JCRELC

Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture

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Preface

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JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

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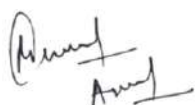
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Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.

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Queer and Crip Embodiment in Woolf's *Orlando* and Beckett's *Endgame*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract— This article argues that Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928) and Samuel Beckett's Endgame (1958), when read through a combined queer/crip theoretical lens, reveal a continuum in twentieth-century literature's critique of normative embodiment, temporality, and autonomy. While Orlando employs playful gender transformation and centuries-spanning narrative to challenge fixed identity and chrononormativity, Endgame presents a stark vision of disabled interdependence and stalled time in a post-apocalyptic setting. Through close textual analysis informed by queer theory (Butler, Halberstam) and disability studies (McRuer, Kafer), this study demonstrates how both texts destabilize the modern ideal of the autonomous, progressive, able-bodied subject. The comparison illuminates how privilege mediates experiences of non-normativity while revealing shared strategies of resistance to compulsory able-bodiedness and heteronormative time. Ultimately, this dual reading contributes to interdisciplinary conversations at the intersection of literary modernism, queer studies, and disability theory.

Keywords— queer theory, crip theory, disability studies, Virginia Woolf, Samuel Beckett, temporality, embodiment, modernism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century witnessed profound literary interrogations of what constitutes a "normal" body, identity, and life course. This article examines two landmark texts that challenge these norms from distinct but complementary angles: Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1958). Separated by three decades and emerging from different literary movements—modernist playfulness and postwar absurdism—both works dismantle core assumptions of liberal humanism, particularly the ideals of stable identity, bodily autonomy, and progressive temporality.

Existing scholarship has productively analyzed *Orlando* through queer and feminist lenses, highlighting its subversion of gender binaries and linear biography (Caughie; Marcus). Similarly, *Endgame* has been read through existential and, more recently, disability studies frameworks that examine its representation of dependency and bodily limitation (Mitchell and Snyder; McMullan). However, these analyses typically remain within discrete theoretical domains. This article bridges that divide by applying an integrated queer/crip hermeneutic—a framework that recognizes how norms of gender/sexuality and ability/disability mutually constitute and reinforce one another (McRuer; Kafer). We argue that reading these texts together through this lens reveals a more comprehensive critique of what Robert McRuer terms "compulsory able-bodiedness" and its entanglement with heteronormativity.

Our analysis pursues three interrelated questions: How do *Orlando* and *Endgame* envision embodiment outside binary gender and ableist paradigms? In what ways do their narrative structures formalize "queer time" and "crip time" to resist chrononormative progress? And how does comparing these works—one centering privileged fluidity, the other stark dependency—deepen our understanding of the material and historical conditions of non-normative survival?

The article proceeds in four parts. Following this introduction, Section 2 outlines the key theoretical convergences between queer and crip theory that inform our reading. Section 3 offers a close analysis of *Orlando*, focusing on gender performativity

and queer temporality. Section 4 turns to *Endgame*, examining crip time and the ethics of interdependence. Finally, Section 5 synthesizes these readings to articulate the broader implications of this comparative approach for literary studies and critical theory.

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: QUEER/CRIP INTERSECTIONS

Queer theory and disability studies (often termed "crip theory" in its critical, political mode) share foundational commitments to deconstructing normative systems that govern bodies, desires, and life trajectories. Both fields interrogate how power operates through the production of "normal" versus "deviant" categories, and both attend to the lived experiences of those who inhabit non-normative positions.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity illuminates how identity is constituted through repeated stylized acts rather than expressing a pre-existing essence (Butler 1990). This framework proves essential for understanding *Orlando*'s gender transformation, which reveals gender as a mutable construct rather than a biological destiny. Complementarily, Jack Halberstam's concept of "queer time" challenges "chrononormativity"—the organization of life into linear, reproductive timelines centered on marriage, childbearing, and inheritance (Halberstam 2005; Freeman 2010). Queer time opens alternative temporalities that resist this normative scheduling.

From disability studies, the social model distinguishes impairment from disability, locating the latter in social and environmental barriers rather than individual bodies (Oliver 1990). Robert McRuer's *Crip Theory* (2006) extends this, arguing that compulsory able-bodiedness functions analogously to compulsory heterosexuality, with both systems producing and marginalizing their "deviant" others. Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013) further develops the concept of "crip time"— flexible, non-progressive temporalities that accommodate disabled bodyminds and challenge curative futures.

These theoretical strands converge in their critique of the autonomous, productive, future-oriented subject of modernity. By bringing them together, we can attend to how *Orlando*'s gender fluidity and *Endgame*'s disabled embodiment both disrupt this ideal, while also recognizing the material differences that privilege and vulnerability make. This integrated lens avoids reducing disability to metaphor or celebrating queer fluidity without attention to embodiment's constraints.

III.   QUEER FLUIDITY AND PRIVILEGED EMBODIMENT IN ORLANDO

3.1   Gender Performativity and the Constructed Self:

Woolf's *Orlando* famously features a protagonist who begins as a sixteenth-century nobleman and midway through the narrative, without explanation, becomes a woman, living on for centuries with minimal aging. This transformation brilliantly illustrates Butlerian performativity. As the narrator notes, "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been" (Woolf 102). The self remains continuous while the social signification of the body changes entirely.

This moment lays bare the constructed nature of gender: Orlando's essential consciousness persists, but their social existence is radically altered. As a man, Orlando enjoys property rights, diplomatic access, and poetic ambition; as a woman, they encounter legal restrictions, societal expectations of marriage, and diminished public authority. The satire lies in how arbitrary yet consequential these gendered scripts are. Woolf demonstrates that gender is less an identity one *is* than a role one *performs* within specific historical constraints. Orlando's performance shifts, but the performative nature of gender remains constant.

3.2   Queer Temporality Against Chrononormativity:

Orlando' temporal structure constitutes a radical experiment in queer time. Spanning over three centuries (1588–1928), the narrative refuses linear development and progress. Orlando does not age conventionally; time accelerates and decelerates whimsically. This structure rejects what Elizabeth Freeman terms "chrononormativity"—the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity, often through heteroreproductive milestones (Freeman 2010).

Orlando's life evades these milestones. Their marriage to Shelmerdine is notably unconventiona—a partnership of mutual convenience and companionship that produces no children and demands no cohabitation. This arrangement exemplifies what Halberstam calls "queer temporalities," lives that unfold outside "the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family,

longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (Halberstam 2005, 6). Orlando's centuries of writing, traveling, and loving disrupt the generational logic of birth, reproduction, and death that structures normative time.

The narrative form itself reinforces this queer temporality. The mock-biographical voice jumps capriciously between centuries, lingers on trivial details, and skips major historical events. This nonlinear, anti-teleological structure refuses to organize time as a coherent progression toward a meaningful end, instead embracing a more fluid, episodic, and playful experience of temporality.

3.3   Privilege and the Limits of Fluidity:

While *Orlando* celebrates gender fluidity, it does not ignore how privilege mediates non-normative existence. Orlando's aristocratic wealth, property ownership, and literary talent provide a buffer against the most severe consequences of gender transgression. They can retreat to their country estate, maintain financial independence, and cultivate artistic circles that offer relative acceptance. This insulation allows Orlando's queerness to be experienced more as creative freedom than as material vulnerability.

A crip perspective, however, reminds us to attend to embodiment's material constraints even within this privileged context. Orlando's body, while seemingly ageless, is not invulnerable. They experience fatigue, cold, desire, and the weight of historical memory. The text subtly registers how even a privileged queer body must negotiate physical limits and social environments not designed for it. Orlando's gender transition, while seamless in essence, exposes them to new forms of bodily regulation and vulnerability (e.g., legal constraints on property ownership for women). The novel thus offers neither a purely utopian vision of fluidity nor a tragic narrative of constraint, but a complex portrait of how privilege and difference intersect.

IV.   CRIP TIME AND INTERDEPENDENCE IN ENDGAME

4.1   The Misfit Body in a Broken World:

Beckett's *Endgame* presents a stark contrast to *Orlando*'s expansive, playful world. Set in a bare interior with two small windows looking onto a lifeless exterior, the play features four characters whose bodies are marked by impairment and dependency: Hamm, blind and unable to stand; Clov, who can only walk stiffly and with pain; Nagg and Nell, Hamm's parents who are legless and confined to ashbins. This is a world where the "misfit" between body and environment, to use Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's term, is total (Garland-Thomson 2011).

Unlike *Orlando*, where non-normativity is a site of creative possibility, in *Endgame* it is the brutal condition of existence. Hamm's blindness and immobility are not metaphors but material realities that structure his entire existence and his power dynamics with Clov. The play refuses to sentimentalize or heroicize these conditions; instead, it presents them as the grim facts of a world in decay. This aligns with a crip theory insistence on engaging disability as lived materiality rather than symbolic abstraction.

4.2   Crip Time as Repetition Without Progress:

The temporal structure of *Endgame* embodies what Alison Kafer theorizes as "crip time." The play's famously circular dialogue ("Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished") creates a sense of time that is stagnant, repetitive, and devoid of progression or hope for cure (Beckett 1). Unlike normative time that moves forward toward improvement or resolution, crip time accommodates different rhythms, delays, and "a future that might not follow a straight line from the present" (Kafer 2013, 27).

Hamm and Clov's routines—checking the windows, telling stories, requesting painkillers—are performed day after day with no expectation they will change or improve. This repetitive stasis rejects the modernist narrative of progress and the curative timeline that demands disabled bodies strive toward able-bodied norms. In *Endgame*, there is no "getting better," only ongoing survival within limitation. This represents a radical break from teleological time and embraces what might be called a "crip present," where value is not contingent on future improvement.

4.3   Interdependence as Ethical Practice:

A central contribution of *Endgame* from a crip perspective is its unflinching portrayal of interdependence. Hamm and Clov are locked in a symbiotic yet antagonistic relationship of care: Clov provides food, mobility, and access to the outside world;

Hamm provides (or withholds) meaning, narrative, and the semblance of purpose. Their dynamic complicates simplistic notions of autonomy, exposing the fiction of the independent subject.

As Kafer notes, "dependency is not a sign of failure but a fact of life" (2013, 145). *Endgame* dramatizes this fact in its most raw form. The characters' survival is entirely collective, even if that collectivity is fraught with resentment and power struggles. This representation challenges cultural ideologies that privilege independence and self-sufficiency, instead proposing interdependence as the fundamental condition of existence, especially for disabled lives.

The play also resists redemptive or heroic narratives of care. Clov's service is grudging, Hamm's demands are tyrannical, and their relationship is punctuated by threats of abandonment. This complexity avoids sentimentalizing dependency while still insisting on its necessity. It presents care not as a moral ideal but as a practical, often messy, reality of embodied life.

V.   SYNTHESIS: FROM PLAYFUL SUBVERSION TO STARK SURVIVAL—A QUEER/CRIP CONTINUUM

Reading *Orlando* and *Endgame* together through a queer/crip lens reveals a provocative continuum in twentieth-century literature's engagement with non-normative embodiment and temporality. Both texts dismantle the ideal of the autonomous, progressive, able-bodied subject, but from different historical moments and with different affective registers.

