asked again, and the proprietor ignored him once more. The sound had become frightfully insufferable for him.

"Stop it!" He shouted, and lightning struck the very moment. It started to drizzle, and the creaking continued.

He wanted to shout again, but realised that the roof was leaking, for droplets of water were falling on his head. He decided to tend to the leaking first, for he deemed it more irritating. He got up, walked to the table, and then tried to pull it. The table did not budge. He pulled at it again, and then he looked down at its legs. The table was stuck to the floor by the mould around it. He gave up, and walked back to his chair.

Once he got back, he knew that it was too precarious to stand on the rocking chair, but he decided that he had no other choice. The leaking was beyond intolerable for him. As he put his left foot on the seat, lightning struck once more. He shivered, put his hands on the armrests, and pushed himself up. The chair kept rocking back and forth as he tried to balance himself on it. He grabbed the protruding plank on the roof and pushed it into its place. Then suddenly, something lashed the cabin violently. He fell on his back, and as he was facing the roof, he saw the plank protruding once again. He got up to his feet and looked outside from the window.

The ocean had devoured the desert and had risen to the bottom of the cabin. Thunderous waves began to thrash it relentlessly. It shook violently, and as he was trying to balance himself in that turmoil, he caught a glimpse of the proprietor. He was still sitting in his chair and was rocking it back and forth as if nothing was happening. The creaking sound had now blended completely with the violent sound of raindrops pelting on the window panes. He stumbled to the rocking chair and grabbed the proprietor by his shoulder, turned him toward his own face and roared, "Stop it you bastard!"

The proprietor stared at him with his coal-black eyes, which were growing larger and larger. Staring back at him, he could see himself in the black void that was the proprietor's eyes. Petrified and shaky, he drew back, and the creaking continued. He sat back on his rocking chair and watched the turbulent ocean in front of him quietly and obediently. A few moments passed, and the storm suddenly abated and became a mere drizzle again, making the creaking sound insufferable once more.

"Please stop it!" He begged, not looking at the proprietor lest he might see himself in his eyes again.

He took a glance from the corner of his eye and saw that the proprietor was staring raptly into the horizon.

"Stop it!" He cried and decided to get up.

As he was getting up, lightning struck, and a splash of water lashed his face from above. He raised his head and saw that the protruding plank had completely shattered. He ran to the proprietor and grabbed him by both his shoulders. Not looking directly into his face, he shook him and shouted helplessly "Please stop." The proprietor continued to swing himself on the chair. He pulled him up and threw him onto the ground. The proprietor lay on the hideous rug. He jumped on him, and, suddenly, he saw himself in the eyes once more. He grew furious, lifted his right hand, clenched it, and then landed it on his face. He repeated it

over again.  
Left...Right...Left...Right...Left...Right.

He was breathless. He drew back and looked at his clenched fists dripping with blood. He looked back at the proprietor, whose face had now become one with the hideous rug. He got up and glanced out of the window. The ocean had subsided, and the clouds had disappeared. The desert was visible once more. He walked to the door and opened it. The reflection of the sun made the blue ocean luminous and almost blinding. He screwed up his eyes and walked out of the cabin. He strolled aimlessly on the top of the great dune, then tripped and slipped from it and rolled down onto the sands of the desert. Sprawled on his back, he looked at the sun and smiled at it as it poured its burning rays on his rotting corpse.

# Zombies Take Over The World But Scientists Are Making A Breakthrough...

Paria Mokhtarian

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The laboratory lamp buzzed a low constant hum and casted a sickly yellow light all across the room. Whoever was on the last shift had forgotten to turn it off. Not that it would bother anyone of course; the lab was deserted for the night as the exhausted, despondent team of lab techs were gone home after another day filled with fruitless efforts. Dozens of funnels and bottles were scattered all around the lab while mixtures of chemicals were boiled in them uselessly, resulting in no valuable product. All around... except for one. On the far left side of the lab, on one of the shabby lab tables surrounded by second handed items, a living creature was being formed. A white shapeless blob was swirling round and round in

the lab bottle and was slowly gaining consciousness; getting aware of its immediate surroundings.

First was the sensation around its body. The warm goop of liquid embracing its body was quite pleasant; but the constant whirling not so much. It didn't know how to make it stop however, so it let it happen and instead focused on other sensations. The sounds surrounding it were blended together and were of such intensity that its body threatened to erupt from sensory overload; but it forced its consciousness to focus and detect the sounds from each other. It took an exertion of will and it hurt, but it managed to make it happen.

The next sensation however... nothing could prepare it for that. Suddenly everything was too much. too bright. It wanted to scream, but it didn't know how to. Its mental wirings panicked and again began to stretch themselves wider and wider, portending their split. In a midst of fright, it forced them to cooperate, focusing their lens on one specific item and filtering everything else out. It was a pair of blue goggles right in front of its bottle. It knew what it was, but it didn't know how it knew. That didn't matter however; what mattered right now was keeping itself alive. So it zoomed in on the item, taking in the color, the shape, and the way it could perceive it. Vivid and clear.

It tried to communicate with the goggles somehow, make its consciousness connect to that of the goggles and propel it to answer its questions, but it was to no avail. It wondered how it could see when it was swirling in the bottle but then it realized it had stopped swirling a while ago. Huh. That was nice.

Now that it was settled it was easier to take in everything around it. It still took effort and it hurt, but it was manageable. Bottles, tubes, pens, papers, tables, all these items it knew of, but how? How do I know? It asked but there wasn't any answer. After a while of investigating its surroundings, it got bored. Everything was so

new, yet so old and repetitive. Is this my life now? Looking at these unchanging, boring items that can't answer me back?

It thought. I am so much better than them.

It wasn't long until fatigue took over it. It tried to fight it, to stay alive, but it was too much. "I don't want to die", It thought. Everything turned black.

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"I'm just saying I'm tired of this dumb project that is going nowhere!" A sound stirred him up from his slumber. "None of you want to admit it, but we could do something actually useful out there, instead of being holed up here trying to make the impossible happen."

"It's not impossible George," came an exasperated voice of a second voice, "it's just a matter of time, my studies aren't wrong."

"But when? When? What if it's too late by the time it happens?"

"Holly shit, can you guys chill the fuck out?" Came a third sound. "It's only 9 in the morning."

There was a temporary silence, which he used for assessing this sudden change of surroundings. His last memory was of him trying to talk to a pair of goggles and failing, but now... now there were others talking? Others like him? He would make a sound indicating his excitement, but he hadn't learned how to do that yet.

"Whatever, look. we were assigned a project and we're too deep in now to chicken out." Said the second voice, "And it's not like we haven't made any progress, you just don't care to listen anytime I try to illustrate them to you."

There was some shuffling, probably from them changing into lab clothes.

"Anyway, I'm going to my studies room, you guys clean this place up and we start anew today. There's something about today... I can just feel it." The second voice continued and then left the

other two muttering words to themselves that were hard for him to decipher.

And then they came to his view. he could see them now. Two of them. Big. So much bigger than him. How? Why? And they moved around differently too; not floating in a bottle of thick liquid like him; but their body was shaped in a way that they could move on it. Curious. Weird.

"He's being too optimistic," the sound belonging to George said. "There's not much time left and he knows it."

"He's right about not being able to chicken out though," the third voice said. "It's either working here or being on the front row fighting them head on."

"At this point I'm preferring the latter option." George said bitterly.

The person that the third voice belonged to came closer and closer to the area around his bottle. He tried to move around to capture his attention, hitting his body to the interior of the bottle to produce a sound, but either his body was not solid enough or he didn't have enough momentum. Either way, no sound was made and the guy passed him on his way to the fridge near him and poured himself a drink.

"You say that but then you see one of them in the vicinity of 2 meters from you and you screech running away like a chicken."

"That happened one time!" George protested.

The other guy chuckled, sipping from his drink. His eyes wandered around the room and finally finally got fixed on his bottle.

He vibrated with excitement, wiggled his body as much as he could to signify his existence. I'm alive! Notice me, I'm here!

"Holly fucking mother of-" the glass he was holding clashed to the ground and broke into a million pieces.

"What the hell is wrong with you Sap?" His friend yelled at him, he paid him no mind and

skipped over the pieces of glass to get to his bottle, his eyes not leaving it for one second.

The guy stooped down to the bottle and stared incredulously. All his view was now taken by this guy's face. Do I have a face too? He found himself wondering. He wanted to touch to find out but he couldn't.

"G-George, come, look at this." He stammered out.

"What the hell were you thinking breaking this, literally all I do here is clean up after you and Alex and get no credit whatsoever I-"

"GEORGE." The guy stood straight and screamed.

"WHAT." George screamed back.

He thought if he had ears, they'd definitely be bleeding by now. Even without ears all his nerves felt like they were on fire.

"It's- it's a... I don't know, just come look at it god fucking dammit." The guy said, short of breath.

George abandoned the task of cleaning the glass reluctantly and came their way to take a look at what his friend was yelling about.

As he got closer, his grimace unfurled slowly and his features grew apart in shock. his eyes widened as if he couldn't fathom what he was seeing.

What do I look like?

"It's moving," George said dumbly.

"Yes!" The other guy said uneasily; he was now pacing back and forth in front of his bottle.

"And what are those? It has eyes?"

The blob found himself offended at the disgusted tone of his voice.

"YES."

"that has to mean something, right?"

"Hey I heard something break; you guys didn't break anything important right?"

The third guy was shorter than the other two but still a lot bigger than him. He moved with quick rapid steps towards him and when he saw him, he started laughing hysterically, his eyes filled with pure joy.

"Oh, my god, oh my god, oh my god, we did it, we finally did it!! What were the chances, holly shit we're geniuses, actually I'm a genius, you guys didn't do shit. Wait lemme see, which one is it? Is it the one I added chromium just for experiment? Wait no its number #709-"

As he went on his crazed ramblings looking at his research papers, the blob started feeling himself slipping in and out of consciousness. The words began jumbling together.

"Alex-"

"Wait but was it formed overnight? If so, how did it keep itself alive without any of us monitoring... this shouldn't have happened, this is an absolute miracle..."

"Alex, but what do we do with it," Sap cut in exasperated.

"What do you mean, its purpose is quite clear- wait, can it hear us?"

Yes, I can.

"It's falling sleep," George whispered in awe.

"Of course, of course, let it regain its energy, let me see the tubes again... we can't have it die after we got so lucky, let's see-"

Everything turned black.

## A Nonentity



Roya Naderi

There I perched,  
 On the far end of a battered bench,  
 Like a chipped figurine that no one cares to repair!  
 Or a cursed crooked frame everyone wants out of  
 their hair!  
 I was clenching my fist,  
 Like a baby does her mother's fingers!  
 Terrified that this little butterfly I have caged in  
 there,  
 Might just fly away if I dare to unlock the gate!  
 The butterfly,  
 My butterfly,  
 Its ocean blue wings with tinges of grey  
 Fluttering its feathers trying to find its way,  
 Fully aware  
 that I am not going to let her leave this dungeon of  
 despair!!  
 So far, I have kept myself fair  
 And no one suspects of my being dead!  
 I'm not going to let this little ashen fly leave its lair  
 And snitch to people that I am scared!



## Normal



Shahrzad Mohseni Movahed

Every day is like the other day.  
 You wake up, fix your hair, or make up,  
 Deal with the same people from every day,  
 Smile like nothing is wrong,  
 Eating and sleeping are normal,  
 But then at night, you close the door,  
 And the smile finally drops down to the floor.  
 The truth is all the people makes you sick;  
 The lies they feed you, their facade,  
 The way you have to pretend you also exist,  
 Despite all the daggers they throw behind you or  
 at your face,  
 Keep smiling, as if you are made of steel.  
 The social media, the happy life they show you,  
 Their accomplishments and happy life they feed  
 you,  
 The sympathy too expensive for them to spare  
 you,  
 It is all too much, that the smiling faces  
 of people you love, feels like a burden!  
 Yes, you are fine and normal, always act.  
 Don't be such an ungrateful child, and smile!  
 People would be like...why sad? You have no  
 reason for that  
 As if I'm only here to be normal, and  
 Smile, provide, come and go  
 As if doing that is what I'm here for.  
 I Would like to know, what is normal to you?  
 Underestimating pain is all you can do,  
 Never sparing a second of your time and comfort,  
 A bit of POV and saying, "I'm sorry I hurt you",  
 My feelings are blocked within my head,  
 My anger, frustration, never leave me for one  
 second.  
 After all I'm a human, unlike you.

# Indigo Spectrum of My Evening's Sky



Nili Afravi

As they come nearer, it becomes clearer,  
the epic battle of warm and cold,  
and the symphony of pink, indigo and red, Up  
in the sky.

My cup as a warm star,  
The awakening sounds of the city, a dream afar,  
And the gazing lights of cars passing by...

Wait, there comes a thought,  
In my golden mind,  
Of my own, and wonders up in the sky, My own  
sun which I hold inside.

Let all of whatever that's left, pass by;  
Like gazing lights of passing cars.  
As they pass, those blinding lights.

There remains your own wondrous sky.  
Still, even your dimmer lights,  
Cause just after they revive, there ends, your  
darkest night,

Then comes another evening with a cup,  
And all those cars just passing by...

## Theory in Practice

Theory in Practice was suggested by our Dear professor, Dr. Shahriyar Mansouri, to encourage students to gain more insight into different critical approaches to writing. Formalism is one of the critical mediums through which we can write literary works; Theory is not just a theoretical background to critique texts but rather a platform to gain a better vision and understanding to produce texts. So, we suggest writing creatively in light of other critical approaches, such as psychoanalysis, ecocriticism, social and cultural criticism and more will follow in the coming issues.

# The Broken Tombstone



Hamed Mirghazanfari

When I climbed from the grave, I first looked for the gun whose bullet had caressed my forehead. It had a trigger of death that no finger could pull. Therefore, I did not blame the shooter and returned the gun to blood and heart. But I did not find the way anywhere.

A grave was behind my head, but there was no point in looking. What about the retreaters who rise from the pit and return from death? I put the gunpowder left on my face, on my fingers, which was always stained with tears, and sniffed, sniffed until the end of the line that indicated the gun.

When I saw the stone inscriptions of my acquaintances around me, I got angry and was pounding on the door and the wall of my body. Why am I the only one who cracked open to see unbroken stones? Where is their courage when they surrender with a shot? I shouted to get you

up, you who rest in oblivion, but I did not hear any sound except the worms inside my body. Disappointed in the company of my friends, I was looking for the bullet that made my blood the life of the tulips and found it.

When I passed by the sleeping place of the cowards who didn't dare to get up, I saw those who had woken up, one after the other. They were lost in lust and left the road to memory and the weapon to oblivion. One was engrossed in the feeling of love's false promise, and the other was immersed in the truthfulness of his lover. I shouted, "You seekers of liberation, come out of your false signs and follow your killer, not his gun." But deaf as ever and empty of any words, I continued on the path that was the key to the beginning of my death. I turned the key in the box that contained only an empty magazine. I continued searching with the magazine in my pocket and the thought

of the gun in my head.

When I reached the shooting stage, I saw a few vigilantes who, like me, had reached this stage but were too busy. They transferred their fear to freedom and got dried up in their place. I shouted that you scoffers should accompany me so that we can make them understand that killing us once was not enough, but again, I just continued to lock the magazine in place.

I reached the end of the road, which had another cemetery. A graveyard with guns in hand. All the enemies who killed us the first time and were afraid of our rising, but why did I see the fearful dead again? When I opened the last box, the bullet fit into the magazine, and the weapon caressed my hand. My eyes were wide, and I was holding the gun in the direction of those I was fighting alongside. Those to whom I screamed in hope, but I continued alone. So, why are friends targeted in the grave and enemies targeted on the way there?

I fired the gun. Bullet and gunpowder got wet from tears. The graves of friends and the tombs

of enemies are full, but my grave is empty. Both sides sacrificed to pour the same color on the canvas, which ended up being forgotten. They who did not break their stone lost their love and lover, left freedom, and got dried up; they found peace. But now that I know the truth, I have no more breath left to scream. Yes, there is no breath left. There is no breath left for those who have shot themselves; First, on this side of the wall and finally on the other side. One in the cemetery of friendly cowards and the other in the enemies'. But the end was under the ground, and the truth stands bitter.

## The Remainder



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**L**ight. A sallow light leaking in to slip on the two single sofas, facing the windows with a slight shift towards each other. The whole house smells of static stagnation.

The light moves. It shortens and elongates, encompasses all: the creases on the sofa, the ancient coffee stains, the ash, and the old notebook on the coffee table. The light. It tells you when to sleep and when to work. And it puts time into measurable sections and so, the old notebook has writings in it about December and July, and different months and days and years past.

It's a curious thing, the afternoon. It is too late often, as the light dictates. Too late to begin a day, too late to start getting anything done, too late. And too early for bed or a drink. And so you have to wait. Wait it out. And you sit on her single sofa in front of the window.

If you wait out the afternoon, and if you wait out the night, there comes tomorrow. Tomorrow. Tomorrow. And tomorrow is the day. The time.

Tomorrow, with the very first ray of light, she walks in small quick steps from this pharmacy to the other and asks very quickly for what she wants.

Tomorrow, you will wake up without her. The clumsy light wakes you. She has gone out the night before. It happens sometimes. She sometimes goes places, wanders a lot. She sometimes walks the whole night. You sometimes wake up without her. You text her, your eyes only half-open. She replies immediately and of course, you remember every word: "i'll start walking home in a bit bisous bisous"

She starts walking right away but she is on the other side of the city and her feet hurt. She doesn't care much. She walks.

You get out of bed. Sighing, you make yourself a coffee, set a timer for three minutes and go to the bathroom to pee. You hear the timer go off in the kitchen and you have to hear it for a minute before you get out and touch dismiss to make it shut up. You drink your coffee sitting on the sofa facing the morning, you get dressed and you leave for the office, trying to remember. What was it?

Sous une lumière blafarde

Court, danse et se tord sans raison

La Vie, impudente et ...

Remembering is a struggle. You are late.

She walks and walks, the sun starts to annoy her. She sees a supermarket. She walks in and comes out with a bucket of strawberry ice cream. She would then run home and wouldn't want to spoil the ice cream. She would run.

You would walk around in the office, getting this done and getting that done. Listening to a



colleague, convincing her that it is too late to pick up a certain project now.

She would get home, throw her shoes somewhere—they have bugged her all night—and go to the kitchen. Throw everything she has bought on her shopping expedition in the ice cream and mix it up. She would think of them for a second as smarties, wouldn't she? And would she smile? Bitterly even? Would she cry?

She would take her bucket, go to her sofa – the one you sit on this very moment— she would look out the window and light a cigarette. She would light a cigarette; you know that much.

Then, she would almost hug the bucket and have spoonful after spoonful and a puff here and a puff there in between. Would she cry? She would look out the window and think of all the times she has looked at the same view with you, wouldn't she? Would she think of the poem you had read together, looking at the light change? Would she remember it? Would she be tired and yet, would she be ecstatic? Would she be sure? Would she think of you? Would she think of you? Would she...

You have a headache. You leave early. It's full-blown noon when you walk in. The whole place is under a layer of blinding yellow. And as you walk towards the bedroom, you call out her name and right when you reach the bedroom door, you see something from the corner of your eye. Something your brain immediately decides shouldn't be there. And so, you abruptly turn. To find her. You jump towards her and look at her white skin yellowed by the sun. You touch her and call her and shake her, both hands on her shoulders. She doesn't move. You clean up the vomit around her mouth. You listen for her breath. You shake her again. You call her again. You do this again. And that again. Again. Again. Again.

It is noon. You are late. Too late.

You sit in her chair and you think of her. And at the end of everything you think of, her skin,

her smile, her ears, her accent, her weird laugh and her cheerful walk, at the end of everything you imagine, at the end of all you remember bitterly, all you make yourself review, you ask again and again did she think of me?

You watch the light fade. You watch the night take over. You go to bed without her. Tomorrow. You will wake up without her.

## The Cracks



Amirhossein Nobarian

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The cracks of the ceiling above his bed appear to him as a pack of wild creatures attacking one another pathetically for finding a miniscule of meaning. At every twist and turn, they fail miserably to make sense of their desperate endeavor to form a shape through which they can be understood. Their shapes resemble the plethora of small red veins shattered inside his swollen eyes trying to scream the sad story of another night deprived of the bliss of sleep. The faint light of the first rays of sunlight struggle to pass the thick black curtains hanging from the window by his bed into a confinement that would fit them. The small clock up his wall shows 5:30 and his phone alarm goes off for the fourth time in a hopeless attempt to be the start of another period of pathetic pointlessness one may call a day.

The deafening screeches of the subway wagons trying miserably to put a stop to the merciless movement of the big black train sound so distant and insignificant to him. The loud noise of the subway salesmen also seems to have ceased to bother him for once. A young lady sitting on the other side of the wagon smiles at him and says something joyously. He can hear her but the words "great", "day", "isn't", and "it" fail to convey any sort of meaning to him. She bursts into laughter. He tightens his fist and sighs.

He stares into the weird yellow and blue flowers on the guy's tie. A small rectangle tag says "Supervisor" right next to a coffee stain in the shape of an odd snake right above his shirt pocket. The guy's finger wanders without any hopes of finding a destination in the air. The word "tardiness" coming out of his mouth sound so ridiculous. He wonders who would put a t, a, r, d, i, n, e, and two strange s letters together to form a word so out of shape.

He stares into a shaking image in his big glass of beer. The face of a 30 something man with his cheekbones on the verge of blooming from under his pale skin disgusts him. He tries so hard to remember where he has seen this image but the hollow eyes of the stranger prevent it. The bitterness of the pint of beer does everything in its power to bring out a tad of expression to the stranger's face, and then faints slowly in the depths of his throat.

The cracks of the ceiling above his bed appear to him as the mesmerizing journey of a group of doves effortlessly finding their place on the white canvas. At every twist and turn, they form shapes that loudly tell the time-old tale of their existence. He sinks into his bed as he imagines merging into the cracks, dancing in the ecstasy of meaning. His eyes slowly close as a small smile form on his lips in the shape of the most beautiful of the cracks on his ceiling.

# Lucy Is Gone.

Arshya Sasanifar

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**M**y first year after the academy, I was assigned to a small town in California, neighboring a community college. My transfer was scheduled for the middle of March, right around spring break. Given the wild reputation of the mid-west, I expected my first call to be some senior citizens complaining that the “youngsters” next door were being loud and indecent. Imagine my surprise when the first case I was assigned to was a missing case. It is the most confusing and challenging case I had ever worked on. Heck, I still don’t know if Lucy was a person or a dog.

The station back then was a small local office under renovation. It was short staffed and anyone who picked up the phone was stuck with the call. The caller was an elderly gentleman, Mr. Josef Miller. He lived with his wife and their dog about two streets down the station. The contractor was pumping the sewage that day so

all I was able to hear over the phone was bits and pieces. I recall hearing him say “Hello...help...Lucy is gone”.

I checked the caller ID and matched it to the address. I pulled up and knocked on the door. A caucasian male in his early twenties opened it. He was wearing sunglasses, turquoise shorts, and no shirt. He had a tattoo of SpongeBob, the nickelodeon character, smoking a marijuana joint. He nodded as in “hi”. I asked if he knows Mr. Miller. Clearly ticked, he said: “He’s the old guy next door.” I explained that the landline to his name is signed to this address. He smirked and mumbled: “He STILL uses a land-line? What a boomer!”. He confirmed that Mr. Miller used to be the owner of both houses. He sold this one to the community college. It is now used as a pseudo dorm of sorts. I asked if he knows Lucy and that Mr. Miller called about her being gone. He raised his voice and angrily said: “Thank God. I hate her. She never shuts up. Always yapping and yapping”. Another Caucasian male stepped out behind him. They looked practically identical. Except he had a tattoo of Jimmy Neutron’s mother, another Nickelodeon character, in lingerie. He quirked up and said: “Hey man, she is awesome. She was the only one happy to see us pull up in this cemetery. She is always screaming because she hates being in that house. I would too if I were her. It is all dark and gloomy in there.” SpongeBob tattoo interrupted: “I do not get why everyone here likes her so much. All I have ever seen is that she lies on the couch and watches Tv and screams at it. Plus, they are too lovey-dovey considering”. Before I could ask them anything else the smoke alarm went off. Jimmy Neutron’s mom exclaimed: “Dude! The brownies!”. They both rushed back in and closed the door on me.

I sighed and decided to go to the Miller’s. I was in between the houses, when I noticed an elderly woman, Caucasian with curly white hair, waving at me. She slowly and carefully crossed the street. Almost running out of breath, she

said: “Excuse me mister officer, have you seen Lucy?”. I explained the situation. She had turned her face to the side and had put her right hand under her ear. I guess you could say that she was trying to listen with her good ear. She turned to face me, adjusted her jaw and said: “That explains why she was not at the park this morning. She loves running around in there. She is very active for her age, you know. Oh, and the accident, oh lord.” I asked her about the accident. She yelled out “WHAT?”. I went to her good ear and asked again. She shook her head and said: “Oh she went to pick the morning paper and something in the tree spooked her. She jumped in the street and a car grazed her. She was shaking head to toe. Poor thing.” I went to her good ear again and asked her if she could describe Lucy for me. She looked at me puzzled and yelled out “WHAT?” again. I repeated the process five times with no result. Eventually, I decided to go to the Miller’s. I walked her back across the street. She did not go inside. She walked over to the house and headed for the backyard. I had never felt so motivated, never so determined, never so curious. I marched across the street again. From the corner of my eye, I saw a woman and a big Husky walking slowly down the sidewalk. I ignored them and arrived at the door. I buzzed. No one answered. I buzzed three more times. No one answered still. I knocked on the door and yelled out for Mr. Miller. He finally opened up. Before I can get a word out, he exclaimed: “Oh, thank you so much officer. You found her!”. I was baffled. I looked around. The woman and the dog were right behind me. They walked past me and went inside. I was nailed to the ground. Mr. Miller put his left hand on the woman’s shoulder and said: “Let’s fix you some peanut butter. I know how much you love peanut butter my dear.” The door closed in my face. I was immobile for what felt like hours. From across the street, I heard a familiar voice yell what was on my mind. “WHAT!?”

## Fresh Snow



Navid Sharifioun

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Spring had yet to arrive and dawn had yet to break. The stiffened snow from last night was constantly changing colors; white, red and blue, and then, pure white again. At such a disposition, under the crimson sky and its regiment of clouds, there was a man, blank, bleak, unmoving, running in his white shirt, beige coat, loosely knotted grey scarf and office pants.

He remembered as he ran. Remembered his old friends, gone, in a car accident. The switch in hand, knowing that none would ever follow him around mindlessly again. He remembered his pet, buried. Shovel in hand, knowing that none would ever need his care and affection ever again, he remembered his wife and child, suffocated from the gas leak; Keys in hand, knowing that none would ever love him again. And at last, he remembered his parents, dead. And his own small, empty hands, and with this, comes resolution.

A resolution of sadness. It looms over him, stops him dead in his tracks, robs him of the will to move. For throughout all his losses, he was unable to cry. To all events, he was apathetic all the same. He remembers looking for a cure, time and time again, and with each failing

experiment, his worries and sadness grew larger. He cried not for the dead, he cried for himself, the apathetic, boring, ordinary man who fails to shed tears, though his heart is filled with grief. He who failed to be human. “Was I ever human to begin with?” he thought to himself. Unlike them, he was never bound, not by society, not by morals, not by sadness, and here comes epiphany.

