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## ENGLISH

**O**n behalf of our authors, reviewers, editorial board, and editorial team – I warmly welcome you to the ninth issue of *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*.

I am proud to present the ninth issue of *ETKI: Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the editorial board and the refereeing committee, especially the issue writers, for their help in delivering the ninth issue of this journal. I am equally grateful for the many authors who offered candidate contributions to this ninth issue – and for the many more colleagues around the globe who consistently provided critical but supportive reviews. Many of these reviewers were drawn from our Editorial Board, whose broader support has likewise been essential.

*ETKI*, like many scientific and academic journals that have pioneered literature and drama studies, aims to host self-sacrificing and qualified works that have not had the chance to be published but must be delivered to readers and literature/drama experts. Each work that is filtered from the theoretical and practical knowledge of the authors and passed through the filter of field expert referees and editors will be included in the scope of this journal, which aims to close a gap in the world of literature, theatre and cultural studies. I wish *ETKI* to be beneficial to the academic world, and I wish it to guide our dear readers, field experts, professionals, undergraduate and graduate students.

ÖNDER ÇAKIRTAŞ  
Editor-in-Chief

## TÜRKÇE

**Y**azarlarımız, hakemlerimiz, yayın kurulu ve yayın ekibimiz adına – *ETKİ: Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi*'nin dokuzuncu sayısına hoş geldiniz.

*ETKİ: Edebiyat, Tiyatro ve Kültür İncelemeleri Dergisi*'nin dokuzuncu sayısını sunmaktan gurur duyuyorum. Bu derginin dokuzuncu sayısının yayımlanmasında emeği geçen başta sayı yazarları olmak üzere, yayın kuruluna ve hakem heyetine en içten teşekkürlerimi sunarım. Bu dokuzuncu sayıya çeşitli katkılarda bulunan birçok yazara ve sürekli olarak eleştirel ve destekleyici incelemeler sunan dünya çapındaki birçok meslektaşına aynı derecede minnettarım. Bu hakemlerin çoğu, her zaman desteğini esirgemeyen yayın kurulumuzdan seçilmiştir.

*ETKİ*, edebiyat, tiyatro ve kültürel çalışmalara öncülük etmiş birçok bilimsel ve akademik dergi gibi, yayımlanma şansı bulamamış, okuyuculara ve edebiyat, tiyatro, kültür incelemeleri ve drama uzmanlarına ulaştırılması gereken özverili ve nitelikli eserlere ev sahipliği yapmayı amaçlamaktadır. Edebiyat, tiyatro ve kültür dünyasındaki bir boşluğu kapatmayı hedefleyen bu dergide yazarların teorik ve pratik bilgilerinden süzülerek alanında uzman hakem ve editörlerin süzgecinden geçirilen her esere yer verilecektir. *ETKİ*'nin akademik dünyaya faydalı olmasını diliyorum, siz değerli okuyucularımıza, alan uzmanlarına, profesyonellere yol göstermesini temenni ediyorum.

ÖNDER ÇAKIRTAŞ  
Baş Editör

*Journal of Literature,  
Theatre and Culture Studies*

## The Ethical Choices of Philosophers in Tom Stoppard's Philosophical Plays

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This article examines Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers* (1972) and *Professional Foul* (1977) as complementary investigations into the limits and possibilities of philosophical ethics in modern dramatic form. Through the analytic lens of ethical context, the study argues that *Jumpers* dramatizes the collapse of moral authority in a culture dominated by opportunism and relativism, where ethical principles lose traction amid performative reasoning and institutional incoherence. *Professional Foul*, by contrast, relocates philosophical inquiry within a politically volatile landscape, foregrounding how ethical coherence must be forged through situated decisions rather than safeguarded by theoretical consistency. Across both works, Stoppard stages ethical dilemmas, communicative breakdowns, circular dramatic structures, and strategically motivated violations of norms to interrogate the unstable boundary between moral reasoning and real-world action. These plays together suggest that ethical agency is neither guaranteed nor fixed, but continually shaped, tested, and transformed at the shifting intersection of thought and practice.

**Keywords:** Tom Stoppard, philosophical drama, dilemma, ethical context, moral agent

## *Journal of Literature, Theatre and Culture Studies*

# Tom Stoppard'ın Felsefi Oyunlarında Filozofların Etik Seçimi

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Bu makale, Tom Stoppard'ın *Jumpers* (1972) ve *Professional Foul* (1977) adlı eserlerini, modern dramatik biçimde felsefi etiğin sınırları ve imkânları üzerine birbirini tamamlayan incelemeler olarak ele alır. Etik bağlamın analitik merceğinden bakıldığında, *Jumpers* in fırsatçılık ve görelilik tarafından belirlenen bir kültürde ahlaki otoritenin çöküşünü sahnelediği; etik ilkelerin, performatif akıl yürütme ve kurumsal tutarsızlıklar arasında etkisini yitirdiği ileri sürülür. Buna karşılık *Professional Foul*, felsefi sorgulamayı siyasal açıdan istikrarsız bir zemine yerleştirerek etik tutarlılığın teorik bütünlükle korunmaktan ziyade belirli koşullar içinde verilen kararlarla şekillendirilmesi gerektiğini vurgular. Her iki eserde de Stoppard, etik ikilemleri, iletişimsel kopuşları, dairesel dramatik yapıları ve stratejik biçimde güdülenen kural ihlallerini işleyerek ahlaki akıl yürütme ile gerçek dünyadaki eylem arasındaki istikrarsız sınırı sorgular. Bu oyunlar birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, etik öznenin ne kendiliğinden ne de kalıcı olarak güvence altında olduğunu; tersine, düşünce ile eylemin değişken kesişiminde sürekli biçimde oluştuğunu, sınındığını ve dönüştüğünü öne sürer.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Tom Stoppard, felsefi tiyatro, ikilem, etik bağlam, ahlaki fail

## 1. Introduction

In the Western tradition, the interdependence and intertwines between philosophy (as the realm of ideas) and drama (as the realm of language and enactment) find their most striking expression in Plato. As Marvin Carlson reminds us in *Theories of the Theatre*, since the Greeks, theatre has long served as a cultural apparatus through which intellectual and ideological debates are staged as collective experience (Carlson 16-21). This insight resonates with Martin Puchner's argument in *The Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* that "it was Plato's dramaturgy that effectively 'overturned' Platonism" (Puchner 171). Drama, with its embodied language and theatrical vividness, thus becomes a powerful medium for disseminating metaphysical ideas to a broader public. Within this Platonic lineage of philosophical drama, the Czech-born British playwright Tom Stoppard (1937–2025) emerges as a quintessential contemporary "dramatist of ideas" (Puchner 113), whose meta-theatrical practice brings to the fore a sustained and rigorous philosophical inquiry. In interviews, Stoppard himself readily acknowledged that his plays genuinely reflect the architecture of his own intellect— "an equilibrium between literature and philosophy" (qtd. in Gussow 18). For Stoppard, philosophical thought is the first and most substantial course in the theatrical feast he serves.

Critical reception has long emphasized this philosophical dimension in Stoppard's oeuvre. The theatre critic Mel Gussow famously catalogued *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as "theatre-phil," *Travesties* as "lit-phil," and *Jumpers* as "phil-gym" (Gussow 84). David Kornhaber further traces this tendency to the British reception of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, which gave rise to a generation of philosophical playwrights from George Bernard Shaw to Tom Stoppard (Kornhaber 2012:80-82). Regarding the relationship between philosophical speculation and dramatic ethics, Stoppard once spoke with such characteristic candor: "Philosophy is merely the organization of a man's thoughts in his bathtub, ... drama provides a moral matrix for shaping the values by which we live" (qtd. in Delaney 84). Here, Stoppard's notion of a "moral matrix" parallels the concept of the "ethical context" in Nie Zhenzhao's *Ethical Literary Criticism*—a "discursive and historical sphere" (Nie 256) in which literary works exist and interact with their social milieu. In Stoppard's dramaturgy, the stage becomes a privileged site for philosophical investigations, while his characters not only present multiple facets of the ethical context but also, through their dilemmas and ethical choices, enact a form of Platonic revelation.

This conceptual foundation allows Stoppard's plays to function as philosophical laboratories, where his characters enact, resist, or disintegrate under the pressures of ethical conundrums. Through these figures, Stoppard dramatizes how philosophical worldviews shape—and fail to shape—moral actions. The following analyses therefore approach *Jumpers* (1972) and *Professional Foul* (1977), two plays that foreground philosophy professors as ethical agents, as paired investigations in philosophical ethics: each play stages a distinct ethical context, yet both use the philosopher's predicament to illuminate how thought and action repeatedly collide, fracture, and reconfigure the very conditions of moral choice.

## 2. Thought and Action: Philosophers' Conflict

It is intriguing that the titles of *Jumpers* and *Professional Foul*—both featuring philosopher-protagonists—do not directly reference philosophical concepts, but rather evoke the domain of athletics. In *Jumpers*, the term “*Jumpers*” refers not only to the troupe of amateur gymnasts in yellow leotards who perform endless acrobatic routines throughout the play, but also to the university’s Vice-Chancellor, Sir Archibald Jumper (called “Archie” in the play), the ideological and personal antagonist of the protagonist, George Moore (addressed simply as “George”). Moreover, the term designates the radical liberal faction—the *Jumpers*—led by Archie and supported by the gymnasts. When interrogated by Inspector Bones about these curious performers, George provides a description that deftly captures the fusion of gymnastics and philosophy that defines the play:

BONES: Tell me something—Who are these acrobats?

GEORGE: Logical positivists, mainly, with a linguistic analyst or two, a couple of Benthamite Utilitarians... lapsed Kantians and empiricists generally... and of course the usual Behaviourists... a mixture of the more philosophical members of the university gymnastics team and the more gymnastic members of the Philosophy School. The close association between gymnastics and philosophy is I believe unique to this university and owes itself to the Vice-Chancellor, who is of course a first-rate gymnast, though an indifferent philosopher. (*Jumpers* 41)

By contrast, the title *Professional Foul* is borrowed directly from the lexicon of competitive sports. The phrase denotes a deliberate foul committed by a player to prevent an opponent from scoring or gaining advantage—a calculated breach of the rules for strategic benefit. The practice is especially common in football (soccer), the sport that forms the background of Stoppard’s play, which is set in Prague during the European qualifying rounds of the World Cup.

At the same time, both “jumping” and “fouling” metaphorically allude to the philosophers’ own rational and irrational actions within these plays. Through such athletic metaphors, Stoppard constructs a collective portrait of philosophers whose moral choices—whether cautious or transgressive—reveal the tension between abstract thought and embodied action.

### 2.1 George: Idealist Philosopher in Contemplation

From its opening scene, *Jumpers* immediately presents the tension and conflict between the moral philosophy professor George and the psychoanalytical philosopher Archie. To celebrate the Radical Liberal Party’s victory in the British general election, the Vice-Chancellor, Archie, holds a jubilant party at the home of his psychotherapy patient and romantic interest, the faded cabaret singer Dorothy Moore (called “Dotty” in the play). During the festivities, the amateur gymnast-philosophers from the Department of Philosophy perform their human pyramid. Suddenly, one of the *Jumpers*—Professor of Logic, Duncan McFee (called “McFee”)—is shot and collapses, sending the guests fleeing in panic.

Meanwhile, George, as usual, has shut himself in his study; apart from telephoning to complain about the noise, he remains wholly unaware of the murder unfolding in his own home. Even when the following day brings dramatic changes to both nation and world—the shift in British politics and the moon landing—he notices none of it, absorbed instead in composing a paper refuting McFee’s position for an upcoming philosophy colloquium. Thus begins what has been described as “a near-surreal philosophical play in the guise of an Agatha Christie murder mystery” (Barnes 36).

Stoppard barely conceals the fact that George’s name evokes his real-life philosophical prototype, the ethicist G. E. Moore (George Edward Moore, 1873–1958), known for his influential work *Principia Ethica* (1903). George’s pedantry and naïveté in the play likewise echo Moore’s. As Alfred J. Ayer observes, Moore’s “philosophical inquiries did not arise from reflection on the real world or on specialized academic fields, but rather from the opinions other philosophers had expressed on these matters” (Ayer 141). Moore was famously unworldly and indifferent to practical affairs—and George mirrors this bookish mode of inquiry. Not only does he declaim lengthy monologues to his mirror, he also learns about public events (British political upheavals) and even domestic crises (the murder) only through others’ reports, lacking any first-hand engagement with reality.

The staging further reinforces this separation: the three areas of George’s home (his study, Dotty’s bedroom, and the hall) are lit separately so that “the bedroom can be blacked out completely while the action continues elsewhere” (*Jumpers* 7). The spatial division underscores the disjunction between George’s abstract philosophical–ethical context and the “real-world” ethical environment occupied by Dotty and everyone else. For George, philosophy is a purely academic exercise detached from the complexity of human life. Thus, in his ethical universe, neither Dotty’s emotional and physical needs nor the murder in his home carries more weight than the props—Thumper the rabbit and Pat the tortoise—he uses to illustrate his argument. When the traumatized Dotty repeatedly interrupts George’s recitation of his paper by crying out “Help! ... Murder! ... Rape! ... Horror! ... Wolves!” in distress (*Jumpers* 15–18), George’s misinterpretation exposes his ethical priorities:

DOTTY (*off*): Fire!

(*George fires, startled before he was ready, and the arrow disappears over the top of the wardrobe.*) Help—rescue—fire!

GEORGE (shouts furiously): Will you stop this childish nonsense! Thanks to you I have lost the element of surprise! (*Jumpers* 19)

Absorbed in his philosophical world, George is holding a bow—one of his lecture props—and thus interprets “fire” only as the imperative “fire the arrow” instead of a desperate cry for help. Even after realizing the situation, his concern remains that the dramatic effect of his paper has been compromised by the loss of the arrow. Small wonder, then, that George never notices McFee’s corpse, even when Dotty hides it clumsily under a nightgown right before his eyes.