Orlando, emerging from the optimistic experimentalism of high modernism, uses playfulness, parody, and privilege to imagine gender and time as fluid constructs. Its queer critique is expansive, spanning centuries to show the arbitrariness of social categories. *Endgame*, born of postwar trauma and existential crisis, offers a materialist, minimalist vision of survival within inescapable limitation. Its crip critique is circumscribed, focusing on the immediate realities of dependency in a ruined world.

Yet important connections emerge. Both texts reject chrononormativity: *Orlando* through centuries-spanning narrative that evades reproductive timelines, *Endgame* through repetitive, non-progressive dialogue that refuses curative futures. Both challenge autonomy: *Orlando* through its demonstration of identity as socially performed and relational, *Endgame* through its depiction of survival as fundamentally interdependent. Both reconfigure embodiment: *Orlando* by decoupling gender from biological sex, *Endgame* by presenting disability not as lack but as a different mode of being-in-the-world.

The comparison also highlights how privilege mediates experiences of non-normativity. Orlando's aristocratic status buffers their gender transgression, allowing it to be experienced as creative freedom. Hamm and Clov, devoid of such privilege, face non-normativity as raw survival. This contrast is crucial for intersectional analysis, reminding us that queer and crip experiences are always shaped by other social locations.

VI.   CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERARY AND CRITICAL THEORY

This comparative reading demonstrates the value of applying an integrated queer/crip framework to literary analysis. By bringing these texts and theories into conversation, we gain a more nuanced understanding of how twentieth-century literature contested normative constructs of body, time, and self. The approach reveals connections between modernist play and absurdist minimalism that might otherwise remain obscured by generic and period boundaries.

For queer theory, this analysis suggests the importance of engaging more substantively with disability—not merely as metaphor but as material reality that shapes temporal experience and relationality. For disability studies, it demonstrates how queer conceptions of performativity and temporality can enrich readings of disabled embodiment in literature. For literary studies more broadly, it offers a model for interdisciplinary reading that respects textual specificity while drawing on critical frameworks from adjacent fields.

Ultimately, both *Orlando* and *Endgame*, in their radically different ways, envision lives that flourish outside normative scripts of progress, productivity, and independence. They imagine alternative temporalities (queer and crip time), alternative relationalities (chosen affinities and necessary interdependencies), and alternative embodiments (fluid and limited). In doing so, they contribute to what José Esteban Muñoz might call a "queer utopia" and what Alison Kafer might term a "crip future"— not a perfect world, but one where difference is not merely tolerated but becomes the ground for reimagining what it means to live, and live on, together.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Investigating the Translation of Idiomatic Expressions in the Indonesian Subtitles of *Dead Poets Society*

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Abstract— *This research investigates the translation of idiomatic expressions in the Indonesian subtitles of the film Dead Poets Society (1989). Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study identifies idioms in the English dialogue, analyzes the translation strategies applied, and evaluates the resulting meaning equivalence. Data were collected through documentation of the film's dialogue and official Indonesian subtitles, with analysis guided by translation strategy frameworks. Findings indicate that paraphrasing is the dominant translation strategy (53%), followed by idiom-to-idiom translation (27%), literal translation (13%), and omission (7%). While core meanings are generally preserved, metaphorical nuance and cultural connotations are frequently reduced. The study concludes that idiom translation in subtitling involves balancing semantic accuracy with the technical constraints of the medium, often prioritizing audience comprehension over stylistic preservation. These findings contribute to understanding the complexities of audiovisual translation and offer practical insights for subtitle practitioners.*

Keywords— *idiom translation, audiovisual translation, subtitling, translation strategies, Dead Poets Society, cross-cultural communication.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Language functions not only as a tool for conveying information but also as a medium for expressing cultural values. Idiomatic expressions represent a linguistic element that reflects cultural identity, as their meanings cannot be interpreted literally from their constituent words. Idioms often contain figurative messages, symbolic values, and cultural connotations that present complexity in translation (Ngongo et al., 2024). When transferring idioms from English to Indonesian, translators must negotiate meaning, culture, and readability to ensure message relevance for the target audience, given that cultural differences between languages can cause semantic shifts.

Film is a medium that frequently features idiomatic expressions, as dialogue typically aims to represent native speakers' language style for natural and communicative effect. *Dead Poets Society* (1989) is particularly rich in idiomatic expressions, especially through the character of Mr. Keating, whose language style is inspirational and advice-laden. These idioms are not merely linguistic embellishments but reflect philosophical motivations, emotional developments, and character evolution. They contribute significantly to character building, moral messaging, and narrative progression.

However, translating these idioms into Indonesian subtitles presents numerous challenges. Idiomatic expressions may undergo meaning shifts, paraphrasing, omission, or cultural adaptation to maintain clarity within the limited text duration of subtitles (Sinambela et al., 2024). This raises important questions about how equivalently the source language idiom's meaning is represented in the target language. Therefore, examining idiom translation in the Indonesian subtitles of *Dead Poets Society* is relevant both linguistically and culturally, helping to understand how figurative meanings are transferred and to what extent message integrity is maintained in audiovisual translation.

Based on this background, the present research addresses three main questions:

1. What idiomatic expressions appear in the English dialogue of *Dead Poets Society*?

2. What translation strategies are employed in rendering these idioms into Indonesian subtitles?

3. How accurate and equivalent are the translated idioms in conveying meaning to Indonesian audiences?

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Defining Idioms:

Idioms are phrases whose overall meaning cannot be deduced from the literal meanings of their individual components. Fernando (1996) describes them as set phrases that function as single units of meaning. This non-compositional nature makes idioms unique linguistic elements that require contextual and cultural knowledge for proper interpretation. Gibbs (1994) emphasizes that idioms carry cultural, historical, and symbolic significance within a language, often originating from community practices, stories, or shared experiences. Glucksberg (2001) further notes that understanding idioms requires pragmatic competence, where listeners utilize shared knowledge, situational context, and social norms to infer meaning. Thus, idioms represent complex linguistic constructs that blend fixed structures, figurative meanings, and cultural references.

2.2   Idioms in Film and Media:

Research demonstrates that idiomatic expressions in film dialogue play crucial roles in constructing meaning, shaping character identity, and enhancing emotional resonance. Bell and Lister (2012) argue that idioms serve as linguistic markers revealing characters' social backgrounds, cultural influences, attitudes, and emotional states, thereby contributing to authentic and relatable dialogue. In cinematic narratives, idioms function as rhetorical, stylistic, and symbolic devices that enable viewers to access deeper interpretive layers and facilitate the communication of moral, philosophical, and thematic messages.

Studies across various films illustrate the prevalence and diversity of idiomatic expressions. Research on *A Dog's Journey* (2019) identified multiple types, with phrasal verbs being dominant. Analysis of *Coco* found "pure idioms" to be most frequent among 32 expressions examined. In *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), researchers classified idioms into lexemic, proverbial, and institutionalized forms, demonstrating their varied manifestations beyond simple phrases. Collectively, these studies confirm that idioms in film are integral narrative tools that enhance storytelling, emotional depth, and audience engagement.

2.3   Language in *Dead Poets Society*:

Previous analyses of *Dead Poets Society* consistently highlight how figurative language forms the philosophical and ideological core of the film. Mr. Keating's dialogues are constructed as persuasive literary discourse rather than mere instructional speech. Through idioms, metaphors, analogies, and poetic references, he reshapes students' perceptions of themselves and their world. This figurative language serves as a crucial narrative strategy, communicating complex ideas in accessible yet emotionally resonant ways.

Idioms and figurative expressions in the film reinforce several thematic pillars: individuality and self-expression, resistance to conformity, and the pursuit of meaning and purpose. Although "Carpe Diem" is technically a Latin maxim, it functions

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idiomatically within the film, evolving beyond its literal translation ("seize the day") to become a symbolic directive encouraging students to embrace their choices, potentials, and identities. The repetition of this maxim creates a linguistic ritual that shapes character development and moral decisions. Thus, idioms in *Dead Poets Society* operate as strategic linguistic devices that empower characters, cultivate critical thinking, and challenge institutional rigidity.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1   Research Design:

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to examine the forms of idiomatic expressions, translation strategies, and levels of meaning equivalence in the Indonesian subtitles of *Dead Poets Society*. Qualitative research is appropriate for analyzing language features requiring contextual understanding (Creswell, 2014). This approach enables contextual analysis aligned with the linguistic, cultural, and communicative situations present in the film's dialogue, ensuring interpretations consider both linguistic structure and embedded cultural values.

3.2   Data Sources:

Data comprise English dialogues containing idiomatic expressions from *Dead Poets Society* (1989) and their corresponding Indonesian subtitles. The film was selected for its richness in idiomatic expressions reflecting philosophical values, motivation, and character development. Supporting theoretical references include works by Fernando (1996) on idiom theory, Baker (2018) on translation strategies, and Nida and Taber (1982) on translation principles.

3.3   Research Instruments:

The primary research instrument is the researcher as human instrument, responsible for determining focus, selecting data, identifying translation strategies, and interpreting meaning equivalence. Supporting instruments include:

1. Data classification tables for recording English idioms, Indonesian translations, meanings, timestamps, strategies, and equivalence levels

2. Film dialogue transcripts and Indonesian subtitles as reference sources

3. Theoretical frameworks for idiom classification and translation analysis

3.4   Data Collection Techniques:

Data collection employed documentation methods through several stages:

1. Repeated film viewing to understand storyline, characters, conversation contexts, and idiom usage situations

2. Acquisition of English dialogue transcripts and Indonesian subtitles from verified sources

3. Identification and documentation of idiomatic expressions, recorded in data tables with source dialogue, translation, timestamp, and conversation context

4. Data verification to ensure no duplication and proper idiom classification

3.5   Data Analysis Techniques:

Analysis followed three main stages:

1. Identifying idiom meanings in English dialogue based on conversational context

2. Classifying translation strategies in Indonesian subtitles using Baker's (2018) framework

3. Evaluating meaning equivalence between source and target languages to assess translation effectiveness

IV.   FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1   Translation Strategy Analysis:

Analysis of 15 idiomatic expressions revealed the following distribution of translation strategies:

TABLE 1
TRANSLATION STRATEGY DISTRIBUTION

Strategy	Number of Idioms	Percentage	Example (English → Indonesian)
Paraphrase	8	53%	"Suck the marrow out of life" → "Nikmati hidup sepenuhnya"
Idiom-to-idiom	4	27%	"Break a leg" → "Semoga sukses"
Literal translation	2	13%	"Out of the blue" → "Tiba-tiba"
Omission	1	7%	(No subtitle for the idiom)

Paraphrasing emerged as the dominant strategy, indicating the translator's prioritization of clarity and audience comprehension over preserving idiomatic form.