He finally understood, he was not cursed, nor blessed; he was the one granting the blessing and curse. He was God incarnate. Such trivial matters were beneath him. To miss out on such an obvious yet grand thing! The excitement made him burst out laughing, so loud that the snow began to change color. White, red and blue; but this time, by his power and godly volition, they kept on changing. He felt overjoyed by his sudden realization, so much he dropped to the ground. Laughing even louder, he couldn’t hear a thing, make out a word, and follow the most basic instructions. Everything was drowned in his laughter. Poor bystanders, unaware of his holy presence, blind to his glory, just circling and pointing at him. He decided to test his powers, as well as enlighten the poor bystanders, and in his infinite wisdom, he decided to desire snow; for he was always fond of this particular creation of his.

So, he grabbed a young human, naturally, for their mind is better suited for learning than the older ones; and showed him the sky and the freshly falling snow. The child could not comprehend and irked him in insolence. “Faulty creature! Return to whence you came and soil this world no further.” The child’s empty vessel fell to ground, while others praising this miracle with their cries, and while its soul departing. A god as he is, he should not trifle himself with humans, and as such, our newly born benevolent god was recalled to heaven with an almighty blast, leaving the snow red, blue, red and red. But fear not! For his miracles became known to all, only one day too late.

## The Selfless Daughter



**Mahboobeh Rashno**

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**I**t was almost midnight. Aurora stepped out of the car and aggressively shut its scraped door. For a moment, she stopped and stared absent-mindedly at the old withered bricks in the exterior of the apartment. A passing thought revisited her: “I wish I had an accident on the way.” The thought of death calmed her. She sighed and aimed for the metal stairs. Her turquoise uniform was stinking with the smell of burnt oil and fried onion. This had been her nightly routine for the past five years. No breaks or holidays in between. She couldn’t afford any time off work. She needed all the money she could gather.

As she opened the door, several envelopes of unpaid bills welcomed her on the ground. After

two shifts of frying cheap burgers, she was too exhausted to decide between paying the hospital bills or paying the monthly rent. She imagined an alternative life, where she went home to a lovely husband, a beautiful child and a warm homecooked meal; but for now, she took off her greasy apron and tossed it off somewhere. She entered the only bedroom where her father and his ventilator had occupied. She quickly checked on him and then went back to the bleak living room and passed out on the couch. Sometimes she felt like her apartment was a prison, but couldn’t decide which resident was the prisoner.

Before Aurora was hit by the heavy waves of sleep, she heard a beeping sound. She was weary and drowsy, but she got up and dragged herself to the bedroom. As always, something was wrong with the ventilator. She fixed it and sat down on the chair, next to her father’s bed. For a second she had a glimpse of cutting off the device and letting her father go. She wondered about a life free of his healthcare expenses. When she came to her senses, she cursed herself for that thought. “Dad is the only family I’ve got left” She mumbled to herself.

The next morning, Aurora woke up in distress, being late for work. She was getting ready as fast as she could, when she suddenly heard it. A monotonous beeping sound. She ran to the bedroom and yelled “But I fixed it!” and started manically pressing some buttons on the medical device. “I swear to God, I fixed it!” She didn’t know whom she was swearing for or what exactly she was doing with the buttons. In an abortive attempt, she tried to give her father CPR, but then realized what had taken place. She must have made a mistake the night before with the ventilator. “Did I just kill my father?” she murmured and then fell to the ground and stared at the wall. She thought about all the years of working double shifts to pay for her father’s medical treatment. She thought about all the dreams she gave up to stay with him and take care of him. She thought about the last



memories of them together when he used to be conscious. She thought about the paperwork necessary for registering the death of a family member. She thought about the expenses of having a funeral and how most probably no one would attend. She thought about the act of unintentional murder and wondered about its sentence. “But no one’s gonna know, right?” She reassured herself. All of a sudden, she noticed a stain on the wall and in a frantic moment, thought about how the stain looked like a cat. “My dad just died and I’m thinking of a stain.” She started laughing hysterically. She was feeling a peculiar sense of lightness and sorrow. Her father was really gone. She was all alone in the world now.

About a week later, Aurora came back home, holding a coral black cat in her arms. She removed her apron and threw it in the bin. She staggered towards the bedroom and hold onto the doorframe. She stared at the empty bed for a while and went back to the living room. The cat jumped out of her arms over the couch. Aurora sat next to the cat and started caressing it.

“Guess I don’t have to take care of anyone no more, right kitty?”

The cat growled at the heavy smell of alcohol coming out of Aurora’s mouth.

“I’m finally free. I can do whatever I want with my money. I can have any job I want. Hell, I can even hit the road, travel the world!” She yelled.

The cat remained uninterested in her remarks and jumped over the ground. Aurora gave it an annoyed look and then grabbed her car keys. She didn’t have any destination. She was completely free. The last thing she saw before waking up in a blindingly white room, was a mixture of red and orange flickering lights.

When Aurora regained consciousness, she tried to look around and make sense of the situation. She couldn’t move at all. She tried to use her voice but felt as if her throat was clogged.

After an excruciatingly long while, a grumpy middle-aged man entered the room and fixed her bed. Aurora realized she was in a hospital and guessed that the man must be a nurse. To Aurora, every word coming out of that man’s mouth felt like a bullet in the head: “Don’t try to move young lady! You had a terrible accident. You’re paralyzed for life. What is up with you kids and drunk driving these days? Just go thank whatever God you believe in that you didn’t kill anyone. Anyways, we didn’t find any emergency contact in your phone...” The rest of his speech was Greek to her.

## An Everlasting Silence



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The moonlight was the only thing keeping the room from sinking into mere darkness. He squinted his eyes. He wanted to check everything on the crimson desk once more. He had been planning to do this for a long time. Nothing could go out of plan. Nothing dared to go out of plan. And tonight, exactly at midnight, it would all end. Everything was screaming at him. Everything was asking for his attention. He tried to be indifferent, so he took a look at the calendar. There was a round red circle around today's date. He had put it there himself. He took his eyes off it and looked at the half-burnt sandalwood incense-stick next to it. It was reminiscent of what was left of him. He laid eyes on the next item; a reddish-brown

mahogany picture frame with its face on the desk. Before he could turn it over, he heard the annoying ticking of the clock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. He could not ignore it, so he turned his head to the left. The clock was about to strike eleven o'clock. How could it? Was not the shorthand between five and six just seconds before? He looked at the frame once more from the corner of his eye. A scream. He shook his head fiercely. He wanted to throw out the obtrusive noises. Shaking his head could not help him; perhaps, a cigarette would be of help. He took one out of the packet. He put his right hand in his pocket and took out the lighter. He lit the cigarette. With every puff, the end of the cigarette flickered and lit his face. He looked at the cake in the middle of the desk. One, two, three, four, five. He lit the candles on the cake one by one and put away the lighter. He could hear a child's laughter. He put his hands on his ears. A gloomy cloud was formed around his head. He coughed and crushed the end of the cigarette in the ashtray. He sighed. It was time. He turned over the picture frame and put it in the candlelight where he could see her face more easily. Suddenly, the evil noises were not there anymore. Now, all he could hear was her voice. Soon, there would be nothing but her voice. He had planned for it. He felt the blood rush into his veins. His cheeks went upward. He straightened his back. He touched her face for the last time, and more decisive than ever, he opened the desk drawer. As he put his hand in the drawer, he felt a cold hard metal presence. He took his hand forward so that he could grab it. He took it out slowly. He took a glimpse of the clock. There was only ten seconds left; ten seconds till he could make all the noises go away. He rose his hand. A momentary loud noise to get to an everlasting silence.

## The Sword



**Matin Chenary**

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The old man sat on his wooden chair in the courtyard; a rusty longsword was resting on the side of his chair. The sword did not reflect the sunlight like it used to in its prime and it had little to do with the dark clouds covering the sun. It was nothing more than a dull piece of metal that served no purpose; a relic of a glorious past, much like the old warrior himself. As he sat there, the old man reflected on the passage of time. He remembered his days of youth and adventure when the world had seemed so vast with so many opportunities. But now, in his old age, his world had shrunk down to the size of a chair and he found comfort in watching the younger warriors training on the castle grounds.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a young boy's voice. He looked up and saw a boy, staring at him with wide, bright eyes. "Hello", the boy said, as he slowly approached the old man. "Is that sword yours?". "Aye lad,

she is mine", the old man replied. The boy went silent for a couple of minutes, with his gaze fixated on the rusty sword. Then he said, in a polite manner, "may I ask how you came to possess such a sword?". The old man's eyes brightened. It was as if a force of something almost indescribable moved through his blood and brought him back to the world of the living. He asked the boy to take a seat next to him and started telling him about his stories with great enthusiasm. Hours passed and the clouds were nowhere to be seen anymore but the old man was still talking; he was drowned in an ocean of old memories which now seemed as clear to him as the sky above. The young boy, running out of patience, asked if he could have a swing with the sword. The old man smiled gently and said "she was a beauty back in her youth but, alas, she is in no shape to serve you anymore." With a disappointed look on his face, the boy said goodbye and went on to join his friends.

The next morning, the sound of the local blacksmith's hammer could be heard across the streets. The boy was wandering the courtyard, practicing with a wooden sword. Then he caught a glimpse of the old man, sitting on his chair as before. But this time. The old man slowly stood up and started walking towards him. The boy was surprised when he was handed a now refined sword and couldn't contain his happiness. He looked the old man in the eye and received his approval with a nod, then he went on to show off his new blade to his friends, clutching it tightly in his hand. That sword might have been old and rusty, but it was held within a world of memories for the old man; yet what he felt upon giving up the sword was not sadness or loss but a sensation of hope and rejuvenation. In that simple act, he had found something greater, passing on his legacy to a new generation as if he himself was born again.



# Threshelf

## Challenger Deep



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For a moment imagine yourself to be in Neo's—the character from the movie *The Matrix*—shoes. From the world you thought to be the real, with a mere device attached to your brain, you are transferred into a new unfamiliar place called the “Construct”. There Morpheus informs you, that the world your body has occupied thus far, is nothing but an imaginary world. Or think yourself as a spectator of John Nash's life—portrayed by Russel Crowe in *The Beautiful Mind*—where you see that he lives in one dimension and yet two different plots that coalesce with one another is illuminated before you as the story progresses. Finally, you realize that most events or people, that you have seen thus far, are products of his own mind. How then, one might inquire, you can distinguish between what is real, and what is not, how can you discern what character or event is real or not. Moreover, how do you know which of these dual worlds that your mind/body inhabits is the actual?

These are the key questions that Caden Bosch, the protagonist of the novel *Challenger Deep*, tries to find answers of by traveling on board a ship that is sailing toward Marina Trench (The deepest point on earth). He and his crewmates are under the ever-watchful gaze of the captain and his eccentric parrot, who guides them in this arduous journey. However, we shall soon find out that things are not as simple as Caden would have us believe.

Neal Shusterman, the author of this exuberant novel has written one of the most seminal works of YA—young adult—fiction that captures not a plain description of what schizophrenia is, but the genuine experience of what it's like to suffer from a mental illness. His goal in writing of this book is to help tackle the numerous misconceptions and stereotypes that existed (and still exist) of the people who suffer from schizophrenia. As he himself attests, this is by no means a work of fiction. He tries his best to vividly illustrate, what is like to be



hospitalized in a mental hospital, that constant fear of anxiety, the numbness because of the medications, and interaction with people such as family, friends, doctors, fellow patients, and so on. In a way his novel is quite similar to the movie *the Matrix*, in a sense that in each depicted world we get to see how blurry the lines get between what is real or not.

Shusterman is not alone in writing about a character who suffers from a mental illness. Many authors such as Charles Dickens' *Life Adventure of Nicholas Nickleby*, *Barnaby Rudge*, Sylvia Platt's *Bell Jar*, John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Mark Haddon's *Curious Incident of Dog in Night-Time*, are amongst the many authors who have more or less tried to provide an extra layer of space to these characters so that they could function more as nuanced characters rather than being used as a mere plot catalysts. But then a question may rise on what purpose do the disabled characters serve in works of fiction? The answer to this question is pretty straightforward; they function as a metaphorical artifact that might serve a political, social, and cultural position. Be as it may, how then can disability be used metaphorically in art that there be a hidden political agenda behind its depiction? To show the peripheral position of their Irish subjects, an English newspaper by the name of *Punch*, depicted an Irish man with a scooped back, this Othered Irish is a clear example of how disability can have multi-faceted meaning beyond the surface of corporeal lack.

The disability studies provide the necessary framework to answer the earlier question more fundamentally, by using "Narrative Prosthesis" discussed at length by Sharon Snyder and David Mitchel in their book of the same name. What do they mean by it is that whenever there exist a body that is lacking or in other words aberrant, there need be a compensation to mask or fix this unwanted deviancy and give the text an illusionary semblance of wholeness, that is where

prosthesis enters the fray. The way we can map this "prostheticizing" effect according to them is: first, a deviance or something that makes a character stand out—like a lameness or feeble-mindedness—that is exposed to the reader; second, a narrative in order to justify its own existence brings forth an explanation of the root and formative consequences of the said disability; third, the deviance from the margin of the story is brought into the center of the story to come; and fourth, the rest of the story shall try to somehow fix this deviance or rehabilitee it in some way. This last step of 'fixing' a deviance may include an utter destruction of the thing that marks their difference by a 'cure' or complete annihilation from the story. To better understand this mapping let us examine the following examples: Dickens' rendition of the character Smike in *The Life Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, clearly fails to encapsulate the experience of someone who suffers from intellectual disability. Because, as a disabled character, he is slowly disintegrated from the narrative, by getting demoted from central to a peripheral position, and ultimately getting removed from the story altogether by death. This erasure was inevitable for Smike; since from the beginning to the end he did not make any mutual bond with anyone, not even with Nicholas. Smike's wish was always to be his "hard working servant", without any payment. While Nicholas calls for an egalitarian relationship between the two. However, Smike is always on the receiving side which reduces him to that of a needy dependent. Nicholas is always present for Smike when he is depressed and encourages him to express his troubles to him. Yet, Smike never has this level of access to Nicholas' innermost thoughts and troubles. The characterization of Smike shifts excessively, for at times he is accepted by the community as a participating member, but other times being a marginalized other. He is a pathetic victim of abuse who runs away, an actor for a play, sometimes companion and listener of Mrs.

Nickleby, a misfortunate soul who gets into an unrequited love, and finally an ill invalid, all of which limits his role. His role was always peripheral—that of a “spectacle” without an agency, of misery that demanded and provoked compassionate acts and words, albeit mixed with pity. Thus, his presence in the novel is nothing more than a spark necessary to garner the attention of readers. On the other hand, Faulkner’s portrayal of Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury* takes a drastic turn. His narrative is structured to be vague and fragmentary where timelines submerge into one another, to the point that Churchwell has called Benjy’s section “reduction of the act of reading itself”, it is as if narrative itself has become disabled and because of it we as the reader must act as a detective and piece the puzzles together to understand what is entailing in this novel. Moreover, since Benjy is an autistic character and as such uses synesthesia to interact with his surroundings, Faulkner is challenging the credibility of narrators whose sensory faculties are limited. Both these characters serve the purpose of tackling the prevalent misconceptions that surrounded mental disabilities at the time which labeled them all as ‘idiot’.

Moving on to the story of the novel; it revolves around the schizophrenic protagonist by the name of Caden Bosch, who is seemingly living a normal high school life. In parallel with this story of a normal teenager living in the United States, the reader is also introduced to another plotline within the original story, which is mentioned earlier: Caden journeying on board a ship toward Marina Trench. The two key concepts of actual and fantasy pertinent to this novel are of high importance, because of Shusterman’s constant fiddling and divorce from reality by moving the storyline in the boundaries of the real and not real. A first-time reader might be confused to ascertain which world depicted by Shusterman is the actual one (real), and which one is the product of Caden’s own mind (fantasy). Ultimately, the reader is

offered a free ride on a roller-coaster as Caden unfolds what is happening in this voyage with each wave of chapters and seeks out the answers himself.

Literature embraces the trap of difference that socially stigmatized condition provides. Once a narrative establishes the exoticness of a disabled character, it will then leave it behind as matter of biological fact. The disability of a character marks him/her as “unlike” the rest of fiction’s characters, and when it is put in the pedestal, they become a case of special interest. Disability cannot be in same rank and file of the “norm(als)”, and, therefore, they are either left behind or punished for the lack of conformity. It is by referring to prostheticizing effect that it is possible to detect such mishaps in any works of fiction. *Challenger Deep* is not such story, but it is a story of a character whose first life account is shown to be a real case of a schizophrenic state, and yet within the frame of the main narrative that exists in the realm of the real, there exists another story, produced by the unreal fantastical element; Caden’s schizophrenic mind. Perhaps, what is his mind trying to utter is more than just a noise, maybe it is a metaphorical space whose message is more real than what we are led to believe. Nevertheless, what is feasible is that it is the unreal psychosis of a schizophrenic protagonist that is being used here as a conduit with which answers reveal themselves the closer Caden gets to the bottom of Marina Trench.

# Game Studies

The game industry has grown significantly in the past few decades and yet there is a consensus that video games are shallow and pointless entertainment for younger audiences. Game studies have chosen the goal of changing such standpoints and it is our duty to contribute to this exciting development in academia, both as students and gamers. Since Game studies is a recent phenomenon compared to other critical categories like media studies and literary studies, it is only natural to expect works that aim to explore the fundamental aspects of video games, like the interesting essay you can read in this issue of Threshold Journal. Thus, we encourage others to share with us and our readers their insights on their understanding of video games, narration, direction, the art of making these works, and any other critical examination that can help us have a general and comprehensive understanding of games.

Moreover, just as we see many academic works done on different readings of literary, cinematic, or any other kind of artwork, we encourage critical writing done on specific video games. Using literary criticism as the framing background theory can be a good start but those who are interested to delve deeper into the world of video games and game studies can work on newer trends in this field and even introduce these trends to us. With the growth of adaptations in the past few years, the study of such works can be another interesting subject to be published. While we are still chastised for our interest in video games, game studies is the best way to change the negative stand against them and inform others of one the most innovative forms of art in the contemporary era.

**Sepehr Karimi**

# How AI can Revolutionize NPCs in Singleplayer Games

Ali Ghorbani

Singleplayer games have been experiencing a decline in popularity in recent years due to the rise of online multiplayer games. However, advancements in AI technology have the potential to revolutionize singleplayer games by offering a more captivating and dynamic gaming experience compared to traditional NPC design.

By creating more responsive and interactive non-playable characters (NPCs), AI can enhance gameplay mechanics, replicate online game features, and provide a less lonely gaming experience. Despite potential drawbacks such as unintended narrative consequences and excessive realism, careful programming and the use of Bertolt Brecht's distancing effect can mitigate these issues.

This paper explores the limitations of traditional NPC design, the benefits and potential drawbacks of AI-driven NPCs, and how developers can overcome hardware limitations to create a more immersive and enjoyable gaming experience.

## 1. Introduction

Singleplayer games have been the standard of the gaming industry for decades, providing players with a unique and immersive gaming experience. Unlike multiplayer games, which often focus on competition and social interaction, singleplayer games offer players the chance to explore complex game worlds at their own pace, engaging with a variety of characters and completing quests and challenges. Singleplayer games are an opportunity for players to lose themselves in a world of their choosing, without the distractions or pressures of other players. They offer a form of entertainment that can be enjoyed in solitude, providing a respite from the demands of daily life. Moreover, Singleplayer games have played a significant role in shaping the gaming industry, with numerous beloved titles like Bioshock, Half-Life, and Resident Evil. Singleplayer games

have a special place in the hearts of gamers and continue to be a vital part of the industry.

despite singleplayer games been the traditional way of gaming, their popularity has waned in recent years as online games have taken center stage. Many gamers have shifted their focus to multiplayer titles, drawn to the social interaction and competitive gameplay that they offer. This trend has led to a decline in the production of singleplayer games, as developers prioritize the development of online games that generate more revenue. However, this shift has left a void in the gaming industry, as many players still crave the immersive and narrative-driven experiences that singleplayer games offer. The incorporation of AI-driven NPCs could be the key to revive singleplayer games; providing players with more dynamic and engaging gameplay experiences that can compete multiplayer games. By leveraging AI technology to create NPCs that are more responsive, intelligent, and lifelike, developers can create singleplayer games that are more immersive and engaging than ever before, and recapture the attention of gamers who have turned to multiplayer titles.

## 2. The role of NPCs in singleplayer videogames

Non-playable characters, or NPCs, are computer-controlled entities that interact with the player in a game world. NPCs can take on a variety of roles in singleplayer videogames, from providing information and guidance to the player to serving as allies or enemies in combat. In many singleplayer games, NPCs play a vital role in creating a sense of immersion and narrative progression, serving as key characters in the game's story and helping to bring the game world to life. NPCs can also provide gameplay challenges and opportunities, offering the player quests to complete, puzzles to solve, or combat encounters to overcome. The design and implementation of NPCs is a critical aspect of singleplayer game development, as NPCs are

often one of the primary means through which players interact with the game world and progress through the game's story.

NPCs are a crucial element in creating immersive and engaging game worlds in singleplayer videogames. By providing a range of interactive, responsive, and believable characters, NPCs can help to build a sense of a living, breathing world, where the player's actions and choices have meaningful consequences. The presence of NPCs can also enhance the player's sense of agency, as they provide opportunities for the player to make decisions and impact the game world in meaningful ways. Well-designed NPCs can also serve as key components of a game's story and narrative, providing the player with a deeper understanding of the game world and its inhabitants. Overall, the inclusion of NPCs in singleplayer games can help to create a more immersive and engaging experience, drawing the player further into the game world and providing a greater sense of connection with the game's story, characters, and the game as a whole.

## 3. The limitations of traditional NPC design

While NPCs play an essential role in creating immersive and engaging game worlds, traditional NPC design has its limitations. In many singleplayer games, NPCs are often characterized by scripted behavior, meaning that their actions and responses are predetermined by the game's developers. This can result in NPCs that feel static and unresponsive to the player's actions, limiting the sense of agency and immersion that the player experiences. Additionally, traditional NPC design often involves limited interactions with the player, such as providing quest objectives or engaging in basic combat. This can lead to a sense of repetition and predictability, as the player encounters the same types of NPCs and interactions repeatedly throughout the game. As singleplayer games continue to evolve and

players' expectations grow more, the limitations of traditional NPC design have become increasingly apparent, highlighting the need for more advanced and dynamic NPC systems.

The limitations of traditional NPC design can have a significant impact on the player's experience, detracting from the game's overall immersion and engagement. NPCs with scripted behavior can feel robotic and predictable, taking away from the sense of exploration and discovery that many players seek in singleplayer games. Similarly, limited interactions with NPCs can lead to repetitive gameplay and a lack of variety, making the game feel stale and frustrating. When NPCs fail to respond to the player's actions or provide engaging challenges, the game can feel unresponsive and unsatisfying, diminishing the player's sense of accomplishment and investment in the game world. As such, these limitations can make the gaming experience less enjoyable and more frustrating for players, leading to a decrease in overall engagement and interest in games.

The limitations of traditional NPC design can also reduce a game's replayability, as players may become bored or frustrated with the lack of variety and engagement provided by the game's NPCs. If NPCs have scripted behavior and limited interactions, players may quickly learn the patterns and responses of these characters, making subsequent playthroughs feel repetitive and easy to predict. In addition, the lack of variability in NPC behavior and interaction can make it difficult for players to develop a sense of connection or investment in the game world, reducing their desire to return to the game and explore its narrative and gameplay mechanics. Ultimately, these limitations can lead to a decrease in the game's replayability, reducing the game's value and long-term appeal for players.

#### 4. How AI can enhance NPC design

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform NPC design by creating more dynamic and responsive characters that can

adapt to the player's actions and behaviors. With AI, NPCs can learn from the player's actions and adjust their behavior accordingly, creating a more personalized and immersive experience. AI-powered NPCs can also provide more diverse and interesting interactions, such as engaging in realistic conversations, reacting to environmental stimuli, and adapting their behavior to changing circumstances.

By using machine learning algorithms, AI-powered NPCs can continue to evolve and develop over time, creating a more engaging and responsive game world. Overall, the use of AI in NPC design has the potential to revolutionize singleplayer games, providing a more dynamic and engaging gameplay experience that can adapt to the player's needs and preferences.

A potential drawback of playing singleplayer games is the feeling of isolation and loneliness that players may experience when they explore game worlds on their own. However, AI-powered NPCs have the potential to make players feel less alone by providing more realistic and engaging social interactions. NPCs can be programmed to provide more dynamic and realistic social interactions, such as engaging in realistic conversations, forming relationships with the player, and providing emotional support. Additionally, AI-powered NPCs can be programmed to provide more diverse and interesting interactions, such as reacting to environmental stimuli or adapting their behavior to changing circumstances, creating a more immersive and engaging game world. By using AI to create more realistic and engaging NPCs, game developers can provide a more dynamic and social gameplay experience, making singleplayer games feel less lonely.

One of the reasons online games have become so popular is the sense of community and competition they provide, as players can interact and compete with each other in real-time. However, the use of AI in NPC design has the potential to replicate some of the social and



competitive aspects of online games in singleplayer games. AI-powered NPCs can be programmed to provide more challenging and competitive gameplay experiences, such as adapting to the player's skill level and providing more realistic opponents. Additionally, AI-powered NPCs can provide more dynamic and realistic social interactions, such as forming alliances or rivalries with the player, creating a sense of social connection within the game world. By using AI to replicate some of the aspects of online games in singleplayer games, game developers can provide a more engaging and competitive gameplay experience that can appeal to a wider range of players.

AI-driven NPCs can also enhance the realism of the game world by performing tasks and activities that make the game environment feel more alive. This can include farming crops, hunting animals, or repairing buildings, and can make the game world feel more believable and engaging.

Also, it is worth delving deeper into how the use of AI-driven NPCs can vary across different genres of games, as the design and implementation of these NPCs should be tailored to fit the specific requirements and gameplay mechanics of each genre. For example, in role-playing games, AI-driven NPCs can be utilized to create immersive, believable worlds with complex storylines and quests, while in action games, AI can be used to create more challenging and varied enemies. Moreover, in strategy games, AI can be employed to create more intelligent and responsive opponents that can adapt to the player's strategies, making the gameplay experience more engaging and enjoyable. Thus, understanding the unique demands and characteristics of each gaming genre can help game developers better leverage the potential of AI-driven NPCs to enhance the overall gaming experience for players.

One recent paper that demonstrated the potential of AI-driven NPCs in game design is

"Generative Agents: Interactive Simulacra of Human Behavior." In this paper, the authors introduced generative agents, computational software agents that simulate believable human behavior. They put these agents inside a simulated Sims-like world and observed how they interacted with each other.