Later, when the doorbell rings and the police arrive, George assumes it is the much-despised Archie. Whispering into the tortoise's ear, he mutters, "Now might I do it, Pat" (*Jumpers* 34). The line adapts *Hamlet's* famous hesitation—"Now might I do it pat, now he is praying" (Shakespeare 213)—as he contemplates killing Claudius. Like *Hamlet*, George hesitates and over-analyzes; he meets practical problems with purely abstract reasoning. He is therefore doomed both in his intellectual contest with Archie and in his attempt to repair his fractured marriage. G. B. Crump labels George's behavior "ineffectuality" (Crump 368). I would suggest instead that such a judgment is made from the standpoint of the real-world ethical context. Within George's philosophical-ethical domain, however, his actions are entirely coherent. His prolix, jargon-laden speech mirrors the logic of his ethical choices: his "inaction" is not inertia or incompetence, but rather an ethical stance comparable to the non-choice of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as they face death—a refusal to be swayed by an ethically deteriorating external world, a steadfast commitment to his philosophical convictions, and a faith in moral intuition and altruism.

George enters the real world only once in the play—not when he discovers Dotty's affair with Archie, nor when he learns a colleague died in his home, but when he realizes that he himself accidentally killed Thumper with his arrow and then inadvertently stepped on Pat, prompting him to "burst into tears" (*Jumpers* 72). This moment of emotional collapse occurs precisely when his philosophical world disintegrates with the loss of the two props essential to his paper's logic. His despair thus reveals his fierce attachment to preserving the integrity of his philosophical framework and ethical environment. George's philosophical world, mute and myopic when confronted with specific real-life crises, ultimately demonstrates what Kornhaber calls the "incommensurability between the pursuit of moral philosophy and the practice of a moral life" (Kornhaber 2021:84)—the irreducible gap between two ethical environments that cannot be reconciled.

## 2.2 Archie and the *Jumpers*: Moral Relativists in Motion

To George's colleagues—philosophers who delight equally in physical and political forms of movement—he is the least active philosopher imaginable. In the play, motion and stillness correspond directly to the contrasting philosophical commitments of the characters. As the only moral absolutist on the stage, George maintains that human "goodness" is intransigent and non-negotiable; moral relativists, by contrast, regard standards of goodness as variable and therefore inhabit an ethical "limbo" (*Jumpers* 58). True to their name, the *Jumpers* flit unethically between incompatible moral standards, and some even argue that murder, like lying, is "simply anti-social" and thus "not sinful" (*Jumpers* 39).

If *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* dramatizes an ethical void by juxtaposing Shakespeare's orderly world with the drift of its marginal figures, *Jumpers* similarly sketches the erosion of moral values in modern society through its depiction of academic *jumpers* who have abandoned both moral standards and religious belief. Their jumps operate on several interrelated ethical levels:

(1) Bodily action. The *Jumpers* perform literal circus-style feats, “jump[ing] through” the Vice-Chancellor’s oversized metal hoops (*Jumpers* 43). Their acrobatics signify complicity with the radical liberal order that now dominates the university.

(2) Thought. Having lost intellectual discipline, the *Jumpers* lack an interest in philosophical reflection and rush to hasty conclusions—jump to the conclusion. Logic, ostensibly their professional currency, is displaced by shallow, spectacular bodily display.

(3) Emotion. Their emotional detachment precludes empathy. Their repetitive gymnastic routines embody the cold, mechanical reasoning typical of moral relativism—a process constructed from a series of disconnected intellectual jumps. As George says in the Coda, their epistemology reduces “knowledge” to the mere “possibility in matters that can be demonstrated to be true or false.” (*Jumpers* 77)

All these layers of metaphor culminate in the figure of Archie—the Vice-Chancellor, who lists trampoline as his “main interest” (*Jumpers* 52). Although *Jumpers* is “not a polemic against the evils of modernism” (Durham 179), Archie’s title nevertheless signals his moral orientation: the “vice” in “Vice-Chancellor” inevitably evokes its other meaning—immorality. Even described as “satanic” (Hunter 79) by some scholars, Archie appears polymathic, collecting doctorates in medicine, philosophy, law, literature, physiotherapy, and more. Yet his interpretations of the world are superficial and opportunistic, mirroring the empty athleticism of the *Jumpers*. He can prepare a keynote address in two minutes—an apparently orderly “one-two-three-four” that is in fact nonsense (*Jumpers* 60). In a further satire of intellectual vacuity, the ushers hold up scorecards reading “9.7—9.9—9.8” after his speech (*Jumpers* 73), as though judging a gymnastics routine. Metaphysical speculation has been debased into quantifiable performance, serving the swift satisfaction of personal advantage.

Archie’s treatment of Dotty during her “therapy” is likewise subject to quantification. Convinced that all psychological and physical ailments manifest on the skin, he uses a vaguely defined “dermatograph” to “read” data from Dotty’s naked body:

ARCHIE (*within*): ...There...

DOTTY (*within*): ...Yes...

ARCHIE: There... there...

DOTTY: Yes...

ARCHIE: ...and there...

DOTTY: Yes... yes.

*(These sounds are consistent with a proper doctor-patient relationship. If Dotty has a tendency to gasp slightly it is probably because the stethoscope is cold, Archie on the other hand, might be getting rather overheated under the blaze of the dermatograph lights.)*

ARCHIE (*within*): Excuse me...

*(Archie’s coat comes sailing over the drapes. George retreats, closing the door.) (Jumpers 51)*

Because Dotty's bed is enclosed by a curtain, neither George nor the audience can see what happens—only hear dialogue that resembles clinical detachment. As George later mutters, “She's in bed with the doctor. Not literally, of course” (*Jumpers* 68). Meanwhile, Dotty's body image is projected onto the television via the Skin-Reading Machine.

Within real-world ethical norms, Archie's actions suggest the sexual exploitation of a female patient. For Weldon Durham, Dotty's pathological state symbolizes the “moral toxicity permeating the world,” while Archie's transgressions allegorize “the intrusion of politics upon morality” (Durham 173). Yet within the play's philosophical framework, appearances cannot confirm inference. Archie retorts, “What would it have looked like if it had looked as if I were making a dermatographical examination?” (*Jumpers* 69). The line paraphrases Wittgenstein's critique of subjective certainty:

Meeting a friend in a corridor, Wittgenstein said: ‘Tell me, why do people always say it was natural for men to assume that the sun went round the earth rather than that the earth was rotating?’ His friend said, ‘Well, obviously, because it just looks as if the sun is going round the earth.’ To which the philosopher replied, ‘Well, what would it have looked like if it had looked as if the earth was rotating?’ (*Jumpers* 66)

Philosophy insists that the objective world does not bend to human assumptions. Archie exploits this principle, knowing that questioning its validity will drive George into paradox. Thus George, humiliated, must remain neutral; Archie escapes blame. This strategic evasion constitutes Archie's “moral jump”—the essence of moral relativism.

Archie and his followers embody the anti-intellectualism and ethical disarray of their environment—or rather, they create it. After the political upheaval depicted in the play, Britain is inverted: churches become gymnasiums; an atheist (the Radical Liberal agricultural spokesman) is appointed Archbishop of Canterbury; police officers assume the role of honor guards. Those in power ignore or sabotage the moral and political order essential to social functioning.

The *Jumpers*' ethical confusion extends even beyond the Earth. Dotty watches the moon-landing on TV, and the two astronauts, the Captain Scott and Oates pair, apparently function as Doppelgängers for Archie and George. After a mishap leaves insufficient fuel for two, Scott kicks Oates from the ladder to secure the sole survival spot (*Jumpers* 14). Yet the moral relativist can rationalize even this crime: “Of course, to somebody on it, the moon is always full, so the local idea of a sane action may well differ from ours” (*Jumpers* 29). The echo of Archie's habitual self-justification is unmistakable.

This pattern culminates when George petitions Archie to appoint him Chair of Logic, arguing that ethics is “always based on logical principles” and that he is “the longest-serving professor” (*Jumpers* 64). Archie's disdain for ethics—and the lowly place of ethics and theology in the university—mirrors a cultural abandonment of moral and spiritual values. Archie replies glibly: “I don't wish to make a fetish of denying you chairs, but you will appreciate that I can't ask you to sit down—a psychiatrist is akin to a priest taking confession” (*Jumpers* 64). Unlike George's earnest mishearing earlier, Archie's pun on “chair”

(professorship/seat) is a malicious exploitation of linguistic ambiguity. Linguistic disorder is one of the clearest signs of ethical disorder. And often even such verbal evasiveness is unnecessary, for “where wrong-doing is not agreed upon, neither is the need to justify it” (Gabbard 92).

Even in the dream-constructed Coda, Archie remains dominant—the nucleus of George’s ethical nightmare. Leadership should carry responsibility and shared purpose, yet Archie exemplifies a leadership that drives society toward opportunism, moral unaccountability, and self-interest. The destructive influence of such pseudo-philosophers lies in their ability to persuade the public to accept moral relativism as “orthodox, mainstream philosophy” (*Jumpers* 39), marginalizing conscientious philosophers like George and destabilizing ethical order at its foundations. This is the choice of evil.

### 2.3 McFee and Crouch: Transformations of Ethical Identity

Professor McFee, the logician, is a senior member of the *Jumpers*, a close ally of Archie, and an ardent supporter of Jumperism. Although he is murdered at the very beginning of Act I, he nonetheless functions as an invisible central character linking the play’s various ethical threads. He stands at the center of the human pyramid formed by the *Jumpers* in the opening acrobatic tableau; he occupies the center of the murder mystery (Who killed him? Why?); and he is also the intellectual center of the forthcoming annual philosophy symposium, at which McFee—as conference chair—will present the position George intends to refute. After his death, McFee’s body becomes the shifting visual center of the stage as Dotty and Archie repeatedly attempt to conceal it.

Several scholars have noted that the name McFee carries the meaning “son of faith” (Davidson 309; Dean 62). Thus, the collapse of the human pyramid at the moment the head of the Logic Department is shot symbolically represents the disintegration of ethical order following the loss of both logic and faith. In the Coda, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury—now an emblem of scientism replacing religious belief—is compelled by the *Jumpers* to take McFee’s former place atop the pyramid. Yet this attempt at ethical reconstruction also fails: another gunshot erupts, and the pyramid again collapses into chaos. Leslie Thomson observes that the repetition of imagery at the beginning and end of the play forms a “circular structure” (Thomson 481), but I would argue that the repeated collapse of the pyramid suggests something more crucial: so long as the agents who constitute the ethical environment (the *Jumpers*) remain unchanged, the environment itself—determining the ethical trajectory and the choices available to its characters—cannot shift. The figures onstage remain trapped in this circular structure precisely because they inhabit a historical moment in which moral values have been weakened to the point of paralysis.

Like George, Archie, and the other aptly named figures in the play, McFee suffers from what might be termed “Cognomen Syndrome”—a psychological correspondence between name and social role (Crump 357). His given name, Duncan, together with his Scottish surname, evokes King Duncan in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, a parallel that corresponds to McFee’s position as “the guardian and figurehead

of philosophical orthodoxy” (*Jumpers* 64) and foreshadows his violent end. Yet the ethical identity suggested by a name is never fixed. Once as devoted to philosophy as George, McFee undergoes a transformation after losing faith in moral absolutes. The “son of faith” embraces moral relativism; in doing so, he wins Archie’s favor and advances within the university hierarchy. The theme of the symposium he is slated to chair—“Man—Good, Bad, or Indifferent?” (*Jumpers* 73)—directly encapsulates the issue of ethical choice. Predictably, as a representative of Jumperist thought, McFee would answer “indeterminate”, while George, as the lone dissenter, would suffer humiliation and bullying.

As the plot unfolds, the apartment building’s caretaker, Crouch, gradually reveals McFee’s hidden ethical identity. Before his death, McFee had concealed the fact that he was married while beginning a romance and engagement with George’s young secretary. Seeking to evade responsibility, he retreated to a monastery in an effort to escape worldly entanglements.

McFee’s death thus offers a lens through which to examine the ethical behavior of the other characters. Aside from the mentally unstable Dotty, nearly everyone has a plausible motive. George harbors professional jealousy but lacks the capacity for wrongdoing; the secretary, likely betrayed and humiliated, may resent McFee, though her moral stance remains unclear; Archie possesses both motive (he tells the inspector he quarrelled violently with McFee the previous night) and the ethical license to kill, since he does not believe murder to be morally wrong; and the *Jumpers* demonstrate their moral bankruptcy by stuffing McFee’s body into an oversized garbage bag, echoing George’s mocking description of Jumperist utilitarianism: “No problem is insoluble given a big enough plastic bag” (*Jumpers* 31). Although McFee occupies the center of the murder plot, *Jumpers* is no conventional detective drama; the function of his death is not to direct attention toward solving the mystery but rather to open space for examining each character’s ethical choices.

The first person to report the murder and to discover McFee’s hidden body is Crouch, who collects rubbish and serves drinks during the party, giving him access to all the rooms, including George’s study. Though not an academic philosopher, Crouch has befriended McFee during the latter’s clandestine visits to George’s home to have “a bit of chatting” about philosophy, and eventually earns Archie’s praise as “something of a philosopher” (*Jumpers* 70). Crouch’s philosophical aptitude is revealed in his unexpected critique of George’s paper:

(...Crouch is seated at George’s desk, reading the typescript and chuckling!)

