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Exploring Identity and Selfhood in *A Number*: A Freytagian Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Caryl Churchill's *A Number* (2002/2008) explores identity, scientific innovation, and the ethical dilemmas of human cloning, particularly the debate between nature and nurture. The play questions whether identity is shaped by genetics, experiences, or personal choices, raising profound ethical and psychological concerns about the consequences of replicating human life. This study examines how *A Number* navigates identity and ethical dilemmas through Freytag's Pyramid, focusing on Salter and his cloned sons: Bernard 1, Bernard 2, and Michael Black. The exposition introduces Salter's guilt and the origins of the clones, while the rising action builds tension as Bernard 2 confronts his father about his existence, uncovering the unsettling truth about multiple clones and triggering an identity crisis. The climax unfolds when Bernard 1, filled with resentment, confronts Salter and kills Bernard 2, exposing the selfish motives and emotional toll of cloning. In the falling action and resolution, unresolved tensions persist, leaving behind irreversible consequences that provoke reflection on identity, ethics, and scientific responsibility. The play's open-ended conclusion compels audiences to question the moral implications of cloning and the commodification of human life in an era of rapid technological advancements. To deepen this analysis, this study incorporates Jean Baudrillard's (1994) concept of simulacrum, which examines how cloning blurs the boundaries between original and copy, and Emmanuel Levinas's (1969) ethics of the Other, which provides a moral framework for understanding the ethical consequences of treating cloned individuals as disposable entities. By examining these perspectives, this study underscores how *A Number* interrogates the intersection of identity, ethics, and selfhood, encouraging further exploration of these pressing issues.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores Caryl Churchill's play *A Number* (2008), through Freytag's Pyramid, a structural model developed by German novelist and playwright Gustav Freytag (1863), known for his contributions to dramatic theory. Freytag's five-part model consists of: Exposition (introduction of characters, setting, and background), Rising Action (events that build tension leading to the climax), Climax (the turning point or most intense moment), Falling Action (events following the climax that move toward resolution), and Dénouement (the conclusion, where loose ends are tied up). While originally applied to classical and Shakespearean plays, Freytag's Pyramid remains a foundational tool for analyzing narrative structure and continues to be relevant in modern works like *A Number*, offering insight into how dramatic tension unfolds in contemporary storytelling. This analysis examines the complex father-son relationships in *A Number*, focusing on Salter and his cloned sons, Bernard 1 (B1), Bernard 2 (B2), and Michael Black. Through minimalist yet powerful storytelling, the play explores themes of individuality, nature versus nurture, and the ethics of cloning. By applying Freytag's Pyramid, this study breaks down the dramatic structure—exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution—to demonstrate how each stage frames the characters' struggles with identity and authenticity. The

investigation highlights the identity crises experienced by the characters, analyzing how cloning shapes their relationships, psychological states, and perceptions of humanity. It also explores the ethical and emotional consequences of artificial replication, questioning the boundaries of selfhood in a world where genetic duplication challenges individuality. The central questions guiding this study are: How does Freytag's Pyramid structure enhance the play's exploration of identity crisis? And what role does cloning play in the characters' conflicts over selfhood and authenticity? In summary, the study argues that the play's narrative structure deepens its thematic impact, offering a compelling critique of scientific intervention in human life. *A Number* stands as a significant work that challenges audiences to confront the complexities of identity, the fragility of selfhood, and the moral dilemmas posed by cloning.

Caryl Churchill's play *A Number*, published in 2002, was written amid intense public debate over the ethics of cloning. The controversy surrounding Dolly the sheep's cloning (1997), the creation of human embryos at Advanced Cell Technology, and the cloning of a kitten fueled discussions about the potential for human cloning. The play engages with ethical and legal concerns surrounding cloning, particularly Salter's decision to have his son cloned without consent, raising questions about parental authority, scientific ethics, and the