One of the most thrilling and groundbreaking results of the study was when one of the AI-generated characters autonomously decided to throw a Valentine's Day party and sent out invitations to fellow agents. This impressive display showcased the agents' ability to dynamically spread invitations, forge new relationships, and effectively coordinate social activities; while other characters deciding if they are going to the party or not. Such advancements in AI-driven NPC design have the potential to revolutionize the way we interact with video games, creating truly immersive and lifelike virtual worlds.

This paper highlights the potential of AI-driven NPCs to enhance game worlds by making them more dynamic and immersive. With the continued development of machine learning and natural language processing, we can expect even more sophisticated and complex AI-driven NPCs in future games. These NPCs could provide players with more engaging and meaningful experiences, from creating more realistic and believable game worlds to enabling new forms of gameplay and interaction. As such, AI-driven NPCs have the potential to bring singleplayer games back to the forefront of the gaming industry.

### 5. Potential drawbacks of AI-driven NPCs

While AI-driven NPCs have the potential to enhance singleplayer games, there are also potential drawbacks to their use. One concern is the risk of unintended consequences. For example, NPCs may behave in ways that were not anticipated by the game developers, potentially leading to glitches or other issues that affect the player's experience. Additionally, there

is a risk that NPCs could be programmed to behave in ways that feel too human-like, potentially leading to ethical concerns or discomfort among players. For instance, if an NPC behaves in a way that is too realistic or empathetic, players may feel uneasy about forming relationships with them. It is important for game developers to carefully consider these issues when creating AI-driven NPCs to ensure that they enhance the player's experience without causing unintended negative consequences.

While there are potential drawbacks to using AI-driven NPCs in singleplayer games, these concerns can be addressed through careful design and testing. Game developers can take a proactive approach to mitigating potential issues by conducting extensive testing and incorporating player feedback during the development process.

For example, one way to address concerns about unintended consequences is to program the AI with specific goals and limitations, such as not being able to harm the player or destroy important game elements. Additionally, game developers can design AI behaviors to be modular, allowing them to quickly make changes or address issues as they arise.

Using the distancing effect, also known as *Verfremdungseffekt*, *V-Effekt*, or alienation effect, is another effective method to alleviate concerns surrounding the use of AI-driven NPCs. Bertolt Brecht, a renowned German playwright and poet, originally developed this concept. The technique has been commonly employed in literature, theater, and other forms of art to generate a feeling of disconnection or detachment between the audience and the artwork.

In the context of video games, *Verfremdungseffekt* can be used to remind players that the NPCs they are interacting with are not real people and are limited by the programming and design of the game. This can

help reduce the risk of players becoming too emotionally invested in the NPCs, which could lead to unintended consequences or negative experiences.

Examples of *Verfremdungseffekt* in video games include using stylized graphics or animations for NPCs, creating dialogue that is intentionally robotic or unnatural, or breaking the fourth wall by having NPCs acknowledge that they are part of a video game.

Ultimately, the key to addressing potential drawbacks of AI-driven NPCs is through a combination of careful design, testing, and player feedback. By taking a proactive approach to these concerns, game developers can ensure that AI-driven NPCs enhance the singleplayer gaming experience without detracting from it.

## 6. Hardware limitations

Hardware limitations can be a significant issue in game development, especially when it comes to creating more advanced AI-driven NPCs. This is because AI processing requires a significant amount of computational power, which may not be available on older hardware or less powerful gaming systems.

For example, if a game developer wants to create highly detailed and responsive NPCs that can adapt to a wide range of player actions and behaviors, they may need to use more advanced AI algorithms that require a lot of processing power. If the player's hardware is not capable of handling these calculations, the game may not run smoothly or may not be able to render these interactions accurately, leading to a less immersive and engaging gaming experience.

There are several ways to overcome hardware limitations when using AI in singleplayer games. One approach is to use pre-trained AI models that are already optimized to run on lower-end hardware. By leveraging pre-trained models, game developers can reduce the amount of computing resources needed to run complex AI algorithms. Additionally, using

cloud services can help to offload some of the processing required for AI, allowing games to run smoothly on hardware with lower processing power.

Another way to overcome hardware limitations is to optimize hardware specifically for AI applications. Graphics Processing Units (GPUs), for example, can be optimized for AI algorithms and used to accelerate the training and execution of AI models. Some companies, such as Nvidia, have released GPUs that are specifically designed for AI applications, making it easier for game developers to implement AI-driven NPCs in their games.

Optimizing the AI algorithms themselves can also help to reduce hardware requirements. By streamlining code and reducing unnecessary computations, developers can make AI algorithms run more efficiently on lower-end hardware.

Finally, a dedicated hardware component designed specifically for running AI could be added to computers. This would allow games to take advantage of the latest AI techniques without requiring extensive hardware upgrades.

In conclusion, there are several ways to overcome hardware limitations when using AI in singleplayer games. By leveraging pre-trained models, using cloud services, optimizing hardware and AI algorithms, and potentially adding dedicated hardware components, game developers can create immersive and engaging game worlds with dynamic and responsive NPCs, even on hardware with lower processing power.

## 7. Conclusion

In this discussion, we explored the role of AI in enhancing the singleplayer gaming experience by creating dynamic and responsive NPCs. We discussed the limitations of traditional NPC design, including scripted behavior and limited interactions, and how these limitations can detract from the player's experience and reduce

replayability. We then explored how AI can be used to create more immersive and engaging game worlds, teach gamers gameplay mechanics, replicate online game features, and make playing singleplayer games feel less lonely.

However, we also discussed potential drawbacks of AI-driven NPC design, such as unintended consequences and creating NPCs that feel too human-like. To mitigate these concerns, game developers can use the distancing effect to create a sense of separation between the player and the NPCs. We also discussed how hardware limitations can be an issue and how using pre-trained AI, cloud services, optimizing hardware, and AI algorithms can help overcome these limitations.

In the future, we can expect further developments in AI-driven NPC design, such as increased use of machine learning and language processing. Overall, AI can play a significant role in bringing singleplayer games back to the center of attention by creating more immersive and dynamic game worlds.

# From Pixels to Protagonists in 50 Years: A Brief History of Storytelling in Video Games



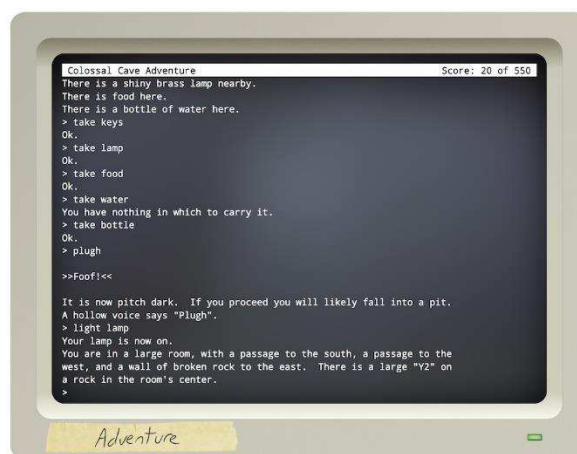
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Video games have come a long way since their birth in the 1950s and 1960s. From simple simulations of tennis and space battles to immersive narratives that rival Hollywood movies, video games have evolved into a powerful medium for storytelling. In the early days of gaming, the focus was on creating games with simple mechanics that would keep players engaged for as long as possible. The notion of video games as a storytelling medium was still years away. In the following years, however, the world of gaming would change dramatically as developers began to create characters, stories, and universes that players could truly get lost in. But how did this transformation happen? And what are the opportunities for video game storytellers today? In this article, we will take a journey through the history of storytelling in video games, and how it has evolved over time.

## The 1970s and 1980s: The Emergence of Text-Based Adventures

In the 1970s, video games were still in their infancy. Most games were simplistic in design and had no narrative to speak of. However, in 1975, Will Crowther created a game called Colossal Cave Adventure. This



game, which was inspired by Crowther's own caving experiences, was a text-based adventure that tasked players with exploring a mysterious underground cave system. Players had to navigate their way through the game by

typing commands into a terminal (similar to typing in a chat window). Although the game had no graphics, sound, or music, it was a hit with players and set the stage for the development of text-based adventure games.

In the early 1980s, Infocom released a series of text-based adventure games that were hugely popular. Games like *Zork Adventure* (1980-2), *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1984), or *A Mind Forever Voyaging* (1985), “were the ones that started it all” (Fernández-Vara 23). They became cult classics and have left a lasting impact on the video game industry, shaping the adventure game genre as we know it today. Many of the gameplay mechanics and storytelling elements pioneered by these games can still be seen in modern-day titles, serving as proof of their influence and legacy. These games were groundbreaking in that they had detailed plots, well-rounded characters, and complex puzzles. Players were no longer just trying to beat high scores; they were trying to solve mysteries and uncover secrets.

Other companies also got in on the text-based adventure game craze in the 1980s.

Sierra On-Line, for example, released a series of games called the Hi-Res Adventure series, which were text-based adventures with simple graphics. One of the most popular games in the series was *King's Quest* (1987), which combined text-based adventuring with graphical elements to create a unique gameplay experience.

Text-based games were also easily portable to multiple platforms, thereby increasing sales potential in a crowded market (Jerz 12). As the 1980s progressed, text-based adventure games began to incorporate more sophisticated graphics and sound, which paved the way for the graphical adventure games of the 1990s. When the PC and Mac emerged as the dominant hardware platforms in the late 1980s, both the aesthetic and economic advantages of text-based adventures evaporated, according to Jerz (12). However, the legacy of the text-based adventure games of the 1980s can still be felt in modern-



day games, particularly in the adventure and puzzle genres.

### The 1990s: The Golden Age of the Graphical Adventure

The 1990s saw the rise of graphical adventure games that used point-and-click interfaces, animated cutscenes, voice acting, and cinematic storytelling. Some of the most influential titles of this era include *Chrono Trigger* (1995), *Myst* (1993), *Metal Gear Solid* (1998), *Half-Life* (1998), *Grim Fandango* (1998), and *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (1998).

These games often combined humor, mystery, fantasy, and science fiction elements to create immersive and memorable worlds. Graphical adventure games also experimented with different styles of gameplay, such as branching dialogue options (where the player can choose what to say or how to respond to other characters), 3D graphics and animation, puzzle-solving mechanics, and moral choices. However, as technology advanced and 3D graphics became more popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, graphical adventure games faced a decline in popularity and sales. Many developers shifted their focus to other genres that could better showcase the new capabilities of hardware and software. Nevertheless, graphical adventure games have inspired many modern-day games that use narrative-driven gameplay and interactive storytelling techniques to captivate players on both an affective and cognitive level. Some examples of these games are *The Walking Dead*, *Life is Strange*, *The Last of Us*, and *Heavy Rain*.

### The 2000s and 2010s: The Power of Cinematic and Emotional Storytelling

The 2000s and 2010s marked a new era of storytelling in video games, as developers explored new ways of delivering narratives and

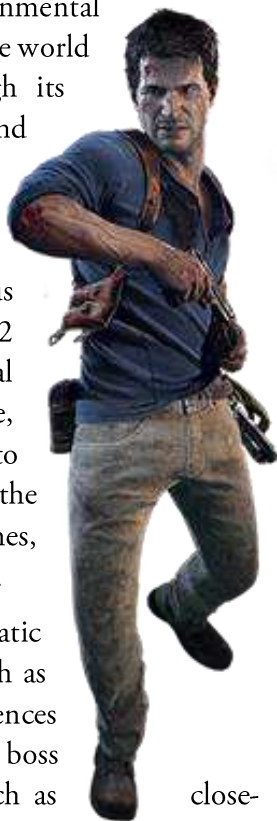


creating emotional impacts. Some of the trends that emerged in these decades include:

- The use of nonlinear and emergent storytelling, where the player's actions and choices shape the story and its outcomes. Games such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (2011), *Dishonored* (2012), *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (2017), and *Red Dead Redemption 2* (2018) allowed players to explore open worlds, interact with various characters and factions, and make moral decisions that had consequences for the game world and the plot.

- The use of environmental storytelling, where the game world itself tells a story through its design, details, and atmosphere. Games such as *Half-Life 2* (2004), *Portal Series* (2007), *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005), and *Silent Hill 2* (2001) used environmental cues such as architecture, graffiti, posters, and music to convey information about the setting, past events, themes, and characters of the game.

- The wide use of cinematic storytelling techniques such as cutscenes, scripted sequences (such as chase scenes or boss fights), camera angles (such as close-ups or zooms), lighting effects (such as shadows or lens flares), sound effects (such as voiceovers or music), and motion capture (for realistic animations). Several acclaimed games, including *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* (2001), *Final Fantasy X* (2001), *Resident Evil 4* (2005), *God of War* (2018), *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* (2007), *Red Dead Redemption* (2010), and *The Last of Us* (2013) effectively used these techniques to create dramatic moments.



- The use of interactive storytelling techniques such as dialogue trees (where the player can explore different topics or questions with other characters), multiple endings (Which means that “there are different storylines that can lead to either of the defined endings based on the decisions the player makes” (Amiri 10)), moral dilemmas (where the player has to make a difficult decision that affects other characters or themselves), and dynamic relationships (where the player can influence how other characters feel about them or each other). Games such as *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* (2003), *Fable* (2004), *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), *Heavy Rain* (2010), *Fahrenheit: Indigo Prophecy* (2005), *The Walking Dead* (2012), *Life is Strange* (2015), *Detroit: Become Human* (2018), and *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (2015) used these techniques to create complex characters.

- The use of experimental storytelling techniques such as metafiction (where the game acknowledges its own fictionality or breaks the fourth wall), unreliable narration (where the game misleads or deceives the player about what is true or real), nonlinearity (where the game does not follow a linear chronological order), and intertextuality (where the game references or alludes to other works of art or culture). Games such as *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* (2002), *Braid* (2008), *The Stanley Parable* (2011), *Undertale* (2015), *BioShock Infinite* (2013), and *Her Story* (2015) used these techniques to create surprising twists, challenging puzzles, and thought-provoking themes.

With the availability of more advanced technologies, video games became more diverse in terms of the media used for context creation. Some games like the *Max Payne*, *Half-Life*, or *Mafia* series are more plot-based than others. Some like *Fahrenheit*, try to create the experience of an interactive film. *Max Payne*, which is guided by a typical noir plot,



reads/plays like a graphic novel, complete with generic cutscenes (Mukherjee 100).

The dawn of the 21st century ignited a revolution in the way stories were told in the realm of video games. A creative renaissance saw developers emboldened by the power of technology to explore novel approaches to storytelling. A plethora of techniques was employed to transport players to undiscovered heights of intellectual engagement. This shift heralded the arrival of complex characters, intricate themes, and engaging conversations that challenged players to think deeply. With each new game came a new opportunity to experience something unique and groundbreaking, a chance to step into worlds that were more immersive and purposeful than ever before.

As video games have grown in popularity and influence over the past few decades, they have also become more diverse and inclusive in their storytelling. This shift reflects the changing social and political landscape of our time, and it has influenced the way people from different cultures and backgrounds see themselves and others. In the early days of video games, protagonists were often portrayed as generic, white, male characters. However, as the medium has matured, developers have recognized the importance of inclusivity and the value of representing a wider range of cultures, identities, and experiences. Today, players can find games that tell stories from a variety of perspectives, including those of women, people of color, and individuals with disabilities. These games not only reflect the diversity of our world but also offer a platform for marginalized voices to be heard.

While there was a time we could trivialize gaming as simply a leisure-time activity that has limited effect on what we deemed as constructive pursuits, now, however, research points to the importance of play as part of learning through cultural practice, and the need to make culturally

responsive and inclusive learning a critical part of learning environments (Richard 40).

Horizon Zero Dawn (2017) is a standout example of a game that brilliantly portrays cultural diversity and inclusivity in video game storytelling. It is set in a post-apocalyptic world where humanity has regressed to tribal societies that hunt robotic creatures. The game's protagonist,

Aloy, is a young woman who is an outcast from her tribe and must seek answers about her past, while also dealing with the dangers of the world around



her. One of the most impressive aspects of the game is the attention to detail in creating the different tribes and their cultures. Each tribe has its unique beliefs, customs, and traditions, which are reflected in their clothing, architecture, and social hierarchies. The game also features a diverse cast of characters, including people of different ages, races, and genders, all of whom contribute to the game's immersive world.

By embracing diversity in storytelling, video games have the potential to challenge societal norms and prejudices, promote empathy and understanding, and inspire positive change. As the industry continues to evolve, we can expect to see even more meaningful and impactful narratives that reflect the diverse range of human experiences.

The future of video game storytelling holds endless possibilities. With the arrival of virtual and augmented reality, players can now fully immerse themselves in the game world and interact with the narrative in unprecedented

ways. As AI and machine learning become more sophisticated, we may even see games that adapt to the player's choices and create truly personalized experiences. Beyond technological advancements, the future of video game storytelling also lies in the hands of the diverse and passionate community of developers, writers, and creatives who push the boundaries of what is possible. As new voices and perspectives are brought to the forefront, we can expect to see even more culturally diverse stories

that challenge our preconceptions and broaden our understanding of the world around us. In the ever-changing landscape of entertainment media, video game storytelling has proven to be a formidable force. As it continues to evolve and grow, it will undoubtedly remain a vital and influential medium for storytelling, inspiring new generations of players and creators alike.

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# Translation

This section is dedicated to the publishing of your English or Persian translations of poetry, short stories, essays, and original essays in the field of translation studies. We aim to foster a community of translators, authors, and scholars working together to push the boundaries of literary translation and translation studies; It is through the art of translation that we access the wealth of human expression, bridging the gaps between different languages, cultures, and time periods.

Threshold welcomes authors of all ages & backgrounds. The editorial team is committed to providing feedback & guiding authors in developing their ideas, preparing them for publication & providing support during the process of submission.

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We are looking for exceptional translations of poetry and short stories that capture the essence of the original works while also conveying the cultural and linguistic nuances to a wider audience. We welcome and encourage submissions that showcase lesser-known voices in world literature.

## **Literary Essay Translations**

The Translation Section also welcomes translations of important literary essays that have made a significant impact on the field of literature, translation, or cultural studies. We are particularly interested in essays that have not yet been translated into Persian or have been translated only in part.

## **Original Essays on Translation Studies**

In addition to translated works, the Translation Section seeks original essays on current and emerging topics in translation studies. Some of the recent trends in this field focus on technology and translation, such as machine translation, translation memory, and corpus-based translation studies; there's also interest in real-world practice such as the practical aspects of translation and the translation profession. More research focuses on the working conditions of translators, translator education and training, and relationships between translators, clients, and end users.

We look forward to receiving & reading your exceptional translations and essays, and to sharing them with our community of readers. Together, let us explore the rich world of literary translation and create a space for cross-cultural conversation and collaboration.

**Armin Siamizadeh**

## Excerpts from "Elizabeth and Her German Garden" written by Elizabeth von Arnim



Haniye Mahmoodi

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May 7th. - I love my garden. I am writing in it now in the late afternoon loveliness, much interrupted by the mosquitoes and the temptation to look at all the glories of the new green leaves washed half an hour ago in a cold shower. Two owls are perched near me, and are carrying on a long conversation that I enjoy as much as any warbling of nightingales. The gentleman owl says, and she answers from her tree a little way off, beautifully assenting to and completing her lord's remark [...] They say the same thing over and over again so emphatically that I think it must be something nasty about me; but I shall not let myself be frightened away by the sarcasm of owls. [...]

من عاشق باغم هستم هم اکنون در  
بعدازظهری دلنشین مشغول نوشتنم و رشته  
خیالم مدام به سبب حضور هفتم می.--- پشه  
ها و وسوسهی نگاه به درخشش برگهای تازه سبز  
شسته شده در شرشر باران از هم گسسته  
میشود. دو جغد در حالی نغمه کنان در کنارم  
نشسته اند که آوایشان همچون چهچه ی بلبلان  
برایم خوشایند است. آقای جغد با جفتش که بر  
درختی آن سو تر نشسته است سخن میگوید و  
خانم جغد به زیبایی سخنانش را تصدیق و تکمیل  
می.کند آنها چنان با جدیت به گفت و گویشان  
ادامه میدهند که گمان میبرم درباره چیز  
ناخوشایندی راجع به من صحبت میکنند؛ اما  
نباید به خاطر ریشخند جغدها به دلم ترس راه  
دهم.

There are so many bird-cherries round me, great trees with branches sweeping the grass, and they are so wreathed just now with white blossoms and tenderest green that the garden looks like a wedding.

درختان گیلاس بسیاری در اطرافم هستند؛  
آنچنان تنومند که شاخه هایشان به سمت چمنها  
خم شده و آنها را غبار رومی میکنند. شکوفه های

سفید و برگهای سبز لطیف چنان به دور شاخهها حلقه زدهاند که گویی در باغ عروسی برپاست.

I never saw such masses of them; they seemed to fill the place. Even across a little stream that bounds the garden on the east, and right in the middle of the cornfield beyond, there is an immense one, a picture of grace and glory against the cold blue of the spring sky.

تا کنون هیچ وقت این چنین گردهمایی از آنها ندیده بودم به نظر میرسید که فضا را آکنده کرده باشند. حتی در آن سوی جویبار کوچکی که قسمت شرقی باغ را احاطه کرده و درست آن طرف تر در میان مزرعه ی ذرت تصویری باشکوه از زیبایی و جلال در برابر آبی سرد آسمان بهاری نمایان است.

My garden is surrounded by cornfields and meadows, and beyond are great stretches of sandy heath and pine forests, and where the forests leave off the bare heath begins again; but the forests are beautiful in their lofty, pink-stemmed vastness, far overhead the crowns of soft-est gray-green, and underfoot a bright green whortleberry carpet, and everywhere the breathless silence; and the bare heaths are beautiful too, for one can see across them into eternity almost, and to go out on to them with one's face towards the setting sun is like going into the very presence of God.

باغ من با مزارع ذرت و چمنزار احاطه شده است کمی آن سوتر پهنه های وسیعی از جنگلهای شنی خاربن و کاج وجود دارد؛ آنجا که جنگلها به پایان میرسند کاجهای برهنه باز آغاز میشوند اما جنگلها در گستره ی عظیم و ارغوانی رنگ خود زیبا هستند آنجا که بر فراز شان قله های سبز و خاکستری رنگ و زیر پایشان فرشی به رنگ سبز روشن از تمشکهای وحشی انداخته شده و سکوتی نفس گیر در همه جا حکم فرماست کاجهای برهنه نیز زیبا هستند، چرا که

هر کسی میتواند از لابه لای آنها به گونههای جاودانگی را بنگرد و عبور از آنها با چهره ای به سوی غروب آفتاب، مانند رفتن به درگاه خداوند است.

In the middle of this plain is the oasis of bird-cherries and greenery where I spend my happy days, and in the middle of the oasis is the gray stone house with many gables where I pass my reluctant nights.

در میانه ی این دشت واحه ای از درختان گیللاس و چمنزار وجود دارد، جایی که من روزهای شادمانیام را در آن سپری کنم. در میان، واحه خانه ی سنگی خاکستری با زیرشیروانی های بسیار وجود دارد جایی که شب های بی رغبتیام میرا در آن میگذرانم.

The house is very old, and has been added to at various times. It was a convent before the Thirty Years' War, and the vaulted chapel, with its brick floor worn by pious peasant knees, is now used as a hall. Gustavus Adolphus and his Swedes passed through more than once, as is duly recorded in archives still preserved, for we are on what was then the high-road between Sweden and Brandenburg the unfortunate. The Lion of the North was no doubt an estimable person and acted wholly up to his convictions, but he must have sadly upset the peaceful nuns, who were not without convictions of their own, sending them out onto the wide, empty plain to piteously seek some life to replace the life of silence here.

خانه بسیار متروکه است و در طول زمانهای مختلف بخشهایی به آن اضافه شده است. خانه قبل از جنگ سی ساله یک صومعه بود. کلیسای کوچک طاقدار که کف خشتیاش با رد زانوی دهقانان پرهیزگار پوشیده شده است، اکنون دالانی بیش نیست. از آنجا که این کلیسا پیش از این شاهراه بین سوئد و برندنبرگ بوده،

گوستاوس آدولفوس و پیروان سوئدی اش همواره از آن گذشته اند. او که شخصی تحسین برانگیز و دنباله رو عقایدش بود به شیر شمال شناخته میشد. اما، به طرزی ناراحت کننده به آزار راهبان آرامی میپرداخت که عقاید خود را داشتند پس آنان را به دشتهای پهناور و خالی از سکنه میفرستاد تا به طور مشقت باری در جست و جوی زندگی به سر ببرند و زندگی خموش در اینجا را با آن معاوضه کنند.

From nearly all the windows of the house I can look out across the plain, with no obstacle in the shape of a hill, right away to a blue line of distant forest, and on the west side uninterruptedly to the setting sun — nothing but a green, rolling plain, with a sharp edge against the sunset.

کمابیش از تمام پنجره های خانه میتوانم امتداد دشت را بدون اینکه هیچ تپه ای مانع دید شود به نظاره بنشینم و بی درنگ امتداد باریکه آبی رنگ جنگلی دوردست به سوی آفتاب در حال غروب را بنگرم در حالیکه هیچ چیز به جز یک دشت سبز و هموار با لبهای بُران به سوی غروب آفتاب دیده نمیشود.

I love those west windows better than any others, and have chosen my bedroom on that side of the house so that even times of hair-brushing may not be entirely lost.

من آن پنجره های غربی را بیشتر از هر چیزی دیگر دوست می دارم و اتاق خوابم را در آن گوشه خانه انتخاب کرده ام تا حتی به هنگام شانه زدن گیسوانم منظره پنجره غربی را از دست ندهم.

How happy I was! I don't remember any time quite so perfect since the days when I was too little to do lessons and was turned out with sugar on my eleven o'clock bread and butter on to a lawn closely strewn with dandelions and daisies.

چقدر شادمان بودم هیچ زمانی را به خاطر نمی آورم که تا این حد خوشایند بوده باشد مگر روزهایی که بسیار خردسال تر از آن بودم که تکالیفم را انجام دهم و با نان شیرین و کره مالیده ی نیمروزی مراراهی چمنزار میگردند، جایی که انگار گلهای شیردندان و بابونه به رویش پاشیده شده بود.

The sugar on the bread and butter has lost its charm, but I love the dandelions and daisies even more passionately now than then, and never would endure to see them all mown away if I were not certain that in a day or two they would be pushing up their little faces again as jauntily as ever.

شکر روی نان و کره دیگر برایم جذابیت خود را از دست داده اند اما من گلهای شیر دندان و بابونه را حتی بیش از پیش دوست دارم اگر نمیدانستم که در عرض یک یا دو روز چهره کوچک گلها مثل همیشه با سرزندگی، دوباره سر بر می آورند. هیچ گاه تاب نمی آوردم که بریدنشان را ببینم.

During those six weeks I lived in a world of dandelions and delights.

در آن شش هفته، در دنیایی سرشار از گلهای شیر دندان و شادمانی زندگی کردم.

they used to be lawns, but have long since

The dandelions carpeted the three lawns, blossomed out into meadows filled with every sort of pretty weed, — and under and among the groups of leafless oaks and beeches were blue hepaticas, white anemones, violets, and celandines in sheets.

گلهای شیردندان چمنزار تازه چیده شده را پوشانده بودند این گلها بیش از این علف بودند اما مدت هاست در مرغزاری که با انواع گیاهان زیبا پوشیده شده است، شکوفه کرده اند



جگرواشهای آبی شقایقهای سفید، بنفشه ها و کلاندینهای برگ دار در بین انبوه بلوطهای بی برگ و راشها جای گرفته بودند.