CROUCH: Saint Sebastian died of fright!—very good! (*To Secretary; surprisingly.*) Of course, the flaw in the argument is that even if the first term of his infinitely regressing series is zero rather than infinitesimal, the original problem remains in identifying the second term of the series, which however small must be greater than zero—you take my point? I grant he’s answered Russell’s first point, I grant you that—the smallest proper fraction is zero—but—

GEORGE (*snatches the paper*): Yes, but you entirely miss my point, which is that having established that the first term—that is God—corresponds to zero, there’s no need to worry about the second term—it is enough that it is the second—Surely you can see that?

CROUCH (*humbly*): I expect you’re right, sir. I mean, it’s only a hobby with me. (*Jumpers 69–70*)

This arcane, comically opaque exchange is dramaturgically functional: it reveals that Crouch, the unassuming layman, possesses latent philosophical acuity, even detecting errors in a professor’s argument. Yet as an amateur, he ultimately yields to George’s authority. His name, Crouch—to bend low—reflects both his subservient ethical status and his deferential posture. The act of crouching can also be read as the preparatory movement before a jump. Indeed, Archie, after refusing George’s request, whimsically appoints Crouch as McFee’s successor—the new Chair of Logic and the symposium’s presiding officer—thus transforming Crouch’s ethical identity into that of a “proto-Jumper”. Archie’s justification is telling: “We’ll get a new chairman, someone of good standing; he won’t have to know much philosophy” (*Jumpers 60*). Archie seeks a compliant puppet, and Crouch—blinded by the mundane world, unaware of his professional inadequacy, and ignorant of the *Jumpers*’ technical expertise—becomes the perfect candidate.

Their exchange at the end of Act II becomes a kind of ethical apprenticeship, a lesson in Jumperist relativism:

CROUCH: And now he’s dead.

(*Secretary snaps her handbag shut with a sharp sound and takes her coat out of the cupboard.*)

ARCHIE: A severe blow to Logic, Mr. Crouch.

CROUCH (*nodding*): It makes no sense to me at all. What do you make of it, sir?

ARCHIE: The truth to us philosophers, Mr. Crouch, is always an interim judgment. We will never even know for certain who did shoot McFee. Unlike mystery novels, life does not guarantee a denouement; and if it came, how would one know whether to believe it?” (*Jumpers 71–72*)

If the secretary’s handbag snapping shut provides the audience with a surface-level clue to the murderer, Archie’s relativistic suspension of judgment gestures toward a deeper nihilism—no truth, no right or wrong, no good or evil. Crouch articulates the confusion spectators themselves experience, a confusion that prepares the ground for the Coda, in which the *Jumpers* transform the philosophy symposium into a frenzied carnival. The play’s concern, therefore, is not the resolution of a crime but the pervasive ethical disarray—indeed ethical darkness—that blankets the action.

This is emphasized visually in the opening scene, when the lights cast the secretary’s swinging motion across the stage and Crouch stands in alternating patches of illumination and shadow. Taking an unwary step, he is struck by the swing and collapses, smashing a glass on the floor (*Jumpers 10*). In that moment, the glass—and symbolically, his earlier moral assumptions—shatters. His transformation into a Jumper has begun.

In *Jumpers*, Stoppard renders the philosophical enterprise inseparable from the ethical environments that shape and distort human action. Through the contrasting figures of George, Archie, McFee, Crouch, and the *Jumpers* collectively, the play exposes how ethical identity is continually produced, threatened, and reconfigured within a world where moral authority has fractured. George's uncompromising moral absolutism collapses under the weight of a reality governed by opportunism and moral relativism; Archie's calculated "moral jumps" exemplify the seductions of power in an ethical landscape emptied of stable values; McFee's fall and Crouch's ascension reveal how ethical positions can be discarded or adopted according to circumstance rather than conviction. The recurrent images of falling bodies, collapsing pyramids, and misfired arrows underscore the instability of any ethical architecture built upon precarious foundations. Ultimately, *Jumpers* suggests that philosophy cannot remain insulated from lived ethical disorder: the play stages the philosopher's struggle not merely to formulate moral propositions but to inhabit a world where the very conditions for ethical coherence have eroded.

### 3. Ethical Coherence: Philosophers' Resolution

If *Jumpers* probes whether a philosopher ought to privilege thought or action, *Professional Foul* shifts the ethical focus to the question of how choices can be made in ways that achieve both logical and moral coherence. Stoppard's play for television *Professional Foul* was first aired in September 1977 on BBC2, Europe's earliest color television channel—a medium that provided Stoppard's philosophical and ethical concerns with an expansive audience—particularly given that the play is set in the Eastern Bloc's Prague, ideologically far removed from Western Europe at the time. As Richard J. Buhr points out, many of the "epistemological and ethical problems that had long preoccupied Stoppard are clarified and brought to their culmination in *Professional Foul*" (Buhr 320).

I argue that this continuity and development manifest primarily in two respects. First, structurally, the play resembles Stoppard's earlier idea-comedies such as *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and *Jumpers* in that it situates its characters against the backdrop of the real-world ethical environment, while foregrounding the philosophers' own philosophical-ethical environment—here, a scholarly philosophy colloquium—as the arena for ethical critique and debate. Second, in terms of characterization, the play, like *Jumpers*, portrays a cluster of ivory-tower philosophers; but unlike the abstract and absurdist mode of *Jumpers*, *Professional Foul* offers its protagonist a far more concrete space for ethical practice, presenting audiences with ethical conflicts and moments of moral resolution that resonate with lived experience. The play thus underscores the significance of ethical practice—of how ethical choices are actually made—namely, that "moral philosophy is useless when it remains mere theory divorced from action, and that ethical insight arises through lived experience" (Purse 185).

As noted earlier, the term "professional foul"—a strategic breach of rules commonly seen in competitive sports—refers literally to the action taken by England player Roy Broadbent during the European qualifying match for the World Cup, when he deliberately "scythe down" the Czechoslovakian

striker “from behind” to prevent a goal (Professional Foul 161). Metaphorically, the term also alludes to the ethically questionable choices made by several philosophers and other characters in the play—choices that violate not sporting rules but the norms of social morality.

### 3.1 Work Ethics of Philosophy Academics

The play features four participants at the Colloquium Philosophicum in Prague: the American philosopher of language Brad Stone and three British philosophers—Andrew Chetwyn, Professor Anderson (whose first name is not revealed), and Bill McKendrick. Among them, Stone—slow to register or respond to his surroundings—is the only philosophy professor who refrains from committing any form of “professional foul”. Early Stoppard scholar Joan Dean has noticed a pair of structurally comparable mirror-figures across *Professional Foul* and *Jumpers*: “In the matter of translating abstract ideas into action, McKendrick resembles George—both profess that philosophy must engage directly with socio-political practice, yet both remain chronically inconsistent; Anderson, by contrast, mirrors McFee in evolving from a detached intellectual into an active participant in political life” (Dean 93). I concur with the latter observation, though in ethical terms Stone, rather than McKendrick, aligns more closely with George—sealed off in a hermetic bubble of pure academic abstraction. Stone is preoccupied with trifling linguistic ambiguities such as “ran well”, which may mean “the show ran well” or “the horse ran well” (PF 151), and he carries this self-amusing pedantry from the conference floor to the dining table, much to everyone else’s embarrassment.

The other three philosophers all arrive in Prague with motives that extend beyond academic exchange. Professor Anderson, the Cambridge ethicist and football enthusiast, sees the conference as a perfect opportunity to attend the Czechoslovakia–England World Cup qualifier—after all, “[a] World Cup qualifier is not just a football match” (PF 152). On the plane, he explains to McKendrick his “ulterior motive”:

ANDERSON: Yes. To tell you the truth I have an ulterior motive for coming to Czechoslovakia at this time. I’m being a tiny bit naughty.

MCKENDRICK: Naughty?

ANDERSON: Unethical. Well, I am being paid for by the Czech government, after all.

MCKENDRICK: And what ...?

ANDERSON: I don’t think I’m going to tell you. You see, if I tell you I make you a co-conspirator whether or not you would have wished to be one. Ethically I should give you the opportunity of choosing to be one or not.

MCKENDRICK: Then why don’t you give me the opportunity?

ANDERSON: I can’t without telling you. An impasse.” (PF 136–37)

Anderson knows full well that treating the colloquium as a free trip to a football match violates basic work ethics, yet because such conduct is a tacitly accepted custom in academic life, he frames this “unethical” act as merely “a tiny bit naughty”, thereby alleviating his guilt over the choice.

Professor Chetwyn, likewise an ethicist, is—at least in McKendrick’s telling—a highly politicized scholar:

MCKENDRICK: ... I mean politics. Letters to The Times about persecuted professors with unpronounceable names. I’m surprised the Czechs gave him a visa.

ANDERSON: There are some rather dubious things happening in Czechoslovakia. Ethically. (PF 136)

Chetwyn remains mysteriously absent throughout much of the conference, and in the end is detained at the airport by the police. From what little we learn, his true purpose was to smuggle important documents out of the country on behalf of Czech friends. The act clearly violates Czechoslovak law, yet in contrast to Anderson’s earlier self-serving use of “ethically”, the phrase here acquires a strong moral charge—Anderson implicitly endorses Chetwyn’s action as ethically justified civil courage.

By comparison, the cynical McKendrick may have the least legitimate motivation for attending the colloquium. He jokingly describes his field of research as “philosophical assumptions of social science” (PF 137), invoking Marxist ideals of social engagement and expanded scholarly horizons as cover for his hedonistic pursuits—womanizing, heavy drinking, and general misconduct. Upon landing in Prague, he eyes the women in his pornographic magazine and remarks, “I wonder if there’ll be any decent women?” (PF 139), using the ambiguous “decent”—ostensibly “virtuous”, actually “attractive”—to gloss over his dubious intentions.

### 3.2 Anderson’s Moral Conflict and Its Resolution

The ethical conflict that Anderson confronts—and the means by which he resolves it—occupies the central arc of *Professional Foul*. As the earlier examples demonstrate, Anderson is adept at using what might be called an “objectifying” philosophical method to defuse an ethical crisis, that is, converting a moment of moral danger into a problem susceptible to philosophical analysis. Yet the challenge he now faces is unprecedented in scale. Pavel Hollar, a Czech student whom Anderson once taught at Cambridge, visits his hotel to ask a grave favor: that Anderson secretly carry his doctoral dissertation out of the country so that it may be translated into English by a friend in Britain. The dissertation is politically sensitive because its argument runs counter to the “ethics of the state” in Czechoslovakia then:

The ethics of the state must be judged against the fundamental ethic of the individual. The human being, not the citizen. I conclude there is an obligation, a human responsibility, to fight against the state correctness. Unfortunately that is not a safe conclusion. (PF 145)

Like George in *Jumpers*—habitually mishearing words from within his insulated philosophical world—Anderson misinterprets the word “safe”. He launches into a long analytical explanation of how

Hollar might strengthen his argument. In philosophical discourse, *unsafe* indeed means that a conclusion is debatable or methodologically weak. But here, *unsafe* expresses Hollar's fear for his own life: "I mean, it is not safe for me." (PF 145) His danger arises precisely because his argument challenges a collectivist state ethics that demands individual compliance. Faced with his former student's plea, Anderson makes his initial ethical decision within the horizon of his own philosophical-ethical environment: he refuses, on the grounds that he is "an honoured guest" invited by the Czech government (PF 144). Yet even this refusal is delivered without conviction:

ANDERSON: ... I'm sorry ... I mean it would be bad manners, wouldn't it?

HOLLAR: Bad manners?

ANDERSON: I know it sounds rather lame. But ethics and manners are interestingly related. The history of human calumny is largely a series of breaches of good manners.... (Pause.) Perhaps if I said correct behaviour it wouldn't sound so ridiculous. You do see what I mean. (PF 144)

"Manners" and "correct behaviour" dilute rather than confront the ethical stakes of the request; both function as euphemisms that sidestep the moral problem. Although etiquette is a minor component of ethics, it usually applies only to decorum in everyday social settings—as when McKendrick scorns Stone's poor dining manners and calls him "a lousy eater" (PF 167). It is never adequate as a moral category. Seeing his student impoverished, mistreated, and fearful, Anderson is clearly moved. When he learns that this brilliant young philosopher has spent ten years working as a bus-stop cleaner, he falls silent, "not knowing what to say" (PF 142). His duty as a teacher would be to help Hollar; his duty as a law-abiding guest would be not to violate Czech legal strictures. Anderson thus finds himself in a classic ethical double bind.

In his rumination on dilemmas, Zhang Longxi sees Anderson as a paradigmatic example, who "understands ethics as a sort of contract between free-will-owning individuals or communities" (Zhang 293). In the concrete situation of the play, Anderson believes that "having accepted their [the Czech government's] hospitality, I cannot in all conscience start smuggling ... It's just not ethical" (PF 146). His sense of ethical coherence rests on his understanding of which ethical norms constitute the customs to which a guest must conform. But because Anderson and Hollar inhabit different ethical environments, what seems a self-evident social contract to the former appears idealized, even unattainable, to the latter—indeed, it is precisely the ethical environment Hollar aspires to create. Within Hollar's ethical world, writing a dissertation critical of the state and asking his professor to take it abroad are both perilous acts of resistance. Once Anderson recognizes this discrepancy, he tries to protect Hollar by removing the dissertation from the hotel so that it cannot be discovered by the police, partly out of concern for the student, partly out of guilt for refusing him. Thus he agrees to return the dissertation to Hollar's apartment the next day—"an indirect way of assuming ethical responsibility" (Dean 92). It is "indirect" because Anderson's plan is merely to return the dissertation on his way to the football match,

which he had already intended to attend by skipping McKendrick's paper. That he is detained at the apartment by police inspection—and thereby misses the match altogether—is an unforeseen sacrifice.