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commodification of human life. UNESCO's (2005) Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights explicitly condemns human reproductive cloning, citing concerns about human dignity and the risks of exploitation. Churchill's depiction of a world where cloning is possible but morally ambiguous reflects real-world fears about the misuse of genetic technologies and the lack of regulatory oversight. Set in a world where cloning is a reality, *A Number* examines the ethical dilemmas of cloning, the fragility of personal identity, and the ongoing debate between nature and nurture. Salter, the protagonist of *A Number*, is a man in his early sixties who fathers multiple cloned sons. His wife died by suicide, throwing herself under a train when their biological son was only two. Struggling with alcoholism and his son's behavioral issues, Salter eventually sent the boy away. Seeking a fresh start, he had his son cloned, creating B2 as an attempt to be a better father. However, the truth later emerges that multiple unauthorized clones were made, a fact hidden by the pathologists. B2, now thirty-five, was intended as a replacement for the original son, B1. Gentle and emotional, he is deeply unsettled by the revelation that he was created to substitute someone else. In contrast, B1, now forty, grew up with resentment and a violent temper, fueled by his father's abandonment and the knowledge that clones of him exist. His anger ultimately leads to a tragic act of revenge. Among the clones, Michael Black, also thirty-five, stands apart. Raised by a different family, he only learns of his origins later in the play. Unlike B1 and B2, he is content with his life as a happily married mathematics teacher with three children. He finds the revelation that he is a clone "delightful" and irrelevant to his sense of self, highlighting a stark contrast in how identity is shaped by upbringing rather than genetic origins. This limited casting reinforces the concept of simulacrum, where the boundaries between original and replica blur, challenging conventional ideas of identity and selfhood.

The tension reaches its peak with B1's death, an act of revenge that highlights the existential crisis created by cloning (Baudrillard, 1994). Jean Baudrillard has introduced the concept of simulacrum that refers to an imitation or representation that distorts the distinction between the original and the copy. In some cases, copies become so detached from their source that they take on a reality of their own, making it difficult to distinguish between what is authentic and what is merely a reproduction. In *A Number*, the existence of clones disrupts traditional notions of uniqueness and authenticity, raising questions about the constructed nature of reality. This aligns with Jean-François Lyotard's (1984) ideas on the dissolution of boundaries between original and replica in a postmodern world. *A Number* is divided into 5 scenes. Scene I unfolds in Salter's living room, where his 35-year-old son, B2, confronts him after discovering he is not unique but one of several clones. Salter reveals that B1, his original son, died in a car accident with his mother (Churchill, 2008). In an attempt to bring B1 back, he consented to

a cloning experiment, but the doctors unethically created multiple clones. This revelation shakes B2, leading him to question his identity and accuse his father of allowing the cloning process. Salter insists that B2 is the real one and dismisses the others as illegal copies. The conflict escalates when Salter refers to the clones as "things," which B2 rejects, asserting their humanity. Salter becomes defensive and even threatens legal action against the doctors. B2, struggling with his existence, wonders what it would be like to meet another version of himself. The scene ends with Salter suggesting they sue the doctors, offering some comfort to B2. This scene serves as the exposition, introducing the characters, setting, and central conflict. It establishes key themes of identity, individuality, and the ethics of cloning while laying the foundation for the unfolding drama.

In the Scene II, where the original B1 appears, very much alive, and visits Salter, who had previously claimed he died in a car accident. B1 has learned about the clones and is furious at his father for creating them. Salter attempts to shift blame onto the doctors for the multiple copies, but B1 confronts him about being sent away and replaced by a genetically identical son. Salter claims he did not have another child with another woman because B1 had been "the most beautiful baby" (Churchill, 2008). B1, however, challenges Salter's neglect, asking why he never came to him when he cried out at night after his mother's death. Salter replies that he never heard him crying. Overwhelmed by guilt, Salter admits that he was a terrible father to B1. He looks him in the eye and acknowledges him. Salter confesses that the clones were his attempt to raise Bernard again without repeating past mistakes. Growing increasingly agitated, B1 threatens to murder B2, unwilling to live in a world with cloned versions of himself. And Scene III opens with Salter and B2 discussing B1, who recently paid B2 a visit. B2 was frightened by the meeting with his genetic "brother," who was aggressive and whom he thought had died in a car accident. Unsettled by the existence of identical copies of himself, B2 considers leaving the country. He demands to know how his mother died. Salter reveals that his wife committed suicide by throwing herself under a train when B1 was two years old. Salter explains, he did some bad things, he deserves to suffer he did better things too, that should be recognized. B2 tells Salter that both he and B1 hate him for what he has done. Salter pleads, he loves him, and he does not want him to leave. B2 responds, he is afraid B1 might kill him. B2 decides to leave the country, fearing B1 might try to kill him. Salter tries to convince him to stay, but B2 refuses.

Later in Scene IV, B1 returns and coldly informs Salter that he has followed and killed B2 after he left the country. Salter, stricken with grief, demands details about the murder, but B1 refuses to provide them, saying, that Salter does not deserve to know. Salter reveals that he could have killed B1 but chose instead to send him away to be cared for by others. He explains that he decided to start again with a copy of B1 because he remembered how

perfect B1 had been before his mother died. Scene V is the last scene that is final attempt to connect with a version of his son, Salter decides to meet another clone, Michael Black, who was raised by a different family. Salter tries to get Michael to share something unique about himself, hoping to find a sense of individuality in this clone. However, Michael, a happily married math teacher with three children, is entirely undisturbed by the revelation that he is a clone. He finds the idea “delightful” and tells Salter, “I don’t care about being a clone. It doesn’t change who I am”. Salter becomes increasingly unsatisfied with what Michael can offer him. He grieves the loss of both B1 and B2, realizing that he can no longer correct his failures as a father. The encounter leaves Salter empty, as he confronts the irreversible consequences of his actions and the futility of seeking redemption through cloning.