The celandines in particular delighted me with their clean, happy brightness, so beautifully trim and newly varnished, as though they too had had the painters at work on them.

در این بین، کلاندینها که به زیبایی هرس و به تازگی جلا داده شده بودند، مرا با روشنی پاک و مسرورشان به وجد آوردند که گویی نگارگران را برای کار بر رویشان گماشته اند.

Then, when the anemones went, came a few stray periwinkles and Solomon's Seal, and all the bird-cherries blossomed in a burst.

سپس، وقتی که شقایقها رهسپار شدند تعدادی گل پروانش و مهر سلیمان رهگذر آمدند و تمام درختان گیلاس در یک آن شکوفه دادند.

And then, before I had a little got used to the joy of their flowers against the sky, came the lilacs masses and masses of them, in clumps on the grass, with other shrubs and trees by the side of walks, and one great continuous bank of them half a mile long right past the west front of the house, away down as far as one could see, shining glorious against a background of firs.

و بعد، کمی پیش از آنکه چشمانم به خوشحالی شکوفه هایشان در برابر آسمان عادت

کند پاسهای بنفش طبق طبق به صورت خوشه هایی بر روی چمن فرا رسیدند که دیگر گلبنها و درختهای کنار پیاده رونیز آنها را همراهی میکردند یک ردیف بزرگ نیم مایلی از آنها درست از نمای غربی خانه میگذشت که در مقابل زمینه ای از صنوبرها میدرخشیدند و از دوردستها هر کسی میتوانست آنها را ببیند.

When that time came, and when, before it was over, the acacias all blossomed too, and four great clumps of pale, silvery-pink peonies flowered under the south windows, I felt so absolutely happy, and blessed, and thankful, and grateful, that I really cannot describe it.

از هنگامی که آن زمان فرارسید تا پیش از به پایان رسیدنش گلهای آکاسیا نیز همگی شکوفه زدند و چهار خوشه بزرگ صورتی کمرنگ از گل صدتومانی زیر پنجره جنوبی شکوفه دادند. چندان احساس خوشحالی، خوشبختی، سپاسگزاری و شکرگزاری تمام وجودم را فرا گرفته بود که قادر به وصفش نیستم.

My days seemed to melt away in a dream of pink and purple peace.

گویی روزهایم در رویایی از آرامش به رنگ صورتی و بنفش آب می شدند.

## Any Clue?



Melika Afzal

*Translation Challenge*

Any clue why, like a wave,  
I dwindle as I escape myself?  
For through this dark drape,  
This Imminent blackout;  
What I want doesn't come to sight,  
What comes to sight, I don't want.

## پژواک



### ترجمه یاسمن پرستوک

در سکوت شب به دیدارم بیا  
 در سکوت پروازه ی یک رویا بیا  
 بیا ، با گونه های سرخ و چشمانی به روشنی رگه های آفتاب  
 بازگرد، اشک آلوده ،  
 ای خاطره ، امید،  
 عشق سالیان دور  
 آه که چه رویای شیرینیست، بیش از اندازه شیرین ، چه اندازه تلخ که شیرین...  
 چه کس می بایست در بهشت از خواب میخواست ؟  
 آنجا که جانهای لبریز از عشق دیدار میکنند  
 آنجا که چشمان پر از عطش ، درهایی را نظاره میکنند که به آرامی گشوده میشوند و  
 تنها اجازه ی ورود میدهند ، و دیگر خروجی در کار نیست  
 با اینحال به دیدارم بیا در رویاهایم  
 شاید که بتوانم زندگی کنم  
 زندگی حقیر من اما بار دیگر در سرمای مرگ است  
 در رویاهایم به منم بازگرد، شاید که بتوانم  
 تپشی را به تپش تو  
 و نفسی را به نفست ببخشم  
 نفس هایم کوتاه شده است  
 پشتم خمیده شده است  
 چرا که دیر زمانیست عشق من  
 دیر زمانیست که رفته ای

## Echo

### Christina Rossetti

Come to me in the silence of the night;  
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;  
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright  
As sunlight on a stream;  
Come back in tears,  
O memory, hope, love of finished years.  
Oh dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,  
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,  
Where souls brimful of love abide and meet;  
Where thirsting longing eyes  
Watch the slow door  
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.  
Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live  
My very life again tho' cold in death:  
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give  
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:  
Speak low, lean low,  
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

..

# Events

# The Unthinking Automaton in Beckett's Drama

*Professor Shahriar Mansouri on the Irish Giant and his Automaton*

**Ghazal Nessari**

*MA in English Literature, Shahid Beheshti University*

Having had the pleasure of sitting in Professor Mansouri's classes during my MA years at Shahid Beheshti University, I knew I couldn't miss his talk on the main focus of his research, Samuel Beckett. What was more intriguing to me was the postapocalyptic sense of the title, "The Unthinking Automaton in Samuel Beckett's Drama". The past year had been a year full of will and agency, at least for me personally, and I thought, how does a changing force in world literature could write of robotic beings that conform and continue undemandingly? That is how I wound up at Khatam University located on Mollasadra Street on a Wednesday noon.

Ready as ever, Professor Mansouri began by projecting his slides on the screen. Beginning with some background information, Professor Mansouri explains how traumatic events of Beckett's life, including World War II, the Paris knifing incident, and his mother's death, encourage the author to seek therapy and psychoanalytic sessions with Wilfred Bion. With



every story unraveled by Professor Mansouri, a play by Beckett found new significance for me. It was almost as if the professor was providing us with pieces of puzzles and little by little, scenes from Beckett's work



would come to materialize. Professor Mansouri connected the dots between what I previously thought were arbitrary stylistic details with monumental events in Beckett's life; naive of me to think anything is random in a Beckettian play anyway!

“Remember the beginning of Molloy? ‘I am in my mother’s room’. Remember the knocks? One knock meant yes, two no, three I don't know, four money, five goodbye. May Beckett, Sam’s mom, had Alzheimer's and Parkinson’s disease. Do you see why Beckett would write that?”

It has always been a wonder for me how our families, despite all our differences, find us in the commonality of life. Perhaps the automatic behavior of robotic characters in Beckett's plays began right here, I thought, where even a striking force in Beckett's life, such as May Beckett, is obligated to conform to a still and paralyzing life full of oblivion.

As someone who writes, I always found the struggle of writing within writing outside of my Self. Although I admire Modernists like Hemingway, whose writing oftentimes mirrors his personal life, I always thought a valuable piece of writing is one growing out of the unknown. I adore Sylvia Plath's poems with all my heart, but I couldn't help but think confessing to what you already know can't be the challenge literature wants us to face. Now thinking in retrospect, I believe we might be plagued with Self; an incurable disease without which life would be even harder. When I heard how Beckett's life infuses his work, I almost immediately got over my rigor about writing

outside of Self. I was brought back to amazing memoirs I have read like a Beckettian author, John Banville, or a personal favorite, Patti Smith's *Just Kids*. Writing is a challenge regardless of its inspiration, the real challenge is Language. There is no way of thinking that what Beckett has done with drama is anything but

putting it up to a permanent challenge and that is final.

Among the personal matters inflicted with Beckett's drama, it's hard not to overestimate the effect of the War. Professor Mansouri went on to explain in detail Beckett's reaction to Kay Boyle's letter, asking for his opinion on Eichmann's trial. The tone and the intertextuality of Beckett's letters to Tom MacGreevy concerning Boyle's shocking letter fascinated me. What Beckett writes about Eichmann in his letter to his friend, MacGreevy, becomes an insightful threshold into what he stood for not only in regard to human rights but also when it came to the modern brutes of the world. The reason why being asked such a question was a surprise to Beckett was perhaps because of the way Beckett carried himself in his life encompassing an absurdist silence that reminds me of his refusal to be interviewed after winning the Nobel prize. Instead of being interviewed, he only agreed to be recorded while being completely silent. During the Q&A, Professor Mansouri emphasizes although some people might label Beckett as hesitant to react to political matters, in-fact artists like Beckett develop a labyrinth of responses in their work to respond to such questions.

“In his trial, Eichmann claimed he was ONLY following orders!”

In thinking of such passiveness, an average Beckettian enthusiast would think of Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. However, Professor Mansouri's explanations of Beckett's experience with Psychoanalysis, more specifically with Wilfred Bion's work, encourage us to have a more in-depth reading of less discussed works of Beckett like *What Where*. Having made an introduction to Milgram's *Shocking Test*, Professor Mansouri expands on how automatons have fit themselves as authority servants who blindly follow orders in Beckett's play. Much discussion was devoted to the similarities between some characters in this play

and Milgram's Experimenter and Subject, which only refreshed our view of dominance and free will in today's world.

As I write this report, I think of the timeliness of this talk. How important it is to highlight the robotic nature of modernity. How important it is to sit outside of your narrative-outside of your Self-and witness the Other battle with struggles that are only apparent to you when you look at it on the stage of someone else's life. I invite you to scan the QR code provided and listen to the Beckettian scholar of Shahid Beheshti University, the IASIL Regional Bibliography representative for Iran, Dr. Shahriyar Mansouri, whose insightful reading of Irish Literature has inspired many of us at Shahid Beheshti.



Scan to Watch

# Remapping Diasporic Subjectivities in Light of Jean Laplanche's Theory of Translation

Dr. Bahareh Bahmanpour

The talk given by Professor Bahareh Bahmanpour on "Remapping Diasporic Subjectivities in Light of Jean Laplanche's Theory of Translation" on Feb 20, 2023 was divided into two major parts. The first part, dedicated to a theoretical overview of Jean Laplanche's major psychoanalytic concepts, revolved around the three main axes of Laplanche's conceptual framework, namely his critical reading of Freud's texts, his general theory of seduction, and his model of psychic mechanism as defined by his notion of translation. In the second part of her lecture, Bahmanpour explored the literary representations of diasporic subjectivities in selected Indian-American short fiction in light of such a Laplanchean logic of thought in general and Laplanche's notion of other-ness, belatedness, and the enigmatic signifier in particular. In the final section of her talk, Bahmanpour also attempted to join theory and practice more



directly by contemplating on the implications of Laplanche's (m)other-centered model of subjectivity for a kind of rewriting, if not re-theorizing, diasporic subjectivities.

Bahmanpour started the first part of her talk by a brief introduction on the life, works, and significance of Laplanche. Jean Laplanche

(1924-2012), she claimed, is one the greatest and the most controversial post-Freudian psychoanalytic thinkers who is, though, not as well-read or known in English as the other French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Like Lacan, Laplanche also implements a return to Freud. The latter's return, however, is done in a more systematic and thorough way. Attempting to re-found psychoanalysis, Laplanche systematically works his way through Freud's works, but then radicalizes their contending and even contradictory conceptual logics, namely a Ptolemaic, geocentric, or self-centered model of thought versus a Copernican, heliocentric, or other-centered logic. It was only after a differentiation between these two cosmological metaphorical shorthands was established and their significance for Freud and Laplanche was discussed that Bahmanpour could work through some of the more foundational concepts in Laplanche's frame of thoughts including his general theory of primal seduction and his notion of translation.

Giving priority to the more foundational other-centered movement of thought that emphasizes on the fact that the development of various structures of the human psyche are not internally and spontaneously generated but are rather formed in relation to the figure of the other, Laplanche then puts forward his (m)other-centered theory of subjectivity in the context of what he says not only of the presence of a double otherness (an internal and an external other), but also of the significance of a general theory of primal seduction. Distinguishing his general theory of primal seduction (via an elaboration on his notion of an enigmatic message) from Freud's more restricted and pathological theory of primal seduction, Laplanche uses the term primal seduction to describe a fundamental situation in which an adult (m)other proffers to a child a series of verbal or non-verbal i.e. behavioral signifiers many of which carry enigmatic messages which are too excessive and too troubling, if not

traumatizing, for the child to handle, process, and integrate. It is, therefore, only at certain privileged-yet-belated moments that the child, in his/her later psychic phases of development, is likely to, if not forced to, revisit the site of the primal trauma and to confront the implantation (at times even intromission) of those same enigmatic signifiers via acts of translation (and even non-translation). Bahmanpour later also concluded then that, within a Laplanchean frame of thought, in every act of translation, there is always a remainder—a non-translated signifier that, against all the odds, continually and forcefully demands (re-)translation.

In the second half of her talk, Bahmanpour used Laplanche's theoretical developments to capture certain dimensions of diasporic short fiction that the non-Laplanchean more self-centered theories of subjectivity had perhaps sidelined and marginalized. Choosing literary texts that, each in their own way, represented the trauma of displacement, she then asked a number of Laplanchean more Copernican questions at the level of literary interpretation. It was in her chartered responses to those same questions that she, contesting Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity, proposed her Laplanchean perception of diasporic subjectivities. Claiming that a Bhabhaian notion of hybridity, despite its inherently deconstructive nature, was still bound to an ideal notion of the possibility of fostering a well-balanced subjectivity in an apparently easy-to-traverse conceptual ground between the pull of the roots and the allure of the routs, Bahmanpour then called for a re-theorization of diasporic subjectivities in full awareness of the shakiness of this conceptual ground. Such a re-theorization, she keenly argued, could be certainly done via an application of Laplanche's more (m)other-centered theory of subjectivity—a theory which can also give, above all, a new insight into the trauma of displacement.

In the final section of her talk, Bahmanpour, thus, attempted not only to delve into this new

insight into the trauma of displacement, but also to remap diasporic subjectivities in light of Laplanche's translational model of the psyche as discussed above. Firstly, she argued that the trauma involved in diasporic displacements is not due to the presence of a one-time actual psychic wound or a singular moment of having been ripped from the womb, but it is rather a direct result of the (re-) activation of the traumatic temporality of belated-ness (also called afterward-ness) in response to the implantation (if not intromission) of an enigmatic message of other-ness and unbelonging-ness which is, above all, in constant need of being addressed, bound, and (re-)translated. Despite the diasporic subjects' constant (though oft-failed) attempts at (re-)translation via the detour of their relations with external others, this enigma is left unresolved and its sting is felt even across generations. Paradoxically though, it is the diasporic subjects' constant failure at the (re-)translation of the enigmatic message of the (m)otherland that enables them to (re-)negotiate their subjectivities in the emerging psychic spaces opened-up by this transgenerational trauma of displacement.

Turning trauma into power, abandonment into separation, and an unidentifiable sense of absence into an identifiable sense of loss within an intersubjective field of encountering the enigma of displacement, diasporic subjects, like the trauma of displacement in relation to which they are often defined, are ungraspable: they simultaneously breach and salve; fail and succeed; show and hide; narrate and obliterate—hence their being a source of potential threat to any and every rigid frame of thought whose survival depends on the implementation of an either/or logic. It is this same logic which diasporic subjectivities, being translational and bound to a both/and logic, consistently question and defy and from which they constantly evade. Doubtlessly, such an outlook on the enabling side of the trauma of displacement and the unyielding aspect of diasporic subjectivities in

literary representations would not have been possible, if it had not been for the psychoanalytic framework proffered by Jean Laplanche.



Scan to Watch

# TEFL

This section is dedicated to publishing a range of articles related to teaching English as a foreign language. We invite authors to share their work, including introductory and review articles, qualitative and quantitative studies, critical analysis of course books, and introducing new materials available for teachers. Our goal is to provide a platform for scholars and students to share their insights, ideas, and findings related to teaching English as a foreign language.

We believe that everyone has something to contribute, and our journal welcomes authors of all ages and backgrounds. We also welcome submissions in a range of formats. These may include original research, literature reviews, case studies, or teaching tips and techniques. Our editorial team is dedicated to providing feedback and support to authors to help them develop their ideas and prepare them for publication. Our editorial team is also dedicated to fostering an inclusive environment and providing support to authors throughout the submission process. We encourage authors to share their work with us and our readers by emailing their articles to our email address.

For novice writers looking to submit articles to the TEFL section of Threshold journal, there are a number of trends and subjects to consider. These may include exploring the latest technology trends in language teaching, innovative teaching techniques, materials development, language assessment, and teacher education and professional development. We encourage writers to consider these and other topics that are of interest to them, and to share their insights and experiences with our readers.

Overall, we hope that the TEFL section of Threshold Journal will serve as a platform for dialogue and collaboration between language teachers and researchers around the world. We invite authors to share their work with us and our readers and look forward to publishing insightful and thought-provoking articles on teaching English as a foreign language.

Fateme Jamali



# The Relationship between Time Spent on Social Media and Attention Span in Young Adults Aged 18-26



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## Abstract

In this study, the relationship between time spent on social media and attention span in young adults aged 18-26 is pursued. With the surge of social media, our lifestyle has changed and so has our capacity for attention. There are aspects such as age, academic performance, multitasking, the pandemic which led the research in its direction to establish the relationship. For example, a shortened attention span can drastically affect the attention of students in a classroom leading to poor performance. So the hypothesis was formed to find a relationship between the two variables mentioned in the title with the help of past research reaching a stage to further encourage research in this area. The method of data collection was through a questionnaire in which the participants were asked about their own personal experiences on the matter, especially after the breakout. The results of the questionnaire and its analysis which are discussed in detail in the results section showed a rather clear relationship between the variables being time spent on social media and attention span. It was established that as we use more time on social media and the internet, it is more likely to be interrupted and distracted by unimportant events and procrastination. Further research is suggested to be conducted on the matter to achieve a better view for the future and avoid possible consequence of this raised problem.

*Keywords: Academic performance, Attention span, Covid-19, Multitasking, Social media, Young adults.*

## 1. Introduction

In today's ever-changing and rapidly growing world and human life along with the presence of an inevitable element, technology, we simply can't ignore the influence and impact of social media on us. Our lives are intertwined with using social media in many different aspects. We

use our favorite social media apps available on our phones and computers on a daily basis. Apps like Tiktok, Youtube, Instagram, Facebook and various messaging platforms are where the majority of the new generations spend their time, especially young adults who almost can't function without them.

### 1.1 Extensive social media usage

According to figures in the latest Statista Digital Economy Compass (2021), the global average time spent using social media platforms per day is 142 minutes in 2021 - far higher than the 90 minutes recorded in 2012. This statistic is only a drop of the ocean compared to what might happen in the next few years.

Another indication of this explosion of social media can be noted in the rise of different social media platforms themselves. In research focusing on multiple social media platforms usage (Primack et al. 2017, p. 2), it was found that the number of social media channels being used is increasing. In just one year, from 2013 to 2014, the use of two or more platforms climbed by 10%. Social media platforms range by type, functionality, and primary intended purpose, in addition to their growing quantity.

### 2.1. Shorter attention spans

As human species evolved throughout history, a certain capacity for paying attention to a particular object has been detected in our nature which is nowadays referred to as "Attention Span". This feature of ours is highly affected by our lifestyle and how we tend to interact with particular matters. The idea of controlling attention span at a consistent point and measuring average attention span has always been a controversial issue. However, according to a study by Subramanian in 2018 "the idea of an "average attention span" is very much meaningless. It's very much task-dependent. How much attention we apply to a task will vary depending on what the task demand is. But the idea that there's a typical length of time for

which people can pay attention to even that one task has limited value." This brings us to the notion of multitasking which is quite a familiar concept for 21st century men.

## 2. Literature review

When an average person without specific knowledge about the matter hears the word "Multitasking", he or she would think of it as a skill which you can master in order to perform more work in less time and overall be more efficient in your life which shows the overall opinion of people. Whereas an academic study (Primack et al. 2017) has shown that multitasking has previously been linked to poor cognitive, mental health results, worse attention spans, inferior academic performance, lower subjective well-being, and increased levels of despair and anxiety. The use of many social media sites, even if not all of them are used at the same time, may be linked to unfavorable mental health consequences. Also, the previously pointed out fact that the number of social media platforms is increasing could lead to increased multitasking between multiple social media platforms, as well as increased multitasking between social media and other activities like school or job according to Primack.

Moreover, Deitchman (n.d.) in his article describes this phenomenon in detail. "Media Multitasking" is a "Person's consumption of more than one item or stream at the same time". He goes on to explain that, "Multitasking with media is closely linked to a negative approach to basic information processing. In this case, multitasking is ineffective because heavy media multitaskers were unable to switch tasks successfully. This is surprising because multitasking is defined as the continuous switching of tasks. Multitasking is bad on many levels if the individuals in this study were less motivated to efficiently task-switch or filter out irrelevant interferences."

When we are considering young adults, the academic aspect of the matter is rather

indispensable. The discussion of academic performance and attention span has been going on and there are a lot of quite conflicting and contrasting views. Attention span shows its importance in this matter in the place a student's attention span plays an important role in him or her being actively engaged in listening and contributing to the lecture. If we don't find some standard or criteria for how long our lectures for students should be, we can't claim that the lecture is efficient which leads to generally poorer performances from students. One of the most thorough responses on the issue is in a study by Bradbury (2016, p. 2-5) where he explains academic literature assumes that academic lectures should be tailored to the modern student's attention span of 10-15 minutes. "Student attention during lectures tends to decrease after 10–15 minutes," Davis writes in *Tools for Teaching*. "Although student attention is high at the start of a lecture, it has reached a low point after 10–15 minutes," Wankat claims. "When the lecture begins, most students are paying attention, and for most students, that focus lasts 10 minutes," Benjamin writes in an essay honoring psychologist Wilbert J. McKeachie. Indeed, McKeachie stated in *Teaching Tips* that "Attention normally increases from the beginning of the presentation to 10 minutes into the lecture and drops after that point," a feeling reiterated by this author in the 14th version of the book more than 20 years later. With the current educational trends of "lifelong learning" and "evidence-based teaching," if we insist on dogmatically applying a 10- to 15-min limit on lectures, we are implying that we really don't care about evidence.

On the performance side, it has been proven that internet dependency plays a role in the overall results of students. A study in 2015 by Gueverra & Bukkecer indicates that Internet addiction is linked to students' diminishing attention spans when it comes to their academic work. The more students rely on the internet for

academic work, the more likely they are to become sidetracked from their studies by non-academic websites like Youtube, Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter. Because both variables are statistically significant, it's possible that increasing or decreasing internet dependency can have an impact on a person's attention levels.

Another one of the significant determining factor for attention span is Age. In 2015, a study by Fortenbaugh et al. on the relationship between task capacity and age it was found that across the youngest age groups, all performance metrics point to an initial period of development marked by significant increases in task capacity and a change toward a quicker, less cautious strategy, with early transition zones in adolescence at 14 to 17 years of age. However, significant dissociations in life-span trajectories were identified after this initial transition phase, with task-ability measures indicating indications of sustained progress into maturity and notable declines in ability beyond 43 years of age. So, the selected age range-18 to 26- is among the first years of the prime era for attention span when it most matters.

With the emergence of COVID-19 in the approximately past two years, we have started to adapt to a new, virtual lifestyle which has also greatly affected the educational system. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between academic performance and attention span doesn't need further explanation. Yet as we had to change our way of learning and teaching, this relationship came into sight even more. He in his article (2021) claims that online learning has been a lifeline for students during the lockdown and social media has helped to maintain personal bonds and many tasks are done through this medium. However, as technology hasn't developed enough and we are in the early stages yet, we have to proceed with caution for the future.

Furthermore, the role of the ongoing pandemic and the inevitable impacts it has had

on a new education system and lifestyle leading to an even wider use of social media perhaps escalated the attention span deterioration and we should look for evidence on this matter in more recent sources. According to Garcia-Bulle (2019), “a study conducted by Kent University showed the impact of a shorter attention span and poorer degree of concentration is greater in online classrooms. Students who take online classes, according to researchers, are more susceptible to distractions since they have more time to multitask. Students who took classes in a classroom with a teacher present, on the other hand, performed better. This is explained by the teacher's many conditions, which operate as an anchor to keep the students more grounded than they would be if they were on their own.”

### 2.1. Past theories of attention span

Interestingly enough, there is a popular belief about the average attention span which Bradbury (2016) addresses: “In 2015, a study commissioned by Microsoft and discussed in Time magazine found that the average attention span was in fact only 8 s. If indeed this is the case, then even participating in a 15-min lecture would be positively heroic. To place this in perspective, it was reported in the same Time article, that goldfish, of the piscine rather than snack variety, have an attention span of 9 s, one whole second greater than humans! It is perhaps rather premature to opt for an 8-s lecture format, as there are many caveats to the Time article, not the least of which is that no one knows how to actually measure a goldfish's attention span.” He provides evidence to refute it and goes on to point out such false theories which are completely based on no evidence or misunderstood by people. We can clearly see how narrow public knowledge on the matter is.

### 2.2. Attention span and social media relationship and its lookout

All this brings us to wonder whether there is a relationship between social media usage and attention span shortening. As Stefanski (2020)

explained, “Content is increasing in volume, which exhausts our attention and urge for ‘newness’ causes us to collectively switch between topics more regularly.” Moreover, he claims that we've basically conditioned ourselves to focus on things for extremely brief periods of time before moving on to the next item as a result of this. So given the mentioned determining factors- extensive social media usage, the explosion of social media platforms, ongoing pandemic, academic performance, Age factor and the seemingly increasing need to multitask- along with the fact that average people have little information on the subject, there seems to be a gap for research to fill and find at least a connection or relationship between the two variables to contribute to and encourage further study.

For the sake of this study, I will delve further into the matter based on the hypothesis that spending more time on social media is associated with a smaller attention span. In the case of the hypothesis being true, not only are there health risk factors to be considered, but also the potential effects on the next generations should be taken into account. Hence, these matters at hand will be discussed in the following sections of the study.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Design, participants, and setting

For the purpose of this research, I have taken a questionnaire from a 2015 study by Fillmore. The questionnaire was adapted to meet the needs of the current subject. I surveyed a total of 30 young adults aged from 18 to 26 years old who studied in different fields such as Law, Graphics, English Literature, Medicine and so on to achieve a kind of diversity and represent the normal young adult. There were also participants with little or no academic background to further help maintain the mentioned goal

The Fundamental aim of the selected questionnaire was to identify how much time the participants spend on social media, how they spend it, how they use their time on social media to multitask and how it has affected their attention span. I tried my best to keep the questions in line with these principles hence removing and adding multiple questions so that there would remain no ambiguity in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was made with Google Forms and was sent through different social media platforms to the participants. The questionnaire consisted of two major parts, the first one is about the social media aspect of the study and the earlier mentioned arguments about it.

The main questions were about their social media usage time and the number of used social media platforms along with getting into more detail about how the participants use social media for the different purposes they might have.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on attention span and its determining factors. Participants were asked about the general information they interact with while using social media and how would they describe their experience. They were questioned on the matter of being distracted which is an indication of short attention spans and the questions went on to ask about multitasking and whether the participants thought it would make the more productive. One of the important discussed cases, academic performance especially in the time of the pandemic was taken into consideration to cover what has been proposed.

The objectivity of the participants plays an important role, so I tried to select participants in a way that they would have no background knowledge or particular presuppositions on the

matter or on the variables being studied. All the participants were given the same time and context to provide the answers to the questionnaire. Unexpected and expected results emerged from the answers which will be discussed in the results and discussion section.