What ultimately compels Anderson's second ethical decision is his experience within Hollar's apartment. Expecting to drop off the dissertation quickly, he finds instead that Hollar has been arrested and the apartment is crowded with police. Hollar's wife asks him to stay as a witness during the search, as required by law. Forced to miss the match, Anderson is permitted to listen to the radio commentary. The irony is sharp: just as a "professional foul" occurs on the football field, the police simultaneously commit what might be called a "double professional foul" (Zhang 294) in the apartment—one officer plants black-market currency in the room to frame Hollar on economic charges. After the police leave, Hollar's distraught wife and child break down in tears, and the sight finally moves Anderson to promise he will help.

Anderson's promise—his second ethical choice—takes shape in two stages. The first consists of a series of philosophical and practical "professional fouls". He spends the night revising his conference paper to incorporate Hollar's arguments, transforming his prepared remarks into an explicit condemnation of the Czech government and turning himself into a conduit for Hollar's suppressed voice. Just as the police planted evidence and just as Anderson earlier used the conference program to cover a pornographic magazine on the plane, his rewriting of the paper constitutes another strategic breach of decorum. The Czech authorities predictably cannot permit such dissent to be aired at the colloquium. The conference chair first claims that the translators cannot accommodate last-minute changes; when this fails to deter Anderson, a fire alarm is pulled to evacuate the hall—another "professional foul" deployed to defend the ethical order of the State.

Anderson's second step completes a structural ring reminiscent of *Jumpers*. After the airport search, he boards the plane safely and reveals to McKendrick that he placed Hollar's dissertation in McKendrick's bag while the latter was drunk. The play thus returns to the aircraft setting with which it began, creating a circular ethical structure. Once they learn that Chetwyn has been arrested at the airport, the opening discussion of the ethical legitimacy of his actions recurs; yet Anderson, who has also smuggled documents illegally, escapes through a final "professional foul"—the covert substitution of luggage. Anderson acknowledges that he has "reversed a principle" (PF 184), making McKendrick an unwitting accomplice, but he explains the pragmatic logic of his choice: "They [the police] were very unlikely to search you." (PF 185). Such an inversion of ethical principle resembles the logic of a professional foul in football: a rule is broken to maximize a morally intelligible advantage. Whether this counts as ethical or unethical depends entirely on the observer's ethical environment and standpoint. Anderson's two infractions fulfill his promise to Hollar but violate McKendrick's autonomy and undermine the political-ethical order of Czechoslovakia. This ring-like ethical structure enacts Anderson's own remark that "[e]thics is a very complicated business" (PF 185).

Anderson's wry ease in dismissing McKendrick's protests contrasts sharply with his earlier anxiety when he notices the plane's wing trembling at the start of the play. That tremor symbolized, as critics

have noted, a concern over “the fragility of the modern mechanized world” (Buhr 322)—a metaphor for the instability of the ethical principles that govern Anderson’s philosophical world once he enters the contingencies of real life. Through a sequence of ethical decisions and strategic professional fouls, Anderson ultimately attains a form of ethical coherence and completes a trajectory from abstract philosophical theory, through concrete moral practice, and back again to reflective ethical understanding. In this sense, Anderson’s final composure in the face of ethical ambiguity mirrors the structural and conceptual logic that governs *Jumpers*: both plays end not with the restoration of a stable moral order but with the philosopher suspended within an environment fundamentally out of joint. Yet where George remains immobilized—caught within the airtight logic of his philosophical world and unable to intervene meaningfully in the ethical disorder that surrounds him—Anderson discovers a path toward ethical coherence precisely through acting within such disorder. His sequence of decisions and professional fouls forms an arc that moves from abstract principle to situated judgment, from theoretical scruple to morally fraught responsibility. Far from resolving the contradictions of the world he inhabits, Anderson’s actions acknowledge them, demonstrating that ethical agency consists not in preserving purity but in navigating complexity. In paralleling George’s paralysis with Anderson’s compromised but committed engagement, Stoppard suggests that the philosopher’s task is neither to withdraw from ethical chaos nor to master it definitively, but to respond within it—to forge, however imperfectly, a coherence that remains attentive both to philosophical rigor and to the lived stakes of human vulnerability.

#### 4. Conclusion

Stoppard’s two philosophical plays trace distinct but converging paths toward an understanding of how moral agency is formed, tested, and often undone within unstable ethical landscapes. In *Jumpers*, George’s uncompromising moral absolutism reveals the danger of philosophical systems detached from lived experience. His faith in the internal consistency of ethical reasoning cannot withstand the surrounding culture of opportunism and relativism, and the play’s recurrent imagery (collapsing pyramids, misfires, and recursive misunderstandings) underscores a world in which moral order is no longer grounded in shared principles. As Bernard Williams cautions, philosophy often falters when it seeks “the absolute conception” of ethics at the expense of human complexity (Williams 139). George’s plight exemplifies precisely this limit: for him, philosophical clarity becomes a form of paralysis.

Professional Foul presents an inverse dilemma: here the philosopher must act. Anderson’s decisions—shaped first by hesitation, then by reluctant responsibility, and finally by ethically risky intervention—demonstrate that moral coherence often emerges through negotiation rather than prescription. Ethical responsibility surfaces not through theoretical purity but through engagement with the vulnerabilities and urgencies of others. His “professional fouls”, morally compromised though they are, indicate a willingness to assume responsibility within a coercive political environment where inaction itself becomes ethically fraught.

In juxtaposing a philosopher immobilized by principle with one compelled into action by circumstance, Stoppard stages the tension between contemplative ethics and lived moral practice from within. This tension echoes Martha Nussbaum's reminder that to understand how literary works "share certain ethical commitments," we must also attend to "seeing on what grounds some philosophers have denied or refused them" (Nussbaum 190). Stoppard's plays intricately dramatize both the refusal of ethical responsibility and its reluctant acceptance.

The recent passing of Tom Stoppard inevitably situates these readings within a widening historical frame. His philosophical plays stand as part of a larger dramatic tradition in which theatre becomes a testing ground for philosophical inquiry. While neither play offers a stable solution, both suggest that philosophy becomes ethically meaningful only when it confronts the world's disorder rather than retreating from it. Ethical coherence, in Stoppard's dramatic universe, is provisional, contingent, and forged at the shifting intersection of thought and action—a process continually renegotiated in response to human need and political pressure. Stoppard thus reimagines the philosopher not as a guardian of abstract moral truth but as a figure compelled to navigate, however imperfectly, the unresolved complexities of ethical life.

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**Review of the Book *de Ataúro***

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**de Ataúro Kitabı İncelemesi**

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The book *Bonecas de Ataúro*<sup>1</sup> (Ba 2010) was the result of a project involving 30 female inhabitants of the island of Ataúro, East Timor, to produce dolls and other figures in fabrics typical of the country, such as *tais* (Instituto 2010). Piera Zuercher<sup>2</sup>, a Swiss artist who has lived in France, Italy and East Timor, but now lives in Portugal (Roque, 2024), realised that the island's inhabitants already had cutting and sewing skills and so decided to combine the tradition of the craft to create something typical of the place (Esectv 2009).

The dolls were the highlight of the production and were part of an educational exhibition/workshop organised by the Instituto Camões in 2007 (Ba 2010), which also sponsored the book, which is divided into four parts: “Álvaro Tilman”, “Manufacturing Process”, “Dolls”, “Districts and Dolls”. It is not known how the photographs were chosen aesthetically.

The chapter “Álvaro Tilman” is a mini-biography of Álvaro Tilman Soares, the photographer responsible for capturing the images of the dolls that take up most of the book. Born in Dili, the capital of East Timor, he studied Economics at the Catholic University of Parahyangan in Bandung, Java (Indonesia) and returned to his homeland when East Timor gained independence in 2002, working in logistics and as a film actor as well. He then decided to study photography at the Modern School of Design in Yogyakarta (Indonesia). Tilman's curation of photographs found in the book was one of his first authorial works, which should not be confused with amateurism, since the artist manages to both illustrate the step-by-step production process – concentrated in the “Manufacturing Process” chapter – and produce conceptual photographs – found in the “Dolls” chapter.

The next chapter, “Manufacturing Process”, shows a series of photographs with their respective captions, showing the reader the step-by-step process of creating the dolls. Some of the photos in the book appear in EsectV's report on the dolls (Esectv 2009). This chapter is still a good source of knowledge about the process of creating the dolls, as there are still no tutorials explaining how to make them. However, an important record of how the social and economic implications of the project benefit the women of the community is missing.

After learning about the dolls' creative process, the chapter “Dolls” contains a series of conceptual photographs that illustrate the toys “moment”. Just like impressionist paintings, sometimes a doll, its origin and the sensation experienced when capturing the scene are named, as in “Gabbe, da família Coração<sup>3</sup>, feliz por estar perto do mar”<sup>3</sup> (Ba 39) in which the reader sees a smiling turquoise doll in a checkered outfit sitting on a rock (blurred background) looking at the horizon, or “Encontro dos casais de todos os distritos”<sup>4</sup> (Ba 67), a photo in which 13 pairs of dolls are mostly sitting on their sarongs on a fallen log in front of a hill, as if they were looking at the photographer. The photos communicate the story and essence of the project effectively.

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1 “*Bonecas de Ataúro*” translated as Dolls of Ataúro.

2 In the book, her name appears as Piera Zürcher.

3 “Gabbe, da família Coração, feliz por estar perto do mar” translated as Gabbe, from the Heart family, happy to be near the sea.

4 “Encontro dos casais de todos os distritos” translated as Meeting of couples from all the districts.

Finally, the last chapter “Districts and Dolls” is possibly the most interesting, as it seems to expand on the conceptual photography of the previous chapter. This is because it is divided into 13 sub-chapters, which correspond to the country’s 13 districts: Aileu, Ainaro, Baucau, Bobonaro, Covalima, Díli, Ermera, Lautém, Liquiçá, Manatuto, Oécussi, Same, Viqueque. In each of them, there was a photo of one (or more) doll(s) in the typical costume of the corresponding region and a short story. At the time, the authors were students studying for a degree in Portuguese Language Teaching at the National University of Timor Lorosa (Instituto 2010). An example can be seen below:

SAME – Manufahi

The smiling puppet has arrived from an imaginary country to meet Mrs Virginal Doll in Same, in the sub-district of Nada, in the Region of Inexistence.

But in this district, Inexistence is also imaginary after all, as the maize harvest is fortunately four times a year.

Mrs Virginal Doll took her friend to visit the mountain of Kablaki and another that gives this town its name - the walls of Don Bonaventura.

She also explained that the “Samenses” don’t go a day without having curry on their table. <<If you really want to savour this dish, take a walk through the city and enjoy the beautiful and unique landscape that surrounds us, with its huge stones, known by the name “fatuk-mamorak”, the “stones of God”.

Ah, it was an invitation that the Smiling Puppet couldn’t refuse.

<<The traditional dances will accompany us on stage, as salt and spice for our sensations, while the curry is once again placed on the table. Be careful not to spill it, as it’s very “slippery”. If you “slip” on it and “fall” to the ground, you’ll be left lying with your eyes on the attic where the flowers stored in it (the dreams), which taste like love, will smile down at you.

Come too! Don’t waste any time, if you want to get to know Timor a little deeper (Soares 94).

Although they are narratives invented as part of the project and its publication, it is possible to see that the narratives have a strong influence from Timorese oral literature, which shows that the authors’ literary creations, even if unconsciously, maintain the

country's literary tradition. The short story *Suco<sup>5</sup> Saboria* (2018) can confirm this fair comparison, starting with the presentation of the district, followed by the title and then the narrative<sup>6</sup>:

AILEU

Region of *Saboria*

[...]

There used to be a region called Sarilihu where many people lived. There lived a grandfather called Maubere and his wife, grandmother Maria, who lived in a house that was on top of a mountain and had a roof made of grass. They had three farmer sons called Leki Malik, Mau Leki and Ber Lelo. Maubere and Maria loved their sons so much that they went to work every day. Leki Malik went to look at the buffalo, Mau Leki went to the vegetable garden and Ber Lelo helped his parents at home. In this house, Grandpa Maubere and Grandma Maria put an object called a *fildaun*<sup>7</sup> in a basket and placed it on top of a tree. At night, the *fildaun* would always light up and the people who lived at the foot of the mountain would see the light, but they didn't know what it was.

Over time, the *fildaun* would light up as if it were a star, and people would get scared and want to know what that glow was that always appeared at the top of the mountain. There were many comments about that light and Grandma Maria didn't know if it was true or not. So one night she went to find out if the glow that people said they could see was real. She knew that the *fildaun* was sacred, but she didn't know that it lit up at night. On seeing the bright light, Grandma Maria called Grandpa Maubere and asked:

– Hei..! Tat Leki Bere sabid fe leo na?<sup>8</sup>

Grandpa Maubere replied:

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5 “*Suco*” translated as Region.

6 All footnotes have been kept in the original text.

7 Word from the Mambae language: glittering sacred object that has a form of an earring.

8 Mambae language: “Hey..! Old Maubere, what’s this that’s glowing?”

– Hai...! Saun Luli fuis ni taka fe hodan leo na<sup>9</sup> .

Worried, Grandma Maria said to Grandpa Maubere:

– Ohh...! Au kal tu se o fe sauba<sup>10</sup>.

From then on, Grandma Maria and Grandpa Maubere learnt that it was the fildaun that shone every night, so they didn't worry any more, as they knew that the fildaun was a sacred object that brought them luck.

When their three children went to play, their mates always called them witches and said they couldn't play with them. Leki Malik, Mau Leki and Ber Lelo would come home and tell their parents that the other children had called them witches.

It was then that Grandpa Maubere and Grandma Maria called everyone to tell them that they weren't witches, but that they possessed a sacred object called a fildaun that stood on top of a tree on the mountain and at night it lit up with its glowing light.