4.2   Meaning Equivalence Analysis:

Equivalence levels varied according to translation strategy and idiom complexity:

TABLE 2
MEANING EQUIVALENCE ANALYSIS

No.	English Idiom	Indonesian Subtitle	Meaning Retained	Equivalence Level
1	Carpe diem	Raih hari ini	Fully	High
2	Kick the hell out of yourself	Lepaskan batasanmu	Partially	Moderate
3	Lead down the garden path	Menyesatkanmu	Nuance lost	Low

4.3   Idiom Function Analysis:

The preservation of idiomatic functions depended on their narrative roles:

TABLE 3
FUNCTION PRESERVATION ANALYSIS

Idiom	Function in Film	Subtitle Result	Function Preserved
Carpe diem	Philosophical motivation	Preserved	Yes
Cross my heart	Emotional assurance	Simplified	Partially
A far cry	Comparative emphasis	Reduced	Partially

4.4   Comprehensive Data Summary:

The complete analysis of 15 idiomatic expressions reveals patterns in translation approach and effectiveness:

TABLE 4
COMPREHENSIVE IDIOM TRANSLATION ANALYSIS

No.	English Idiom	Indonesian Subtitle	Translation Strategy	Equivalence Level	Notes
1	Carpe diem	Raih hari ini	Idiom → Idiom	High	Core philosophical imperative is preserved effectively.
2	Suck the marrow out of life	Nikmati hidup sepenuhnya	Paraphrase	Moderate	Vivid metaphor ("marrow") is lost, but core meaning is retained.
3	Kick the hell out of yourself	Lepaskan batasanmu	Paraphrase	Moderate	Intensity and colloquial force are reduced.
4	Out of the blue	Tiba-tiba	Literal Translation	High	Meaning is accurately conveyed.
5	Lead down the garden path	Menyesatkanmu	Paraphrase	Low	Connotation of deceptive pleasantness is completely lost.
6	A far cry	Jauh berbeda	Paraphrase	High	Comparative meaning is clearly preserved.
7	Food for thought	Bahan renungan	Idiom → Idiom	High	Equivalent metaphorical concept exists and is used.
8	On top of the world	Sangat bahagia	Paraphrase	Moderate	Idiomatic hyperbole is simplified to a basic adjective.
9	Cross my heart	Sumpah demi Tuhan	Idiom → Idiom	Moderate	Cultural/religious framework shifts from a secular gesture to a religious oath.
10	Light a fire under you	Memaksamu bergerak	Paraphrase	Low	The sense of urgent motivation is weakened; metaphor is lost.
11	Dead as a doornail	Mati total	Paraphrase	High	Figurative meaning is clearly conveyed.
12	Hold your horses	Tunggu sebentar	Paraphrase	Low	Original metaphor and mild exasperation are removed.
13	March to the beat of your own drum	Ikuti kata hatimu	Paraphrase	Moderate	Core idea of individuality is kept, but the vivid metaphorical image is replaced.
14	Break a leg	Semoga sukses	Idiom → Idiom	High	Functionally equivalent performative wish is used.
15	The sky is the limit	Tak ada batas	Paraphrase	High	Meaning is accurately and idiomatically conveyed in Indonesian.

V.   DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that idiom translation in *Dead Poets Society* subtitles employs varied strategies, with paraphrasing being predominant. This preference reflects the technical constraints of subtitling, where space limitations and readability requirements often necessitate simplification. While paraphrasing successfully conveys core meanings, it frequently reduces metaphorical richness and cultural connotations.

The idiom-to-idiom strategy produced the highest equivalence when culturally analogous expressions existed in Indonesian. However, this approach was limited by the availability of suitable counterparts. Literal translations occasionally functioned effectively but risked creating unnatural phrases in the target language.

The functional analysis reveals that idioms serving philosophical or motivational purposes (e.g., "Carpe diem") were more successfully preserved than those providing emotional emphasis or stylistic color. This suggests translators prioritize narrative-essential meanings over expressive embellishments when facing space constraints.

These findings align with audiovisual translation principles emphasizing the need to balance semantic accuracy with practical limitations. The translation approaches observed reflect negotiation between linguistic fidelity, cultural adaptation, and medium-specific requirements.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that translating idiomatic expressions in *Dead Poets Society* Indonesian subtitles involves strategic choices significantly affecting meaning equivalence. Paraphrasing emerges as the primary strategy, prioritizing audience comprehension within subtitling constraints. While this approach generally preserves core meanings, it often reduces metaphorical nuance and cultural specificity.

The research confirms that successful idiom translation in subtitles depends on multiple factors: availability of cultural equivalents, the idiom's narrative function, and technical limitations of the medium. Translations achieve optimal results when strategies align with the idiom's communicative purpose and the target audience's cultural framework.

These findings contribute to translation studies by illustrating practical applications of translation theory in audiovisual contexts. They offer valuable insights for subtitle practitioners, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive strategies that balance meaning accuracy with medium constraints. Future research could investigate audience reception of different translation approaches or examine idiom translation across various film genres and cultural contexts.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Graphic Silence and Political Dissent: Memory, Power, and Resistance in *Delhi Calm*

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Abstract— This paper examines Vishwajyoti Ghosh's Delhi Calm (2010) as a paradigmatic graphic narrative that stages political dissent through what can be termed "graphic silence": the deliberate use of visual omission, negative space, fragmented panels, and allegorical absence to represent repression, censorship, and the contested production of cultural memory during the Indian Emergency (1975–1977). Moving beyond conventional readings of political comics that emphasize satire or direct allegory alone, the study argues that Delhi Calm uses silence as an aesthetic and rhetorical strategy to register trauma, complicity, and resistance. Drawing on New Historicism, cultural memory theory, and graphic-narrative scholarship, the paper performs a sustained text–image analysis of the novel's major sequences, focusing on its deployment of animal allegory, urban iconography, panel rhythm, and visual metaphors for surveillance. Methodologically, the study combines close formal analysis of panels and sequences with contextualization in historical scholarship on the Emergency and memory studies. The analysis shows that Ghosh's visual grammar—gutter silence, collapsed chronology, repetitive framing, and the substitution of absent human faces with symbolic animal masks—creates a counter-archive that both bears witness to and critiques official historiography. By staging silence rather than narrating every fact, Delhi Calm invites readers to inhabit the affective textures of fear and to interrogate processes of forgetting and enforced amnesia. The paper concludes that graphic silence functions as a mode of political dissent: it exposes the limits of overt protest under authoritarian conditions, preserves marginalized memories, and models an ethics of reading attentive to omission as evidence. Delhi Calm therefore expands the formal and political possibilities of Indian graphic literature and provides a vital intervention in debates about memory, power, and representation in postcolonial democratic cultures.

Keywords— Graphic novel; Delhi Calm; Emergency (India); political memory; silence; visual narrative; New Historicism; cultural memory.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Emergency (June 1975–March 1977) represents a rupture in post-Independence Indian political life that continues to reverberate through historical, literary, and cultural discourse. During that period, democratic institutions were suspended, censorship intensified, and myriad personal liberties were curtailed; yet, the event's representation in literature and public memory has been shaped by competing narratives of necessity, excess, courage, and complicity. Within this contested field, Vishwajyoti Ghosh's *Delhi Calm* (2010) emerges as a significant and formally adventurous attempt to represent the Emergency in graphic form. Unlike documentary histories or testimonial prose, Ghosh's graphic novel foregrounds the sensory and affective dimension of living under authoritarian rule: silence, muffled voices, enforced compliance, and quotidian acts of survival.

This paper proposes to read *Delhi Calm* through the concept of **graphic silence**, which can be defined as the strategic use of pictorial omission, negative space, panel-collapse, non-diegetic gaps, and allegorical substitution to communicate what direct representation cannot—trauma, censorship, and the workings of power. Graphic silence does not simply denote absence; it is

an active representational device. When harnessed within political graphic narratives, it can function both as testimonial practice and as resistance by mobilizing readers' inferences and ethical attention.

The study addresses three interlocking questions: (1) How does *Delhi Calm* formalize silence in its visual rhetoric, and with what political effects? (2) In what ways does the novel's visual grammar produce an alternative memory of the Emergency that complicates official historiography? (3) How might the concept of graphic silence help us understand the politics of representation in other accounts of state repression?

To answer these questions, the paper proceeds in four parts. Section 2 reviews relevant scholarship: graphic narrative theory, memory studies, and critical work on Indian political comics. Section 3 sets out the theoretical apparatus: New Historicism, cultural memory theory, and the visual semiotics of comics. Section 4 details the methodology and offers a close, sustained analysis of *Delhi Calm*'s representative sequences, organized under thematic headings: silence and censorship; animal allegory and depersonalization; urban space as an instrument of control; and the ethics/politics of readerly participation. The paper closes with conclusions about the novel's contribution to cultural memory and political dissent and proposes directions for further research.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Graphic narratives have, over the past three decades, been increasingly recognized as serious sites of historiographic and testimonial practice. Seminal theorists such as Scott McCloud have established the formal vocabulary of comics—panels, gutters, closure, and sequentiality—showing how the medium produces time, emotion, and narrative through image–text interplay. Scholars like Hillary Chute and Marianne Hirsch have further demonstrated how graphic forms mediate memory and trauma, particularly in works of testimony, thereby complicating the boundary between visual art and historical record.

Within Indian studies, scholarship on the graphic novel is expanding. Critics have examined urban narratives, postcolonial identity, and globalization in works by Sarnath Banerjee, Orijit Sen, and Amruta Patil, among others. Political graphic narratives in India, though less numerous than their Western counterparts, have begun to attract attention for their capacity to intervene in public memory (Ghosh's oeuvre is increasingly cited in this context). Existing commentary on *Delhi Calm* in popular and journalistic forums highlights its satirical edge, visual complexity, and historical ambition, but scholarly engagement with the novel's formal strategies for representing repression remains limited.

Memory studies provide critical tools for this inquiry. Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, and Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, foreground the mediated and transmitted nature of recollection; both frameworks are useful for understanding how artworks participate in public remembering and forgetting. New Historicism, with its attention to reciprocal shaping between text and historical context, provides a method for reading *Delhi Calm* as both product and producer of discourses about the Emergency.

Finally, the specific critical vocabulary of comics studies—closure, transduction, panel rhythm, and visual metaphor—enables close attention to how *Delhi Calm*'s graphic devices produce meaning. McCloud's work remains foundational here, while contemporary analyses of political comics illustrate how visual form can encode dissent even under constraints of censorship or risk. This paper synthesizes these bodies of work to argue that *Delhi Calm* accomplishes a distinct mode of political representation: it stages silence as evidence, and it transforms omission into a rhetorical instrument for dissent and memory.

III.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three theoretical strands guide this study: New Historicism, cultural memory theory, and graphic narrative theory. Together they allow for a textured reading that attends to historical context, the politics of remembrance, and the medium-specific strategies of comics.

3.1   New Historicism:

New Historicism disrupts any easy separation between literary-textual production and historical discourse. Prominent among its tenets is the assertion that texts and histories co-constitute one another: literature both reflects and participates in the cultural and ideological networks of power from which it arises. Reading *Delhi Calm* historically, therefore, entails both situating the text within Emergency-era cultural politics and recognizing the novel's active role in reshaping memory narratives about that era. New Historicism compels attention to marginal voices—rumors, paratexts, everyday practices—precisely those elements foregrounded in Ghosh's narrative.

3.2   Cultural Memory and Postmemory:

Jan Assmann's work on cultural memory identifies institutionalized forms of remembering (monuments, ceremonies, canonical histories) and stresses how cultural artifacts transmit shared recollections across generations. Marianne Hirsch's postmemory describes how descendants and later generations inherit traumatic memories that they did not directly experience, yet which structure their imaginative lives. *Delhi Calm*, though authored decades after the Emergency, participates in cultural memory formation by reshaping affective recollection through images and silences that invite the reader's imaginative reconstruction.