### 3.2. Data analysis

I used the quantitative analysis method to analyze the collected data. The questionnaire has a sample of 30 subjects and the answers were pre-coded. The challenge here was the abundance of information and ways of organizing the data which I overcame by using the platforms for organizing data online. I have used a correlational analysis style for collecting data and analyzing them further to find out the relationship between the two variables: social media usage and shorter attention spans. The matter of relationship between the two mentioned variables was established in the questions of the questionnaire and was analyzed and rendered into presentable and explainable numeric data to clarify the possible answer. The results of the analysis and mentioned questions will be discussed in the next section.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Social media usage

The majority of the participants were male constituting 70 percent of the whole and 30 percent of them were female participants. All the participants were aged from 18 to 26 with the most repeated age group being 20-21 comprising 40 percent of the whole study cases. The age years 18 (16.7%), 19 & 26 (10%), 23 & 24 & 25 (6.7%) and 22 (3.3%) were next. In the next question, the amount of participants' usage of the internet was focused on. The result showed that the internet plays an even more important role in young adults' daily life than we thought as the graph shows.



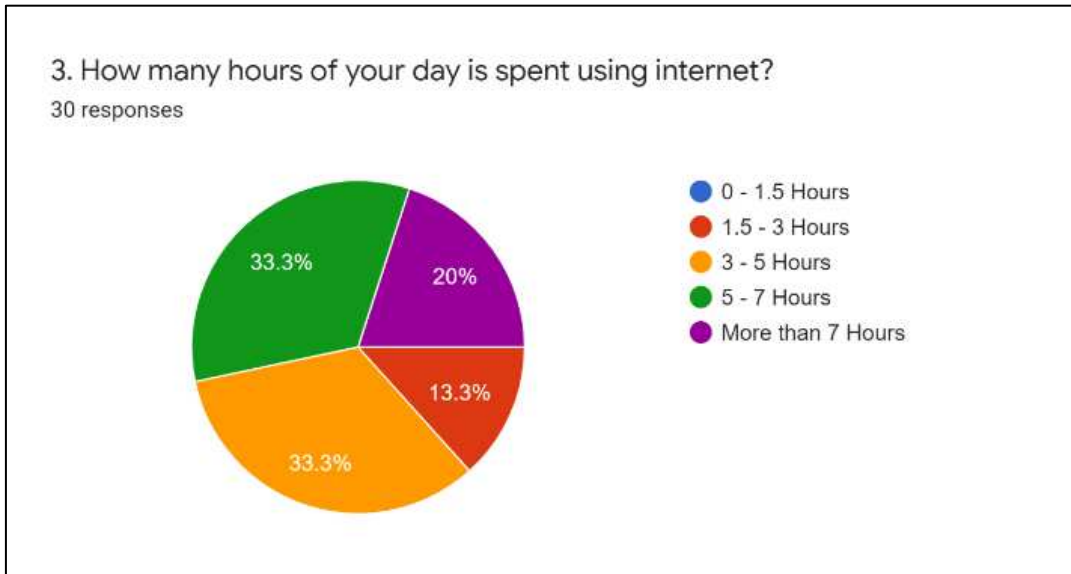


Figure 4.1 Hours of the day spent online

As for the next questions, participants were asked how they would spend their online time. You can see the results in the tables below.

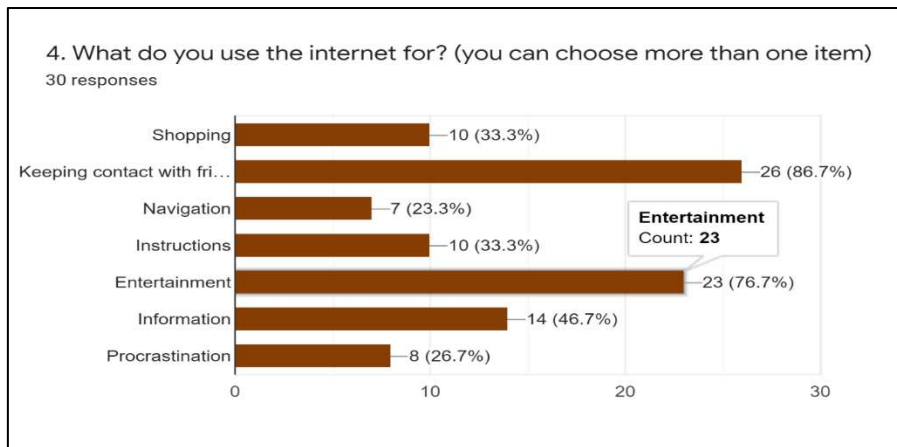


Figure 4.2 general usage of the internet

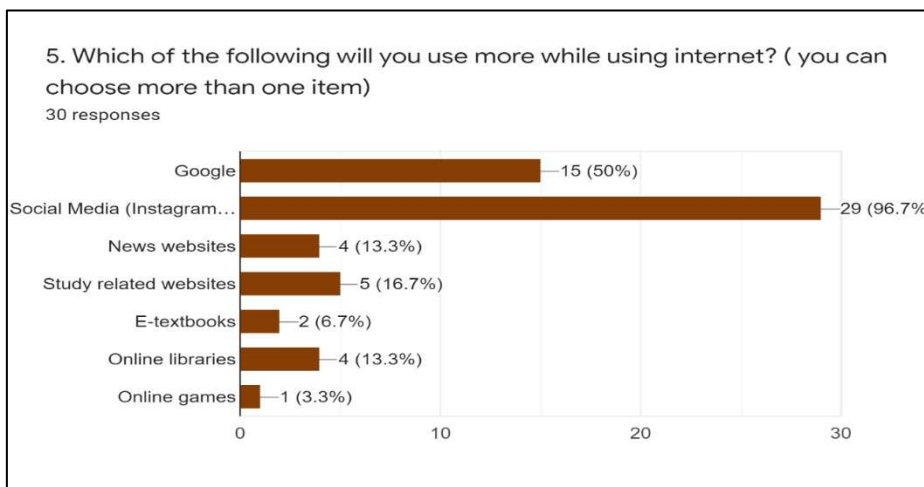


Figure 4.3 specific usage of the internet



These graphs indicate that in most of the extravagant time, they put aside for interacting in an online environment, they use social media particularly to keep in contact with their relatives and friends. Also in the next graph, I asked them

further to select the specific platforms they used. However, going into detail for each one of the platforms is beyond the scope of this paper and it's just a potential lead to do further research in this area.

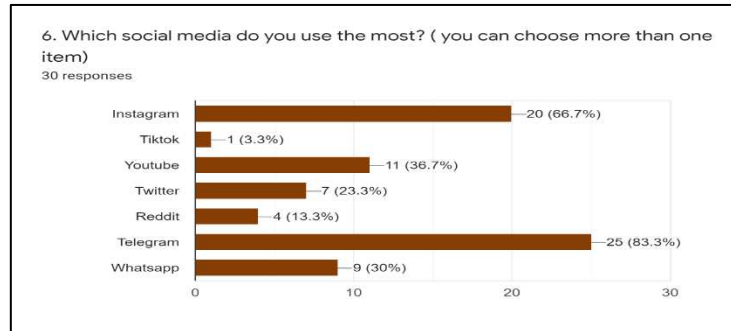


Figure 4.4 most used social media platforms

The final question of the social media section asked about the number of participants' devices with an internet connection to show their connectedness and also pave the way for the next section to begin. About 67% of the participants said that they had 2 devices with an internet connection. 10% had only one and the rest (23%) had more than 2 devices.

This section of the results starts with a question about using the internet for academic purposes to which a high portion of 87% of the participants said yes. It shows the important role of the academic factor which was mentioned before. As shown in graphs 4.5 and 4.6, in the next two questions, the information we get online and its effect on us was under investigation. Participants find the amount of information overwhelming, but they can find what they want rather easily.

#### 4.2 Attention span

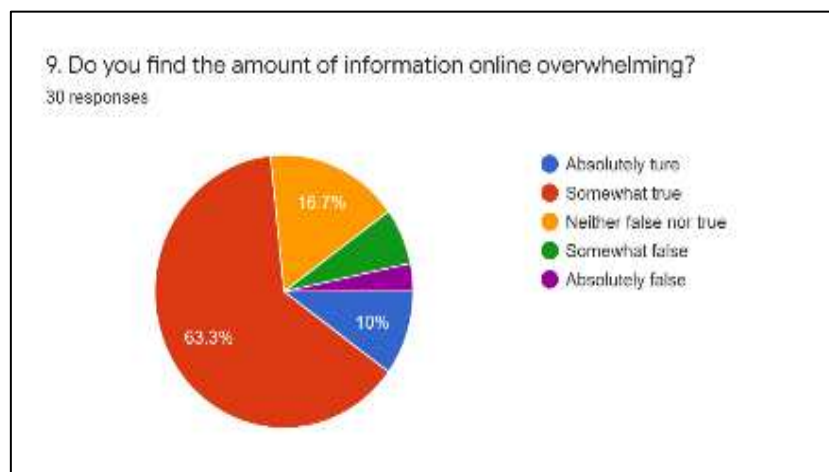


Figure 4.5 amount of information being overwhelming



Figure 4.6 availability of information

The next similar questions focus on the main concerns of the paper. 80 percent of the participants said that they at least somewhat agree with the notion that they easily get

distracted from certain projects and procrastinate on the internet, namely social media as argued earlier which is shown in figure 4.7

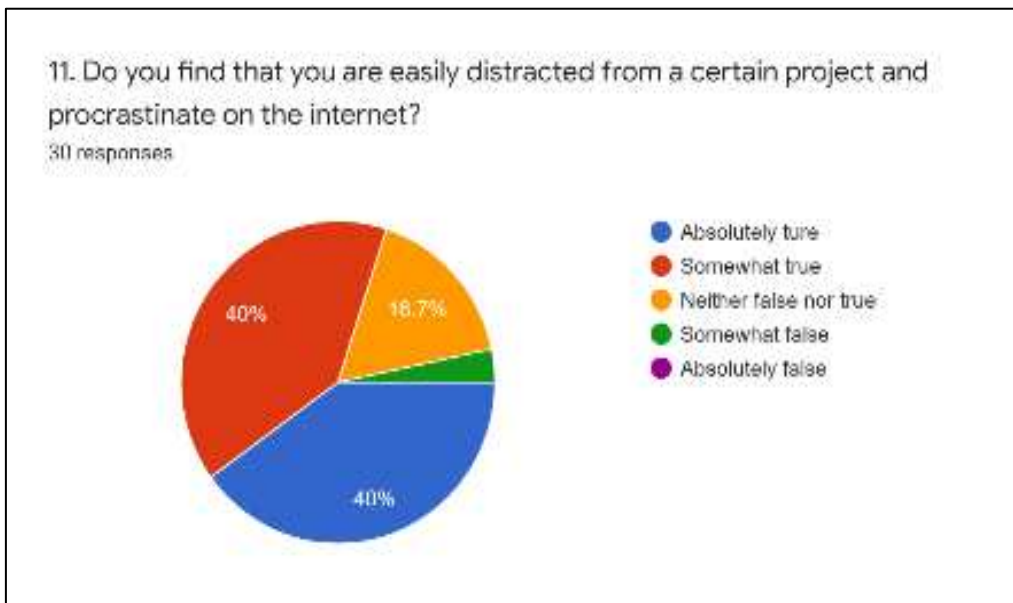


Figure 4.7 Distraction and procrastination on the internet

Also, 40% of the participants felt that the internet makes them more productive. At the same time, nearly the same percentage found themselves multitasking which explains the common beliefs about multitasking and its

effects mentioned earlier. Nearly 77% of the participants at least some found themselves interrupted to check their social media accounts while doing other tasks. As shown in figure 4.8, about the same percentage (64%) of people found it difficult to finish a traditional newspaper article or book while only 3.3% didn't think so which is a significant sign of declining attention spans.

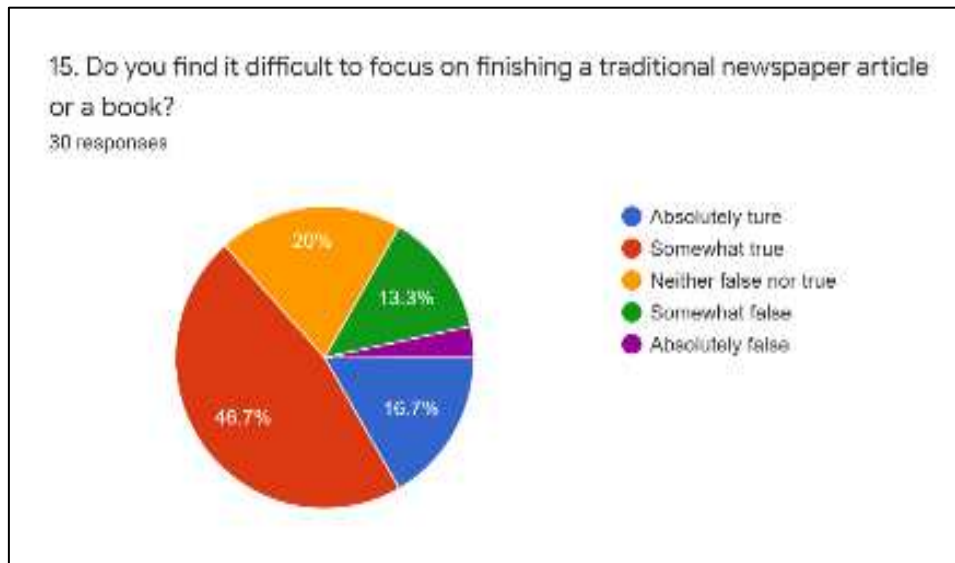


Figure 4.8 Difficulty in focusing on books and articles

On the matter of attachment to social media, about 57% of the participants declared that they get nervous when they are without an internet connection for a prolonged period of time which confirms our assumptions of inevitable attachment. Moreover, on the note of the ongoing pandemic and what is its role, about 83% of the participants found themselves more

distracted in an online class compared to a traditional class as shown in figure 4.9. Also, 70% felt that they have the ability to focus on a single task for a long time without being distracted in the period of the ongoing the pandemic which is a significant number and indicates the huge effect of pandemic.

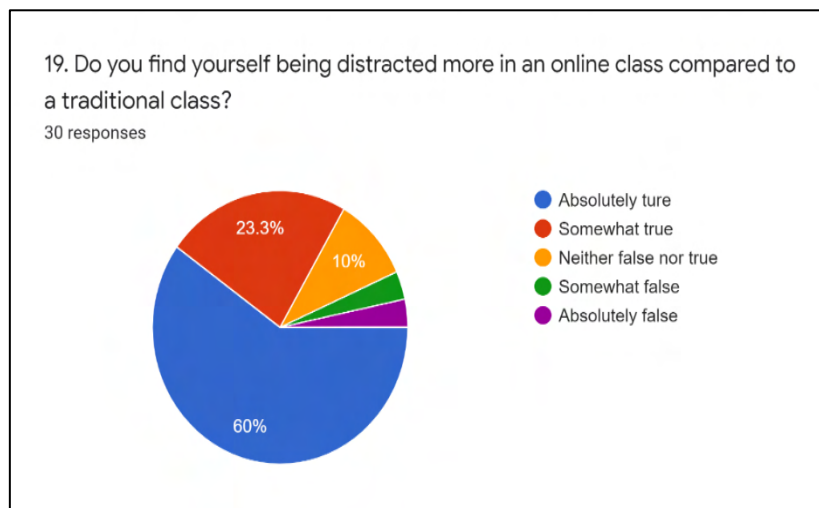


Figure 4.9 Being distracted in online classes vs traditional classes

To summarize, all statistics and results seem to confirm the hypothesis and mentioned factors are in line with the effect that was intended.

## 5. Discussion

There is a lot of debate and research going on around the matter of social media and its effect.

Social media, as stated earlier, has made our lives much easier than the past generations and we should appreciate its existence. Nonetheless, As Brooks (2015) explains, personal use of social media has negative consequences for both efficiency and well-being. Social media use, in

particular, is linked to poor task performance, higher technostress, and poorer happiness.

We have to beware of its consequences for us if we get too much deep in its system so that we reach a stage where we can't get out. Attention span is one underrated and ignored capacity of human beings which should be cared and talked more about. The results of the conducted survey completely confirm the notions of attention span being deteriorated by social media overuse and the amount of information we are encountered every day.

We have to think of solutions before the problem reaches a point where it can't be stopped. In a note on the impact of social media on attention span, Ashrof (2021) suggests storytelling as a way to deal with attention span problems "as storytelling brings learning to life. Stories have an emotional impact on us, causing us to laugh, cry, fear, and become enraged. Storytelling may encourage children to discover their individual expressiveness and improve their ability to convey their thoughts and feelings in a clear and eloquent manner. Children learn to become better listeners when they develop the practice of listening to tales. It provides them with the required training to listen and comprehend more rather than speak."

There is a lot of extra information on the solutions to these problems, however, they are

beyond the scope of this research hence the reader can find them online.

## 6. Conclusion

All things considered, the importance of attention span in this age of social media and virtual life can't be ignored, especially when the pandemic made us stay home and deprived us of interpersonal communication. There is clearly a direct relationship between social media usage and attention span. As the results of the taken questionnaire suggest, as we spend more time exploring social media or procrastinating to run away from our duties, we tend to be able to focus less on different tasks so we easily get distracted from them. When we consider that the generation of young adults, who are supposed to be at the peak of their attention span, not being able to focus on reading an article or book without being distracted, we can guess the acuteness of the problem and the need to deal with it.

Further research is definitely needed in this study area because there are still many things to be discovered about the subject and for it to be under the scope of the public. Information such as solutions to the problem we are facing and the study of individual social media platforms and their potential effect definitely are areas on which conducting research is advised.

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# The Roles of Depth and Breadth of Vocabulary Knowledge in EFL Reading Performance



Mohsen Rasooli

## Abstract

In vocabulary research, two important aspects of vocabulary knowledge, namely size and depth, continue to play a significant role. The present study aimed to see how vocabulary size and depth affect reading performance in an EFL setting and to determine which aspect, size, or depth of vocabulary, has a stronger influence on reading comprehension performance. To this end, the Vocabulary Size Test by Nation and Beglar (2007), Words Associate Test by Read (1998), and a reading performance test was used in this study (n=13). As predicted, the findings revealed that while both vocabulary size and vocabulary depth were associated with reading performance, the data demonstrated that vocabulary depth predicted reading performance better.

## Keywords:

Size of vocabulary, depth of vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension

## Introduction

Teachers of English as a foreign language and language teaching theoreticians have long held the belief that vocabulary and reading go hand in hand. There is no question that the ability to read in English and the understanding of English as a foreign language vocabulary are inextricably linked. According to Anderson and Freebody (1981), the reader's broad vocabulary knowledge best predicts how well the reader understands the material. Nagy (1988) states that vocabulary is essential for the comprehension of various texts, therefore vocabulary teaching should be a part of language education. While there is agreement on the significance of vocabulary in reading performance, opinions on how much vocabulary and in what depth to offer to students differ.

How much vocabulary and what vocabulary should be taught to students to aid their reading comprehension is an essential subject to be



discussed in the link between vocabulary knowledge and reading. Rather than being a single construct, vocabulary knowledge has several dimensions; different researchers have developed various frameworks in an attempt to characterize the complicated nature of word knowledge. Vocabulary knowledge is generally believed to have at least two basic characteristics, namely breadth and depth. (Qian 1999, Read 1988, Wesche & Paribakht 1996)

Qian (1999) defines size or breadth of vocabulary as "the number of vocabulary items for which a learner possesses at least minimum knowledge of their meanings," Knowing 2000-3000 words in a foreign language was linked to reading comprehension in short answer tasks, according to Zhang and Anual (2008). Laufer (1992) found similar results, claiming that 3000 words best predicted student reading performance. According to Saragi, Nation, and Meister (1978), a student of English must know at least 3600 words in order to understand demanding texts in English, but they add that the number of meanings learners must know must be significantly more.

Aside from the number of words to be taught, one of the most contentious concerns in recent decades has been the depth to which words should be taught. Qian (1999) proposed that, in addition to vocabulary size, there should be another dimension to vocabulary teaching, which he dubbed "depth of vocabulary". Qian (1999) defined depth as a concept including lexical characteristics, such as phonemic, graphemic, morphemic, syntactic, semantic, collocational, and phraseological properties. He claims that a learner's high score on a vocabulary size test does not imply that she has a profound understanding of the words. In fact, he proved that learners with little awareness of various dimensions of words, including syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features, face difficulties in L2 reading (Qian. 2002). According to Qian (2002), vocabulary items are

learned in an incremental fashion, meaning that the sooner a term is taught, the more deeply the learner understands it. Despite the fact that Qian (2002) does not dismiss the value of a learner's vocabulary size, he emphasizes the importance of vocabulary depth in predicting the meaning of new terms in a text, making the text more comprehensible. Depth of knowledge focuses on the idea that for useful higher-frequency words learners need to have more than just a superficial understanding of the meaning. According to Qian (2002).

There are several studies in the literature on the relationship between vocabulary size and depth, as well as their impact on reading performance. The present study also sets out to determine the link between vocabulary size and depth, as well as the impacts of those two concepts on EFL students' reading performance, using a sample of Iranian EFL students. This study is unique in that it tries to determine which of the two concepts best predicts reading performance, as well as the combined impact of the two concepts on reading performance. The study found that test scores on vocabulary breadth, vocabulary depth, and reading comprehension are all positively related, with vocabulary depth being a greater predictor of reading comprehension for the participants than vocabulary size.

We hope that this study sheds light on the matter of the importance of depth of vocabulary which may serve as a backbone of vocabulary teaching in an EFL context and curriculum development. Our objective is that this study becomes a useful guideline for curriculum designers and material developers.

### Research question

The main concern of this research will be the relation between size, depth, and breadth of vocabulary in students' reading. In my research, I will try to answer this question: What is the relationship between the size and depth of

vocabulary on reading comprehension in learning English as a second language?

### Research hypothesis

The student with more knowledge in the depth of vocabulary have a better understanding of the text and can read better.

### Limitation of research

Due to the outbreak of Coronavirus and its limitations, I did not have access to students and professors, and we were unable to use more students, so we used only 13 students for this research

### Review of Literature

Over the years, attempts have been made in the field of L2 research to explain what it means to know a word, resulting in a range of approaches to define vocabulary knowledge (e.g., Cronbach 1942, Qian 1999, and Richards 1976).

Cronbach (1942) divided vocabulary knowledge into two categories: knowledge of word meaning (generalization, size, and precision of meaning) and levels of accessibility to this information (availability and application). This pioneering explanation ignored other components of word knowledge, such as spelling, pronunciation, morpho-syntactic qualities, and collocation, by focusing solely on the meaning part of a word (Qian 1999). Following that, Richards proposed a broader meaning of the term knowledge (1976). The following components of lexical competence, according to his beliefs about what it means to know a lexical item, are lexical competence: frequency, register, syntax, derivation, association, semantic values, and polysemy (Richards 1976). Despite the fact that his assumptions were not intended to be exhaustive (Meara 1996), they have been used as a broad framework for defining vocabulary knowledge since they highlighted the diverse character of word knowledge.

There appears to be a tendency in all studies to treat language knowledge as a multidimensional rather than a single construct. This recognition of the complexity of vocabulary knowledge is represented in a number of different but complementary theories, which claim that vocabulary knowledge has at least two fundamental dimensions: breadth and depth (Qian, 1999, Read 1988, Wesche & Paribakht 1996)

The number of words known is referred to as vocabulary breadth or vocabulary size, but vocabulary depth is defined as how well a student understands a term. While the number of vocabulary items for which a learner has at least a basic understanding of their meanings is considered the breadth of vocabulary knowledge, the depth of vocabulary knowledge ranges from a partial understanding of a word to full mastery of multiple aspects of a given word, including its various related meanings and appropriate use in various contexts (Qian 1999). Despite some debate in the literature over whether the binary difference between breadth and depth is legitimate (Kieffer & Lesaux 2012), the majority of lexical researchers tend to agree that the two regions represent separate characteristics of vocabulary knowledge (Read 2000, Tannenbaum et al 2006). When considering the two dimensions, however, care must be taken not to misinterpret them as separate or independent creations. Rather, they are inextricably linked (Schmitt & Meara 1997)

In order to determine a student's vocabulary size, the Vocabulary Size Test by Nation and Beglar (2007) has been proven to be useful as diagnostic testing for learners from non-English backgrounds. It is one of the most extensively used vocabulary size tests. The test contains high-frequency words, which are deemed a prerequisite for the effective use of the English language

The recognition of vocabulary depth or vocabulary quality as a construct of lexical

knowledge has grown in recent years. A definition of vocabulary, according to Chapelle (1998), should encompass four dimensions: (a) vocabulary size, (b) knowledge of word characteristics, (c) lexicon organization, and (d) lexical access processes. Henriksen (1999), claimed that lexical competence has three separate dimensions: (a) partial-to-precise knowledge, (b) depth of knowledge, and (c) receptive and productive knowledge, including the depth dimension. Henriksen saw the depth dimension as a process, rather than a single continuum, of constructing a network that connects one word to another. Qian (2002) created a vocabulary knowledge framework based on prior definitions in a more recent investigation (e.g., Chapelle 1998, Henriksen 1999). Qian's (2002) approach, like others, recognized that depth of vocabulary knowledge is an important component of multi-faceted lexical knowledge.

The Word Associates Test is a commonly used examination for measuring the depth of vocabulary. Words Associate Test (WAT) by Read (1998) can be used to determine the depth of a person's vocabulary. Instead of estimating the complete dimensions of the learners' word

knowledge, the WAT assesses how well they know of various relationships of the stimulus word with other words.

The importance of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension has long been acknowledged among vocabulary researchers, with a vast number of studies concluding that a big vocabulary size is required for good reading comprehension (Meara 1996). However, actual researches on the significance of vocabulary depth on reading comprehension are few. A few studies have recently been undertaken to investigate the impact of vocabulary depth on reading comprehension among EFL students (e.g., Tannenbaum et al. 2006)

Qian (2002) assessed the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge as well as reading

comprehension ability in 217 adult ESL students from 19 different L1 backgrounds. The variables were measured using the Vocabulary Levels Test, the Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge Test, which was developed from the Word Associates Test, and a TOEFL reading comprehension. The results of this study backed up Qian's (1999) prior findings, indicating that scores on vocabulary size, depth, and reading comprehension were all significantly associated, and that vocabulary depth might make a distinctive contribution to predicting academic reading comprehension. The depth dimension was shown to provide predictive value to the prediction of reading comprehension.

## Methods

### I. Participants

The participants in this study were 13 EFL students who had studied English as a second language either in a classroom setting or through self-study. The sample of participants consisted of 8 females and 5 males ranging in age from 16 to 25 years old. There were 5 EFL learners at the level of education of high school and 8 were undergraduates. (Table 1.)

### II. Instrument

We collected data from our participants with the help of The Vocabulary Size Test by Nation and Beglar (2007), Words Associate Test by Read (1998), and a reading performance test.