From then on, the community realised that they weren't witches and because they possessed that sacred object, the population chose Grandpa Maubere to be liurai (traditional ruler) of that region. He became liurai and changed the name from Sarilihu region to *Saboria* region, which in the Mambae language literally means "village of witches" (sabo: witch; ria: village), but in reality it is not a place of witches but a place where people have been unfairly judged as witches. This region still exists and is in the area of the administrative post of Aileu Vila, in the municipality of Aileu (Pinheiro 29-31).

As with the book *Stories of My Origin*<sup>11</sup> (2018), which rescues and collects stories from the Timorese oral tradition itself, *Bonecas de Ataúro* was published in a bilingual Portuguese-Tetum format, given the global reach that Lusophony provides.

The book *Bonecas de Ataúro* is an interesting record of local art and culture. Through

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9 Mambae language: "Hai...! It's the sacred object we put in the basket and it's glowing at night."

10 Mambae language: "Ohh...! I thought you were a witch"

11 "*Histórias da minha origem*" translated as *Stories of My Origin*.

it, we can learn a little about the folk art of a small part of its territory, bringing together cultures that are so diverse and distant, but united because they share the same Lusophone space. This book contributes to the promotion of East Timor's art and culture in a global context, showing the world some of the country's material heritage.

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Theatre and Culture Studies*

## **The Evolution of the Theatre Play, Human to AI: The Case of AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (2021)<sup>1</sup>**

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AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (Když Robot Píše Hru) (2021) is a contemporary attempt to write an AI-generated play in Prague, Czechia, directed by Daniel Hrbek. The contemporary play is developed and put on stage by a versatile team from the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague, Charles University, and Švanda Theatre, like a multifaceted collaboration. In detail, it is a 60-minute play streamed on the website. It is performed in Czech, and it can also be followed by simultaneous English subtitles. This article asks how the understanding of contemporary theatre is affected by AI technologies and explores the ongoing evolution from human to AI. Thus, is it possible for AI to create a machine-generated playwright, an AI form of Shakespeare, within both the limitations and advantages of artificial intelligence? Lastly, as this paper examines, will there be an AI-generated concept of art that can be possible and valuable?

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence, contemporary theatre productions, the evolution of theatre plays, technology, and theatre

1 This paper was presented at the **3rd International UTAD Theatre Research Conference "Evolution in Theatre"** hosted by the Turkish Society for Theatre Research (UTAD) and the Departments of English Language and Literature and Theatre at Süleyman Demirel University, Türkiye, on 4–6 September 2025.

*Journal of Literature,  
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## **Tiyatro Oyununun Evrimi, İnsandan Yapay Zekâya: Yapay Zekâ Örneği: *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play* (2021)**

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AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (Když Robot Píše Hru) (2021), Daniel Hrbek'in yönettiği, Çekya, Prag'da yapay zekâ tarafından yaratılmış bir oyun yazma girişimidir. Bu çağdaş oyun, Prag Sahne Sanatları Akademisi, Charles Üniversitesi ve Švanda Tiyatrosu'ndan oluşan çok yönlü bir ekip tarafından, bir iş birliği ile geliştirilip sahnelenmiştir. Ayrıntılı olarak, web sayfası üzerinden de yayınlanan 60 dakikalık bir oyundur. Bu oyun, Çekçe oynanır ve aynı anda İngilizce altyazı ile de takip edilebilir. Bu makale, çağdaş tiyatro anlayışının yapay zekâ teknolojilerinden nasıl etkilendiği sorusunu sormakta ve insandan yapay zekâya doğru devam eden evrimi incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Dolayısıyla, yapay zekânın hem sınırlamaları hem de avantajları göz önünde bulundurulursa makine tarafından yaratılmış bir oyun yazarı, yani Shakespeare'in yapay zekâ versiyonunu yaratması mümkün müdür? Son olarak, bu makalede incelendiği gibi, ileride, mümkün ve değerli olabilecek yapay zekâ tabanlı bir sanat kavramı olacak mı?

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yapay zekâ, çağdaş tiyatro prodüksiyonları, tiyatro oyunlarının evrimi, teknoloji ve tiyatro

AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (*Když Robot Píše Hru*), directed by Daniel Hrbek, presents the human-versus-machine binary while exploring technological developments in the contemporary period. It is the first theatrical play that was written by artificial intelligence. The play premiered globally on 26 February 2021. (van Heerde et al. 104-105). In English, the plot and the script are created by OpenAI's language model GPT-2 (Radford 1-24). In Prague, it was translated into Czech, and 92% of the characters' lines are computer-generated. This article attempts to question and analyze the possibility/ impossibility of a machine-generated playwright or an AI form of Shakespeare, within the limitations and advantages of artificial intelligence.

### **The Evolution of the Theatre Play, Human to AI**

Theatre has historically served as a crucible for technological development and experimentation, particularly through the creation of artistic value. However, it can be argued that theatre institutions have been relatively slow to respond to rapid transformations in their external environments, especially in their support and operational departments. Rapid advances in AI are having significant effects on different industrial sectors spanning operational, support, and artistic domains, and consequently on theatres themselves. It is crucial that theatre professionals develop a deeper understanding of AI's potential applications, benefits, and emerging challenges. (Horvath 10)

Theatre, as an art form, has embraced and adapted emerging technologies throughout its history. As a historical example, the Greek theatre introduced the *eccyclema* to stage automation. According to the Web page of Encyclopaedia Britannica, an *eccyclema* is "a stage mechanism consisting of a low platform that rolled on wheels or revolved on an axis and could be pushed onstage to reveal an interior or some offstage scene such as a tableau" ("*eccyclema*"). Moreover, in the nineteenth century, limelight, which was a "first theatrical spotlight ... was first employed in a theatre in 1837 and was in wide use by the 1860s" ("*limelight*"). It also transformed theatre production, becoming the first instrument used for indoor stage lighting. The most significant recent addition to the theatre's technological developments is media/projection design. Emerging technologies are transforming theatre production across artists, audiences, and arts administrators. Artificial Intelligence (AI) dominates discussions in the contemporary period, causing major disruption across industries worldwide. Some areas, such as finance and information, have embraced AI more easily. Others, such as the arts and theatre, cannot fully manage AI and its potential applications in their industries. Despite the theatre industry's continued scepticism toward AI, many theatre practitioners have experimented with and explored its possibilities, encouraging the creation of new works. (Garcia, "AI and Theatre: Playwriting, Stage Design, and Ticketing")

AI, with its diverse algorithms, can initially analyze large volumes of pre-existing plays, theatrical works, and scripts to identify patterns, themes, and structures that are similar or different. This wealth of data can then be used to generate new and innovative storylines, plot twists, and character development, opening up unexplored possibilities for narrative exploration. Furthermore, AI can assist in the design and generation of visual effects and virtual sets to augment the audience's overall sensory experience. (Ren 28)

As an example of another significant perspective for the evolution of theater and the future of the AI-generated plays, Stanford's Michael Rau, who is both a live performance director and an assistant professor in the Theater and Performance Studies (TAPS) program in the School of Humanities and Sciences, can be valuable for comprehending the relationship between AI and theater. Rau has long explored how theater can mirror the complexities of modern life, a theme that is particularly relevant to this analysis. Rau argues that human creativity and artificial intelligence can enrich stagecraft's storytelling processes. In Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), Rau's mission is to integrate artificial intelligence into a theater. He merges three significant approaches: the first is image generation, an AI-powered image generator that takes a video feed from a specific live performance and interprets a command to manipulate the actors' images. The AI-adjusted feed is projected onto the stage in sync with the human-generated image, creating a stream of images that can be seen as a dream sequence, an alternate story, or an alternate dimension. Secondly, large language models (LLMs) live scripts are significant in current debates about AI. Audience suggestions are integrated into a larger language model as a script that provides suggestions. Text-to-speech developers then convert the script's lines into audio. The role is then transferred to a headset-equipped actor, who then voices the dialogue written by AI. This allows the actors to perform without the constraints of holding a script or reading lines from a monitor. Instead, they can react instantly using the lines delivered through their headsets. Lastly, pose analysis is the third important step for scholars and users of AI: This analytical tool for academics uses an AI enhancer to create a 3D composite of actors' bodily functions within a frame of a recorded performance. Potential applications of this tool, leveraged in collaboration with Peter Broadwell, Simon Wiles, and Vijoy Abraham at the Stanford Libraries Center for Interdisciplinary Digital Research, include helping film scholars analyze an actor's choreography in a film or enabling political experts to analyze the gestures a therapist uses during a speech. (Jensen, "Ai Brings New Potential to the Art of Theater") These methods are quite contemporary debates in the discussions of AI and the art of theatre, and quite beneficial for understanding the first AI-generated play, *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play* (*Když Robot Píše Hru*) (2021). In particular, large language models (LLMs) "are a category of foundation models trained on immense amounts of data making them capable of understanding and generating natural language and other types of content to perform a wide range of tasks" and these models "are designed to understand and generate text like a human, in addition to other forms of content, based on the vast amount of data used to train them" They also can "infer from context, generate coherent and contextually relevant responses, translate to languages other than English, summarize text, answer questions

(general conversation and FAQs), and even assist in creative writing or code generation tasks” (“What Are Large Language Models (LLMs)?”).

### **AI and The Post-Digital Age in Theatre**

Terranova’s foreword in *Choremata* sheds light on how AI and the post-digital age transform our contemporary understanding of life and the arts. Thus, the post-digital age worldwide has become an era in which technological revolutions continually transform human perception of the contemporary period. For example, in the twenty-first century, social media, various applications, computers, and smartphones have become part of everyday life. This condition becomes an unbelievable reality, how fast the technological developments evolve and transform the world in the period between the second part of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first century. It is also a fact that Generation Y is the last generation to have experienced both the analogue and digital eras. On the other hand, considering the future, it remains a mystery how Virtual Reality or Artificial Intelligence affects human understanding, whether these developments exceed the limitations of human intelligence and aid humanity across various fields, or replace human labour in some job sectors. For instance, artificial intelligence and virtual reality can be used to represent contemporary culture, such as in animation, video games, comic books, theatre, cinema, documentaries, literature, and television. This list could be expanded to meet the needs of both the consumer and the creator of that specific work of art. AI’s profound traces in art can be traced back to Frankenstein’s Monster, Pygmalion’s Galatea, HAL 9000 from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the Puppet Master from *Ghost in the Shell*. Thus, these representations of art have a continual, evolving history, starting with the questioning and positivist times after the Enlightenment Period, through the fluid, dynamic, and non-statistical understandings of the contemporary Post-humanist era. AI’s characteristics of exceeding the limitations of the normativity of the traditional arts and sciences provide a *Zeitgeist* for how the emergence of technology may drastically change economic, epistemological, and political nuances in the world. While AI is not limited to artistic representations, it is both a product of humanity and a separate tool that can threaten it. (Terranova viii-x)

Furthermore, AI has become an indispensable tool for inference and data interpretation in industrial and postindustrial technologies. In the industry, AI sometimes remains a replacement for human workers rather than a reactualization of the technology. AI’s contribution to the industry also helps companies automate repetitive, mechanical, or underpaid tasks within their systems. In digital networks, AI’s contribution becomes a provider of computational power, and in the traditional form of sociopolitics, this contribution becomes a revolutionary change that, in the post-workerist digital era, AI does more than imitate the “virtuosity” and becomes a true source of value in cognitive capitalism of the contemporary period. Still, human creativity and capacity remain fundamental elements in both the arts and the sciences, but it is also a

fact that AI has increased the technicality and standardization of these areas. AI's accumulation and creation of digital commons also open space for using deep learning, neural networks, GANs, etc. For the purpose of broaden our minds, generative AI can be tool for creating a nonhuman reasoning, memory, perception and subjectivity that contemporary art and science critics (Critical race theorists, feminists, political ecologists, postcolonial and decolonial thinkers, neo-materialists, post-phenomenologists, Marxists, pragmatists, speculative philosophers and pragmatics), extend their debates to the how can AI-based realities can be adapted into critical theory that becomes one of the crucial and complex tasks for them to achieve. (Terranova viii-x)

As a further step toward this article's purpose of analyzing recent advancements in AI technology and robotics, these developments offer a new perception of art, with interactivity, reactivity, immersive environments, artificial morphogenesis, and cognitive machines that reshape the definition of contemporary art. In Vorn's article about AI and art, the contemporary advancements and debates in this field are analyzed. In this, it is claimed that theatrical machines integrate with multimedia objects (light, video, or sound) and become a means of expression that contributes to this article's claim. These new forms of expression include both lifelike systems and conceptual explorations of the aesthetics of machine mechanisms and artificial perceptions. In this context, the viewer's perception of the robot and the robot's perception of the environment are both significant, giving meaning to the art. This situation leads to the effect that creates an impression on the viewer that it could be possible to create an impression of life through AI or machine-generated behaviours with the integration of machine aesthetics of artificial construction with our creative work" (Vorn 367). As Vorn defines what AI-generated or robotic art brings to the table, it becomes significant to mention here, for the purpose of highlighting what art can be with a machine contribution in it:

*"Robotic Art is not a single homogeneous discipline; rather it is a mixture of multiple technological areas involving mechanics, electronics, programming, as well as multimedia. In the same manner, our research program does not focus on one single problem or one field of study, it encompasses a wide variety of research projects that all have one thing in common: producing a work of art as a final outcome. (Vorn 366)"*

Similar to the play that will be discussed, AI: When a Robot Writes a Play, a robotic or machine-generated piece of art, is not a homogeneous discipline. It is a mix of disciplines that includes both technology and art, such as mechanics, programming, and multimedia. Vorn emphasizes his research, which aims to be a complex and heterogeneous field of study that encompasses the limitations of traditional art.