3.3   Graphic Narrative Theory:

Comics-specific theory illuminates how visual sequencing, framing, and inter-panel gaps create meaning in ways distinct from prose. Scott McCloud's investigation into closure—the active cognitive work readers perform to bridge panels—suggests that omissions are generative: the gutter is where meaning is made. *Delhi Calm* exploits this affordance by strategically withholding explicit events, thereby forcing closure to operate as an ethical and interpretative labor: readers must infer what state violence made unspeakable. This study further contextualizes "graphic silence" within broader comics theory, considering its relationship to concepts like Thierry Groensteen's "braiding" (*tressage*)—the network of relations that gives a comic its coherence—to highlight how strategic omission functions as a deliberate compositional and rhetorical choice.

IV.   METHODOLOGY

This is a formal, qualitative study relying on close reading and visual analysis of *Delhi Calm*'s panels and sequences. The analytic method combines:

1. **Close formal analysis** of representative pages and sequences to map recurring visual strategies (e.g., use of negative space, panel density, animal motifs, page layout). Sequences were selected for their thematic centrality to the novel's engagement with silence, power, and memory, as well as for their visual density and innovation.

2. **Contextualization** using secondary historical sources on the Emergency to link visual tropes to historical practices of censorship, surveillance, and propaganda.

3. **Theoretical interpretation** applying New Historicist and memory-theoretical lenses to read how the graphic form mediates memory and dissent, with particular attention to the ethical implications of representation.

The analysis focuses on major sequences that thematically cluster around silence, public space, allegory, and readerly response. While not every page of the novel is examined, the selected sequences are representative of the novel's overall rhetorical strategy and formal innovation. The visual analysis attends to compositional elements—line, shading, framing, and the interplay of text and image—as semiotic units that construct meaning.

V.   ANALYSIS

The analysis proceeds in four thematic subsections: (1) graphic silence and censorship, (2) animal allegory and depersonalization, (3) urban space, surveillance and visual claustrophobia, and (4) readerly closure as ethical labor.

5.1   Graphic Silence and Censorship:

A central visual strategy in *Delhi Calm* is silence rendered visually. Silence in the novel manifests not merely as the absence of speech balloons but as a complex of representational choices: pages where panels shift from dense text to blank gutters; faces rendered as voids; public noticeboards with words redacted; and sequences where the soundscape is indicated by icons of microphones and loudspeakers more than by human voices.

This formal silence performs several functions. First, it enacts the experience of censorship: state suppression during the Emergency frequently manifested as the removal of newspapers, the interdiction of speech, and the planning of public auditory spaces. Ghosh's depiction mimics this by literally removing speech from the page, thereby making the page itself a site of censorship. Second, silence becomes affective: repeated visual quiet invites readerly empathy with characters whose capacity to protest is curtailed. Third, silence constructs a historiographic argument: what is missing on official pages of history—individual grief, small acts of defiance, the slow erosion of daily freedoms—must be attended to through indirect representation. Silence thus becomes argumentative: the novel claims that absence is evidence.

Consider a sequence in which a public plaza is shown across several panels. Early panels depict a montage of faces and conversation balloons; subsequent panels collapse into rows of identical, faceless citizens under a loudspeaker's shadow. Speech balloons shrink, then vanish; gutters widen; the recurring visual motif of a redacted poster—rectangular black bars replacing text—appears repeatedly. The reader experiences a transition from communicative plenitude to enforced muteness. This formal move mimics the historical transition from a free press to imposed silence and thereby critiques the mechanics of state censorship.

Importantly, graphic silence is not a retreat from politics—it *is* political. By leaving gaps, Ghosh shifts the burden of meaning-making onto the reader, requiring active engagement. This practice aligns with Hillary Chute's observation that graphic narratives often produce memory through presence-and-absence dynamics: what is omitted can be as telling as what is shown.

5.2   Animal Allegory, Depersonalization, and Satirical Humor:

Delhi Calm frequently substitutes human characters with animal masks or full-bodied anthropomorphic figures. This allegorical strategy has multiple effects. On one level, animalization satirizes power: bureaucrats become office-owls, policemen become mastiffs, and technocrats take on reptilian features. Satire here performs a distancing function: by rendering officials as beasts, the text unloads the theatricality of authoritarian rhetoric while disarming it with ridicule. This use of dark humor and irony operates as a survival strategy and a means of critique, exposing the incongruity between state propaganda and lived reality.

But animal allegory also accomplishes a darker task: visualizing depersonalization under authoritarianism. When entire populations are reduced to "sheep" or "cogs"—literal or figurative animals—the graphic novel illustrates the flattening of individuality and moral imagination. Faces vanish behind masks or are replaced by animal snouts, making it difficult to attribute agency or accountability in a straightforward way. This formal depersonalization captures the paradoxical experience of the Emergency: while the state attempted to homogenize citizens into a manageable mass, acts of resistance remained dispersed and fragmentary.

The use of animals also enables coded critique. In contexts where direct naming of perpetrators could be risky or where direct realism might trigger defensive contestation, allegory allows ethical censure while retaining plausible deniability. This is a classic function of fable and satire, but in *Delhi Calm* it acquires a visual particularity: animal heads are often drawn with exaggerated, caricatural features that suggest cruelty or buffoonery; their speech balloons, where present, reproduce slogans and clichés rather than dialogue, indicating the substitution of propaganda for human discourse.

5.3   Urban Space, Surveillance, and Visual Claustrophobia:

Delhi, in *Delhi Calm*, is not just a backdrop but an active architecture of power. The novel's urban imagery repeatedly emphasizes grids, fences, loudspeakers, and repeating façades. Panels often constrict movement: characters are framed in narrow vertical panels that mimic corridors or holding cells; birds-eye views show people as tiny figures in regimented rows; repeated use of shadow and bar-like motifs suggests bars and optical surveillance.

These visual decisions map onto historical forms of surveillance deployed during the Emergency—neighborhood informants, press monitors, police checkpoints—and they establish the city as both instrument and locus of control. The novel's formal architecture invites a comparison with Michel Foucault's description of the panopticon: built environments that organize behavior through the constant possibility of observation. However, whereas Foucault's model emphasizes internalized discipline, Ghosh's visual strategy foregrounds the external apparatuses of control—loudspeakers that instruct citizens not only what to do but how to feel.

Moreover, the spatial configurations in many sequences produce a sense of visual claustrophobia. Dense panels, crowded frames, and repetitive imagery compress the reader's field of view, reproducing the oppressive sensation of living in a monitored city. This compression is politically legible: it stages the ways in which public life shrinks under authoritarian rule, and how private interiority becomes the only remaining space for dissent.

5.4   Readerly Closure as Ethical Labor:

Building on Scott McCloud's notion of closure—the interpretative work readers do between panels—this paper argues that *Delhi Calm* deliberately designs its gutters and elisions to transform closure into an ethical act. Where conventional narratives might fill gaps with explicit exposition, Ghosh's novel often stops short of showing acts of violence or naming perpetrators. Readers must infer what happened in a blank panel or a redacted stanza. This enforced inference has ethical

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implications: to close the gutter responsibly is to acknowledge the reality of repression rather than to gloss over it. The act of making sense from visual silence thus becomes a form of bearing witness.

Consider a sequence where a character disappears between panels. The first panel shows a domestic scene; the next panel shows an empty bed with a newspaper headline partially visible and redacted. There is no depicted arrest, no caption; instead, the reader's knowledge of historical context guides the inference: the State intervened. By never showing the act directly, Ghosh maintains the emotional weight of disappearance and avoids spectacle while ensuring the event's testimony remains legible.

This strategy both respects traumatic privacy and refuses a closure that domesticates suffering into consumable spectacle. The reader's labor is required, but the reward is a deeper engagement with the ethics of remembering: one does not merely consume a narrative of victimhood; one participates in reconstructing and acknowledging erasure.

VI.   DISCUSSION: MEMORY, POWER, AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION:

The analysis above shows that *Delhi Calm* stages an alternative mode of historical knowing—one where absence, allegory, and readerly inference constitute memory work. What are the implications of this mode for broader debates about political representation and cultural memory?

First, the novel challenges the hegemony of official historiography by positing memory as fragmentary and affective. Official accounts often privilege chronological causation and named actors; Ghosh's counter-archive privileges sensation and small acts. In doing so, the novel advances a New Historicist claim: texts are not mere reflections but interventions in historical discourse. *Delhi Calm* rewrites the past not by correcting facts but by shifting the parameters of what counts as historical evidence—silences and omissions become sites of inquiry.

Second, the novel models a politics of representation attentive to ethical risks. Direct, graphic depictions of violence can sometimes instrumentalize suffering for rhetorical effect. Ghosh's use of omission avoids spectacle and preserves human dignity, suggesting an ethical aesthetic that resists commodifying trauma. This restraint is itself political: it refuses to let state violence be spectacularized into entertainment; instead, it asks readers to slow down and attend, aligning with ethical considerations in trauma studies regarding representation.

Third, the graphic novel form is shown to be particularly apt for this kind of memory work. Comics' sequentiality, closure mechanics, and combined verbal–visual channels enable nuanced representation of simultaneity (public rituals vs. private fear), temporality (repetition and arrested time), and affect. *Delhi Calm* exploits these affordances to create a textured public memory that is layered, participatory, and resistant to totalizing narratives.

Finally, graphic silence also raises questions about reception and pedagogy. How do readers unfamiliar with the Emergency decode the silences? The novel expects some historical literacy; without contextual knowledge, many of the inferential gaps may remain closed. This observation points to an important limitation: counter-archives like *Delhi Calm* both rely on and contribute to public memory circulations; their efficacy depends in part on cultural contexts and pedagogical infrastructures.

VII.   CONCLUSION

Vishwajyoti Ghosh's *Delhi Calm* offers a compelling model for thinking about how graphic narratives can engage political trauma and memory when direct representation is ethically fraught or historically contested. By enacting **graphic silence**—the deliberate, formal production of absence—the novel performs dissent: it documents repression without rendering it spectacle, critiques authoritarian rhetoric through allegory and urban mise-en-scène, and invites readers to participate in the often-difficult labor of remembering.

This paper has argued that graphic silence is not a failure of representation but a tactical, ethical choice that enables a deeper engagement with the politics of memory. *Delhi Calm* thereby contributes to evolving conversations in comics studies, memory studies, and postcolonial cultural critique—showing how form and politics are mutually constitutive. The concept of graphic silence provides a new critical lens for analyzing how comics can articulate resistance under constraints, making a distinct contribution to graphic narrative theory.

Areas for further research include comparative studies of graphic silence across global contexts (e.g., comparing *Delhi Calm* with *Persepolis* or *Maus*), empirical studies of reader reception and pedagogical use in teaching modern Indian history, and archival work tracing the afterlife of such graphic counter-archives in public discourse.

Ultimately, *Delhi Calm* demonstrates the capacity of the graphic medium to sustain political memory in democratic societies where forgetting can be legislated and dissent suppressed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declare no conflict of interest.