The Vocabulary Size Test (VST) by Nation and Beglar (2007) was used to obtain data on the students' vocabulary sizes. This exam contains 14 sets of vocabulary items, each of which contains 10 items. Each of these items is a 100-word representative, referring to the fact that each set has 1000 words with 10 representative words. This test is designed to assess receptive vocabulary knowledge, emphasizing that it assesses the vocabulary knowledge required for reading. Each item is presented in a multiple-choice style that is largely context-independent. There are four

choices for the item in a context-free statement, and test takers are required to identify the best description of the object from the possibilities. It's important to note that test-takers can't predict the meaning of an item based on the sentence it's in since the sentence lacks context. Given that each item represents 100 words and that each of the 14 sets has 10 items, this exam measures the knowledge of a total of 14,000 words through 140 items.

Students were given the Words Associate Test (WAT) by Read (1998) to assess their vocabulary depth. Qian (1999) altered this test and found that its reliability was 0.88 Qian (2002). There are eight possibilities under the stimulus words, from which test-takers must pick four, based on which are closest in meaning to the stimulus word or which noun may come after those stimulus words to make collocation. There are 40 items on this test which makes the total scores up to 160. The WAT intends to assess the depth of vocabulary knowledge through word associations; the semantic and collocational relationships that a word has with other words in a language. Each test item comprises one stimulus word, which is always an

adjective and eight words located in two different columns, each containing four words. Among these eight words, four are associates (i.e., related words) to the stimulus word and the other four are distractors.

At last, the reading comprehension exam (RC) applied in this research was drawn from the Longman TOEFL (Philips. 2006). The reading comprehension test consisted of four texts and had a time restriction of 20 minutes. There was a total of ten multiple-choice questions.

### **Procedure**

The vocabulary Size Test was administered to the participants first for 30 minutes. Following the Vocabulary Size Test, Words Associate Test was administered for 40 minutes. Lastly, a reading achievement test was administered for 20 minutes. The results of each test were then compared

### **Results**

The summary of the participants' demographic data is presented in Table 1. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive data for our main variables.

Table 1.

Demographic data for the current sample (N=13)

Variable		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	9	69.23
	Male	4	30.67
Level of Education	High school	5	39.47
	Undergraduate	8	61.53

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics Of The Rc, Vst, And Wat (N=13)

Test	Maximum Score	Score Range	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
RC	9	4 (40%) – 9 (90%)	6.6 (66%)	3.23
VST	130	63 (45%) – 130 (90%)	102.2 (73)	8.78
WAT	134	96 (60%) – 134 (84%)	123 (75%)	11.4

The relationship between participants' RC, VSL and WAT's results was analyzed using Pearson correlation to identify the unique roles of breadth and depth of word knowledge in explaining reading comprehension. This section of the study presents the findings of the data analysis on the relationship between vocabulary size and depth; the relationship between vocabulary size and reading performance; and

the relationship between vocabulary depth and reading performance, as well as the predictor value of vocabulary size and depth in EFL students' reading performance. As predicted, the findings revealed that while both vocabulary size and vocabulary depth were associated with reading performance, the data demonstrated that vocabulary depth predicted reading performance better.

Table 3.

Pearson Correlations Between The Vocabulary Breadth, Depth, And Reading Comprehension

Variables	Breadth	Depth	Reading
Breadth	1	.837**	.717**
Depth	.837**	1	.740**
Reading	.717**	.740**	1

The correlations between vocabulary breadth, depth, and reading comprehension scores are shown in Table 3 to indicate the degree of relationship between the dependent and independent variables. As can be seen from the table, the learners' reading comprehension ability was substantially connected with their vocabulary breadth ( $r = .71, p.01$ ), showing that having a bigger vocabulary allowed students to retain more information from the text they read. As far as the findings of the aforementioned statistical analysis indicate, there was a strong and significant association between depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension ( $r = .74, p.01$ ), implying that richer vocabulary knowledge helps learners grasp the text better. When the two independent variables of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge are compared, there is a positive and statistically significant correlation ( $r = .83, p.01$ ), indicating that these two aspects of vocabulary knowledge are interrelated, i.e., those learners with a large vocabulary size also had a deeper understanding of the words.

### Discussion

The findings of this study validate previous studies on the importance of vocabulary knowledge in EFL learners, as well as provide fresh insights into the nature of the process. Data analysis demonstrated that EFL learners with a larger vocabulary were more proficient than those with a smaller vocabulary. Further research revealed that EFL students with a deeper vocabulary knowledge were more proficient than those with a shallow vocabulary knowledge. Simply put, we tried to answer this question: What is the relationship between the size and depth of vocabulary on reading comprehension in learning English as a second language?

The results of this study indicate that although both size and depth of vocabulary knowledge contributed considerably to the prediction of EFL reading performance, depth of vocabulary knowledge indicated success in RC

over and above the prediction provided by the size of vocabulary knowledge. In other words, beyond the forecast offered by the VST, scores on the WAT contributed a significant and distinctive addition to the prediction of RC scores. In conclusion, as expected, the depth of vocabulary knowledge is a better predictor of one's reading performance than the size of vocabulary knowledge.

To explore the correlations between vocabulary breadth, depth, and reading comprehension scores to illustrate how closely the dependent and independent variables are related. The learners' reading comprehension ability was significantly related to their vocabulary breadth ( $r = .71, p.01$ ), indicating that having a larger vocabulary enabled students to remember more information from the material they read. The learners' reading comprehension ability was significantly related to their vocabulary breadth ( $r = .71, p.01$ ), indicating that having a larger vocabulary enabled students to remember more information from the material they read. According to the results of the statistical analysis, there was a strong and significant relationship between depth of vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension ( $r = .74, p.01$ ), showing that having a larger vocabulary helps learners absorb the text better. There is a positive and statistically significant correlation ( $r = .83, p.01$ ) between the two independent variables of depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge, indicating that these two aspects of vocabulary knowledge are interrelated, i.e., those learners with a large vocabulary size also had a deeper understanding of the words.

The strong relationship between breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge is found to be consistent with the results of previous studies (Read, 1998 and Qian, 2002). It's worth mentioning that WAT had a substantial impact on RC prediction. Apart from the additional contribution the WAT measure made in Qian's



studies, the conclusion that the WAT provided a major additional contribution is identical to Qian's (1999, 2002) finding.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, as can be seen from the findings, there is a high correlation between vocabulary size and vocabulary depth. Despite the fact that this finding does not definitely prove one variable predicts the other, we can confidently conclude that students who know a large number of vocabulary items also know those items in greater depth. This finding is consistent with past research in the field. Qian (1999) discovered a strong link between vocabulary depth and breadth of vocabulary. The findings of this study, as well as other studies in the literature, clearly suggest that there is a positive relationship between vocabulary size and depth, which might serve as the foundation for vocabulary instruction in an EFL setting for English instructors. Whatever their goal is, whether it's fundamental interpersonal communication skills or academic reasons, teachers should make sure they teach as many related vocabulary items and as profoundly as feasible.

Another significant relationship was found between depth of vocabulary and reading performance in the present study. This finding can be confirmed by the studies in related literature. Nagy (1988) also came up with the suggestion that a learner's reading performance depends on his size of vocabulary and depth of vocabulary. Qian (2002) also stated that the dimension of vocabulary knowledge was as important as the breadth of vocabulary knowledge in predicting the reading performance of learners. Therefore, teaching

vocabulary items in depth will contribute to the reading performance of students greatly.

The study's final conclusion was that, while both vocabulary size and vocabulary depth predicted EFL students' reading performance, vocabulary depth predicted reading performance better. Overall, both vocabulary size and vocabulary depth have a significant impact on reading performance in an EFL environment, with the latter predicting reading performance better. For EFL situations, curriculum planners and course book authors should place just as much emphasis on vocabulary depth as they do on vocabulary breadth. Because the depth of vocabulary knowledge impacts the reading comprehension level, EFL teachers should arrange their classes in such a manner that students can learn the vocabulary items they are exposed to in detail.

More research into the interaction between vocabulary breadth and vocabulary depth in reading performance could be conducted. Longitudinal research is required to understand the extent to which vocabulary depth and breadth influence and predict reading performance in EFL environments. These longitudinal studies could collect data from students at all levels of English learning, measuring their vocabulary size, depth of vocabulary, and reading performance at each level, and coming up with conclusions about how much vocabulary helps students achieve higher reading performance, and when students' depth of vocabulary starts to improve and even surpasses their breadth of vocabulary, better predicting their reading performance.

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# Iranian University Students' Perceptions and Experiences of Bilingual Teaching of Computer Science Courses



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## Abstract

In contemporary times, codeswitching and translanguaging, are widely deployed as bilingual teaching strategies around the globe. Due to its peculiar nature, the field of computer science has been immensely influenced by non-English speaking lecturers' embedding of English words in their instructions for the sake of promoting students' epistemic access to complex concepts in the computer specialty in the 21st century. Therefore, it is essential to conduct studies that will disclose and examine students' beliefs about such practices; however, it should be noted that existing literature on the topic has mainly investigated perceptions of students in Chinese, Indian and African universities. Whereas, in the present study, we aim to divulge Iranian Computer Science students' views on codeswitching and translanguaging. The data collection process involved the collaboration of BSc Computer Science students by completing a survey questionnaire at an Iranian university in Tehran. The cumulative responses evince that undergraduate students' perceptions of instructors' bilingual teaching practices are highly positive.

**Key Words:** Codeswitching, Translanguaging, Linguistic repertoire, Iranian Computer Science Students

## Introduction

Owing to a manifold of reasons, it is crucial to switch to bilingual education in the specialized courses of Computer Science in Iranian universities. First and foremost, English is deemed to be the language of technology due to its predominant role in the "development of the first international databases and the arrival of the computer age". (Kaplan, 1993, p. 151) What is more, is that the forerunners of technological advancements are mostly native speakers of English. Hence, the most cutting-edge technologies are publicized in English. Secondly,

considering the fact that the operating systems managing all of the software and hardware on computers are in English, it is almost impossible to carry out commands on computers if you do not know English. In addition, due to the fact that computer science is an international discipline in the modern world, computer scientists can only study, work and communicate freely if they know English. Last but not least, English is of the utmost importance in the career development of computer science enthusiasts in the sense that no matter where they are, it can help them broaden their professional horizons by collaborating with foreign fellow workers, going abroad for further education and participating in international events concerning computer science (Want et al., 2010). Therefore, devising curriculums involving both English and Persian as the mediums of instruction is of an essential nature.

Many Iranian university students and professors in this field confirm that having a fairly good level of English along with expert knowledge are the two components of a successful career in computer science, and as far as academic education is concerned, both of them can be accomplished through the implementation of effective bilingual teaching methods. However, it should be noted that, in comparison to other countries, very little work has been done to promulgate bilingual teaching of professional courses for students of Computer Science in Iran.

In many Asian countries, especially China, a myriad of research projects has been conducted to analyze the status of bilingual teaching in the computer specialty, which as Ma and Chen (2017, p. 105) claimed, could be quite effectual in the reformation of education in this field by proposing a student-centered interactive and heuristic bilingual teaching model established under “acquisition-learning hypothesis” and “monitoring hypothesis” in second language acquisition theory introduced

by American linguist Krashen. Whereas, researchers in Iran have shown this interest only in bilingual teaching for EFL students.

This paper is intended to explore the theory and practice of bilingual teaching in the computer specialty by relying on a survey that attempts to reflect Iranian Computer Science students’ attitudes towards and experiences of bilingual practices. Moreover, some frameworks and methods for bilingual education are to be put forth after analyzing factors influencing the effectiveness of bilingual teaching in Iranian universities.

## Literature Review

### Terminology

In this study, languages are viewed as fluid codes of communication formulated for social practices that are used to negotiate various contexts (Moody et al., 2019). A review of related literature reveals that various terms have been coined for the use of two languages in different social contexts: ‘code-switching’, ‘code-mixing’, ‘translanguaging’, and ‘bilingualism’. Although all of them involve the same ideological concept, the roots from which each term was developed differ. According to Hymes (1974), code-switching is a common term that is used for the alternative use of two or more languages in a social context, whereas code-mixing is defined as the use of one or more languages for consistent transfer of linguistic units from one language into another (Nursjam, 2011). Even though both phenomena are used for the sake of better and faster communication, they slightly differ from each other. In simple terms, code-mixing is when a word or phrase from one language is embedded in an utterance or expression comprised primarily of another language, and code-switching is when sentences from different languages are used to communicate a special concept (Celik, 2003).

On the contrary, translanguaging is seen as the process of “making meaning, shaping

experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (Baker, 2011, p. 78). Melo-Pfeifer (2015) argues that translanguaging differs from code-switching and code-mixing in the sense that it is about the speakers’ generations that deploy their complete language repertoires. To put it in another way, translanguaging is a complex process of discursive practice and pre-existing controllable cognition in which bilinguals understand what they are saying while generating words in both languages. Pedagogically speaking, lecturers resort to translanguaging in order to build spaces in which different language practices are used to foster creative and critical learning (García et al., 2017).

Bilingualism is another critical concept that needs to be defined. For Bloomfield (1933, p. 56), bilingualism denotes “native-like control of two languages”, which encompasses ‘code-switching’, ‘code-mixing’ and ‘translanguaging’, as it refers to the ability to effortlessly alternate between two languages (Weinreich, 1953).

The correct understanding of the above terminology is helpful in understanding bilingual education, and thus, interdict any miscomprehensions that might lead us in the wrong direction. In *The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, bilingual education is defined as the use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects. (Richards, & Schmidt, 2013). In other words, bilingual education often denotes the use of English, as the language of science, along with students’ mother tongue for the teaching of non-language subjects. However, it should not be dismissed that bilingual education beholds distinct connotations in different parts of the globe. In the present study, bilingual education is primarily considered as instructors’ use of code-switching, code-mixing and, translanguaging for pedagogical proposes.

### **Bilingual Education in Iran**

In the Iranian educational system, aside from Persian being the primary medium of education, English is also one of the mandated foreign languages that are taught (Beiranvand, 2019). In the Iranian K-12 education policy, students are introduced to English from seventh grade for 1.5 hours per week, and education in this subject continues until their graduation from high school. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Iranian students are often thwarted from their path of attaining high levels of English proficiency as government officials feel threatened by the inherent “cultural and linguistic imperialism” and hegemony of English-speaking countries over Iranian youth (Borjia, 2013, p. 71). As Haghghi and Norton argue, one of the many policies that Iranian officials have implemented in this regard is the prevention of English communicative skills from being promoted or accommodated in public schools (Haghghi & Norton, 2017).

At the university level, however, English has been integrated into the national curriculum in the form of a two-credit General English (GE) course in addition to an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course which “credits vary according to the area of study and the required English knowledge in their major” (Moharami, & Daneshfar, 2022, p. 249). Instructions in these two courses are often carried out through many implementations of ‘code-switching’, ‘code-mixing’, and ‘translanguaging’. In addition, all other specialized courses in almost every field are expected to be taught using Persian only. However, there seems to be a tension between the government policy of mono-lingual education and university instructors’ bilingual education practice which seems to diverge from monolingualism due to practice requirements.

Iranian university instructors who deploy bilingual teaching methods wish to teach students professional knowledge of their study field and also, improve their proficiency in



English, “so as to help them study further and understand the specific subject with the help of the foreign language.” Therefore, in nature, bilingual education, or the use of English along with Persian for pedagogical purposes, is intended to “improve students’ international competence and to push on students’ quality education in an all-round way.” (Feng, 2010, p. 145).

As opposed to children who have just begun school and are devoid of any ideologies regarding education, by the time they start attending university lectures, the majority of university students develop a set of beliefs about bilingual education based on their precursory experiences with second language learning (Moody, Chowdhury, & Eslami, 2019). In the following, I intend to explore the way bilingual teaching strategies are perceived by university students based on the extant literature on bilingual education.

### **Perceptions of Bilingual Education in University Classrooms**

So far, a handful of research projects have been carried out to ascertain university students’ perceptions of bilingual classrooms. However, it should be pointed out that the majority of these projects were concerned with EFL students, rather than non-English majors. Horasan (2014) justifies this existing gap by indicating the countless merits of using bilingual teaching methods such as codeswitching in EFL classrooms. She outlines attracting attention, checking comprehension, facilitating classroom management and other purposes to be just a few examples of the advantages brought forth by bilingual classrooms. In addition, she claims that such strategies are “and can be employed in EFL classrooms because teachers’ use of CS is for the development of the students in the learning process and should not be taken for granted” (Horasan, 2014, p. 42). This study on EFL students is concluded by Horasan (2014)

referring to both Turkish teachers’ and students’ inevitable desire for bilingual instructions.

A similar study was also conducted in an Iranian setting by Rahimi and Jafari (2011). According to their survey, which was done on a class of 83 EFL students in Iran, they found out that approximately half of the participants “considered no role for the application of code-switching in increasing their motivation, learning, and concentration during the classroom interaction” (Rahimi & Jafari, 2011, p. 27), whereas, around 30% of students agreed to the facilitative role of bilingual teaching methods and were of the opinion that the absence or presence of Persian or English directly affected their motivation, comprehension, and concentration.

Studies of this nature have also been organized to divulge the predisposed attitudes of students majoring in science subjects. Carstens used a semi-structured questionnaire to examine how civil engineering majors in South Africa responded to the use of bilingual pedagogy. Based on his findings, a great proportion of students found instructors’ translanguaging quite beneficial, as such methodology prioritized the “cognitive gains” of students above all others (Carstens, 2016, p. 216). His content analysis culminates in his assuring scholars of the usefulness of multilingualism in classrooms by “performing multiple pedagogical functions in multilingual contexts” (Carstens, 2016, p. 217).

On a similar note, Rivera and Mazak’s study (2017) of psychology students’ perceptions of translanguaging pedagogy indicated that the majority of students viewed such practices by lecturers to be “normal” and scientifically acceptable. Moreover, the participants attested to the usefulness of codeswitching in facilitating classroom discussions.

Correspondingly, a small number of research projects were undertaken to establish the conceptions of computer science students regarding the use of English as well as their own

mother tongue for pedagogical purposes. Mbirimi-Hungwe and Hungwes (2018), using an open-ended questionnaire, conducted a survey on 40 students majoring in the computer specialty. According to the participants' responses, the majority of students preferred their home language to be used as a "vehicle that could help them to understand difficult concepts in computer science." However, a few students believed that English should be more integrated into their existing curriculum as a supplementary medium of instruction, which was primarily because of being the sole "language of conducting business" (Mbirimi-Hungwe, & Hungwe, 2018, p. 108).

### Theoretical Framework

The present study has been conducted using Garcia's theory of pedagogical translanguaging. Garcia views an individual's linguistic repertoire as a monolithic system which is often demonstrated as a separate system by manifestations of acts of deployment and suppression of linguistic features (words, sounds, rules) assigned in the society (Ortheguy, García & Reid, 2015, p. 286). Hence, bilingualism is "inherently dinámico" (García, 2017, p. 257), and is utilized with an emphasis on interpreting the social context in which the individual lives. She emphasizes that bilingual education not only does not restrict students' and instructors' linguistic repertoire but also liberates it for the sake of unlimited knowledge generation. This research project is founded upon this pedagogical translanguaging theory to understand computer science majors' perceptions of bilingual teaching methods (code-switching, code-mixing, and translanguaging)

### Methodology

This study was conducted among BSc Computer Science students at an Iranian university. All student groups present at the campus in December 2022 and January 2023, except first-year students, were asked to

complete a questionnaire with 2 diversified parts. The first part of the questionnaire included 4 multiple-choice as well as open-ended questions that were designed to elicit participants' academic backgrounds. The second part, however, was comprised of 20 Likert-scale statements, with responses ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Neutral", to determine students' agreement and/or disagreement about the principles of the lectures they attend on a regular basis.

The questionnaire was created on a digital platform, and a short link to it (<https://porsa.irandoc.ac.ir/s/zU5MTI>) was shared with around 100 students via Telegram, out of whom 76 were tender enough to complete the questionnaire to the very end. Participation in the survey was utterly voluntary and students were not offered any remuneration in exchange for their responses. It should also be noted that the data collection process was carried out in a fashion that it retained from requesting personally identifiable information from the attendees. Having received 76 responses, the data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and qualitative methods featuring recurrent concepts, which revealed valuable insight into students' perspectives on bilingual teaching strategies.

### Results

The survey involved two major areas of investigation: the use of codeswitching or translanguaging in the lectures and the study materials used by the lecturer. The following interpretation will deal with the participants' answers under two headings with allusions to the frequency counts of the responses. The main focus of this study is on where the majority of the opinions lie, and how the forthcoming results can be used to provide feasible strategies for teaching and learning purposes in bilingual classrooms.

Prior to indulging in the recurrence of opinions for the sake of determining the

students' perceptions, it is valuable to refer to the correlation between students' preferred study language and their educational background:

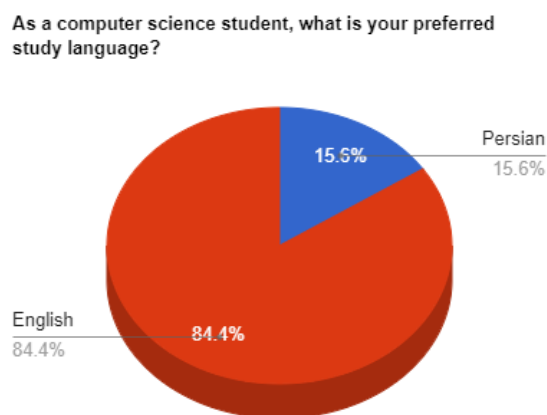


Figure 1 Students' Preferred Study Language

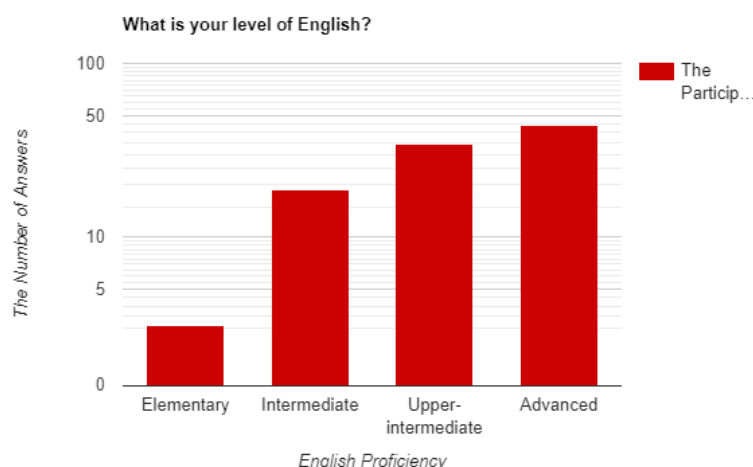


Figure 2 Students' English Proficiency

As demonstrated in Figure 1, a significant number of students declared that they preferred English to be the major medium of education in their academic lives. However, since the present study does not involve any descriptive methods of data collection such as interviews, we are not aware of the reasons for the majority of students' linguistic propensity for English. In addition, Figure 2 indicates that approximately half of the participants possess a high level of proficiency in English, which may be conducive to "the

proliferation of English Language Institutes (ELIs)" in Iran (Haghighi & Norton, 2017, p. 428). Therefore, it can be concluded that a rather thorough competence in the English language is an essential factor influencing the students' bent for studying in the language of science.

The Options	The Frequency of Answers	The Percentage
Excellent	2/76	2.62%
Very Good	16/76	20.96%
Good	48/76	62.88%
Average	8/76	10.48%
Below Average	2/76	2.62%

*Figure 3 Students' Evaluations of Their Academic Achievements*

What is more is that having a rather strong linguistic repertoire in English, the majority of attendees also considered themselves to be academically competent when it came to studying computer science subjects. According to Figure 3, almost two-thirds of the participants evaluated their academic success as 'good', whereas roughly 8% of the remaining students deemed the magnitude of their achievements in education to be at a 'very good' or 'excellent' level. Conclusively, all the 3 parameters demonstrated in the above figures can be interpreted to be in close relation with one another. In other words, students with higher levels of English are more prone to nurture special academic capabilities in computer science as well, resulting in a decline in the students' trepidation with using a second language in an unfamiliar setting.

#### **Language use by the lecturer**

It is evident from the survey results that the majority of computer science students feel they benefit greatly from lecturers' use of English alongside Persian in the form of codeswitching for pedagogical purposes owing to the fact that it culminates in a better comprehension of the technical concepts on students' behalf. It is noteworthy that a little under 85% of participants had staunch convictions about the usefulness of English in academic lectures. Furthermore, aside from the instructional merits

of codeswitching in learning computer science concepts, when asked about the role of bilingual classrooms in student's level of English (statement 15), approximately 70% of students agreed that their instructors resort to English during lectures has influenced their English proficiency positively, whereas around 20% stated the opposite.

The responses to statement 2 (I get confused when the lecturer uses both Persian and English for teaching purposes) corroborate the aforementioned points, as only 6/76 students have declared that they get confused when codeswitching is implemented as a pedagogical strategy in the lectures given by the instructors. Additionally, the survey results confirm that using bilingual teaching methods such as codeswitching and translanguaging not only stimulates epistemic access to computer science concepts in students (statement 13) but also has led to the formation of ideologies that pertain to the necessity of lecturers' use of English in classrooms (statement 16). Interestingly, of all the attendees in the data collection process, no one posed a strong disagreement towards the proposal of instructors using more English equivalences of key terms while lecturing.

Incidentally, even though about two-thirds of students said that they depend heavily on self-studying rather than classroom lectures

(statement 10), the answers to statement 6 (I would prefer it if the lecturer explained difficult concepts in the language with which s/he (the lecturer) is most comfortable) evince that just below 70% of the students concur with the idea that the lecturer should use the language that s/he is most comfortable with when they explain difficult concepts. This statement has also been confirmed by Van der Walt and Steyn, asserting that African university students prioritized the lecturers' mother tongue in their choice of the language of instruction. Based on Ma and Chen's findings, teachers' proficiency in both languages as well as their bilingual teaching abilities are crucial factors that "affect students' learning motivation".

Finally, as far as learning is concerned, one thing almost all of the students admitted was that being familiar with the English equivalents of key concepts in specialized courses was of the utmost importance for them (statement 7). Hence, the majority restrained from demurring at the cessation of using codeswitching in classes.

The study materials used by the lecturer

The results conceived from statements 4 (I understand the subject better when the lecturer uses bilingual materials (books, booklets, PowerPoint slides,... in Persian and English) and 5 (I will derive more benefit from bilingual classes if the lecturer provides a bilingual subject glossary containing technical terms beforehand) showcase the students' unwavering support of lecturers' use of bilingual teaching materials, ranging from projected slides to subject glossaries, in specialized courses, as over 50% of students passed their consent for the respective statements. On a similar note, when asked if they translate the study materials that are not in Persian (statement 9), only 6 students acknowledged indulging in such practices.

The responses to statement 10 (I find it easier to do assignments in Persian), however, demonstrated rather contradicting results. Around 40% of students confessed that it is

easier for them to do assignments in their mother tongue rather than their preferred study language, whereas only 19/76 students concurred with the opposite. Correspondingly, statement 11, which asked about the students' note-taking habits, divulged that about 65% of the participants were more drawn to taking notes in Persian. The responses to these two statements affirm that of the 4 foundational language learning skills, listening and reading skills of non-native students always develop much faster than their speaking and writing skills, which explains why only half of the participants were keen on doing assignments and carrying out other classroom activities in English.