In Demers's article, it is mentioned that theatre theorists, through the concept of presence, can be cited as an investigation of intention and the body. The presence of an actor is a vital element that contributes to

the play's liveness and energy. In performance theory, this also becomes a centre of analysis for the audience's perception and the human performer's reception. This performance has to gain empathy and understanding from the audience. Thus, the actor's embodiment, in conjunction with the spectator's imagination, creates a new potential insight. Similar to the human performer, according to Demers, the machine performer also needs the audience's co-presence to be fully realized. (Demers 275-276)

Demers thus asserts that “embodied AI provides not only new ways of considering embodiment but also techniques and principles to achieve alternative morphologies that could have an impact on how artists can design machine performers” (Demers 276) that can have the potential to create alternative and innovative art techniques similar to the one in *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play*. Demers expands his idea of the relationship between humans and AI on stage and tries to blur the dichotomy between the human and the machine: “the co-presence of audience and human performers is bonded, the machine performers also become more embodied” (303). Demers also emphasizes the importance of the AI designer who could possibly invent a re-experience of human experiences: “The designer of a machine performer should seek morphologies and cultural embodiment that help robots to recall, re-experience and re-enact human experiences, invented or not, simulated or not, and certainly not, with a complete computational model” (303). His idea of blurring the differences between humans and the machine while re-enacting the human experience with the help of an AI also coincides with *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play*'s aim: how the audience interacts with an AI-generated play, and it is possible for a human to experience an AI-generated play like a human-generated one?

*AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (Když Robot Píše Hru)* (2021)

THEaiTRobot is a specialized theatre script-generation tool that can create a play as an example of the subject matter of this article: *AI: When a Robot Writes a Play (Když Robot Píše Hru)* (2021). This play lasts approximately sixty minutes. The THEaiTRobot program is a revolutionary tool capable of producing 90% of computer-generated play. With the aid of dramaturgist David Košťák and director Daniel Hrbek, the play makes the role of the artificial intelligence tool in its creation transparent. (Elias et. al 4) Generally, the play's script is mainly created as such:

For the play, 727 lines of script were generated. The user had the option to discard any generated line (together with all subsequent lines), prompting the tool to generate a different continuation (used 46). The user could also manually enter a line into the script, which became part of the input to GPT-2 (used 8). The script was then post-edited by deleting 214 lines and changing 362 words (8%) on 146 lines. (Rose et. al 1)

These figures show that even though the AI can produce a substantial amount of textual material, dramaturgical cohesion ultimately depends on human curation, which raises questions about authorship and the extent to which AI can truly function as an autonomous creative agent in theatrical production.

Thus, the creation process for the artificial intelligence-generated play differs significantly from that of human-generated playwriting. The process is much more technical and data-based. In this process of generating the play, the script begins with a specific user—a theatre dramaturgist — who defines the scene’s opening phrase. The play begins with a setting and two lines of dialogue. The team behind this creation defines a specific set of inputs that selects a general topic, ultimately creating coherence for the script. The THEaiTRObot tool then continues this creation process by using GPT-2 XL to develop lines for the play. (Rose et. al 1) The characters in the play “do not seem to have independent personalities in the generated script; the model seems to simply ensure consistency with already generated text, not taking the character names into account” (2). Thus, these characters are more like shallow characterizations, lacking detailed, vivid descriptions. As “the text is generated word by word and line by line, whereas human authors of theater plays typically operate on a more abstract level, such as dramatic situations” (2), this characteristic of the play constitutes one of the differences between the human-generated play and the AI-generated play.

THEaiTRE is an interdisciplinary project that aims to combine science and theatre, led by a Czech team. The team mainly consists of computational linguists from Charles University and theater experts from the Academy of Performing Arts (DAMU) and Švanda Theater. The main goal is to explore the potential of contemporary AI techniques for theater practice. Also, confronts and explains the process behind the creation of the play and the current capabilities of the AI techniques. (Musil et. al 398)

The dramaturgist, or the human interpreter of the play, asserts that the AI-generated play lacked the conventional drama structure; instead, the words “relied on word associations to establish connections between various elements, having a consequent literary patina that did not fully adhere to the norms of dramatic dialogue”. As a result, the script required a significant reinterpretation from the director and the actors” (395). Thus, the Švanda Theatre designed a comprehensive production that contradicted its in-depth strategic vision with its creatively unconventional elements. This attempt succeeded by testing the elements’ cohesiveness by placing the script within a traditional theatrical context (395).

In the main website of the play, the Czech Theatre London defines the performance as being about a story that has “joy and sorrow of everyday life from a robot’s point of view, is composed of dialogues generated by artificial intelligence to celebrate 100th anniversary of the premiere of Czech playwright Karel Čapek’s play R.U.R. in which the word ‘robot’ was first used” (“Czech Centre London / AI: When a Robot Writes a Play”). Mainly, the 60-minute play is performed in Czech with English subtitles. Also, the performance is followed by a debate over whether a robot can write a play that is translated into English. In detail, Čapek (1890-1938) is still a prominent literary figure in Czechia: “Karel Čapek was a prolific writer in nearly every genre and

one of the most well-known figures from inter-war Czechoslovakia. He is best known today for coining the word robot in his dystopian play *R.U.R.* and for his satirical novel *War with the Newts* (Christensen 1). Therefore, the premiere of the first play written by artificial intelligence is intended to celebrate and commemorate Karel Čapek, who paved the way for the age of robots in Czechia.

#### Can an AI-Generated Concept of Literary Art be Possible and Valuable?

In this article, the main question is how an AI-generated concept of literature can be possible and valuable. To discuss this subject, an example from the audience's reception can be valuable. After the play's performance, a discussion with the audience questions the project's origins. The audience fails to identify which parts of the play were human-generated and which were AI-generated. They also find the play not very good, yet their expectations for an AI-generated text exceed their overall expectations as an audience. They even find the script "as fluent and eerily natural but also as glitchy, a reminder of its artificial nature" (Musil et. al 395-396). The author's reception of the first AI-generated play can also lead to a transformation in how playwrights develop their writing styles through innovative methods and adapt their creativity to current AI systems. Similar to playwrights, directors can also shift their direction toward more AI-generated texts that require a balance between a human director and an AI text. Actors, for instance, can seek authenticity in AI-generated content, which can elicit different responses from the audience, ranging from negative to positive. In this THEaiTRE project, the audience becomes observant and curious about the play's context, but in future AI-generated plays, reactions may vary. (Musil et. al 395-396) This difficulty in distinguishing between human and AI-generated passages opens an important discussion about naturalness and estrangement in algorithmic dramaturgy, suggesting that while AI may simulate structural cohesion, it does not necessarily deliver emotional depth or performative resonance

#### Conclusion

AI-generated drama may still not have reached the level of literary merit found in human-generated texts, but the level of development achieved by AI in transforming the discipline of creative writing and addressing perceived challenges is promising. The evolving relationship between human creativity and Artificial Intelligence holds potential for future exploration, offering new dimensions to the field of digital humanities. (Elias et al. 10)

As this article explores how understanding contemporary theatre is affected by AI technologies, it aims to examine the ongoing evolution from human to AI. Thus, is it possible for AI to create a machine-generated playwright, an AI form of Shakespeare, within both the limitations and advantages of artificial intelligence? Lastly, as this paper examines, will there be an AI-generated concept of art that can be possible and valuable? The answers to these future-oriented, ambivalent questions may also be controversial. In particular,

for the near future, an AI version of Shakespeare seems unlikely. Yet, as AI technology continually evolves, maybe for future generations, AI-assisted Shakespeare might be possible, because AI and human beings can augment their collaborative efforts in the literary field. As “the THEaiTRE project provides a fascinating glimpse into the possibilities of human–AI collaboration in the context of theatrical performance and highlights the potential of AI to transform the creative process in presently unimaginable ways” (Musil et. al 398), why can’t the potential of AI transform the creative process much more efficiently in the following years in the context of theatrical performance?

As this article’s claims suggest, Ren’s ideas can be useful for concluding the article. While AI has made significant advances and challenges in generating plays and assisting in the creative process, it is still clear that human playwrights’ depth and cultural understanding in their work of art are far superior to those of AI-generated plays. Human playwrights’ artistic voices draw on unique life experiences. Thus, human-generated plays can more easily and deeply resonate with the audience. On the other hand, AI can analyze and generate large amounts of data based on the themes or patterns of specific types of play, potentially broadening the horizons of human playwrights through its technical capabilities. As Ren concludes, The collaboration between AI and human creativity can lead to exciting new horizons for stage plays, where AI augments human creativity and enhances the theatrical experience” (29). THEaiTRE project or AI: When a Robot Writes a Play can become a precursor of the future theatre that “lies in a harmonious convergence of art and artificial intelligence, where each complement and enriches the other. This synergy could lead to novel forms of storytelling and immersive experiences that have yet to be fully realized or understood” (Ren 29). Human playwrights’ artistic voices draw on unique life experiences. Thus, human-generated plays can more easily and deeply resonate with the audience. As performance theorists such as Erika Fischer-Lichte argue, the embodied presence and lived experience of the artist remain central to theatrical creation—a dimension current AI systems cannot replicate—which may explain why human-authored drama continues to produce emotional impact and relational depth in ways machine-generated dramaturgy has yet to achieve.

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## **Narrative for the Women, of the Women: A Multicontextual Interpretation of Sisterhood in Christina Rossetti's Poem "Goblin Market"**

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Christina Rossetti's allegorical poem "Goblin Market" is rich in motifs, metaphors, symbols and themes which can be interpreted through multicontextual perspectives. Although much of the significance of the sisterhood presented in the poem hinges on reception theory, some parts of these nuanced interpretations are a result of Rossetti's deliberate criticism of Victorian social constructs that dictated the identity, position and mobility of women as passive participants in the activity of the phallogocentric society. Rossetti weaponises the poem to culminate the concepts of female solidarity, women's emancipation, and body autonomy by subverting gender roles and resisting against patriarchal norms of the nineteenth century. The unique representation of the sisterly bond and female friendship is both a reflection of Rossetti's subjective experiences and objective understanding of the sociology of her times. Therefore, the poem not only signifies the enduring legacy of Rossetti's literary contribution in promoting the arguments of radical feminism, but it also functions as a dialectic of the historical progression of gender politics. She has not only questioned the societal injustices done to women's economic freedom, but has also denounced the financial deprivation coerced upon them. Rossetti subtly criticises the underlying concepts of male chauvinism and gender inequality that the society presents through the institution of religion, so that these regulations cannot be easily disobeyed. Besides specifying these obvious flaws of religion and society, she also suggests the possible procedures for resolving these flaws by narrativising multiple counter-discourses in the poem. A postmodern reading of "Goblin Market" unfolds the fundamentals of queer theory present in the narrative, which become instrumental in portraying the liberation of the sisters. The portrayal of sickness, survival, and differently abled bodies in the poem can be commented upon from the perspective of disability studies. This paper aspires to articulate the magnanimous importance the poem harbours, especially in the literary spectrum of women's writing, as the poem functions not merely as a deviation from preexisting traditions but also as the establishment of traditions that were way ahead of its time.

**Keywords:** Christina Rossetti, Laura, Lizzie, women, Victorian

*Journal of Literature,  
Theatre and Culture Studies***Kadınlar İçin, Kadınların Anlatısı: Christina Rossetti'nin "Goblin Market" Şiirinde Kız Kardeşliğin Çok Bağlamlı Bir Yorumu**

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Christina Rossetti'nin alegorik şiiri "Goblin Market", çoklu bağlamsal perspektifler üzerinden yorumlanabilecek motifler, metaforlar, semboller ve temalar bakımından oldukça zengindir. Şiirde sunulan kız kardeşlik olgusunun anlamının büyük bir kısmı alımlama kuramına dayansa da, bu nüanslı yorumların bazı yönleri Rossetti'nin, kadınların kimliğini, toplumsal konumunu ve hareket alanını fallogosentrik bir toplumda pasif katılımcılar olarak belirleyen Viktorya dönemi toplumsal yapısına yönelttiği bilinçli eleştirinin bir sonucudur. Rossetti, şiiri bir araç hâline getirerek kadın dayanışması, kadınların özgürleşmesi ve bedensel özerklik kavramlarını öne çıkarır; toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini tersyüz ederek ve on dokuzuncu yüzyılın ataerkil normlarına karşı direnerek bu temaları doruk noktasına taşır. Kız kardeşlik bağı ve kadınlar arası dostluğun özgün temsili, hem Rossetti'nin öznel deneyimlerinin bir yansıması hem de yaşadığı dönemin sosyolojisine dair nesnel kavrayışının bir ürünüdür. Bu nedenle şiir, Rossetti'nin radikal feminizmin argümanlarını destekleyen edebi katkısının kalıcı mirasını simgelemekle kalmaz, aynı zamanda toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarının tarihsel ilerleyişine dair diyalektik bir işlev de görür. Rossetti yalnızca kadınların ekonomik özgürlüklerine yönelik toplumsal adaletsizlikleri sorgulamakla kalmaz, onlara dayatılan mali yoksunluğu da kınar. Şair, toplumun din kurumu aracılığıyla sunduğu ve bu nedenle kolayca ihlal edilemeyen erkek egemenliği ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği kavramlarını inceliklerle eleştirir. Bu açık kusurları belirtmenin yanı sıra, şiirde birden fazla karşı söylemi anlatılaştırarak bu sorunların nasıl çözülebileceğine dair olası yollar da önerir. "Goblin Market" in postmodern bir okuması, anlatı içinde yer alan ve kız kardeşlerin özgürleşmesini betimlemede işlevsel hâle gelen queer kuramın temel unsurlarını açığa çıkarır. Şiirde hastalık, hayatta kalma ve farklı bedenlenmişliklerin temsili ise engellilik çalışmaları perspektifinden ele alınabilir. Bu makale, şiirin özellikle kadın yazını bağlamındaki büyük önemini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır; zira eser, yalnızca önceki edebi geleneklerden bir sapma olarak değil, aynı zamanda kendi zamanının çok ötesinde yeni gelenekler kuran bir metin olarak işlev görmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Christina Rossetti, Laura, Lizzie, kadınlar, Viktoryan