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Examining the Effectiveness of Peer Review in Improving Students' Writing Performance: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract— Writing is a complex academic skill that requires not only linguistic proficiency but also higher-order cognitive abilities such as organization, coherence, and critical thinking. Peer review, in which students provide feedback on each other's writing, has been widely promoted as a strategy to enhance writing performance. This systematic literature review examines empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 to evaluate the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing across diverse educational contexts. A total of 25 studies were included, encompassing secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate learners in EFL, ESL, and first-language writing settings. Findings indicate that peer review positively impacts higher-order writing skills, including content development, organization, coherence, and revision practices, while improvements in grammar and mechanics were more variable. Structured implementation, such as the use of rubrics, peer review training, and guided feedback, was associated with more consistent improvements. Students generally reported positive perceptions, citing increased engagement, motivation, and awareness of writing quality, although challenges such as feedback reliability and cultural hesitancy in critique were noted. Overall, the review highlights that peer review is an effective pedagogical tool when appropriately scaffolded and integrated with teacher guidance. Implications suggest that educators should employ structured peer review practices to foster collaboration, reflection, and critical engagement with writing. Future research should investigate longitudinal outcomes, optimal peer review configurations, and strategies to enhance feedback quality.

Keywords— Peer review, writing performance, systematic literature review, higher-order writing skills, student engagement, EFL/ESL education.

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is widely recognized as one of the most complex language skills to master, particularly for students in academic contexts. It requires not only linguistic knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary, but also higher-order cognitive skills including organization, coherence, and critical thinking (Rumapea et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2025). As a result, many students struggle to produce effective written texts, and improving writing performance remains a major concern for educators across disciplines and educational levels (Hyland, 2003; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Girsang et al., 2025).

Traditional approaches to teaching writing have often emphasized teacher-centered feedback, where instructors are the primary source of evaluation and correction. While teacher feedback is valuable, it can be time-consuming, limited in scope, and may not always lead to meaningful revisions by students (Ferris, 2003; Simanjuntak et al., 2025; Herman et al., 2025). These limitations have spurred interest in alternative, learner-centered strategies that promote autonomy and active engagement in the writing process.

One instructional approach that has gained considerable attention is peer review. Peer review refers to a process in which students evaluate and provide feedback on each other's written work based on specific criteria or guidelines (Liu & Hansen, 2002). Grounded in social constructivist theory, peer review emphasizes learning as a collaborative process where knowledge is constructed through interaction and dialogue among learners (Vygotsky, 1978). Furthermore, from the perspective of discourse community theory, peer review can be seen as a socialization process through which students begin to internalize the conventions, norms, and expectations of academic writing genres, thereby facilitating their entry into scholarly discourse communities (Bizzell, 1992; Bartholomae, 1986).

Previous research suggests that peer review can offer several pedagogical benefits. By reviewing peers' work, students may develop greater awareness of writing conventions, improve their critical reading skills, and reflect more deeply on their own writing (Falchikov, 2001). Additionally, receiving feedback from peers may help students identify weaknesses in their writing that they might overlook when relying solely on teacher feedback (Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014).

Despite these potential advantages, the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing performance has been debated. Some studies report positive outcomes, such as improved text quality, increased motivation, and enhanced revision practices (Min, 2006; Cho & MacArthur, 2010; Herman et al., 2024). However, other studies highlight challenges, including students' lack of confidence in providing feedback, variability in feedback quality, and cultural factors that influence peer interaction (Nelson & Carson, 1998; Hu, 2005).

Furthermore, existing research on peer review spans diverse educational contexts, learner populations, and implementation methods. Differences in training, feedback modes (oral or written), group size, and assessment criteria may lead to inconsistent findings across studies. As a result, it becomes difficult for educators and researchers to draw clear conclusions about the overall effectiveness of peer review as a writing instructional strategy.

Given the growing body of research and the mixed findings reported in the literature, a systematic literature review is necessary to synthesize existing evidence in a comprehensive and structured manner. A systematic review allows for the identification of research trends, methodological patterns, and gaps in the literature, providing a clearer understanding of how and under what conditions peer review contributes to students' writing performance (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to examine the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing performance. By analyzing empirical studies published in relevant academic contexts, this review seeks to provide insights for educators, curriculum designers, and future researchers regarding the pedagogical and cultural value of peer review in writing instruction.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Peer Review in Writing Instruction:

Peer review has long been recognized as an important component of process-oriented writing instruction. Rooted in collaborative learning theory, peer review encourages students to actively engage in evaluating written texts and constructing meaning through interaction (Bruffee, 1984). In writing classrooms, peer review typically involves students exchanging drafts and providing feedback on content, organization, language use, and overall clarity. This practice shifts students from passive recipients of teacher feedback to active participants in the learning process.

Several scholars argue that peer review supports writing development by promoting audience awareness and reflective thinking. When students read and comment on peers' texts, they are exposed to diverse writing styles and strategies, which can broaden their understanding of effective writing (Rollinson, 2005). This exposure may help students internalize evaluation criteria and apply them to their own writing, leading to improved writing performance.

2.2   Cognitive and Metacognitive Benefits of Peer Review:

Research suggests that peer review contributes not only to surface-level improvements in writing but also to deeper cognitive and metacognitive development. Engaging in peer feedback requires students to analyze texts critically, identify problems, and propose solutions, which enhances higher-order thinking skills (Tsui & Ng, 2000). These cognitive processes are closely linked to improved writing quality, particularly in terms of coherence, argumentation, and organization.

From a metacognitive perspective, peer review can foster self-regulation and self-assessment skills. By evaluating peers' work, students may become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses as writers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Studies have

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shown that students who provide feedback often benefit as much as, or even more than, those who receive feedback, suggesting that the act of reviewing plays a crucial role in writing development.

2.3   Effectiveness of Peer Feedback Compared to Teacher Feedback:

A growing body of research has compared peer feedback with teacher feedback to determine their relative effectiveness. While teacher feedback is often viewed as more authoritative and accurate, peer feedback has been found to be valuable in promoting revision and learner engagement (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). Peer feedback tends to be more dialogic and less intimidating, which may encourage students to take greater ownership of their revisions.

Some studies indicate that peer feedback is particularly effective when combined with teacher guidance. For example, structured peer review activities, supported by clear rubrics and modeling, can lead to significant improvements in writing quality (Berg, 1999). These findings suggest that peer review should not replace teacher feedback entirely but rather complement it within a balanced instructional framework.

2.4   Challenges and Limitations of Peer Review:

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of peer review is fraught with challenges, primarily concerning feedback quality and socio-cultural dynamics. One common concern is the quality and reliability of peer feedback. Students may lack sufficient linguistic proficiency or content knowledge to provide accurate and constructive comments (Patchan & Schunn, 2015). In some cases, feedback may focus on superficial issues such as grammar rather than higher-level concerns like argumentation or organization.

Affective and contextual factors also influence the effectiveness of peer review. Students' attitudes toward peer feedback, their interpersonal relationships, and cultural norms regarding criticism can affect how feedback is given and received (Carson & Nelson, 1996). For instance, in cultures with high power distance or strong emphasis on face-saving (Hofstede, 2001; Connor, 1996), students may be particularly reluctant to critique peers' work directly, which can limit the usefulness and authenticity of the peer review process.

2.5   Need for a Systematic Synthesis of Research:

Although numerous empirical studies have examined peer review in writing instruction, findings remain varied due to differences in research design, participant characteristics, instructional settings, and feedback procedures. Narrative reviews have provided valuable insights, but they may lack methodological rigor and comprehensive coverage. Therefore, a systematic literature review is necessary to synthesize existing empirical evidence in a transparent and replicable manner.

By systematically analyzing previous studies, it is possible to identify patterns regarding when and how peer review is most effective, as well as areas where further research is needed. Such a synthesis can help educators make informed decisions about implementing peer review and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of its role in improving students' writing performance.

III.   RESEARCH METHODS

3.1   Research Design:

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology to examine the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing performance. A systematic literature review is a rigorous and transparent approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research on a specific topic using predefined criteria and procedures. Compared to traditional narrative reviews, an SLR minimizes bias and enhances the reliability and replicability of findings by following a structured review protocol. The review was guided by clearly defined research questions, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and systematic procedures for data collection, screening, and analysis. The review process was conducted in accordance with established guidelines for systematic reviews in education and social sciences (e.g., Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

3.2   Data Sources:

To ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant studies, multiple electronic academic databases were used as primary data sources. The databases selected are widely recognized for publishing peer-reviewed research in education, applied linguistics, and language teaching. The following databases were searched:

    a.   Scopus

b.   Web of Science (WoS)
c.   ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
d.   Google Scholar

These databases were chosen because they index high-quality journals and provide extensive coverage of empirical studies related to writing instruction, peer feedback, and educational interventions.

3.3   Search Strategy:

A systematic search was conducted using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to capture relevant studies. The search terms were derived from the main concepts of the study: peer review and writing performance. Examples of search strings include:

a.   "peer review" OR "peer feedback" OR "peer assessment"
b.   AND "writing performance" OR "writing quality" OR "writing skills"
c.   AND "students" OR "EFL learners" OR "ESL learners"

The search was limited to studies published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure that the review reflects recent research trends and contemporary instructional practices. Only articles written in English were included.

3.4   Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

To determine the relevance and quality of the selected studies, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied.

Inclusion criteria:

a.   Empirical studies examining peer review or peer feedback in writing instruction
b.   Studies focusing on students' writing performance as an outcome
c.   Participants from any educational level (primary, secondary, tertiary, or higher education)
d.   Studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2020 and 2025
e.   Articles written in English

Exclusion criteria:

a.   Non-empirical studies (e.g., editorials, opinion papers, book reviews)
b.   Studies not directly related to writing instruction
c.   Research focusing on peer review in non-educational contexts
d.   Conference abstracts without full-text availability
e.   Duplicate studies across databases

3.5   Study Selection Process:

The study selection process was conducted in several stages. First, all identified records were imported into a reference management system, and duplicates were removed. Second, titles and abstracts were screened to exclude irrelevant studies based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Third, full-text articles were reviewed to determine final eligibility. This multi-stage screening process ensured that only studies directly addressing the effectiveness of peer review on students' writing performance were included in the final analysis.

3.6   Data Extraction and Analysis:

Relevant data were systematically extracted from the selected studies using a structured data extraction form. The extracted information included:

a.   Author(s) and year of publication
b.   Educational context and participant characteristics
c.   Research design and methodology
d.   Type and mode of peer review implementation
e.   Measures of writing performance
f.   Key findings related to the effectiveness of peer review

The extracted data were analyzed using qualitative thematic synthesis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and trends across studies. Where applicable, quantitative findings were also compared to determine the overall direction and consistency of results.

IV.   RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the systematic literature review examining the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing performance. The review covers empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. The results are organized into (1) study characteristics, (2) peer review implementation, (3) effects on writing performance, and (4) learner perceptions.

4.1   Characteristics of the Included Studies:

A total of 25 empirical studies met the inclusion criteria. These studies were conducted in diverse educational contexts, including EFL/ESL classrooms and L1 writing instruction, across secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels.

TABLE 1
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF INCLUDED STUDIES (2020–2025)

Characteristic	Frequency / Description
Publication year	2020: 5, 2021: 4, 2022: 6, 2023: 5, 2024: 3, 2025: 2
Research context	EFL: 14, ESL: 7, L1 writing: 4
Educational level	Secondary: 6, Undergraduate: 15, Postgraduate: 4
Study type	Quantitative: 10, Qualitative: 6, Mixed-methods: 9
Peer review mode	Written: 12, Oral: 3, Online: 7, Hybrid: 3

Most studies were conducted in higher education contexts, particularly among undergraduate students in EFL settings. Mixed-methods research was common, reflecting the need to capture both measurable writing improvements and students' perceptions of peer review.