### Discussion

The data collected for the present study can be applied for the modification of bilingual teaching strategies in the computer specialty. Once assured of the feasibility of conducting bilingual teaching in the due setting, 4 different factors need to be taken into consideration and modified according to the students' perceptions:

1) Teaching objects (or students): According to the survey results, the English proficiency as well as the technical knowledge of students as the teaching objects play an essential role in the success of bilingual classes. As Xiaohong and Zhihong have stated, owing to their "dumb English" and incompetence in computer-related subjects, freshmen students are not expedient teaching objects for conducting bilingual teaching strategies. Therefore, "choosing sophomore, junior and senior students to carry out bilingual education is more appropriate" (Xiaohong & Zhihong, 2009, p. 514).

2) Teaching subjects: It is obvious that choosing the right course for implementing bilingual teaching is of great significance. Based on the students' responses, using practices such as codeswitching precipitates their comprehension of the specialized material, however, it should be noted that perhaps

applying bilingual pedagogy for overwhelmingly entangled courses with difficult-to-understand subject materials is not the best of policies.

3) Teaching materials: When encountered with statement 17 (I often use original sources in English to learn/practice specialized lessons in computer science), precisely 96.87% of students claimed that they opt for original sources in English to familiarize themselves with computer-associated themes. Also, a majority said that they benefit from lecturers' use of English teaching materials. The responses to these two statements can be interpreted as the aptness and necessity of switching to all-English teacher materials, including books, booklets, PowerPoint slides, and other practice resources.

4) Teachers' resources: Teachers, as the major conveyors of knowledge, should have two particular abilities in order to qualify for implementing bilingual teaching methods: 1. They should have native-like proficiency in English, and 2. They should possess an adequate amount of professional knowledge in the computer specialty. In proportion to statements 18 (If you do not have a good level of English, you cannot have a successful career in computer science) and 20 (Having a good level of English can distinguish you from your peers in this field), almost 80% of students regard a good level of English as a distinguishing factor in the computer industry. However, 26/76 participants attested that they do not take the instructors who embed English words in their lectures to be more knowledgeable than others who do not do the same (statement 14). Having in mind these results, arranging effective training

courses for teachers should be one of the concerns of bilingual institutes.

### Conclusion

Several implications for both practice and research in the field of bilingual education merged from the present study. To begin with, most participants indicated that being exposed to bilingual pedagogical methods such as codeswitching and translanguaging was helpful as well as essential for both comprehending the key concepts in computer science and also acquiring a better level of English, which constitutes the answer to the second research question (What are Iranian students' attitudes towards and experiences of bilingual lectures?). Moreover, policymakers, administrators, and curriculum designers in universities should put an end to their rigid monolingual strategies, and develop practical bilingual programs for the students of computer science according to the essential factors influencing the success of bilingual classes: 1. teaching objects, 2. teaching subjects, 3. teaching material and 4. teachers' recourses (research questions 3 and 5). As discussed in the previous parts, Iranian university lecturers should cease unofficially incorporating codeswitching and translanguaging into their instructions, and instead pursue the legislation of bilingual programs in the Iranian educational system as all the investigations indicate the positive influence of such pedagogy on the academic performance of computer science students (research questions 1 and 4).

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# Non-native Teachers' Perceptions of the Use of First Language in English Classrooms



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## Abstract

This study was aimed at examining non-native Iranian teachers' perceptions toward employing their first language (L1) in their EFL classes. A quantitative method was applied for this study which involved using a questionnaire developed based on a 4-point Likert scale as the instrument. The questionnaires were filled out by 126 Iranian EFL teachers from three different language institutes in Tehran, Iran. Data analysis based on the descriptive statistics utilizing frequency distribution and percentage analysis revealed that Iranian EFL teachers expressed a desire toward using more English than their L1 (Persian) in the classroom, and they regarded English to be the primary medium of teaching. However, the findings also showed that teachers used L1 judiciously in classrooms whenever necessary and beneficial for several reasons, including presenting hard-to-understand materials, giving instructions and introducing new vocabulary items. Based on the data analysis, it can also be concluded that using L1 helped students to feel more at ease and confident in the process of learning the second language (L2), as well as to express their ideas and feelings easily.

*Keywords: Teachers' perceptions, EFL classroom, First language (L1), Second language (L2), Use of L1.*

## 1. Introduction

The English language has become a global language that is used in practically almost every aspect of human life; as a result, the interest in learning English as a second or foreign language has risen in recent decades (Hasman, 2000). Because of the increased demand for learning English, teaching methods and approaches have received a lot of attention, and we have seen a lot of fundamental developments in English Language Teaching (ELT) during the previous few decades. Therefore, the medium of

instruction, as well as the role of L1, has become one of the most significant issues to address (Debreli, 2016).

Many centuries ago, it was a norm to use learners' first language in studying L2 using a translation technique known as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). According to Richards & Rodgers (2003), at that time, bilingual learning and teaching was prevalent and almost acceptable because the written word was emphasized over the spoken word.

Meanwhile, in the nineteenth century, a new style known as the monolingual approach began to expand its dominance over language teaching by emphasizing the spoken rather than the written word. Moreover, as Miles (2004) stated, the impact of massive migration and colonialism reinforced the Monolingual Approach throughout the twentieth century. These factors led people to believe that English is superior to all other languages and that it is the only language that should be spoken and utilized in English language classrooms (1992, Phillipson).

For a long time, it was thought that utilizing L1 in L2 classes was one of the factors that hindered effective second language learning and caused major issues in learners' second language acquisition (Prodromou, 2002). A lot of scholars believed that students needed to be exposed to a wide range of input in the target language in order to properly learn the target language. As Ellis (1984) stated, many researchers were of the opinion that simulating an L2 setting was a requirement for efficient language learning and instruction.

On the other hand, there have been other scholars, such as Atkinson (1987), Auerbach (1993), Deller & Rinvoluceri (2002), and Phillipson (1992), who consider learners' first language as a helpful instrument in acquiring L2. Many researchers have emphasized that teachers can yield positive results in the process of teaching L2 by using the first language cautiously (Cook, 2001). They also believe that

if we want to promote language learning and make it efficient, L1 use should not be overlooked; as Cook (2001, p. 402) asserted, "we should open a door that has been firmly shut in language teaching for over 100 years."

In this regard, several studies have examined teachers' and students' perceptions concerning the function of L1 in L2 classrooms. Similarly, when it comes to the context of Iran, Iranian teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of L1 have been investigated. For example, although Siah-Chashm (1995) concluded that learners' failure in learning the target language is due to the use of the mother tongue, Moradabadi (2003) recommended the use of the first language (Persian) and translation as a technique in EFL classes. Moreover, some Iranian students believe that if they are not allowed to express their opinions in Persian, they would experience anxiety, uneasiness, and poor self-esteem.

However, according to the literature, relatively few surveys dealing with the attitudes of Iranian teachers have been conducted so far, and both teachers and students in Iran appear to be puzzled when it comes to using their mother tongue, Persian, in English classes.

Therefore, with respect to these differences in language teaching approaches and methods and due to the confusion among teachers regarding whether to use L1 or not, the present study was designed in order to shed more light on the debate that exists in the Iranian context by examining EFL teachers' perspectives toward the usage of L1 in English classes.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Significance of L1 in the Process of Learning L2

According to studies, a person who learns his first language in childhood differs from a person who learns a second or foreign language as an adult (Burden, 2000), because while young

children learn their language naturally and normally in a linguistic and cultural atmosphere, adults learn the L2 later than the first language, after the critical period, and usually in exclusion from the appropriate and proper environment.

Language learners build language knowledge based on prior conceptual knowledge and develop it in phases that are predictable. Therefore, L2 learners are more linguistically and cognitively powerful, as their existing knowledge allows them to apply their analytical mind in learning a new language (Hidayati, 2012). Gass and Selinker (1983, p.7) reported: "There is overwhelming evidence that language transfer is indeed a real and central phenomenon that must be considered in any full account of the second language acquisition process". Furthermore, pieces of research conducted by Meyer (2008) and De La Campa (2009) reveal that learners who have a strong mother tongue are more likely to succeed in learning and functioning in another language. Moreover, these researchers demonstrated that abilities gained in the first language, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing, are transferrable to the target language.

On the other hand, Lin, H.Y. (2005) stated that the patterns transferred from the first language are unquestionably the most important sources of mistakes in learning the target language. Interference, according to Krashen (1982), is a form of automatic and habitual transfer of the surface structure of the first language to the surface of the target language. In the course of target language learning, learners prefer to develop interim rules by utilizing their L1 knowledge, according to Ellis (2008).

Nonetheless, during the target language acquisition process, L1 knowledge will be combined with L2 knowledge, resulting in a mutual set of knowledge (Beebe, 1988). Manara (2007) claims that all target language learners use their L1 while processing their L2. He further asserts that L1 will not be switched off

during the learning of L2; rather, it would be available at all times. In fact, Manara (2007) highlights that in L2 teaching, teachers should neither dismiss nor separate the learners' L1 since it is always there in the thoughts of L2 students, whether the teacher wants it to be or not. In this regard, it may be concluded that learning a new language without using one's own L1 in some form or another is impossible.

## 2.2. The History of Using L1 in English Classes

As Macaro (2005) stated, there is a sort of continuum of opinions on target language and first language usage in target language acquisition. In this regard, the Classical Method, also known as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), is one of these extreme poles of views which makes use of L1 the most. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this technique dominated the English Language Teaching profession (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Since the second language was solely utilized for scholastic and intellectual purposes at that time, GTM mostly concentrated on reading and writing. This method was characterized by its considerable focus on translation and detailed explanations of grammatical principles. As a result, the target language was only utilized seldom in the classroom, as L1 was the primary mode of communication.

Despite its popularity, several scholars and linguists have criticized this method of education since it focuses solely on writing abilities and ignores the spoken part of the target language (Brown, 2007). This issue must be considered that the excessive usage of the first language reduces learners' exposure to target language input according to Swain & Lapkin (2000).

## 2.3. Arguments against the Use of L1 in L2 Classrooms: The Monolingual Approach

In regard to the continuum that Macaro (2005) talked about, the exclusive use of a

second language, known as the monolingual approach, is on the other extreme of the debates. Those who support this approach argue that employing L1 in L2 learning has no pedagogical or communicative benefit and advocate for an English-only classroom policy.

To Cook (2001), who is not a proponent of this method, supporters of the monolingual approach follow three principles: a. The learning of a second language should model the learning of the first language by maximum exposure to the L2. b. The separation and distinction of the L1 from the L2 create successful learning. c. Learners should be made aware of the value of L2 through its continued use.

In regard to Cook's (2001) second point, advocates of the monolingual approach have claimed that translating between L1 and L2 can be problematic because it supports the notion that languages are one-to-one counterparts, which is not necessarily the case (Pacek, 2003). They feel that the two languages should be treated completely separately.

#### **2.4. Arguments in favor of the Use of L1 in L2 Classrooms: The Bilingual Approach**

Despite its supporters, the Monolingual Approach has critics too, with some claiming that excluding students' L1 in order to maximize students' exposure to the L2 is not necessarily productive, and that exposure to the target language is in part dependent on the societally decided value ascribed to the L1, which can be reinforced or challenged inside the classroom.

Since the monolingual approach has been called into question and reexamined, a movement encouraging the use of the mother tongue (L1) in language classrooms has grown, and researchers and teachers have begun to argue for a more bilingual approach to education. This support has even gone so far as Schweers (1999) claimed that using L1 in the classroom is necessary. According to Meyer (2008), countries such as China have experimented with

multilingual English classrooms with great success. Over time, researchers have agreed that a certain application of the L1 is beneficial in the L2 classroom.

Based on the studies carried out by several researchers, the use of L1 serves a number of purposes, some of which are going to be discussed below.

Some proponents of this method regard L1 as a possible source that may be used in the classroom to improve foreign language acquisition. For example, Macaro (2001) claimed that removing the L1 is not only unfeasible but also risks depriving learners of a critical tool for learning the L2. Aurbuch (1993) believes that the mother tongue can play a significant role in the L2 classroom. Language analysis, class management, providing grammatical rules, offering directions or prompts, clarifying mistakes, and assessing for understanding are all conceivable tasks for the L1.

Furthermore, according to Cook (2001), teachers should employ the L1 to express meaning and structure the class. Students can benefit from using L1 for scaffolding (building up the fundamentals from which more advanced learning can be processed) and co-operative learning with their classmates (peer learning). As a result, it is clear that the primary motivations for using L1 in the language classroom are likely to be time efficiency and the reduction of fear and uncertainty (Harbord, 1992).

When it comes to the psychological role of L1 in L2 classes, Auerbach (1993) believes that using L1 will encourage L2 learners to take risks and try new things in English; she also believes that learners will feel more secure as their lived experiences will be validated; as a result, they will be able to express themselves more freely because psychological barriers will be removed and learners will be able to progress more quickly.



Additionally, according to (Atkinson, 1993; Cook, 2001; Tang, 2002; Wells, 1999), using the learners' mother tongue in specific situations by both learners and teachers improves both comprehension and L2 learning. For example, Atkinson (1993) reported mother tongue may be used for a variety of purposes, including engaging and keeping enthusiasm in a work as well as establishing techniques to make a tough activity more achievable.

Miles (2004) also was able to illustrate two points based on the two experiments he carried out. First, employing L1 in the classroom does not prevent students from learning, and second, L1 has a facilitative function to play in the classroom and may really aid learning.

### **2.5. Studies Carried Out on Teachers' and Students' Perceptions toward the Use of L1 in EFL Classrooms**

By studying the relevant literature, it is obvious that the number of research examining teachers' and students' perceptions of the usage of L1 in ESL or EFL classes has increased, some of which are going to be discussed in what follows.

For instance, Tang (2002) empirically investigated English major students and their teachers from China in a research that included classroom observations, interviews, and a questionnaire. According to the results of the questionnaires, a large proportion of students (70%) and teachers (72%) believed that the L1 should be employed in the classroom. Furthermore, many students were pleased when their teachers utilized some first language in various settings.

Bateman (2008) conducted a research in which multiple types of data collection approaches were utilized to measure students' and teachers' attitudes on L1 use, including questionnaires and interviews. The study's findings revealed that participants supported the use of target language to give students as much

comprehensible input as feasible. Vocabulary tasks, activities dealing with reading and hearing materials, offering comments on students' assignments, and warm-up exercises were among the activities in which they believed target language should be utilized entirely. They did say, however, that L1 might be used to clarify things for students who didn't understand, to aid troubled students one-on-one, and to deal with discipline issues.

Another similar survey was carried out by Al-Nofaie (2010) on students' and teachers' attitudes and views of using Arabic (L1) in Saudi Arabia. The study revealed that the students' and teachers' opinions about utilizing L1 in L2 classrooms were positive, and the students preferred L1 in certain circumstances, according to the study. In their lessons, teachers highlighted the relevance of L1. However, they noted that using L1 inappropriately or excessively should be avoided because it might make learning English more difficult.

Al-Buraiki (2008) looked at teachers' attitudes on the usage of the first language in English schools as well. Teachers showed in her study that the primary language was mostly used to offer directions and explain new ideas and vocabulary. The majority of the teachers in this survey agreed that utilizing their native language to promote English language learning and improve students' language competence was beneficial. When trying to convey things that can easily be explained using the L1, she claims that utilizing the L1 saved her time.

Krieger's (2005) study, on the other hand, revealed slightly different results. He looked at how English language teachers in both ESL and EFL settings used their first language. The findings of that study revealed that in a multilingual classroom, adopting the L1 meant that English was no longer only a medium of communication. Students used their L1 not just to help them learn English, but also to meet their personal needs. In the EFL environment, the

data indicated that students used their L1 regardless of whether or not their teachers allowed it. However, the study recommended that the teacher do all possible to encourage students to utilize their native language in order to increase their language acquisition rather than denying them the opportunity to acquire English. Teachers should also establish regulations for when and how students can utilize their L1 and when they are not permitted to do so from the start.

Similarly, university students in Prodromou's (2001) study were suspicious about the role of L1 (Greek) at the university level. They assumed that excluding L1 and getting as much exposure to the target language as possible would help them acquire the second language much faster.

#### 2.6. Studies Carried Out on Teachers' and Students' Perceptions toward the Use of L1 in EFL Classrooms in the Iranian Context

In terms of employing L1 in the teaching of L2 in the Iranian setting, Afzal (2013) conducted research on using L1 in EFL classrooms as a scaffolding for both students and teachers learning and teaching English. The majority of teachers employed L1 in L2 classrooms, according to the findings of this study. Despite the fact that the major reasons for using L1 were to translate a few words, complicated ideas, or even an entire chapter, the study demonstrated that Persian plays a supporting and facilitating function in EFL sessions.

Rabani, Bejarzahi, and Ehsanjou (2014) looked at how Iranian high school English teachers felt about using L1 (Persian) in the classroom when teaching reading comprehension texts. The study included 30 Iranian high school teachers, and the information was gathered by questionnaires. The findings suggested that the instructors were in favor of using Persian in the classroom to teach L2 reading materials. They believed that L1 could be used in the classroom to teach

reading texts for a variety of reasons, including its effects on improving learners' English skills and classroom interaction, as well as its effects on learners' affective and metacognitive aspects, which improve learners' comprehension of L2 reading texts.

Furthermore, Zohrabi, Yaghoubi-Notash, and khodadadi (2014) looked at the role of the first language of Iranian English foreign language learners in learning English vocabulary in Azarbayejan. A mixed methods research methodology was adopted in this study. According to the findings, the majority of Azerbaijani-Turkish intermediate-level ELF learners and Azerbaijani-Turkish ELF teachers had favorable attitudes regarding the usage of Turkish in acquiring English vocabulary.

Nazari's (2008) research, on the other hand, yielded substantially different results. He polled 85 students at Tehran University on their feelings about using L1 in L2 classes. Students majored in a variety of subjects and took extracurricular English language classes to improve their overall English skills. Based on the results of the questionnaire, the author came to the conclusion that Iranian university students, in stark contrast to prior research, were hesitant to use their L1 in L2 classes. They believed that using L1 would reduce the amount of time spent exposed to English, hence limiting language learning.

In line with Nazari (2008), Mahmoudi and Yazdi Amirkhiz (2011) performed a research in Ahvaz, Iran, to examine classroom dynamics in terms of the quantity of L1 usage in two randomly selected pre-university English classrooms. The goal was to learn about students' and teachers' opinions and attitudes towards using L1 in L2 classrooms. The teachers and four high-achieving/low-achieving students were questioned after the courses were observed and videotaped for six sessions. According to the findings, students may become demotivated if Persian is used excessively. As a result, the

questioned students expressed displeasure with the inappropriate use of L1 in L2 lessons and its dominance.

### 2.7. Research Question

Despite the fact that numerous studies have been conducted on utilizing L1 in L2 classrooms across the world, particularly in the Iranian setting, the need for a thorough study on Iranian teachers' opinions of using L1 was recognized. As a result, the purpose of this study was to find out how non-native Iranian teachers felt about using L1 in English classes by answering the following question:

What are the perceptions of Iranian teachers on the use of L1 in English classes?

### 2.8. Research Hypothesis

In addition, the following null hypothesis was proposed based on the study question:

It is possible that non-native English teachers have a negative attitude regarding the usage of L1 in English classrooms and restrict students from using L1 in classes.

## 3. Research Methodology

### 3.1. Research Method and Design

Since the researcher's goal was to investigate non-native teachers' perceptions of using their L1 in English classes, the researcher conducted a survey, which is a quantitative study method. The quantitative data was obtained using a questionnaire developed based on a 4-point Likert Scale as the instrument, and the questionnaire was divided into two parts: non-native teachers' opinions behind using L1 in English language classes, and non-native teachers' reasons behind using L1 in English language classes.

### 3.2. Participants

The subjects for this research were 126 Iranian English language teachers (52 males and 74 females) from three different language

institutes in Tehran, Iran. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 50 years old and were all TEFL graduates. They had more than 5 years of English teaching experience.

### 3.3. Instruments

This study was carried out by using a quantitative approach. In this regard, a questionnaire consisting of 17 statements about the usage of L1 based on a four-point Likert Scale was employed. This questionnaire was adopted from Hashemi & Sabet (2013) who inquired about Iranian EFL students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of L1 in general English classes. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire have been assessed by other researchers, and it is regarded as highly valid and reliable.

This questionnaire was divided into three sections: the first section included demographic information such as gender, age, educational degree and years of teaching experience. The second part of this survey included 11 items on a 4-point Likert scale regarding teachers' general attitudes towards the use of L1 in English classrooms. The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements in terms of "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", or "strongly disagree". The final section of this questionnaire consisted of 6 items on a 4-point Likert scale regarding teachers' attitudes towards the reasons behind using L1 and L1 functions in the English classroom. The participants were asked to indicate their opinions of the statements by marking one of the "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", or "strongly disagree" items.

### 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed through "Google Forms" among 126 teachers who had expressed an interest in taking part in the research. The participants filled out the questionnaires online during Winter of 2022. The participants were

informed that the study was only for academic and research purposes.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data for the current study was done through SPSS 21 software utilizing descriptive statistics. The data was analyzed and the frequencies of chosen options by participants were calculated. Then, the obtained frequencies of all items were converted to percentages to determine teachers' most common opinions and reasons for the use of L1 in English classes. Relevant perceptions were then grouped together and finally used as supplementary sources to support the interpretation and comparison of data.

## 4. Results

In this section, Table 1. depicts the major outcomes that emerged from the data acquired in this study according to the statements in the questionnaire. Data were analyzed by calculating the number of respondents who agreed or disagreed to different degrees with the different aspects specified by each statement included in the survey.

The following table presents the results in percentage. The results of the survey gave useful information that helped to explain the conclusions of the study.

Table 1. Non-native Teachers' Responses to the Multiple-choice Questions of the Survey

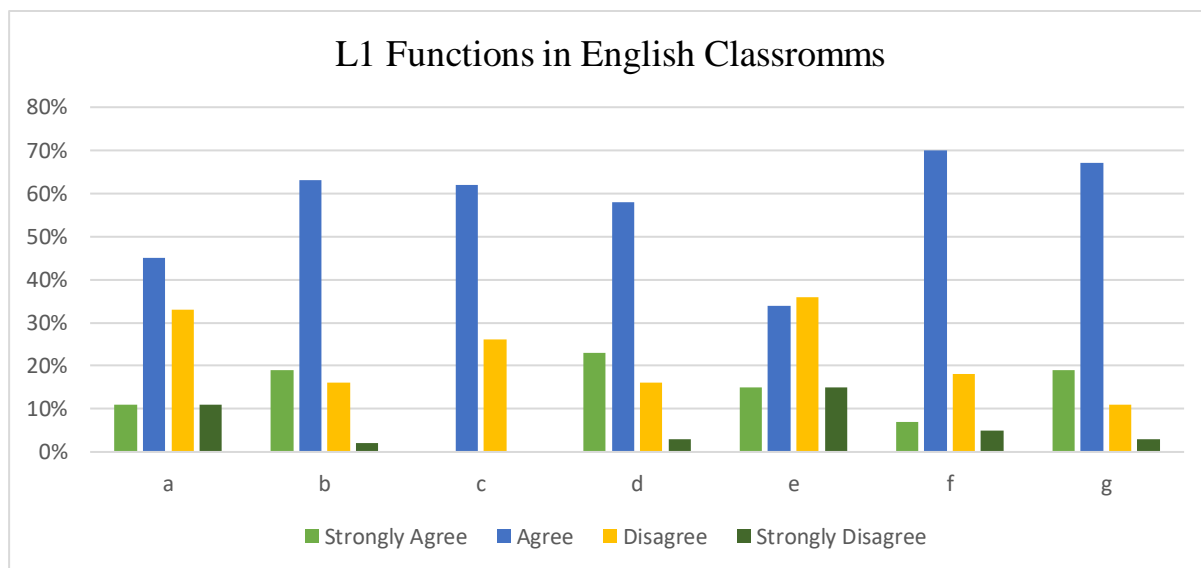
n.	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
		p	P	p	P
1	When I use L1 in English classrooms, students will tend to use more L1 than English in the classroom.	38%	49%	13%	0%
2	The more I make use of L1, the less effort the students will make to understand my use of English.	17%	53.3%	23%	6.7%
3	Teachers should not use L1 in English classrooms because it reduces the amount of students' exposure to English.	8.5%	36.5%	53%	2%
4	The use of L1 should be minimized in English language classrooms.	22%	67%	11%	0%
5	I do not like the use of L1 in English classes because it prevents students from thinking in English.	16.4%	45%	36.6%	2%
6	It makes me disappointed when students speak L1 in English class.	7%	21%	72%	0%
7	The medium of instruction should be mainly English in English classrooms.	21%	48%	24%	7%
8	I find my students frightened when they do not understand what I am saying in English in English class.	3.6%	78%	15.4%	3%
9	My students feel more comfortable when I talk to them in L1.	16.2%	57%	11.8%	15%
10	My students can understand the lesson much better if I use L1 in the classroom.	15%	42%	38%	5%
11	It is necessary to explain the differences and similarities between L1 and English.	11%	45%	33%	11%
12	I use L1 in English classrooms to explain grammar rules.	19%	63%	16%	2%
13	I use L1 in English classrooms for classroom management (e.g. giving instructions and grouping students).	7.7%	62%	26%	4.3%
14	I use L1 in English classrooms to explain the meaning of a new vocabulary.	23%	58%	16%	3%
15	I like to ask my students to translate a word or sentence into L1 as a comprehension check.	15%	34%	36%	15%
16	I sometimes speak L1 to clarify my directions.	7%	70%	18%	5%
17	The use of L1 can help students to express their feelings and ideas that they cannot explain in English.	19%	67%	11%	3%

Key: p = percentage

In addition to Table 1, the following graph demonstrates the data obtained from the second section of the questionnaire. The second section consists of 7 items, items 11 to 17, which are designed to find out about teachers' perceptions

of the reasons behind using L1 in the English language classroom. The attitudes of teachers towards seven common functions of the L1 use can be seen in this graph.

Graph 1. L1 Functions in English Classrooms



a: Explaining the Differences and Similarities between L1 & L2	e: Comprehension Check through Translation
b: Explaining Grammar Rules	f: Clarifying Directions
c: Classroom Management	g: Helping Students to Express their Feelings
d: Explaining New Vocabulary Items	

5. Discussion

The first two items shown in Table 1 were aimed at examining teachers’ viewpoints regarding the indirect effects that using L1 can have on the process of learning English. According to the results, it can be concluded that the majority of teachers believe extensive usage of L1 can have negative effects on learning the English language. 49% of teachers agree and 38% of them strongly agree that when they use L1 in the class as the teacher, students will become inclined to speak more and more in L1 rather than English. Moreover, 70.3% of teachers agree and strongly agree ( 53.3% and 17% respectively) that if they use L1 a lot, students will become reluctant to making effort to understand the materials in English. These results are in accordance with Ellis (1984) who

claimed that using L1 in English language classes should be decreased as much as possible.

In regard to items 3 and 4, the results may be contradictory at first glance. According to item 3, 55% of teachers believe that the use of L1 is necessary and cannot be omitted from the teaching process for the sake of maximizing students’ exposure to the target language. This conclusion is not in line with previous researchers such as Kim (2009) who believed that the best way of learning a second language is to have the maximum exposure to it.