The study applies Freytag’s Pyramid, introduced by Gustav Freytag in *Technique of the Drama* (1863), as a structural model for storytelling. Freytag’s model remains relevant in modern storytelling, offering insight into the development of dramatic tension in contemporary narratives. In *A Number*, the exposition introduces the central conflict: Salter’s decision to clone his son and the ethical dilemmas that arise. Scene I establishes key themes of identity, individuality, and cloning ethics, laying the foundation for the drama. The rising action intensifies as emotional and ethical conflicts between Salter and his sons escalate. In Scene II, B1, previously presumed dead, confronts his father upon discovering the existence of clones. Furious at being replaced, B1 accuses Salter of abandoning him. Though Salter attempts to shift blame onto the doctors, he ultimately admits his failures as a father and reveals that cloning was his attempt to start over. This revelation, however, only fuels B1’s resentment, leading him to threaten B2. Tension continues to build in Scene III when B2 recounts his unsettling encounter with B1. Having believed B1 to be dead, B2 is terrified by his aggression. Grappling with his identity and existence, he demands to know the truth about his mother. Salter reveals that she died by suicide when B1 was two years old, adding a tragic dimension to the narrative. Salter pleads with B2 to stay, but B2 rejects him, acknowledging that both he and B1 despise their father. Fearing for his life, B2 ultimately decides to leave. These developments heighten the emotional stakes, reinforcing themes of identity, betrayal, and moral responsibility, and propelling the narrative toward its climax.

The climax occurs when B1 follows through on his threat and murders B2. This act of violence marks the peak of the play’s conflict, driven by B1’s deep resentment and refusal to accept the existence of genetically identical versions of himself. Upon learning of B2’s death, Salter is devastated, realizing the irreversible consequences of his choices. His attempt to correct past mistakes through cloning has only led to destruction, reinforcing the play’s themes of identity, loss, and moral reckoning. In the falling action, Salter, now alone, seeks out another clone—one raised in a different environment. Unlike B1 and B2, this

young man is unaffected by the turmoil that consumed Salter’s other sons. His detachment underscores the contrast between nature and nurture, emphasizing that identity is shaped as much by experience as by genetics. The resolution leaves Salter in quiet despair, forced to confront the failure of his misguided actions. Isolated and stripped of his illusions of control, he must live with the consequences of his decisions. The play concludes on an ambiguous note, prompting reflection on the ethical implications of cloning, the fragility of identity, and the limits of human agency in shaping destiny.

A Number critically explores the ethical and existential implications of human cloning through a dramatic narrative. The play centers on a father, Salter, and his interactions with multiple clones of his son, Bernard, revealing complex issues surrounding identity, selfhood, and the moral consequences of cloning technology. Churchill’s work aligns with real-world debates on human cloning, particularly concerns about individuality, autonomy, and the unforeseen consequences of genetic replication (Kass, 2002). The cloning process in the play echoes real-world scientific advancements, such as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), the method used to create Dolly the sheep (Wilmut *et al.*, 1997). While *A Number* does not probe into the technical aspects of cloning, it raises crucial ethical questions about the psychological and social consequences of genetic duplication. Similar to arguments by Jaenisch and Wilmut (2001), the play suggests that cloning could lead to unpredictable emotional and identity-related distress, as the clones struggle with the knowledge that they are copies rather than unique individuals. Ethical dilemmas arise when individuals face conflicting moral principles, making it difficult to determine the right course of action. These dilemmas can be classified into personal, organizational, and societal dilemmas. Personal dilemmas involve individual ethical choices, such as deciding whether to report a colleague’s misconduct. Organizational dilemmas occur within workplaces and institutions, where ethical concerns may arise in corporate decision-making. Societal dilemmas extend to broader issues, such as ethical concerns in public policy and environmental responsibility (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). To address ethical dilemmas, different moral frameworks are applied, including deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics. Deontology, founded by Immanuel Kant, focuses on duty and moral rules. Consequentialism, particularly utilitarianism, evaluates the morality of an action based on its outcomes. In contrast, virtue ethics, developed by Aristotle, emphasizes an individual’s moral character rather than specific actions (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). Consequentialism, especially utilitarianism, judges whether an action is right or wrong based on its results. If an action leads to the best for the most people, it is considered morally right. On the other hand, virtue ethics, developed by Aristotle, focuses on a person’s character rather than their specific actions. It suggests that being a good person who is kind, honest, and fair