4.2   Peer Review Implementation:

Peer review procedures varied across studies in terms of training, mode, group size, and focus. Most studies emphasized structured peer review, including rubrics, guidelines, or model feedback.

TABLE 2
PEER REVIEW IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

Implementation Aspect	Observation / Frequency
Training provided	Yes: 18, No: 7
Feedback focus	Content & organization: 21, Language accuracy: 12, Holistic feedback: 7
Group size	Pairs: 10, Small groups (3–5 students): 12, Large groups (>5): 3
Mode of feedback	Written: 12, Oral: 3, Online: 7, Hybrid: 3

Structured peer review with clear training and guidance was linked to more consistent improvements in writing. Feedback focused on content and organization was most common, aligning with studies that emphasize higher-order writing skills over purely mechanical correction.

4.3 Effects on Students' Writing Performance:

Peer review was generally associated with positive outcomes, especially in higher-order aspects of writing such as content development, coherence, and revision quality. Improvements in grammar and mechanics were less consistent. The predominant positive impact on higher-order skills suggests peer review is most effective as a tool for developing rhetorical and conceptual abilities rather than for grammatical remediation.

TABLE 3
REPORTED EFFECTS OF PEER REVIEW ON WRITING PERFORMANCE

Writing Aspect	Reported Effect	Number of Studies Reporting
Content development	Mostly positive	20
Organization & coherence	Consistently positive	18
Revision practices	Strong positive	15
Grammar & mechanics	Mixed	10
Overall writing quality	Positive	22

The review indicates that peer review is most effective in enhancing cognitive and metacognitive skills, such as planning, organizing, and revising texts. Language accuracy improvements were moderate, reflecting the limitation of peer expertise in grammar-focused feedback.

4.4 Learner Perceptions and Affective Outcomes:

Students generally expressed positive attitudes toward peer review but reported some challenges, such as uncertainty about peer feedback accuracy or cultural hesitancy in providing criticism.

TABLE 4
LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF PEER REVIEW

Perception Category	Observation / Frequency
Positive perceptions	19 studies reported increased motivation, engagement, and confidence
Perceived benefits	16 studies noted better awareness of writing criteria and improvement strategies
Reported challenges	12 studies highlighted concerns about feedback quality and peer evaluation reliability
Cultural/contextual factors	7 studies reported reluctance to critique peers directly

The findings indicate that students value peer review for its collaborative and reflective nature, but effectiveness depends on training, clear expectations, and classroom culture. Proper scaffolding is essential to mitigate concerns regarding feedback accuracy and peer reluctance.

V. DISCUSSION

This systematic literature review examined the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing performance based on studies published between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicate that peer review is generally a beneficial instructional strategy, particularly when implemented in a structured and supportive manner. The discussion below interprets these findings in relation to prior research, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical practice.

5.1 Peer Review and Writing Performance:

The results suggest that peer review significantly enhances higher-order writing skills, including content development, organization, coherence, and revision quality. These findings align with earlier research emphasizing that peer feedback promotes critical thinking and reflective writing (Rollinson, 2005; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). By analyzing peers' texts and providing feedback, students become more conscious of writing conventions and strategies, which supports improvement in their own work. This process can be understood through the lens of genre mastery; structured peer review, with its rubrics and

guidelines, serves as a scaffold that helps students decode and internalize the often-implicit conventions of academic writing genres, thereby accelerating their enculturation into academic discourse communities.

However, the review found that improvements in grammar and mechanical accuracy were less consistent. This may reflect students' limited linguistic expertise when providing feedback and confirms earlier observations that peer review is more effective in conceptual and structural aspects of writing rather than surface-level correctness (Tsui & Ng, 2000; Patchan & Schunn, 2015). Therefore, peer review should complement, rather than replace, teacher feedback for language accuracy.

5.2   Role of Structured Implementation:

A key finding is that the effectiveness of peer review depends on structure and guidance. Studies that incorporated explicit training, rubrics, and sample feedback generally reported more positive outcomes. This finding is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist framework, which emphasizes that learning occurs through guided interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development. By providing scaffolding, educators help students give meaningful feedback and internalize evaluation criteria, enhancing the learning benefits of peer review.

The mode of peer review (written, oral, online, or hybrid) also influenced outcomes. While written feedback was most common, online peer review showed promise for facilitating more reflective and asynchronous interactions, allowing students time to analyze peers' work carefully (Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006). Hybrid approaches that combined written and oral feedback appeared to maximize both critical thinking and collaborative learning benefits.

5.3   Learner Perceptions and Affective Factors:

Students generally reported positive perceptions of peer review, citing increased motivation, engagement, and awareness of writing quality. These affective benefits are important because they support sustained writing practice and active participation in learning (Falchikov, 2001). Beyond engagement, successful peer review can foster the development of a writerly identity and agency. As students transition from passive recipients of feedback to active critics and collaborators, they begin to see themselves as legitimate participants in the writing community, which is a crucial step in building academic confidence and autonomy.

However, the review highlighted challenges related to feedback quality, trust, and cultural factors. Some students expressed hesitation in providing critical comments, particularly in contexts where peer critique is culturally sensitive. These findings reinforce the need for educators to create supportive environments and clarify expectations, helping students feel confident and competent in both giving and receiving feedback. Acknowledging and strategically addressing these cultural dimensions is not merely a logistical step but is central to fostering an inclusive and effective peer learning culture.

In summary, this review confirms that peer review is an effective strategy for improving students' writing performance, particularly for content, organization, and revision skills, when it is structured and scaffolded appropriately. Learners' positive engagement and reflection further support its pedagogical value. However, educators should combine peer review with teacher guidance, address affective and cultural factors, and continue exploring innovative methods to optimize its effectiveness.

VI.   CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 on the effectiveness of peer review in improving students' writing performance. The findings indicate that peer review is generally effective in enhancing higher-order writing skills, such as content development, organization, coherence, and revision practices. Structured implementation, including clear guidelines, rubrics, and training, was consistently associated with more positive outcomes, highlighting the importance of scaffolding and support in peer review activities.

In addition to improving writing performance, peer review was found to foster students' metacognitive skills, including self-assessment, critical thinking, and reflective learning. Students generally perceived peer review positively, reporting increased engagement, motivation, and awareness of writing quality. However, challenges such as concerns about feedback accuracy, reluctance to critique peers, and cultural factors were identified, emphasizing the need for carefully designed peer review processes and supportive classroom environments.

Overall, the review confirms that peer review is a valuable pedagogical strategy for writing instruction across diverse educational contexts, particularly when integrated with teacher guidance. Educators are encouraged to adopt structured peer

review practices that promote collaboration, reflection, and constructive feedback. Future research should explore longitudinal effects, optimal implementation strategies, and methods to enhance feedback reliability to further maximize the potential of peer review in fostering not only improved writing performance but also more collaborative and critical academic cultures.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Epistemic Limits and the Inaccessibility of Trauma in *Dying City*

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Abstract— This paper analyzes Christopher Shinn's Dying City as a depiction of trauma that evades typical frameworks of loss, grief, and psychological paralysis. Reading it from the perspectives of contemporary trauma theory, the paper argues that the play presents trauma as an epistemic and moral standstill rather than an accessible and healable wound. Using core arguments of trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra, the paper finds that the play dramatizes trauma as an unclaimed experience which is resistant to closure and remains inaccessible to the talking cure. The protagonist's disillusionment with the cherished ideals behind a war he once believed in leads to a crisis of the self, primarily due to a shattering realization of his own complicity in the atrocities committed in the name of justice. Through emphatic stage devices such as pauses, fragmented narration, non-linear timeframe, and doubling of roles, the play skillfully employs the theatrical medium to stage the limits of knowing such incidents. The play also showcases how trauma moves beyond the individual to involve the survivors left behind in intimate domestic spaces. Their continuous struggle with the uncertainty of events relates to the core claim of the inaccessibility of trauma for those who survive. By exploring trauma as an ethical crisis alongside its psycho-social dimensions, this paper extends the implications of trauma in existing research on post-9/11 literature and adds a new dimension to debates around the morality of modern warfare, cultural trauma, and collective responsibility.

Keywords— cultural, disillusionment, epistemic, ethical, inaccessible, theatrical, trauma.

I. INTRODUCTION

Christopher Shinn's *Dying City* is a formative play about the grim impact of the Iraq War in the wake of the upsurge of an absolute communal desire for retributive action after the 9/11 attacks. With its seemingly calm domestic setting reflecting on the burning universal themes of war, absences, silences, and death, it became a finalist for the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. There is no contesting that *Dying City* is a political drama with its backdrop of the Iraq War, its focus on 9/11, and how it turned New York into a dying city. However, the political in the play has been dexterously synthesized with the personal to narrate the tale of an individual loss that a common family in New York suffered as a result of the ongoing war, and the corresponding state of disillusionment and chaos a nation suffers in a blind rage for vengeance. It is Shinn's mastery that even though the play is centrally concerned with the day of the attacks and the resultant traumatic bearings of the war against terrorism in Iraq, it does not make explicit references to war or over-dramatize its aftermath.

Existing critical works focus on the cultural interpretations of the 9/11 attacks, the sense of urgency and collective helplessness they generated, and the traumatic aftermath endured by survivors and witnesses. Shinn's play also explores this disillusionment, raising critical questions about the moral grounds for the war in Iraq. This paper attempts to read *Dying City* as a play that dramatizes trauma as an experience characterized by epistemic limits—something that cannot be fully grasped or resolved by those who go through it. Using contemporary trauma theory, the paper argues that the play presents trauma as a fragmentary experience that resists closure either through narration or medical assistance. It also reads the play in larger contexts to ascertain how national violence can impact the most intimate spheres of domestic life. In doing so, it pays due recognition to the ethical cost of warfare, reframing trauma as a crisis of the encumbered self.

Existing research on the play lays significant thrust on its concerns with national grief, waning popular trust in political narratives, and the longstanding psychic wounds inflicted by terrorism and endless conflicts. Scholars have primarily focused on the vulnerable self and American identity in the days following the attacks on the Twin Towers. However, a specific kind of trauma—that of complicity—has received less consideration in literary research. The play foregrounds this complicity as a central concern rather than staging trauma merely as a shielding response to violence experienced. Read through trauma theory, studies often relate Cathy Caruth's concept of belatedness to instances of silence, repetitiveness, and fragmentation but rarely relate it to the ethical conundrum of realizing complicity, which also comes to affect the survivor belatedly. Even in the case of cultural trauma, critics often examine the play to ascertain the extent to which national crisis affects individual lives. This paper aligns the focus of such inquiries from trauma as an agonizing wound to trauma as an ethical crisis, arguing that the play dramatizes the limits of knowledge in comprehending traumatic experiences of war and annihilation.