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The safe, hearty and warm bond of female friendship is perhaps the broadest connotation of sisterhood. Time and again, in history and in fiction, many have found a home in platonic feminine intimacy, while many have weaponised its strength for survival. Christina Rossetti's "*Goblin Market*", which is a complex poetic allegory celebrating the strength of sisterly bond, was much inspired by her personal struggles as a woman belonging to the public sphere of literature. Despite being an active and significant part of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, Rossetti struggled with her position as a female poet. The first reason was the gendered hegemony in the field of literature during the Victorian age. Her predecessor, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who enjoyed greater fame during her time, lost the position of Poet Laureate to Alfred Tennyson in the year 1850, and the loss had more to do with gender politics than with literary excellence. Much of the unnecessary criticism Rossetti received was from within her family. Letters and other accounts of her family members reveal that she was often seen as a problem child due to her fits of over-emotivity and non-conformity with ideal femininity. Her brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who is the founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, critiques the unconventionally libertarian approach that Christina Rossetti's poetry offered. In a sketch titled *In A Rage*, he depicts her in a fit of comic rage, slightly critiquing her tendencies of resistance and obstinacy. The sisterhood presented in "*Goblin Market*" becomes Rossetti's weapon in freely and unflinchingly manifesting her progressive beliefs about women in an age that relegated women's position in society beyond measure. From 1859 to 1870, she volunteered at the St. Mary Magdalene Penitentiary in Highgate. The charitable community believed that prostitutes, otherwise known as fallen women, could be rehabilitated and should be reintroduced into society in an unsegregated manner. In the poem, the idea of a marketplace where appetite puts a woman at risk, but her salvation is not to be found in controlling the appetite but in turning to another woman's comfort, originates from the moral enlightenment Rossetti received from the experience at the penitentiary. The social conspiracy that commodifies women's bodies on multiple levels, while the blame of ethical contamination is also imposed upon the women, was exposed to her. Her ideas on feminism were free from complexity and theoretical ornamentation as they emerged from the first-hand experience of dealing with the plight of the social outcasts. In a letter to Gabriel Rossetti, she writes: "Women are not Men, and you must not expect me to possess a tithe of your capacities"(178) on being mockingly asked by him to write political pamphlets instead of children's rhymes. Therefore, "*Goblin Market*" is a documentation of women's lives, by a woman, for the women. It presents the Victorian woman question by establishing the unheard side of women's narratives.

The importance of the sisterhood presented in the poem can be interpreted as a didactic approach towards the subversion of patriarchal expectations. The actions of Laura and Lizzie reflect both defiance and conformity. They break away from societal norms while often internalising and accepting them. The exchange between opposite values ensures the dialectic progression of the poem, leading to a culminating conclusion where the utmost importance is placed upon the individual characters and not on situational

events. Hence, “*Goblin Market*” celebrates individuation of the self, but does not anticipate a utopian society. The narrative, no matter how revolting it appears to be, is much grounded in the reality of the Victorian age. The contextual irony of the poem contributes to articulating the frustration and susceptibility of Victorian women, including Rossetti. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf writes: “And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends...almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men...[women in fiction were] not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman’s life is that.”(65) Opposed to this, almost seventy years prior to Woolf’s opinion, Rossetti creates an idyllic, feminine world devoid of patriarchal judgment, where women are not considered to be the weaker sex for behavioural inclination towards simple, domestic virtues. The sisters, Laura and Lizzie, engage in everyday chores, cooking, cleaning and shopping. Rossetti introduces an alternative household space that defies the pervasive Victorian ideologies known as the “cult of domesticity” and “true womanhood”. These value systems promoted the belief that women must possess every domestic virtue, along with submissiveness, purity and piety to become better wives, and their existence should be restricted to the private sphere of the home. But Laura and Lizzie’s everyday activity is not driven by any social expectation, nor is their movement to the outside restricted. However, each evening, the utopia is threatened by goblin men from “the glen”(Rossetti 15) who sell their mysterious hoard of fruits. It is important to note that the sex of the goblins has not been specified. But their behavioural pattern has been described in terms of a masculine code of conduct. Here, the problem regarding the question of identity arises, which many critics have pointed out. Analysing the poem by setting aside the issue of sex and prioritising the issue of gender as the means of identification creates an inconsistency between what is being critically extracted from the poem and the materiality of the poem itself. Hence, the postmodern reading of the poem often turns the interpretation anachronistic. In the nineteenth century, when sex education was a taboo subject for women, Rossetti made a clear distinction between sex that is assigned at birth and gender, which is a social construct of identification. But regardless of the inclusion of these radical expressions, two contradictory factors must be taken into account. Firstly, these binaries of gender and sex were only abstract ideas during Rossetti’s time, and she herself includes these concepts in the poem according to her subjective understanding of the issues and not as scientifically rigid terminology. A similar attempt remains documented in her poem titled “Sappho”, in which she identifies herself with the voice of the Greek feminist poet and articulates the suffocated existence of a woman trapped in her own body by the socially assigned norms. Secondly, even though the poet and the critics agree with the validity of gender as the means of identification and not sex, the subjugated condition of women in the nineteenth century was caused solely by the hierarchy of sex and not by the identification with any identity agenda. However, despite considering these dichotomies, the poem remains no less pivotal in conveying and shaping the social consciousness of the Victorian times. Her poetry attacks patriarchy, not men as individuals. The vocabulary the goblins use to describe their fruits is loaded with sexual innuendo that is very disturbing in nature. Based on the poem, the

controversial illustrations painted by Kinuko Craft depict how the fruits have been equated with objects of desire. Published intentionally in *Playboy* (1973), targeted towards the male audience, Craft's art is a burning poof of how sexualisation of women in a state of helplessness is all the more subject to carnal urges promoted by patriarchy. The inappropriate touch and goblin fruits shaped as male genitalia are aimed at exposing the dark, incongruous side of desire. But the goblins ultimately become catalysts in the sisters' transition from childhood into adulthood and assist them to realise their physical, emotional and sexual potential. Lizzie embodies the strict Victorian parenting traditions through her wise, experienced, protective approach. But the set of restrictions she utters is not socially internalised but out of reasonable fear of the goblins. She says: "Dear, you should not stay so late,/ Twilight is not good for maidens;/ Should not loiter in the glen/ In the haunts of goblin men." (Rossetti 17) She constantly cautions her sister Laura, whose carefree and daring behaviour embodies the new woman the eighteenth century witnessed. Laura's hyperfemininity, innocent mannerisms, and lovely appearance have made critics compare her with fourteenth-century poet Petrarch's muse, whose name was also Laura. Many have considered the name Laura to be a pun on the word "lure", as she falls victim to the allure of the goblin fruits. Whereas Lizzie, due to her resilience and bravery, has been compared to Queen Elizabeth I. This claim can be further supported by the genderless representation of the self, meticulously constructed by Elizabeth I herself. In order to establish her power over the phallogocentric monarchy, she rejected her femininity in terms of conduct and cognition. She was popularly attributed as "King" Elizabeth or the Virgin Queen, who was an icon of sanctity and strength. Similarly, Lizzie's struggle with the Goblins has different characteristics from that of Laura. She is physically brutalised mercilessly, being treated by the goblins as their equal, but is not a victim of their seductive beckoning. Her resilience has been described through the metaphor of a horse, which was commonly used to describe masculine valour:

One may lead a horse to water,  
 Twenty cannot make him drink.  
 Though the goblins cuff'd and caught her,  
 Coax'd and fought her,  
 Bullied and besought her,  
 Scratch'd her, pinch'd her black as ink,  
 Kick'd and knock'd her,  
 Maul'd and mock'd her,  
 Lizzie utter'd not a word; (Rossetti 27)

There is a quality of chivalry in the way she emerges victoriously and saves Laura. In Laura's revival scenes, she has been placed in the submissive end of the heteronormative gender binary, whereas Lizzie works as the dominant agent in the poem. Lizzie's behavioural pattern throughout the poem replicates that

of the head of the family, who, in the Victorian age, quintessentially had to be a man. The end of the poem reveals that Laura is narrating the entire story to her children while Lizzie remains the valiant heroine, or rather, the hero of the tale. Whether Rossetti's intention behind portraying Lizzie through a gender influx was to criticise or to simply conform to the norm of her age is a debatable subject. But a postmodern reading of the poem exposes the multitude of hegemonic codes women were subjected to.

The economic oppression of women in the nineteenth century has been subtly presented in the poem as well. The title itself is indicative of the fact that the poem can be interpreted from economic perspectives. The opening lines of the poem: "Morning and evening/ Maids heard the goblins cry:/ Come buy our orchard fruits,/Come buy, come buy"(Rossetti 15) assert the possibility of "the cyclical rhythms of women in conflict with the linear pull of the market" (Campbell 199). The poem also deals with how consumer desire is exploited to propagate the capitalist economy. The goblins seem more interested in the sisters rather than their money. The way the rarity of their exotic fruits gives them the opportunity to determine the price and situate the consumers at the passive end of the bargain is very similar to how the mercantile economy was taking over England's code of consumerism. Besides, the Napoleonic code prevalent in the Victorian age restricted women from having financial possessions or doing monetary transactions without the permission of their male guardian— generally the father, brother, husband or son. Managing household necessities based on the earnings of the father of the family was the only financial role women were granted. Apart from that, the personal necessities of non-aristocratic women were rarely indulged in. Laura's desire to buy the forbidden fruit allegorically embodies how women's desire for personal entertainment was forbidden. Laura's hesitating speech about the possession of a coin clearly reveals the economic dependence of women:

I have no coin;  
 To take were to purloin:  
 I have no copper in my purse,  
 I have no silver either,  
 And all my gold is on the furze. (Rossetti 18)

The only socially accepted working roles for women were either being a governess or a prostitute. Both professions preyed on women's labour and bodies. Similarly, Laura too, commodifies her body as she substitutes her "precious golden lock"(Rossetti 18) for money. The extent of women's alienation from the sphere of economy has been conveyed by Laura's naïve comparison between gold and furze, a kind of golden flower. Laura's mistake is not a result of stupidity but sheer inexperience, which society is accountable for. She allows the goblins to determine the terms of the purchase and situate her within the patriarchal economy. She fails to assert her agency and thus is deceived, which mirrors the legalised system of unequal wages for women in the nineteenth century. After Laura is done eating the mysterious fruits, she brings home "one kernel stone"(Rossetti 19) to grow the delicious fruits by herself in the future.

However, she fails to reproduce the fruits that lured her into staking her life. This instance can be seen as a parallel to the termination of women's ownership of wages in Victorian times. Women who were already socially ostracised for entering the public sphere were exploited further for labour, while their wages were deceitfully rejected in the end. Laura pays the price for her desires with her life as her vitality slowly gets robbed from her body. Likewise, women had to pay higher interest rates for loans (as they were not legally allowed to borrow money), which often took them a lifetime of sacrifice to return. However, Lizzie asserts economic agency by demanding a fair exchange, proposing to buy fruits for a penny. The refusal of the goblins replicates the repressive political measures taken by the chauvinistic government against women's rights. The poem employs words like "loiter" and "linger" as part of a cautionary terminology, instructing the women to stay within a strictly drawn boundary of freedom. Yet Lizzie dares to alter the demography of patriarchal economy and inscribe her own understanding of bartering, by demanding: "If you will not sell me any/ Of your fruits though much and many,/ Give me back my silver penny/ I toss'd you for a fee." (Rossetti 26) Rossetti exposes how assault becomes the central expression of masculine control as the long description of abuse Lizzie endures symbolises the torment women went through for mere existential strife: "Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,/ Tore her gown and soil'd her stocking,/ Twitch'd her hair out by the roots,/ Stamp'd upon her tender feet" (Rossetti 27). "*Goblin Market*" was published in the year 1862, yet the way it paints the predicament of women's vulnerability almost predicts the rejection of the amendment to the Second Reform Bill presented by John Stuart Mill in 1867, which aimed to grant women's suffrage. However, Rossetti alters the palimpsest to be the dominant narrative as Lizzie stands her ground until she gets her penny back: "And heard her penny jingle/ Bouncing in her purse,—/ Its bounce was music to her ear." (Rossetti 28). She returns with both her penny and the cure for Laura's illness, as if avenging a generation of women's exploitation.

The feminist implications in "*Goblin Market*" result from Rossetti's subjective voice, plagued by multiple consequent events. In 1964, the Contagious Diseases Act was passed to enquire into the victims of venereal diseases. However, historians later documented that this process of rehabilitation only favoured male citizens, providing them with proper treatment while the women were confined in deplorable lock hospitals, which were remote and ill-maintained. The sole reason for this was a flawed view of prostitution that portrayed women as the carriers of venereal diseases, whereas the male consumerism of prostitution was absolutely invisibilised. Many women were deported to Australia along with national offenders, as carrying these diseases was considered a capital crime only for women. A popular discussion of the age was how and in what ways women were plagued by Hysteria. Derived from the Greek word 'hysterá', meaning womb, Hysteria was considered to be a gender specific disease. Popular discourses, which were medically licensed and widely accepted, concluded that it was caused by what was known as the "wandering womb". The theory stated that the uterus of women who harboured more emotions than what is socially prescribed, dislodged from its rightful place and wandered throughout the body, hammering at the head and causing madness.