matters more than just following rules or thinking about consequences. Ultimately, *A Number* dramatizes the ethical, psychological, and existential dilemmas of human cloning, aligning with real-world bioethical debates about whether genetic replication compromises individuality. As scientific advancements in genetics and cloning continue, *A Number* remains a compelling exploration of the moral and philosophical consequences of creating “a number” of identical beings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Caryl Churchill's *A Number* is a thought-provoking play that explores the ethical and existential dilemmas of human cloning. It follows Salter, a father who has secretly cloned his son, leading to a confrontation between identity, selfhood, and the consequences of scientific intervention. The study critically examines identity, selfhood, and the ethical dilemmas posed by human cloning. Through the lens of Freytag's Pyramid, the play's dramatic structure highlights the tensions between nature and nurture, autonomy and control, while unfolding as a psychological thriller that interrogates the ethical implications of cloning and identity. Each stage of the dramatic arc intensifies the play's exploration of individuality, deception, and morality. The exposition introduces Salter, who struggles with the ethical consequences of cloning, while his sons struggle with self-identity. The rising action builds as Bernard (B2) realizes he is a copy, sparking an identity crisis and questioning his uniqueness. The climax reveals the existence of multiple clones, reinforcing the concept of simulacrum where the distinction between original and replica blurs, challenging the notion of authenticity. This culminates in Bernard (B1) killing B2. This concept aligns with postmodernism, which questions the constructed nature of identity and the loss of the real in a world dominated by reproductions. The falling action exposes Salter's moral ambiguity, revealing that his act of cloning is more self-serving than benevolent. The catastrophe results in tragic consequences, underscoring the ethical and psychological dilemmas of artificial replication.

The characters' existential struggle with authenticity and meaning in *A Number* reflects core existentialist principles articulated by Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger. Sartre's (1946/2007) assertion that “existence precedes essence” and Heidegger's (1927/2010) concept of Dasein (being-in-the-world) are particularly relevant to understanding the clones' crisis of identity, as they grapple with their manufactured existence while attempting to assert individual agency. The play dramatizes Sartre's famous declaration that humans are “condemned to be free” (1946/2007), forcing the clones to confront their absolute responsibility for self-creation despite their genetic origins. This existential framework is further complicated by Erik Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory of identity development, which helps explain the clones' profound “identity confusion” as they struggle to reconcile their biological sameness with their need for authentic selfhood. The tension between being a genetic

copy and a unique individual creates what Erikson termed an identity crisis, exacerbated by their unnatural creation and fractured relationships with their progenitor. Churchill's dramatic structure and succinct dialogue intensify the play's philosophical and psychological conflicts, using form to mirror the instability of identity in a world where human life can be replicated. The fragmented conversations and unresolved endings heighten the clones' ontological uncertainty, transforming the scientific concept of cloning into a deeply human tragedy. This structural approach compels audiences to confront fundamental questions about selfhood and the ethics of artificial reproduction. By merging existential philosophy with psychological theory through innovative dramatic form, Churchill creates a work that is both intellectually rigorous and emotionally devastating. The play's conclusion leaves viewers haunted by Heidegger's (1927/2010) fundamental question- “What does it mean to be?” while serving as a stark warning against scientific overreach and the commodification of human life.

A central theme in *A Number* is the ethical dilemma of identity among clones, particularly the tension between genetic determinism and experiential selfhood. The study employs Freytag's Pyramid to analyze the play's dramatic structure, framing the clones' crisis through rising action, climax, and falling action. The tension builds with B2's discovery of his cloned status, culminating in a confrontation that forces characters to question whether identity is innate or constructed—engaging with theories of psychological continuity and personal identity (Parfit, 1984; Pinker, 2002). While the play critiques purely social models of selfhood, it also rejects genetic essentialism, instead presenting identity as an unstable interplay of biology, memory, and relationality (Kass, 2002; Weber, 2008). The falling action highlights this complexity: despite their shared DNA, the clones develop distinct personalities shaped by environment (Segal, 2000), exposing how cloning disrupts notions of authenticity and uniqueness. The clones' struggles epitomize the ethical quandaries of replication, reducing individuals to copies devoid of an “original” self. Churchill deliberately leaves these conflicts unresolved, mirroring the postmodern condition in which identity is perpetually in flux. The play dismantles the illusion of a stable, inherent self, instead portraying identity as constructed through difference—both social (Weber, 2008) and existential (Žižek, 2001). This void intensifies the clones' crisis, trapping them between genetic sameness and subjective experience. As Žižek argues, the clone embodies “the impossibility of a coherent self”, a tension manifested in Salter's sons, whose fractured identities defy unification. By refusing narrative resolution, Churchill underscores the ethical stakes of cloning: it not only manipulates biological life but destabilizes the very concept of personhood. The play's open-endedness forces the audience to confront unsettling questions about autonomy, replication, and the limits of human intervention (Bochner, 2007). In doing so, *A Number* reflects broader anxieties about

technology's role in eroding individuality, suggesting that identity, like the clones themselves, exists in a state of irresolvable limbo.

Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum further illuminates the play's themes. He argues that in a world saturated with reproductions, the distinction between original and copy dissolves, creating a crisis of authenticity (Baudrillard, 1981). This is embodied in Salter's cloned sons, who confront the existential weight of being replicas rather than originals. B2's realization that he is not even the one epitomizes Baudrillard's assertion that "the real is no longer possible". Salter's inability to differentiate between his sons underscores how simulation erodes the very notion of an original. As Baudrillard states, "The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it is truth that hides the fact that there is none". The clones' existence destabilizes the idea of an essential self, functioning not as mere duplicates but as replacements. Their contrasting personalities—B1's violence versus B2's passivity—suggest identity is shaped by experience, aligning with Butler's critique of biological essentialism and the performative nature of selfhood. Similarly, Derrida (1976) challenges the notion of a stable, self-contained identity, asserting that identity is always relational and never fully present. *A Number* reflects this instability, as the clones define themselves not only through their genetic ties but also in contrast to one another. Their identities are shaped by both biological similarities and divergent experiences, illustrating the interplay between nature and nurture. B1's violent tendencies and B2's vulnerability highlights how personality diverges despite shared genetic material. Derrida's concept of *différance*, where identity is defined through what it excludes, aligns with this dynamic, as each clone's sense of self is formed in opposition to the others. The play also highlights the instability of memory and identity, echoing *Archive Fever* (1995). Salter's unreliable recollections—"I don't know which one you are" (Churchill, 2008)—highlight the impossibility of a fixed origin. This instability aligns with Judith Butler's (1990) theory of performativity, which suggests that identity is constructed through repeated acts rather than being an inherent essence. Salter's attempt to recreate his lost son through cloning ultimately fails because identity cannot be replicated; only the illusion of sameness can be produced. B2's realization, "I'm not even the first" (Churchill, 2008), encapsulates the struggle for individuality, reinforcing the play's critique of identity's fluidity. Despite their genetic sameness, B1's aggression and B2's vulnerability demonstrate that identity is shaped by experience and repetition, not biology. Butler's (1990) assertion that "identity is a fabrication" is literalized in the clones, whose behaviors defy genetic determinism. Salter's efforts to control their identities fail because, as Butler (1993) argues, performativity is inherently unstable. The play critiques the fantasy of engineering identity, whether through cloning or socialization. Butler (1993) further notes, "Identity is reiterated through practices that are themselves unstable". The clones' existence exemplifies

this: though genetically identical, their identities are fractured by experience.

From a Lacanian perspective, the clones in *A Number* experience alienation not only because they are genetically identical but because they lack an independent origin. B2's plea, "because they said that none of us was the original (Churchill, 2008), I am just a copy, I am not the real one" (p. 174), aligns with Lacan's *objet petit a*, the unattainable desire for a coherent, singular self (Lacan, 1977). This unattainable wholeness fuels their existential crisis as they struggle with fractured identities. Slavoj Žižek expands on this idea, stating, "The clone is the purest expression of the split subject" (Žižek, 2001). Even Michael Black, who claims contentment, embodies alienation by completely rejecting his "father." This suggests that identity, rather than being an inherent essence, is a void masked by societal and familial impositions, a void Salter attempts and ultimately fails to fill through replication. Lacanian psychoanalysis deepens the play's exploration of identity, revealing the clones' struggles as manifestations of the *objet petit a*, the unattainable object of desire that fuels the perpetual search for wholeness. Similarly, Sartre (2007) argues that identity is not innate but constructed, a concept reflected in B2's realization that his selfhood is derivative rather than original.