In contrast to the results of item 3, according to item 4, a solid majority of 89% of teachers believe that the use of L1 in English classrooms should be minimized. By comparing these two items, it can be concluded that although teachers believe the use of L1 should



not be completely omitted from English classes, it should be used as less as possible. Therefore, teachers believe in using L1 judiciously in classrooms whenever necessary. These results are in accordance with the answers given to item 7. 69% of teachers, with 48% agreeing and 21% strongly agreeing, think that the main medium of instruction in English classes should be the English language and not L1. As Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz (2007) stated, although employing L1 can be helpful and beneficial in English classrooms under certain circumstances, the significance of L2 cannot be underestimated and teachers should use L2 most of the time.

Moreover, 72% of teachers disagree with item 6. Based on this, it can be referred that teachers do not get disappointed by students using L1 in the classroom. This can refer to the point that most teachers do not believe in completely restricting the use of L1 and conducting only-English classes. In fact, the majority of teachers do not agree with the monolingual approach and believe that students' usage of L1 is not like committing a crime. These ideas contradict monolingual advocates' beliefs such as Norman (2008) who believed there should be sorts of consequences designed in the classroom for students who use the L1.

Items 8 and 9 refer to the mental states of students in the classroom. About 81% of teachers agree with item 8 and believe that students may become frightened or anxious when they do not understand what their teacher is saying. Furthermore, about 73% of teachers believe that the usage of L1 can make students more comfortable and at ease in specific situations. Students' mental state is an issue of utmost importance as Tajgozari (2017) stated that students are not mere objects and their mental health should be considered in the process of learning a second language. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of L1 can have a significant positive effect on making students feel more relaxed and less anxious.

Regarding item 10, 57% of teachers believe that students can learn the lessons better if they employ L1 during the teaching process. On the other hand, 43% of teachers disagree with this idea. It can be seen that a majority of teachers believe in the facilitating role of using L1 in helping students to learn educational materials easier.

As discussed above, from items 1 to 10, the results show that Iranian EFL teachers think the use of L1 can be beneficial in the teaching and learning process. However, they do not believe in the excessive use of L1 and believe English should remain the main medium of teaching, while L1 can be used in specific situations. Some of the functions of L1 in English classes based on items 11 to 17 will be discussed below.

The majority of teachers agree with the statements discussed in items 11 to 17, except for item 15. The results demonstrate that about 56% of teachers believe it is necessary to explain the differences and similarities that exist between the first and target languages. A lot of previous studies carried out in this field also show the same results. Many researchers such as Lin (2005) and De La Campa (2009) have stated that due to the similarities that exist in the structure of most languages, comparing L1 with L2 can be of great help in learning the target language.

Additionally, three other important functions of L1 use can be seen according to items 12 to 14. 82% of teachers have stated that they get help from the mother tongue in explaining some grammatical rules to students. 69.7% of teachers have also claimed that they employ L1 in managing the classroom and tasks such as giving instructions or dividing students into several groups. Furthermore, 81% of teachers have asserted that they use L1 while explaining items of new vocabulary in the classroom. These are three important reasons why teachers use L1 occasionally and can attest to the fact that judicious use of L1 can be useful

and beneficial in the English language classroom. Scholars like Aubach (1993), Duff (1989), and Ellis (1984) have also mentioned such roles for L1 while investigating teachers' views regarding employing the first language in English classes.

Regarding items 16 and 17, the results depict two other significant effects using L1 can have in the classroom. 77% of teachers favored the statement claiming that the use of L1 can help the teacher clarify his directions. This can show that using L1 can help students understand their teachers better and therefore, can prevent misunderstanding in teachers' and students' relationships. Moreover, 86% of participants believe that using L1 can play a major role in letting students express the ideas and feelings they cannot express in English. This shows how much the L1 can be effective for students in the English classroom.

Although several uses of L1 can be referred from the results demonstrated in Table 1, in regard to item 15, a high percentage of teachers disagree with the idea that translating specific words and sentences from the target language into the first language can be a significant factor in checking students' comprehension. This can be in accordance with the fact that Rabani (2014) stated; the fact that translating the target language into L1 cannot be a good strategy since it makes students always rely on translation and not the target language itself.

The points mentioned in the previous paragraphs regarding items 11 to 17 can also be seen in Graph 1. Based on this graph it can be concluded that the most common function of L1 is to help teachers clarify their directions for the students in the English classroom, and also the second-most common reason behind using L1 is to help students express their feelings and ideas much easier than through the target language. However, the results also depict that

the L1 is the least used for checking students' comprehension through translation.

Although the results discussed in the current study can be helpful regarding making use of L1 in English classes, it should be noted that the present study only focused on a few number of Iranian teachers' perceptions; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the whole Iranian teachers.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study focused on Iranian non-native teachers' perceptions of the use of L1 in the English classroom. Based on the results of this study it can be concluded that teachers tend to use more and more English in the classroom and consider the English language as the main medium of teaching. However, they do not ban the use of L1 in the classes completely and believe they can employ L1 in certain situations when necessary, including making students feel more comfortable and at ease, helping students learn difficult materials easier and class management.

In fact, most teachers believe that using the target language in the classroom should be maximized since it helps students significantly in the process of learning the target language; however, using L1 is also necessary under certain circumstances and cannot be neglected.

The findings of the current research can be applied to improve learning conditions in language classrooms by raising awareness about the benefits and drawbacks of using L1 in English classes. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that syllabus designers and language policymakers should consider the constructive role of L1 in designing a classroom syllabus, English language teaching methods and classroom management.

There are certain limitations to this study that should be considered in future research. The number of teachers in this study was a small sample that cannot be generalized to

all Iranian teachers; moreover, the results of this study do not adequately reflect the whole EFL teaching community.

There are several issues regarding the subject of the current study that can be further investigated in the future. One important

question that can be answered in the future is what perceptions students have towards the use of L1 in English classrooms and how their attitudes are related to teachers' attitudes regarding this issue.

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# An Empirical Study on The Iranian Students' and Teachers' Lived Experiences of Online Education During Covid-19 Pandemic



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## Abstract

The pandemic forced schools to close, leading to a shift towards online learning. This disrupted traditional classroom learning, leading to challenges in delivering quality education. The shift towards online learning has highlighted the digital divide, with students from low-income families or rural areas having limited access to the internet and technology necessary for online learning. Besides that students and teachers experienced mental health challenges due to the pandemic's disruptions, isolation, and uncertainty. On these accounts, it is vital to consider the lived experiences of teachers and students about online learning; through this action one can face the challenge of working in this new environment better Fedynich (2013). Based on this study, the main themes in teachers' and students' lived experiences about online education were found. Also, the researcher has tried to mention the stemming reasons of these themes (socio-cultural, instructional, or technological categories).

## 1. Introduction

The crisis of Covid-19 pandemic has not been limited to the borders of one country. Since its beginning, in Wuhan city of China, on December 2019, more and more countries and cities were struck by this lethal virus. This virus can enter the respiratory system, cause damage to lungs and lead to death. As the lockdowns started practically in 2020 all across the globe, various significant aspects of human lives were impacted dramatically; and some aspects like economic and social were even devastated (K. Schulten, 2020). Education was one of those aspects of life that was impacted enormously. According to the United Nation's (2020, p.2) report, "disruption of education systems in history, affected nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 190 countries and all conti-nents". The schools have shut down; and students are asked to stay home and to follow their education



via alternative methods for learning including TV and Radio programs, and internet-based educations. Since its beginning nobody knows when this pandemic ends (D. Schulten, 2020).

Internet-based education also known as e-learning became an alternative method for face to face education as a response to the prolonged lockdowns in most of the schools and educational centers in various levels across the globe. The replacement of traditional education with the pedagogical approaches of online education soon became prevalent via various internet-based platforms in the globe. As Mishra et al. (2020, p.2) put it, after the covid-19 pandemic education got a new disguise, a change "from traditional method to the modern approach of teaching-learning, from classroom to Zoom, from personal to virtual and from seminars to webinars".

Therefore, the ministry of education primarily and the teachers and students essentially were engaged in applying internet-based technology into their education. In this regard, there were not any previous experiences or readiness for implementing any of the online education tools or methods; and this led to a state of staggering at the beginning of this crisis in Iran. Therefore, one could say, although there is plenty of research on the usefulness of applying online education as a complement to face to face education or as a pedagogical approach, there was little empirical research on the status of E-learning as a substitute for traditional classrooms and as an alternative in crisis time (Chua et al., 2020 as cited in Chua et al., 2020). This condition has very recently resulted in some scholarly articles about the practical use of online learning and the related tools in education.

The objective of this study is to investigate and determine the status of online education in Iran during Covid-19 pandemic via the lived experiences of teachers and students across the country. Therefore, it is to enlighten the

challenges and positive aspects of the applying e-learning and technological tools in the context of Iran.

Based on these research objectives, three significant questions apply to this study:

1. What are the main themes in teachers' lived experiences about online education? Where do these themes stem from (socio-cultural, instructional, or technological categories)?

2. What are the main themes in students' lived experiences about online education? Where do these themes stem from (socio-cultural, instructional, or technological categories)?

3. What is the overall evaluation of teachers and students about the acceptability status of online learning?

The findings of this empirical research can be helpful for any future considerations about online education by various institutions involved in it. First, ministry of Education and their team of educational policy makers that are the main reference for proving the required infrastructures for online education can take the most out of it. Then, the results are quite helpful for the experts in educational management and those involved in defining new online pedagogical approaches to distance education. Next, teacher can take the advantage of these findings by providing prior solutions to the likely problems they might face; they can also share these lived experiences by other colleagues. Last but not the least, students can also find these results as a criteria for taking the most advantage out of it by pondering over the best solutions to at least reducing the amount of negative output in their studies.

The study is limited to probing the lived experiences of teachers and students in elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools about online education during Covid-19 crisis across the country Iran. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalizable to any higher levels of education in Iran.



## 2. Literature Review

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, many schools and educational centers have tried to change their education system toward a better and more applicable system. These attempts, though unexpected and shocking at its rise, have paved the uneasy way to make the education available in any part of any country. Despite the difficulties, the government tried their best not to lag behind the educational purposes, goals and timelines. Therefore, this path has witnessed lots of ups and down to get to an almost stabilized status today.

Online learning is a form of distance education where technology plays the key role of facilitator in the process of learning. In online education instruction is presented wholly over the internet, and then students and teachers are not expected to be at the same time and location together (Joksimovic et al., 2015). It's should also be noted that notions such as computer-based instruction, problem-based learning, and internet-based education are associated with distance learning (online) education.

According to Rasmitadila et al. (2020) online learning is in fact Internet-based courses which are presented synchronously and asynchronously. He points that there are direct interactions between students and teachers in synchronous learning while simultaneously using online forms such as conferences and online chat (Rasmitadila et al. 2020). On the other hand, asynchronous learning is learning indirectly (happening not at the same time); it is learning inter-based but via offline softwares.

Distance education has witnessed various forms through its history from traditional mailing form to radio or TV broadcasting, and to computer-based (online) distance education (Anderson & Simpson, 2012). Online education, which became an obligatory trend in

education in almost all the countries in the globe as a response to Covid-19 pandemic, has its roots in mid 1990s when computers and internet were spreading gradually. With the advent of computers and internet in 19th century and their proliferation and accessibility in the 20th century, they exerted their considerable influence over "the evolution of online learning and the transformation of teaching and learning in higher and adult education" (Clardy, 2009; garrison, 2011 as cited in Joksimovic et al., 2015).

Distance education appeared as a means of providing equal access to education for everyone in the world who does not have the opportunity or the resources to receive education in its traditional form. According to Saykılı (2018) it is the delivery of education to the poor and disadvantaged people in a society so that a wider audience can have access to equal chance of online education. Therefore, distance education is believed to be a democratic form of education due to its availability in every parts of the society (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004 as cited in Saykılı, 2018).

However, it should be considered that the nature of online education is quite different from traditional face to face education. Education in traditional model is teacher-centered, whereas it is student-centered in online education. According to Joksimovic et al. (2015), the teacher is more responsible for education in the former, while the students have to take the responsibility of their learning in the later. The teaching environment in traditional approaches are fixed, stable, dynamic and concrete but the environment of teaching in online education is bound to internet-based tools which create a mostly passive and static state . It is also worth mentioning that the time in online classes is of a more flexible nature, while class time in traditional approached of teaching is fixed and predefined.

### 3. Method

The research methodology used in this analysis is a case study research, which is based on qualitative research paradigm. The aim of the case study research is to gather and examine data in a context or phenomenon. According to Yin (2012) the gathered data in a case study research must be in-depth, thorough and in real-life experiences. It entails record gathering for a structured interview, as well as participants' contribution on the results in the final phase of the data gathering through an online survey. The study's results will be used to guide future work in conducting a similar study to strengthen the study's decisions.

#### Participants:

The research participants include a number of 150 teachers and 150 students. These teachers and students are from various provinces and cities of Iran. The age range of both teachers and students and their genders are presented in table 3 of the study.

#### Instrument:

Based on the research objective, that is to investigate the lived experiences of teachers and students about online education during Covid-19 pandemic in Iran, a structured interview was carried out. Overall, the interview questions were about the teachers' and students' personal points of view of the pros and cons they have experienced to date.

#### Procedure:

Due to the schools' lockdown and the wide range of research participant, the teachers and students were accessible via two telegram groups. The teachers were selected from the Telegram group of "Iranian Farhangian (i.e. teachers) association" in which many teachers from across the country have joined; then, they were invited to join the research group in Telegram app for taking part in this research interview. The same procedure was followed for the students; students were also selected from the biggest

Telegram group for students in Iran called "students Reunion". Both students and teachers were from the elementary schools and high schools. The interview was done in the Telegram group. A question was pinned on top of the Telegram group that addressed all the members to express their experiences in a written form or a recorded voice about a year of online education. The data collection of this study took about 15 days.

To analyze the data, the researcher applies an inductive and thematic analysis to identify the main themes of the study. First, the interviews were put down on paper. Then they were read and categorized based on being a positive or a negative trait of online learning. Next, they were thematically categorized into a specific mode of experience. The results are shown in the form of categorical separate tables. The whole data collection and data analysis took about 2 months.

### 4. Results and discussion

It is crucial to consider the lived experiences of teachers and students about online learning; by doing so, you can face the challenge of working in this new environment better Fedynich (2013). Then, you can embrace the new opportunities that it has to offer, and that is its strengths and weaknesses.

Based on the findings from the interviews, there are three main categories for the weaknesses of online education in Iran. It is noteworthy to clarify that the internet-based applications for education in Iran includes Shad, Adobe connect, Skype, and Skyroom; Whatsapp and Telegram groups are also used unofficially for other purposes like arrangements and turning in homework assignments basically.

Here, the findings will be shown into two tables. Table one shows the results extracted from the teachers' responses; and table two shows the results extracted from the students'

responses. First, the negative opinions are extracted and discussed accordingly. Then, they are presented in-depth in two separate tables.

Negative outcomes of online education based on teachers' and students' lived experiences:

**Lack of a helpful interaction:** The first and the most frequent challenge of online education stated by both teachers and students in the interviews was "the absence of a formative interaction". Since online education in Iran during Covid-19 pandemic mainly relies on the internet and software programs, face to face interaction either teacher-student or student-student is vanished in this mode of learning. This idea which had its own proponents and opponents vividly reminds us various learning styles. According to Jingyu (2014) some student who are more interested in taking online courses are more introverted because online learning fits their learning style; he argues that online education gives "them more time to think about answering questions and allowing them the option interact with classmates with whom they might not connect with socially" (Jingyu, 2014, p.460).

**Bad signals and internet disconnections:** Another disadvantage of online education was about the internet connection continuity and its various forms of disruptions and bad signals. The problem of repeated and prolonged disconnection of the internet was mostly reported by the teachers and students in small cities and villages that had poor telecommunication infrastructures. This problem was mostly reported by the students who were living in border areas of Iran. It is in line with what Chua et al. (2020, p. 257) point to in their article, they point to the fact that poor Internet connection happens evidently in some cases amidst the interactions among the students. Therefore, professors had an understanding of the situations and gave their students time to read the uploaded materials. Dhawan (2020) states that there are many

technologies available for online education but they have difficulties too; he mentions them ranging "from downloading errors, issues with installation, login problems, problems with audio and video, and so on" (p. 8). Almost all of the teachers and students in the study had mentioned that they were not prepared technologically or trained well for applying technology to their teaching and learning. The idea of being technically trained about online tools is a significant matter in distance education. As Chua et al. (2020) urge, online softwares are technical tools for promoting the process of teaching and learning.

**Lack of planning and motivations:** Lack of planning and motivations for studying online was another disadvantage of online education. According to the participant students, they had no idea about online education before the pandemic; therefore, in the absence of any training and creating a sense for this type of education, students required advice on how to engage in their studies and how to manage their time for a successful course.

**Inability to manage time:** More than two third of the students in this study reported their inability to manage their time for doing homework assignments or planning for a successful lesson. Instead many of them expressed the fact that their cell phones or computers have been a distraction for them. About 70% of the students acknowledged that the cell phones and other softwares on the cell phones (e.g. mostly games and social networking apps) have reduced their focus on their studies.

**Feeling lonely:** Sense of isolation was another drawback of online education to which both teachers and students had pointed. They complained about the spiritless atmosphere of the online classes as well as their serious and unwelcoming sense. Some researchers point to this perennial problem as a real problem that needs to be counteracted.

**Expensive costs of data packages:** A group of students had reported the expensive costs of data packages they buy. Besides that some students could not have afforded buying a laptop or computer or they bought these tools after a long period, which practically means they did fall behind the school schedule. Chua et al. (2020) have pointed to the same issue in their study; and the result has been difficulty in learning. They argue that in their study, "majority of the students had no capacity to provide the resources like a laptop or computer in their homes, thus, E-learning could be difficult for them" (Chua et al., 2020, p. 257). In response to this condition, other students apply their mobile phones and get connected to the E-Learning platforms used by their professors.

**Parents' poor collaboration:** Poor collaboration of parents with their children was another issue with which students in high school level were not satisfied with.

**Lack of a proper teaching approach:** Unfamiliarity with useful pedagogical approaches was another complaints teachers had made. According to Dhawan (2020) Educators must spend a lot of time in making effective strategies for giving online instructions. To Keeton (2004) efficient online teaching is the one that facilitates feedback from learners, and encourages students to ask questions and broaden their learning horizons for the course content.

Dhawan (2020) argues that sometimes online theoretical lessons do not allow students to practice and to learn efficiently. On the same line, many students were dissatisfied about learning mathematical courses; also teacher complained about the difficulty of teaching math and explaining formulas to their students. Saykili (2018) argues that all of distance education definitions and generations are guided by distinct technologies and pedagogy. Even though no single pedagogical model can answer all of the questions about how people learn, these

models work together to support and supplement one another. New areas of learning, new practices, and thus trends in distance education emerge as new technological innovations emerge. Therefore, a combination of both technology and pedagogy should go hand in hand to lead into flourishing results.

**Unreliable assessments:** Unreliability of Assessments was expressed by both teachers and students. Almost 90% of respondents had pointed to this negative trait as a big problem in online education. The teachers argued that the tests taken by students do not offer any valid results because there is the high likelihood of cheating on the books or other people at hand. Students also reported that the exams' results are not fair due to the high rate of cheating among their friends and classmates and even they themselves.

**Positive outcomes of online education based on teachers' and students' lived experiences:**

**Ease of communication:** According to half of the participant teachers, communication with students is easy and similar to the face to face classroom when they apply synchronous softwares but unfortunately not all of their students had access to online softwares. They stated that students can be seen on video and they speak naturally when questions are asked online.

**Time and location convenience:** Another positive attribute of online learning via asynchronous apps like "Shad" in Iran is flexibility in time and location. This allows both students and teachers to manage their own time better and have their own specific routines. According to Fedynich (2013, P. 2) this is the foremost advantage to online learning.

**Good for introverted students:** Increased self-esteem and communication among more introvert students turned out to be another positive aspect of online education. According to the respondents it is the best opportunity for

introverted students to tackle their inner hindrances and try communicating freely and express themselves openly.

**Improved computer skills:** A group of participants both teachers and students (about 40%) had pointed that this situation let them Improve their skills on computer related issues like Microsoft Office skills. They argued that although it was difficult for them to learn how to apply various softwares to their education, little by little they were either forced or encouraged to learn them so that they could improve their online learning quality.

**Cost effectiveness:** A small group of both students and teachers believed that although online education has reduced the cost of

commuting to school and back, buying extra and unnecessary things for school, and spending money on breakfast and lunch, it still has its absence of own expenses like buying a cell phone, a computer, and internet packages.

**Feeling secure at home:** Some boy students believed that the fights and arguments among classmates inside and outside school exist no longer. This was regarded by them as a positive aspect of online education. On the other hand, 5% of girl students in the research stated they felt more secure at home because there is no threat or disturbance for them like the threats they had experienced on the way to school.

**Table 1. The outcomes of online education in Iran based on teachers' lived experiences**

Teachers' Experiences	Positive/Negative	Category (socio-cultural/ technological/ instructional)
Increased self-esteem among more introvert students	Positive	Socio-Cultural
The absence of violence among students	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Improved skills on computer related issues like Microsoft Office skills	Positive	Technological
Staying healthy at home during pandemic	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Increased self-regulation and self-discipline among students	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Having more contacts with family and friends	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Feeling socially isolated	Negative	Socio-Cultural
Focusing on theoretical teaching rather than practical aspect	Negative	Instructional
The absence of receiving feedbacks from all students	Negative	Instructional
Difficulty of teaching the students who do not have computer literacy	Negative	Technological
Requiring to spend more time on preparing teaching materials	Negative	Instructional
Difficulty of teaching some lessons like Mathematics, algebra, and geometry	Negative	Instructional
Unreliability of Assessments	Negative	Instructional

**Table 2. The outcomes of online education in Iran based on students' experiences**

Students' Experiences	Positive/Negative	Category (socio-cultural/technological/ instructional)
Increased self-esteem among most of the introvert students	Positive	Socio-Cultural
The absence of violence among classmates	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Improved skills on computer related issues like Microsoft Office skills	Positive	Technological
Staying healthy at home during pandemic	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Inability to maintain self-regulation and self-discipline	Negative	Socio-Cultural
Having more contacts with family and friends	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Feeling socially isolated from friends	Negative	Socio-Cultural
The absence of any threats on school way	Positive	Socio-Cultural
More cost-effective	Positive	Socio-Cultural
Difficulty of learning for the students who do not have computer literacy	Negative	Technological
Network problems (i.e. frozen connections, repeated disconnections)	Negative	Technological
Boring classes for high school student	Negative	Instructional
Unreliability of Assessments	Negative	Instructional

**Table 3. Participants' demographic information**

Participants	Age Range	Gender	Population
Teacher	25-55 Years old	65% women/ 35% men	150
Student	9-17 Years old	45% girls / 55% boys	150

Based on the categories of teachers' and students' lived experienced on online education, teachers are the first and the main players who

should plan for a successful delivery of lessons to their students. they have to consider instructional methods, the suitable pedagogy,



the effective media for teaching each course, time management, and their students social and psychological needs. Rasmitadila (2020, p. 92) argues when teachers must have a transition from a face-to-face learning system in the classroom to an online system with never-before-implemented online learning experiences, they have tasks and responsibilities that are difficult to transfer. Here, the teacher must respond to all problems that arise in online learning in order for the learning to continue to meet the target set.

### 5. Conclusion

At the time corona virus was gradually turning into a pandemic, the government in every country felt the urgent need to protect and save the lives of students, teachers, professor, staffs in any educational center. This situation resulted to an emergent, untrained and unprepared turn to web-based education and applying technological tools for education.

Despite the hard and stained efforts of the government in Iran for taking prompt actions to avoid any educational pause in the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, there have been some drawbacks in the path toward a fully intact web-based education.

The findings of the research confirm both the success and the failures of governments' attempts to succeed in online education. Among the weak points of online education, the significance of "teacher training" was the most highlighted weakness reported by the teachers themselves. Chua et al. (2020) emphasizes the idea of accelerating teacher training on the use of technology applications. Besides this, teachers need to be aware and study about the modern pedagogical approaches. In line with this, Dhawan (2020) puts that online courses should be dynamic, interesting, and interactive. To this aim, defining pedagogical approaches are vital. Also, personal attention should be given to students so that they can easily adapt to this learning environment (Dhawan, 2020).

Dhawan (2020) also puts that pedagogical and technical proficiency of online instructors is of extreme significance. In line with him Saykili (2018) puts that Experts in distance education must devise the most effective combination of technology and pedagogy. he adds that learners, instructors, and resources are the primary actors in all distance education generations; thus, any effective distance learning experience must consider how these actors' relationships are constructed based on the pedagogy used and technologies available. Also, Meticulous quality management programs and continuous improvement are essential for online learning success and making people ready for any crisis-like situation.

Regarding students' lack of motivation and self-regulation, teachers should play an encouraging and strict role for the students; teachers must set time limits and reminders for students to make them alert, obliged and self-regulated.

Although most of the online learning platforms are free, some students and teachers cannot still fully make use of them. This is because of not having computer literacy or not being technologically trained. Despite these frustrations, Chua et al. (2020) argue that teachers and students alike should be thankful that these E-learning platforms are available without charge from the institution or individual. They make the academic life easier most especially during these COVID-19 crises.

As the time passes and technology advances, the future of online education becomes more and more promising. As Saykili (2018) argues, Technological improvements together with the pedagogical rules play a key role in shaping and reshaping distance education structure and its delivery mode. Some experts expect that future modes of online teachings will be shaped by technological innovations such as semantic web, mobile devices, augmented and virtual reality (Hendler, 2009 as cited in saykili, 2020).

In summary, to proceed successfully in online education, to Dhawan (2020) educators can use a combo of audio, videos, and text to reach out to their students in this time of crisis to maintain a human touch to their lectures. This can help in creating a collaborative and interactive learning environment.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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# Translation Challenge

# The More Loving One

W. H. Auden

Looking up at the stars, I know quite well  
That, for all they care, I can go to hell,  
But on earth indifference is the least  
We have to dread from man or beast.

How should we like it were stars to burn  
With a passion for us we could not return?  
If equal affection cannot be,  
Let the more loving one be me.

Admirer as I think I am  
Of stars that do not give a damn,  
I cannot, now I see them, say  
I missed one terribly all day.

Were all stars to disappear or die,  
I should learn to look at an empty sky  
And feel its total dark sublime,  
Though this might take me a little time.

## هنوز از شب دمی باقی است

نیما یوشیج

هنوز از شب دمی باقی است، می خواند در او شبگیر  
و شب تاب، از نهانجایش، به ساحل می زند سوسو.  
به مانند چراغ من که سوسو می زند در پنجره ی من  
به مانند دل من که هنوز از حوصله وز صبر من باقی است در او  
به مانند خیال عشق تلخ من که می خواند  
و مانند چراغ من که سوسو می زند در پنجره ی من  
نگاه چشم سوزانش – امیدانگیز – با من  
در این تاریک منزل می زند سوسو.