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRAUMA AS UNCLAIMED AND INACCESSIBLE

When people become unwitting participants in politically driven extremities perpetrated in the name of justice and patriotism, the resultant trauma of collusion appears unnerving. The protagonist's psychological suffering is not just the result of personal experiences of violence on the battlefield or personal tragedy suffered, but is essentially an ethical realization of being complicit in a mass massacre serving a war he once believed to be just and later came to disavow. Trauma theory, particularly through Cathy Caruth, posits trauma as an "unclaimed experience"—one that is not fully grasped as it occurs and returns belatedly through intrusive memories, nightmares, and repetitive behaviors. Dominick LaCapra's distinction between "absence" (a metaphysical condition) and "loss" (a historical event) further provides a lens to understand the play's engagement with mourning and irresolution. In *Dying City*, trauma is not merely a psychological condition but an epistemic rupture: what cannot be known or narrated becomes the source of enduring suffering.

III.   DRAMATIZING THE INACCESSIBLE: FORM AND PERFORMANCE

In a style closely similar to Harold Pinter, Shinn's writing, with its many pauses, showcases an atmosphere as tense and charged with emotions and conflict as the war itself. There are three characters in the play, and in each scene only two of them appear on stage. The play is primarily about a young U.S. Army soldier in his twenties, Craig, stationed in Iraq, who is killed, and his wife Kelly, who is shocked by his sudden absence and is unable to maintain a good relationship with Craig's twin brother, Peter, due to their obvious resemblance. The play is essentially a two-hander, but in flashbacks we see Craig's character, played by the same actor as Peter. This doubling is an effective staging device: Craig becomes a continuous symbolic presence in their lives, just as trauma presents itself as a renewed, unresolved conflict.

The numerous pauses between brief dialogues indicate hesitation and an inability to converse within the grip of personal trauma. Kelly draws a parallel between Peter's sudden appearance and the abrupt way in which the administration informed her of Craig's death: "You know, honestly – when they come to tell you – (Pause.) When they came to tell me about Craig, they just showed up – they just show up, no warning, they don't call or…" (4). Though a year has passed, she has not been able to assimilate the fact into her consciousness. Similarly, Peter lives in denial, noting that the date of his brother's death was 'sort of floating around' in his mind, troubled by the silence at the funeral.

The exchange of dialogues hints at disbelief in the military narrative regarding Craig's death—reportedly an accidental shooting with his own gun. While Kelly accepts the official account, Peter remains skeptical: "Okay. I thought you meant – knew what to say, like, weren't sure what to say because it seemed like maybe what happened wasn't what the military was saying" (9). This disbelief reflects a broader disillusionment with the war being waged in Iraq in the name of combating terrorism.

LaCapra's distinction between absence and loss clarifies the play's trauma: Craig's death is a "loss"—a particular moment trapped in temporality—not an "absence." His death robs the family of a coherent sense of the world. Kelly sighs, "Time. I can't believe so much time has passed—", to which Peter responds, "It feels like yesterday, right?" (11). As a therapist, Kelly understands that people often repress traumatic memories, yet she and Peter themselves live in a mode of denial. This denial is an act of departure, as Caruth describes: "The trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure… linked to the sufferer in his attempt to bring the experience to light" (22).

IV.   NARRATIVE FRAGMENTATION AND TEMPORAL DISRUPTION

The second scene abruptly shifts to an earlier point in time, prior to Craig's involvement in the war. This strategy of alternating between the present and the past corresponds to the way survivors of traumatic events oscillate between timelines through flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitive thoughts. As Jena and Samantray note, repetition and fragmentation are common narrative techniques in traumatic representation (04).

The performative aspects of the play make its traumatic dimensions more evident. Shinn uses theatre to convey psychological implications of incapacitating grief that cannot be expressed through words. The double role, the confined domestic space, and the strategic pauses keep the audience emotionally suspended, mimicking the disorienting temporality of trauma. The non-linear progression impedes narrative closure, reemphasizing the repetitive nature of traumatic memory. Meaning arises not through action but through silences, numbness, and confinement.

V.   ETHICAL CRISIS AND THE TRAUMA OF COMPLICITY

Before Craig leaves for Fort Benning, a discussion about Iraq reveals underlying tensions. Peter, an actor, is excited about a film on special forces, which Craig finds unrealistic. In a conversation about one of Kelly's patients—a liar, according to Craig—Kelly suggests that even if his story isn't factually accurate, it may be the only way he can communicate trauma: "this 'story' is the only way he has of communicating that trauma" (31). This reflects Jeffrey Alexander's view of cultural trauma, where survivors construct narratives to make sense of indecipherable events.

Caruth's concept of belatedness manifests in Peter's experience: "The worst time for me was actually months after – when the official report came out that said it was an accident. After that I just couldn't sleep for some reason" (39). Kelly theorizes that people in noble professions like the military desire to be immortalized, their deaths symbolically reversed by a community seeking answers (40). This reflects the post-9/11 wave of sympathy and national unity, which later gave way to skepticism as the war's true motivations emerged.

Peter's traumatic imagination conjures a Black Hawk helicopter crashing through the theater ceiling, indicating a psyche continually feeling endangered. He feels he is becoming Craig: "But lately, it's like – I feel like Craig in the curtain call… So maybe it's a delayed grief reaction" (40). Craig's emails from Iraq reveal his transformation. Peter notes, "just – this extraordinary thing of him turning against the war, you know?" (62). This awakening is traumatic because Peter can never discuss it with Craig; he is left with conjectures and memories.

VI.   THE CLIMAX: REALIZING COMPLICITY:

Peter reads a crucial email where Craig describes the human rights violations at Abu Ghraib: "From what I can tell, it's not a big deal to people at home either. I think the images are a real comfort to people – that we're the powerful ones, in control, alive, clothed" (67). Sarah Benson observes that the play "excavates the infection of 9/11, the war and the acute humiliation of Abu Ghraib… such that the 'dying city' is understood to refer as much to New York City as it does to shell-shattered Baghdad" (xiii).

Craig confesses to losing faith in the war and American ideals, suffering "a wound I do not feel" (67). The final email reads: "The city is dying and we are the ones killing it… I have begun to wonder if I myself will recover from who I have become here, in just a few short months" (69). The trauma of realizing he has become what he fought against shatters his identity. His suicide is an escape from this irremediable ethical crisis. The email also reveals Craig's infidelities, compounding Kelly's trauma, but Peter defends him, arguing that guilt and shame consumed Craig in his final moments.

VII.   CONCLUSION

Dying City is a disturbing dramatization of trauma that goes beyond usual narratives of mourning and national loss. Craig's gradual disillusionment and his realization of complicity in violence expose a trauma rooted in ethical dimensions rather than merely physical or psychological harm. His description of a wound he does not feel underscores the inexpressibility and inaccessibility of trauma. His death evidences the disorienting impact of ethical corruption. The play also shows how such trauma extends beyond the individual: Kelly and Peter continue to grapple with a ruptured present, circling a past they cannot inhabit. Their inability to ascertain the truth of Craig's final moments reinforces the epistemic limits of traumatic experience—it can never be fully comprehended, and survival requires enduring its uncertainty.

Through its innovative theatrical form—doubling, fragmentation, silence—*Dying City* stages the very impossibility of representing trauma. It reframes trauma as an ethical crisis of complicity, challenging readers and audiences to confront the moral ambiguities of war and the enduring, inaccessible wounds it leaves on soldiers, families, and nations

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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The Exploited Body: A Marxist-Feminist Reading of Gender, Labor, and Capital in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*, and Darko's *Faceless*

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Abstract— This study employs a Marxist-feminist lens to analyze the systemic marginalization and exploitation of female characters in three African novels: Buchi Emecheta's Second Class Citizen (1974), Nawal El Saadawi's Women at Point Zero (1975), and Amma Darko's Faceless (2003). Moving beyond cataloguing instances of patriarchal violence, the paper argues that these texts depict women's oppression as fundamentally intertwined with capitalist economic relations, wherein the female body and labor are commodified, and social reproduction is exploited. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study examines how structures of patriarchy and capitalism converge to relegate women to a state of "second-class" existence, extracting both productive and reproductive labor while denying autonomy. The analysis reveals a continuum of exploitation— from the domestic sphere and formal employment to the informal sexual economy—highlighting how gender subordination is materially produced and sustained. The paper concludes that a Marxist-feminist framework is essential for understanding the depth of women's oppression in these narratives and for envisioning liberation that addresses both economic and patriarchal domination.

Keywords— Marxist feminism, social reproduction, commodification, patriarchy, African literature, gender exploitation.

I. INTRODUCTION: PATRIARCHY, CAPITAL, AND THE "SECOND-CLASS" BODY

The female body in literature often becomes a site where social hierarchies are inscribed and contested. In many African societies, patriarchal norms have historically sanctioned the control, objectification, and exploitation of women, legitimizing their treatment as socially and economically subordinate. However, as feminist theorists have long argued, this subjugation cannot be fully understood in isolation from the economic systems that structure society. Patriarchy and capitalism are not parallel systems but deeply interlocking ones that together organize the exploitation of women's labor—both productive (waged) and reproductive (unwaged, domestic) (Federici, 2004; Vogel, 2013).

African literary landscapes have powerfully documented this confluence. Writers like Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Saadawi, and Amma Darko offer searing portraits of female protagonists whose lives are circumscribed by both gendered violence and economic deprivation. Their works move beyond portraying women merely as victims of cultural tradition, instead revealing how traditional patriarchy adapts to and is reinforced by modern capitalist relations, neocolonial dynamics, and urban poverty.

This paper argues that a Marxist-feminist theoretical framework is particularly illuminating for analyzing three seminal novels: Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero*, and Darko's *Faceless*. Marxist feminism posits that women's oppression is rooted in their role in social reproduction—the bearing and rearing of children, maintaining the household, and sustaining the labor force—which under capitalism is largely unpaid and devalued, serving as a hidden subsidy to the formal economy (Bhattacharya, 2017). This devaluation facilitates the exploitation of women's labor in the wage economy and the treatment of their bodies as commodities.

The study addresses the following core question: How do *Second Class Citizen*, *Women at Point Zero*, and *Faceless* represent the intersection of patriarchal domination and capitalist exploitation to render female characters as marginalized, "second-class" subjects? Through close textual analysis, we will trace the exploitation of social reproduction, the commodification of the female body, and the foreclosure of female autonomy. In doing so, this paper aims to contribute to a materialist understanding of gender oppression in African literature, demonstrating that the personal struggles of Adah, Firdaus, and the women of *Faceless* are inextricably linked to broader political-economic structures.

II.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARXIST FEMINISM AND THE EXPLOITATION OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Marxist feminism provides the critical tools to analyze the dual exploitation of women under capitalist patriarchy. Its core insight is that women's oppression is not merely a cultural or ideological superstructure but is materially grounded in the economic system. Classical Marxism, focused on the exploitation of wage labor in the public sphere, often rendered the private, domestic sphere—and women's work within it—invisible. Marxist feminists corrected this by theorizing **social reproduction**: the daily and generational work of creating and maintaining people, which is essential for capitalism to have a workforce, yet is disproportionately performed by women for free or for low wages (Federici, 2012; Laslett & Brenner, 1989).

This framework reveals several key processes relevant to our literary analysis:

1. **The Devaluation of Reproductive Labor:** Domestic work, childcare, and emotional labor are naturalized as "women's duty," obscuring their economic value and trapping women in financial dependence.

2. **The Commodification of the Female Body:** When avenues for survival are narrowed, women's bodies and sexuality can become direct commodities, as seen in prostitution. This represents an extreme point on a continuum of bodily exploitation.