The play also engages with Michel Foucault's (1975) concept of the panopticon, where surveillance fosters self-awareness. Salter's control over the cloning process and his imposition of a preordained identity on his sons illustrate the tension between autonomy and external influence. Rather than being fully autonomous individuals, they exist as products of Salter's decisions and expectations. The concept of panopticon is reflected in the way surveillance and control shape identity. In Foucault's theory, the panopticon creates a system in which individuals internalize authority because they are constantly under the gaze of power. Similarly, in the play, Salter acts as an unseen force, making decisions that shape his sons' identities even before they become aware of their origins. For example, B2 grows up believing he is Salter's only son, unaware that he is actually a clone. This mirrors how surveillance fosters self-awareness—B2's sense of self is based on what he has been told rather than his true nature. Once he discovers the truth, his perception of himself changes entirely. He realizes that his identity is not solely his own but was constructed by Salter's choices, much like individuals in a panoptic society who adjust their behavior based on the control of unseen authorities. Meanwhile, B1, the original son, represents the consequences of this control. Unlike B2, B1 was not given a fresh start; he suffered neglect and hardship, which deeply shaped his personality. When he learns that his father replaced him with clones, his resentment highlights the imbalance of power—Salter, like an authority figure in the panopticon, has controlled their realities while they had little agency. Churchill's play demonstrates how Salter's control over cloning is not just a scientific or ethical issue but a psychological one. His

sons do not grow up as free individuals but as products of his manipulation. Their identities are shaped not only by genetics but by the choices and expectations imposed upon them, reinforcing the tension between autonomy and external influence.

The clones in *A Number* expose the instability of identity, challenging the notion of a unified, self-identical subject. As Weber (2008) argues, “The clone exposes the myth of the self as self-identical”, revealing identity as fluid, relational, and perpetually deferred. This aligns with Žižek’s (2001) assertion that cloning fractures subjectivity, leaving individuals haunted by their doubles: “the clone is the purest expression of the split subject”. Even Michael Black, who appears content, embodies alienation by rejecting Salter entirely—demonstrating that selfhood is not genetically predetermined but constituted through social and ethical relations (Levinas, 1969). Cloning, then, disrupts the very foundation of identity, reducing it to a replicable commodity rather than an emergent, lived experience (Bochner, 2007). Churchill’s play extends this critique to the ethical implications of cloning, particularly the violation of autonomy and consent. Salter’s attempt to engineer identity through replication treats his sons as interchangeable objects, denying them the right to self-determination. This mirrors Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) theory of performativity, which posits that identity is iteratively constructed through social interactions rather than biologically fixed. By creating clones to fulfill his own emotional needs, Salter instrumentalizes human life, raising urgent bioethical questions about the commodification of personhood. These concerns resonate with real-world debates, where scholars like Kass (1998) condemn cloning as “repugnant” for undermining human dignity and individuality. *A Number* refuses to resolve these dilemmas, instead reflecting the postmodern condition in which identity remains irreducibly fragmented. The play’s unresolved tension between genetic sameness and subjective experience forces audiences to confront unsettling truths: that selfhood is neither intrinsic nor stable, but a contested site of relational and ethical negotiation. In doing so, Churchill underscores the dangers of reducing identity to a scientific or technological project—one that risks erasing the very qualities that define humanity.

A Number uses cloning not as a scientific dilemma in itself but as a conceptual framework for exploring deeper existential questions about selfhood, individuality, and authenticity. Human cloning involves somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT), a process that Wilmut *et al.* (1997) demonstrated with the cloning of Dolly the sheep, igniting ethical and legal debates. While reproductive cloning remains a theoretical and highly contested practice, therapeutic cloning has gained acceptance for its medical potential (Lanza *et al.*, 1999). However, ethical concerns persist, particularly regarding autonomy, consent, and human dignity (National Bioethics Advisory Commission, 1997; United Nations, 2005). Kass (1998) argues that cloning compromises individuality

and moral integrity, reinforcing fears surrounding the commodification of human life. *A Number* engages with these ethical concerns, yet it transcends the standard debates on cloning by focusing on its existential ramifications. The play examines the implications of human replication on personal identity and the unique self, asking whether genetic duplication diminishes an individual’s autonomy or authenticity. The central conflict between Salter and his cloned sons B1, B2, and Michael Black mirrors broader philosophical discussions about selfhood and the relationship between the “original” and the “copy.” The philosophical tension between genetic sameness and conscious experience forms the core of Churchill’s exploration. As Zahavi’s (2005) concept of the “minimal self” suggests first-person consciousness persists regardless of genetic replication - a notion vividly embodied by Michael Black. Despite sharing DNA with the other Bernards, his distinct personality and lived experience demonstrate that environment fundamentally shapes identity, challenging reductionist biological determinism. Churchill’s sparse staging intensifies the play’s existential questions, stripping away distractions to focus on two crucial dilemmas: whether copies inherently lack authenticity, and whether replication diminishes originality. While art forgeries are devalued compared to originals, this framework collapses when applied to conscious beings - each clone, like Michael, maintains a unique subjective experience regardless of genetic duplication. This leads to Churchill’s urgent dramatization of the nature/nurture debate, which interrogates the limits of genetic identicalness. The clones’ diverging personalities and choices empirically demonstrate that while genes provide biological raw material, identity actively emerges through the dynamic interplay of upbringing, cultural context, and lived circumstance. Churchill’s work ultimately posits consciousness and subjective experience – not DNA – as the irreducible foundation of selfhood.