Laura too whimsically wanders to the prohibited regions and suffers from fits of distress as described in the lines :

And gnash'd her teeth for baulk'd desire, and wept  
 As if her heart would break.  
 Day after day, night after night,  
 Laura kept watch in vain  
 In sullen silence of exceeding pain. (Rossetti 24)

In another poem titled "The Daughter of Eve", Rossetti expresses similar agony upon making wrong decisions in life: "Stripp'd bare of hope and everything,/ No more to laugh, no more to sing,/ I sit alone with sorrow." (Rossetti 41) Although the poem itself is subjective, the subject matter of it is quintessentially womanly according to Victorian standards. The title also suggests that the poem captures the predicament of women who are bound to make the same mistakes as their predecessor Eve, who caused the loss of paradise. But an alternate reading of the poem reveals how the whole discourse of women's suffering, starting from Eve to Rossetti's own life, is a socially constructed scheme of gendered blame and marginalisation. Many of Rossetti's poems and letters deal with how women suffer the way society demands them to suffer, which geographically and historically varies. Similarly, Laura's illness is of a specific kind that is decided and inflicted by the goblin men. She manically craves for the goblin fruits, grows restless for the taste of them, and when she fails to reencounter the very feeling that drives her insane, she grows thin and pale, and her hair turns grey. Her innocent hunger causes her ruin. There is an irony in her suffering, which replicates the contradictory expectations society imposed upon women. The age witnessed the massive demand for conduct books written for young girls to instruct them about maintaining virginal purity and presentability in the marriage market. These books conventionally made examples of girls who dared to transgress the boundaries assigned by patriarchy. Similarly, "*Goblin Market*" also uses the example of a girl named Jenie who indulged in consuming the forbidden fruit and ended up losing her life. Lizzie cautions Laura on how even flowers do not bloom over her grave. To interpret it metaphorically, if women were found to have been defiled before legal marital union and hence, "deflowered", they were no longer accepted as brides and therefore, received no wedding bouquet. But most of these women were cheated by their partners, and that other side of the narrative has been silenced by history. In the nineteenth century, when guillotines were gradually being abolished as an inhuman means of execution, England discovered a new, invisible torture device as a morally ironic gift for women under the reign of the great Queen Victoria, namely, the woman question. Besides, the era was so obsessed with taxidermy that it trapped women in a life in death existence, stuffing their psychological innards with socially constructed ideologies of everything: talking and walking, eating and mimicking, and most importantly, being obedient and lovely wives for men. "*Goblin Market*" becomes Rossetti's literary revolt in breaking the notion of the "angel in the house". The value system required

women to become self-sacrificing, domesticated, angelic wives, as their virtue determined the respectability of their husbands. They must produce children, but must not have any personal sexual desire; otherwise, they shall be labelled as barbarous, licentious, repulsive. They must cook, but not be hungrier than the amount prescribed by society. They must ensure the well-being of their family, but must not demand rest. Suffering and staying still, existing in a twilight zone, was what ideal femininity was. The womanly qualities the sisterhood exudes completely debunks these expectations. Laura is not the damsel in distress but firm about her choices and projects her liberty in indulging in her biological desires. Her victimisation is a result of the deceptive goblin fruits. Her trust and curiosity are not her crime, but the goblins who corrupt and exploit her innocence are the actual criminals. Lizzie choosing to confront the goblins but refusing the fruits is proof that it is only through resistance and asserting choices, women will overcome the perils of the age. The victory of the sisterhood is an expression of Rossetti claiming her distinct position among the predominantly male Victorian authors. Her voice against the hypocritical phallocentrism stands the test of time. While in 1928, Virginia Woolf in *Orlando* opines, “As long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking.” (65), Rossetti blatantly showcases the adverse effect of such thinking. Lizzie shudders at realising that “her sister heard that cry alone” (Rossetti 23), which conveys Rossetti’s message for women about distancing themselves from the deceptive promises of patriarchy. And indeed, the age witnessed the rise of unmarried women, including Rossetti herself, who earned for themselves and withstood all odds. What Rossetti achieves is more than just the identification with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, as she finds her unique place amongst the pioneering Victorian female poets, and so do many other women of the age in their different spectrums. Strength of sisterhood triumphs.

Apart from the feminist readings of the poem, it can be analysed from the perspective of queer theory as well. Whether it was Rossetti’s intention to normalise homoeroticism amongst women through the homosexual inferences in the relationship of the sisters is a subject of debate. Though most of her works deal with the spectrum of femininity, they do not feature queerness through its physical manifestation. In fact, it is only in the revival scene of Laura where these themes are found. But the fact that in the poem, Rossetti urges for freedom of expression and spontaneity of subjective behaviourism regardless of gender boundaries, is an unquestionable claim. From one perspective, the homoerotic approach works as a counter force to pacify the effects of the brutal objectification Laura is subjected to by the goblins. She has to be revived by being fed the same fruits that robbed her vitality. But Lizzie feeds her the remnants of the fruits, not in the standard way, but urges Laura to taste the fruits smeared on her skin :

Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices  
 Squeez’d from goblin fruits for you,  
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.  
 Eat me, drink me, love me;

The depiction is extremely obscure and disturbing, which highlights the height of the eeriness of the original seduction of the goblins. The seduction and the re-enactment are both depicted through similar behavioural patterns, but the intention has been altered. The goblin fruits are poisonous because they are infused, described and offered with their malicious intentions. But Lizzie transforms the poison into an elixir with her virtuous intent. This depiction is also similar to the Biblical ritual of consuming bread as the body of Jesus to reach redemption. It is not the goblin fruits but the bodily contact of Lizzie that redeems Laura. Her body radiates the warmth of protection and not the sickness of malevolent lust. The poem employs the contrasting images of light and darkness to articulate the effects of Laura's consumption of the fruits. After Laura eats the goblin fruits, the summer sky becomes dark as the sudden arrival of clouds "Put out the lights" (Rossetti 23) of the day, along with the hues of Laura's colourful life. Contrariwise, the effects of Laura's revival have been depicted beautifully in the lines: "Swift fire spread through her veins, knock'd at her heart,/ Met the fire smouldering there/ And overbore its lesser flame" (Rossetti 31). Rossetti hence weaponises homoeroticism to alter multiple facades of the dominant patriarchal code. One of the major reasons for female mortality in England was due to the neglect of gynaecological health. The subject was not medically studied properly, was considered a taboo, and the symptoms of women were not properly understood due to the absence of female practitioners in the field. If Laura's illness can be interpreted as a gynaecological or venereal illness, then the utmost patience and meticulous care Lizzie exhibits towards her emphasises the mandatory attention gynaecological health should be given, and how women's participation in the field is necessary. Lizzie understands Laura's plight so deeply because she shares the same physiological (gender) identity and experiences as her, and hence, her attempt at saving Laura is uninhibited, unbarred, purely instinctive to the point of exhibiting motherly concern. The lines "That night long Lizzie watch'd by her,/ Counted her pulse's flagging stir,/ Felt for her breath" (Rossetti 31) indicate the spontaneous motherly connection any female bonding has in common. The concept resonates with another poem of Rossetti titled "Crying, My Little One, Footsore and Weary" where the female speaker comforts the readers in a motherly tone: "You are my one, and I have not another;/ Sleep soft, my darling, my trouble and treasure;/ Sleep warm and soft in the arms of your mother,/ Dreaming of pretty things, dreaming of pleasure." (Rossetti 52) Rossetti counters the patriarchal concept that condemns women for falling victim to seduction but does not criminalise the seducer. She also breaks free from the political appropriation of female bodies, as the two sisters cannot be fitted into any neatly knit concept of gender that is determined by certain behavioural registers. According to the socially ascribed gender boundaries, a generalised reading of the poem may mislead the reader to view the sisters to be womanly in their behaviour, manly in their courage and transsexual in their survival. But that would contribute even more to the identity stereotypes that sustain the sex-gender hierarchy. When the protagonist sisters deviate from what is expected of females, they exhibit that being a woman is not linked to notions of sweetness, submission, and femininity, and this non-conformity does not make them evil or transsexual- just women who transgress what has been

imposed on them for centuries. The Victorian society normalised and even convinced women, to some extent, to identify with submission, harassment, lack of autonomy and rights over their own bodies. Rossetti is one of the first female writers to question this abnormal normalisation and normalise what actually should be normalised. She not only redefines and reappropriates the fundamentals of gender identity, but also anticipates the theories of materialist feminism that emerged almost a hundred years after the poem was written. By problematising gender boundaries, Rossetti emphasises the freedom of expression and spontaneous gender discourses that will aid the improvement of human progress. The similarity between the actions of the sisterhood and Biblical myth is remarkable. And Rossetti breaking the myth is more so. She alters the stereotypical masculine role of the knight in shining armour, the protector and provider, by presenting a woman as the Christ figure. Lizzie's capability of self-sacrifice and changing the universal fate of consuming the forbidden fruit makes her an almighty figure. By redeeming Laura and not letting her meet the same destiny as Jeanie, Lizzie's actions logically reflect more kindness than the Biblical God. She neither condemns or curses Laura to be a sinner as God did to Eve, subjecting her to the punishment of painful childbirth and domination by her husband in Genesis 3:16. Instead, she soothes, restores and erases any difference between the pious and sinner as even after consuming the goblin fruit, Laura and Lizzie merrily work together: "Fetch'd in honey, milk'd the cows,.../ Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat" (Rossetti 21). Through these alterations, Rossetti highlights the possibility of the revival of the fallen woman. In a society opposed to the progression of women, empowerment is all the more needed to break the barriers. The unbreakable sisterly bond defying the Biblical degradation of Eve with an alternative end is simply symbolic of Rossetti's faith in female solidarity. Both sisters go through a learning process, acting as redeemer and redeemed for each other. Lizzie learns the strength of emotional and physical love integral to human existence. Laura rediscovers the power of sisterhood and passes that message to her little ones. Even without the direct inclusion of men in the poem, the existence of the children confirms their passive presence. Yet the concluding focus of the poem is:

For there is no friend like a sister  
 To cheer one on the tedious way,  
 To fetch one if one goes astray,  
 To lift one if one totters down,  
 To strengthen whilst one stands. (Rossetti 31)

The system, code of conduct and social expectations persist. Only, the outcome is changed by the hands of the women. The message of empowerment is passed down, from mothers to daughters, from sisters to a universal sisterhood. "*Goblin Market*" can be experimentally read from the perspective of disability studies as well. Rossetti critiques and reconstructs physical differences that fall beyond the socially accepted

boundaries and debunks the unethical treatment of illness, psychological disorder, deviant or impaired bodies. The non-normative, incongruous, hybrid appearance of the goblins as depicted in the lines: “One had a cat’s face,/ One whisk’d a tail,/ One tramp’d at a rat’s pace,/ One crawl’d like a snail,” (Rossetti 16) is indicative of how physical deformity was a laughing stock in Victorian comic literature, lampoons and freak shows. The goblin fruit that causes the mental and physical disorientation of Laura can be considered a metaphor of contagion, which injects uncontrollable addiction and craving in her body, which manipulates her psyche to such an extent that makes her disregard the threats of bodily corruption. Even while slowly wasting away as her hair turns grey and colour fades from her skin, she thinks about the fruits. The symptoms of her fading youth are very similar to the effects of Syphilis and Tuberculosis, both of which heavily affected the Victorian population. She becomes the epitome of the physically and socially unfit outcast as her agility is robbed from her. It is Lizzie’s positive determination that reflects the central themes of disability studies in the narrative as she challenges the boundary of body autonomy by not giving up hope about the revival of Laura, who, according to social standards, is already a lost cause, much like Jenie. Disability studies critiques the flaws in the process of nursing that devalue the dignity of disabled individuals, as such value systems predetermine the scale of one’s abilities without practical proof of what they are actually capable of. But the cure narrative of the poem places Laura as the victor, as she has been given due credit for defeating destiny. Although she is required to be healed to again become an acceptable part of the normative society, her healing is born out of the finer sensitivities of love, protection, friendship and lastly, a sisterly bond, which are the psychological qualities often missing in the treatment of disabled lives. But Lizzie’s intervention introduces a radical reimagining of care narratives according to the standards of the nineteenth century, as she treats Laura as what we modernly know as a differently abled individual. Rossetti opposes the politics of psychology as she inscribes an alternate method of interdependent, communal, emotional healing. She herself experienced near-death conditions of dangerous and long periods of sickness. She was diagnosed with a rare condition of the malfunction of the thyroid gland known as Graves’ disease. From 1870 to the rest of her life, she was plagued by mood swings, fevers, headaches, exhaustion and loss of consciousness. Her body underwent severe swelling, hair loss, discolouration, and weight loss to the point that some accounts of 1872 state that her eyes seemed to protrude out of her face. Some of her letters and related correspondence of people who knew her reveal that her religious background often framed her illness as a trial for spiritual refinement, which caused her more harm than good. She was subjectively aware of the unreasonable isolation caused by society’s discomfort with non-normative corporeality, and hence, she vehemently critiques the moralization of medical narrative in the poem. Therefore, “*Goblin Market*” functions as a palimpsestic and humanitarian discourse over the inhuman medical ideology of the Victorians.

When Rossetti created the sisterhood of her dreams in the nineteenth century, she did so perhaps without realising that the yet-to-develop theories of feminism, queer theory, theology and consumerism would be applied to her work. Her frustrated reaction became solace for the women of her age and ages to

come. Her success in breaking the taboo remains as a burning proof that patriarchal subjugation couldn't muffle the justified protests of women, no matter how few and disempowered they were. What Rossetti fought for in 1865 is still being fought for by the women of the twenty-first century, and the echoes of her rebellion have reverberated down to the "me too" movement of contemporary times. The empathy the tale of the sisters evokes amongst the female readers creates a sense of unification of existential need, and Rossetti sews the thread of interdependence between a universal sisterhood. "*Goblin Market*" establishes the gender unified concept of sisterhood that the lofty agendas of liberty, equality and fraternity have excluded. Rossetti, Laura and Lizzie function as nineteenth-century fairy godmothers, imparting the priceless knowledge of kindness, courage and emancipation amongst a generation of female readers.

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