3. **The Reserve Army of Labor:** Women often form a flexible, low-wage labor pool, easily hired in times of expansion and dismissed in downturns, perpetuating economic precarity.

4. **The Interlocking of Systems:** Patriarchy provides an ideology that justifies this unequal division of labor, while capitalism provides the economic structure that profits from it. This intersection creates what Mies (1986) termed "housewifization"—the social construction of women as dependent, non-productive subjects.

Applying this lens to literature shifts the focus from individual acts of misogyny to systemic patterns of exploitation. It allows us to see Adah's double burden in London not just as a bad marriage, but as an indictment of a system that exploits her wage labor while expecting free domestic service. It frames Firdaus's journey from unpaid domestic servant to prostitute not as a moral fall, but as a logical progression within an economy that offers women few means of independent survival. It interprets the sexual violence in *Faceless* not only as brutal patriarchy but as part of an informal urban economy built on the consumption of impoverished female bodies.

III.   METHODOLOGY: LITERARY ANALYSIS THROUGH A MATERIALIST LENS

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in literary critical analysis. The primary method is **close reading** of the selected texts—*Second Class Citizen*, *Women at Point Zero*, and *Faceless*—guided by the principles of Marxist-feminist theory. The analysis is thematic and comparative, seeking patterns across the novels rather than treating them in isolation.

The process involves:

1. **Textual Engagement:** A sustained, critical examination of narrative structure, character development, and symbolic language in each novel.

2. **Thematic Coding:** Identifying and categorizing recurring instances and descriptions of labor (domestic, professional, sexual), economic exchange, bodily autonomy, and violence.

3. **Theoretical Interpretation:** Interpreting these coded themes through the core concepts of Marxist feminism: social reproduction, commodification, and patriarchal capitalism.

4. **Comparative Synthesis:** Drawing connections between the three texts to build a coherent argument about the systemic nature of women's economic and gendered exploitation in the African contexts they depict.

This methodology allows for a deep, context-sensitive analysis that respects the literary integrity of each work while using theory to illuminate their shared critique of material and patriarchal conditions.

IV.   ANALYSIS: THE CONTINUUM OF EXPLOITATION IN THREE NOVELS

4.1   The Exploitation of Social Reproduction and Domestic Labor:

The novels vividly depict how women's unpaid labor in the home forms the invisible foundation for male privilege and capital accumulation.

In *Second Class Citizen*, Adah Ofili embodies the double shift. She migrates to London with dreams of education and a career, only to be ensnared in a marriage where her reproductive labor is utterly taken for granted. Her husband, Francis, is "lazy and selfish," contributing little while Adah works a demanding job at the library to support the family. Her income is appropriated for household expenses controlled by Francis and his family's long-distance demands. Crucially, her intellectual labor—her writing—is literally destroyed by Francis when he burns her manuscript, an act symbolizing the patriarchal suppression of women's creative and non-reproductive production. Emecheta writes: "Most of the decisions about their own lives had to be referred first to Big Pa, Francis's father… before Adah was referred to. After all, she would have to pay for the plan in most cases" (p. 18). This highlights the economic core of her subjugation: she is the financier yet is excluded from decision-making, her wage labor enabling a patriarchy that renders her a "second-class citizen" in her own home.

Firdaus in *Women at Point Zero* begins her life of exploitation within the domestic sphere. After her parents' death, she lives with her uncle, where "female work was appropriated to serve masculine ends." She performs all household chores in exchange for shelter, a classic scenario of unpaid social reproductive labor. This exploitation is compounded by sexual abuse. Later, her marriage to the elderly, repulsive Sheikh Mahmoud formalizes this exploitation: she becomes a full-time, unpaid housewife and sexual servant. Her husband monitors and beats her, treating her as a domestic appliance. El Saadawi makes the economic basis clear: "I now knew that wives were not so different from prostitutes… The only difference lay in the price, and the duration of the contract" (p. 99). Firdaus recognizes that marriage, under these conditions, is merely a long-term contract for sexual and domestic services without pay, blurring the line between the private, "respectable" sphere of reproduction and the public sphere of commodified sex.

Faceless presents a grim picture of social reproduction under conditions of extreme poverty. Maa Tsuru, unable to provide for her children due to a lack of resources and support, becomes a node in a cycle of deprivation. Her relationships with men like Kpakpo and Kwei bring not security but violence and further pregnancies, increasing her burden of care. Her inability to perform the idealized role of mother-protector is not a personal failing but a consequence of her position at the bottom of economic and gendered hierarchies. The novel shows how poverty strips social reproduction of its protective function, turning the home into a dangerous space for children like Baby T and Fofo.

4.2   The Commodification of the Female Body and Sexuality:

When avenues for socially valued labor are blocked, the female body itself becomes the primary commodity for survival, a process starkly illustrated in these texts.

Firdaus's trajectory is the most explicit mapping of this commodification. After fleeing her marriage, her attempts at respectable employment are thwarted by paltry wages and sexual harassment. She realizes that her monthly salary as a clerk is less than what she could earn in a single night through prostitution. Her conscious decision to become a prostitute is, in Marxist-feminist terms, a rationalization of her labor under extreme constraint. She gains unprecedented economic independence and a sense of power by setting her own price, declaring, "My price… is my pride" (p. 99). However, this "freedom" is brutally circumscribed. A pimp soon captures her earnings, and the state eventually condemns her for murdering him. The system that pushed her body onto the market as the only viable commodity then punishes her for trying to control its terms. Her final refusal to petition for clemency is a radical rejection of a world that only values her life in terms of exchange.

In *Faceless*, the urban slum of "Sodom and Gomorrah" operates as a hyper-capitalist zone where all social relations are reduced to brutal exchange. The female body is the ultimate raw material in this economy. Baby T is raped by her mother's partner, Onko, and later by Kpakpo. Fofo narrowly escapes rape by the street lord, Poison. These are not random acts of lust but assertions of power within an economy where female bodies have been rendered consumable. Maa Tsuru's serial relationships, while seeking security, repeatedly expose her and her daughters to sexual violence. Darko portrays a world where patriarchy

and abject poverty fuse to create a market for sexual access to women and girls, with no social or legal recourse for the victims. The "facelessness" of the title speaks to the dehumanization required for such commodification.

Even in *Second Class Citizen*, Adah's body is not her own. Her marital relationship is characterized by a lack of sexual autonomy; she must submit to Francis. Furthermore, her fertility is an economic liability, with successive pregnancies threatening her job and her health. Her body, as a site of reproduction, is tied to her economic precarity.

4.3   Education, Wage Labor, and the Limits of Liberal Escape:

The novels also critique the limited promise of education and formal employment as escapes from patriarchal exploitation.

Adah's entire struggle begins with her fight for education in Nigeria, where her brother is prioritized because "she was so insignificant because she was born a girl" (p. 1). Her hard-won education and her job in London, however, do not liberate her; they simply make her a more efficient provider for a patriarchal family structure. She is a "second-class citizen" at work facing racial and gendered discrimination, and at home bearing the double burden. Her professional income is siphoned off to sustain the very system that oppresses her, demonstrating how women's entry into the wage economy, without a transformation of reproductive relations, can intensify rather than alleviate their exploitation.

Firdaus's brief stint as an office worker similarly disappoints. She is paid a "small monthly wage" and subjected to the predatory advances of her manager. The man she loves, a supposed revolutionary, ultimately chooses to marry his boss's daughter for social and economic advancement, revealing how capitalist class interests override progressive gender politics. The formal labor market offers her not dignity or independence, but a different, poorly paid form of servitude with added sexual harassment.

In *Faceless*, education is a distant dream for characters like Fofo. The daily struggle for survival in the informal economy precludes any engagement with formal systems of advancement. The novel suggests that in contexts of extreme economic collapse, the classical Marxist or liberal feminist pathways—unionized labor or professional careers—are irrelevant. Exploitation occurs in a raw, unmediated form in the informal sexual and street economy.

V.   DISCUSSION: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED ANALYSIS OF OPPRESSION

Reading these three novels through a Marxist-feminist lens reveals a powerful, shared critique. The individual suffering of Adah, Firdaus, Maa Tsuru, and Fofo is not incidental but systematic, produced by the intertwined operations of patriarchy and capitalism.

Emecheta's novel shows the exploitation of the **immigrant woman's double labor** in the metropolitan core. El Saadawi's work traces the logical endpoint of **patriarchal control over women's bodies and labor** within a hybrid traditional-capitalist society, culminating in the body-as-sole-commodity. Darko's novel depicts the **total collapse of social reproduction** under neoliberal poverty, where the female body is consumed in a desperate informal economy.

The theory illuminates how these narratives connect the private and public, the personal and economic. Francis's control over Adah's salary, Firdaus's calculation of her body's price, and the rape of Baby T in *Faceless* are all moments where economic logic and patriarchal dominance are indistinguishable. This analysis challenges readings that view the oppression in these novels as solely cultural or attitudinal. It argues that the violence is material, systematic, and economic.

Furthermore, the protagonists' resistance—Adah's final departure and writing, Firdaus's murder of the pimp and her defiant silence, the community action investigation in *Faceless*—can be seen not just as personal rebellion but as fractured glimpses of resistance against an entire system of exploitation. Their actions, though often doomed or incomplete, point to the necessity of a struggle that targets both the economic base and the patriarchal superstructure.

VI.   CONCLUSION

The novels *Second Class Citizen*, *Women at Point Zero*, and *Faceless* offer profound literary testimonies to the multi-layered oppression of women. By applying a Marxist-feminist framework, this study has argued that their power lies in depicting this oppression as a material condition, rooted in the exploitation of women's reproductive and productive labor and the reduction of their bodies to commodities under patriarchal capitalism.

Adah's struggle in London, Firdaus's journey to the point zero of prostitution, and the harrowing survival of the women in Darko's Accra are not merely stories of individual misfortune. They are narratives that expose the systemic logic by which

value is extracted from female lives while autonomy is denied. They show that education and wage labor, within an unchanged structure of social reproduction, are insufficient for liberation.

For literary scholarship, this analysis demonstrates the utility of Marxist feminism in moving beyond thematic catalogues of "abuse" to uncover the structural economic relations that give such abuse its force and persistence. It calls for a continued reading of African literature that takes material conditions seriously, recognizing that the fight for gender justice is inextricably linked to the fight against economic exploitation. The "second-class" status of these female citizens is, ultimately, a class status in the fullest sense of the word. Their literary narratives compel us to envision a liberation that is as economic as it is social, demanding nothing less than the reorganization of who labors, who profits, and who is valued

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

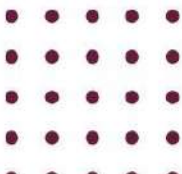The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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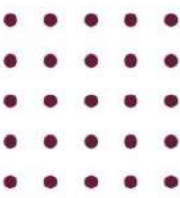
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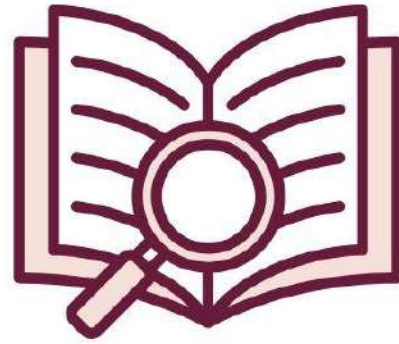
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