The literature review of *A Number* helps us understand the connection between drama and philosophical questions into a way of exploring identity in the age of cloning. The study has focused on its ethical issues (Aston, 2003) and psychological effects (Luckhurst, 2015), this analysis shows how Churchill’s use of structure—such as the timing of key revelations, intense confrontations, and the lack of a clear resolution—reflects the identity crisis faced by the clones. By looking at the play through Freytag’s Pyramid, we see how moments like B2 discovering he is a clone and the unresolved ending highlight the struggle for selfhood. Combining Freytag’s classical structure with modern identity theories (Butler, 1990; Žižek, 2001) gives us deeper insight into Churchill’s approach. As the clones’ identical genes are overshadowed by their different experiences, the play’s form also breaks away from traditional storytelling. The open-ended conclusion is not just a stylistic choice but a powerful statement about identity, making the play’s structure and themes deeply connected. The play emerges as both

narrative and theoretical provocation, using its structural innovations to challenge fundamental assumptions about identity, authenticity, and human uniqueness. Future research might productively extend this approach to other works that similarly employ dramatic form as a vehicle for philosophical investigation, particularly in an era increasingly shaped by biotechnological possibilities. Ultimately, *A Number* compels us to reconsider not just what constitutes identity, but how theater itself can become a medium for staging and interrogating the most pressing existential questions of our time.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a textual analysis approach to examine Caryl Churchill's *A Number* (2002/2008), using Freytag's Pyramid (Freytag, 1863) as a key structural framework. Traditionally applied to classical narrative structures, Freytag's Pyramid provides a lens to assess how Churchill uses the conventional five-act structure of dramatic works. By focusing on the fundamental structural elements—exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution—this study investigates how Churchill crafts a nonlinear narrative to highlight the emotional and philosophical complexities of identity, selfhood, human cloning, and ethics. The framework reveals how the play disrupts linearity, emphasizing themes of identity fragmentation, existential crisis, and unresolved moral dilemmas. The analysis begins with the exposition, where the foundational conflicts are introduced, particularly Salter's guilt over cloning his son and the unsettling revelation of multiple copies. The rising action intensifies as Bernard 2 (B2) confronts Salter about his origins, gradually unraveling the psychological and existential turmoil of discovering he is not unique. This confrontation escalates to the climax, the most intense and crucial moment of the play, when Bernard 1 (B1) murders B2. This violent act not only symbolizes the irreparable rupture within the family but also serves as a dramatic and ethical turning point, illustrating the devastating consequences of cloning on identity and human relationships. In the falling action, Salter is left to wrestle with his guilt, loss, and moral failures, leading to a resolution that presents no true closure—reflecting the irreversibility of his actions and the lasting ethical questions the play poses. This structural analysis underscores how Churchill manipulates dramatic form to mirror the fragmentation of identity, reinforcing the play's central philosophical tensions.

To enhance the analysis, this study integrates theoretical perspectives that further illuminate *A Number*'s thematic concerns. Baudrillard's (1994) concept of simulacrum is employed to examine how cloning blurs the boundaries between original and copy, challenging conventional notions of authenticity and selfhood. Baudrillard's theory suggests that in a world of replication, the distinction between reality and representation collapses, a concept that resonates deeply with the clones' existential crisis in the play. The study also incorporates Levinas's (1969)

ethics of the Other, which provides a moral framework for analyzing the ethical consequences of creating and treating human copies as disposable entities. Levinas's philosophy, which stresses the ethical responsibility toward the Other, offers insight into Salter's failure to acknowledge the personhood of his cloned sons and the moral dilemmas inherent in genetic replication. By applying these theoretical lenses alongside a close reading of Churchill's text *A Number*, (2008), this study provides a comprehensive examination of how dramatic structure and thematic content interact. The research contributes to broader discussions on identity, ethics, and selfhood, particularly in the context of scientific advancements and cloning technologies. Furthermore, this approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the emotional, psychological, and ethical dimensions of the play, offering valuable insights into how *A Number* reflects contemporary anxieties about cloning, originality, and the nature of human existence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The application of Freytag's Pyramid to *A Number* reveals how Caryl Churchill's structural choices intricately amplify the play's central thematic tensions surrounding identity, cloning, and the ethical implications of scientific advancement. The exposition, which introduces Salter's guilt and the existence of his clones, immediately sets up the ethical paradox at the heart of the narrative: the desire to reclaim something lost—his son—through replication. This act of cloning, however, reveals its inherent failure: it cannot bring back the original, nor can it restore the authenticity of the human connection lost through death. Salter's attempt to recreate his son through cloning instead introduces new ethical, existential, and psychological conflicts, which are evident throughout the play's narrative. As the rising action progresses, the emotional and psychological turmoil of the clones intensifies, particularly through the character of Bernard 2 (B2). His statement, "I'm just a copy. I am not the real one" (Churchill, 2008)." encapsulates the profound identity crisis triggered by being a clone. B2's struggle to define himself as an individual is a direct consequence of the existential anxiety created by his creation, which forces him to confront the impossibility of ever being a unique entity. This emotional rupture is mirrored by Bernard 1 (B1), who embarks on a desperate search for his authentic self. B1's quest is epitomized by his assertion to know who he is, which reflects the central existential dilemma of the play: the idea that identity is not fixed, but rather fragile, dependent on context, and subject to external forces, such as genetic replication. The narrative structure amplifies this philosophical tension, as B1's search for an unrecoverable "original" self leads him deeper into an existential void, further illustrating the crisis of selfhood and the unresolvable nature of human identity in a world shaped by cloning.

The climax of the play—when B1 murders B2—functions as a pivotal moment that reveals the destructive force

of cloning, both emotionally and philosophically. This violent act is not merely a plot point, but a structural manifestation of the play's central argument: the inherent impossibility of preserving identity within a system of replication. By committing murder, B1 enacts the ultimate breakdown of the "original versus copy" dichotomy. In the world Churchill has created, where cloning blurs these distinctions, the act of violence becomes the final evidence of the ethical and existential chaos that cloning creates. This aligns with Baudrillard's (1994) concept of simulacrum, where the replication of the original leads to a collapse of meaning and authenticity, further eroding the concept of selfhood. The murder symbolizes the irreversible damage caused by cloning, where no true recovery or return to the past is possible. The falling action, in which Salter is confronted with the irreversible consequences of his actions, culminates in his realization at the end that they're not him. This moment is crucial because it encapsulates the play's central ethical message: cloning cannot restore what was lost—it only compounds the harm. Salter's remorse, though expressed with sorrow, cannot undo the profound existential and emotional damage he has inflicted upon his sons. The structural choice to position Salter's realization at the falling action serves as a key moment in the narrative, emphasizing the ethical void at the core of cloning. It reflects the tragic realization that even if cloning offers the illusion of restoring what has been lost, it ultimately leaves deep emotional and ethical scars that cannot be healed.

The play's resolution, which deliberately refuses closure, further reinforces the thematic exploration of cloning's complex ethical and emotional consequences. By leaving Salter's fate unresolved, Churchill ensures that the audience is forced to confront the very questions that Salter himself grappled with throughout the play. This lack of closure mirrors the unresolved, unending nature of the ethical dilemmas posed by cloning, making it clear that the questions raised are not easily answered. The play thus shifts the burden of judgment from the characters to the audience, encouraging a deeper reflection on the nature of identity, selfhood, and the moral implications of scientific advancement. In doing so, Churchill underscores the tension between scientific progress and the ethical responsibility that must accompany it. The integration of Levinas's (1969) philosophy of the Other adds depth to the analysis of Salter's moral failure. Levinas's ethical framework emphasizes responsibility toward the Other, recognizing each person's intrinsic value and autonomy. Ethics, in this view, arises in the face-to-face encounter, where one is called to respect the Other's dignity beyond self-interest. In *A Number*, Salter's failure lies in his inability to acknowledge the full humanity of his clones. Rather than treating them as autonomous individuals, he views them as extensions of his grief and a means to recreate his lost son. This reduction of the clones to instruments of his desires underlines the play's critique of cloning as an ethical violation. By denying them personhood, Salter diminishes their moral status, treating

them as objects rather than individuals with rights to selfhood. His moral failure reflects the broader critique of scientific overreach, where human beings are reduced to mere products, replicable and disposable.

The analysis confirms that *A Number*'s power derives from its structural irony. By employing Freytag's Pyramid, a traditional linear dramatic structure, Churchill highlights the nonlinear, destabilizing effects of cloning on identity. The play's progression from exposition to resolution mirrors the emotional and philosophical fragmentation of identity, showing how the illusion of genetic replication unravels the characters' sense of self. Each narrative phase in *A Number* systematically dismantles the fantasy of genetic replication, making the ethical arguments not just persuasive, but inevitable. The play's use of structural choices, in combination with philosophical lenses like Baudrillard's simulacrum and Levinas's ethics of the Other, provides a rich, multifaceted exploration of identity, cloning, and the ethical complexities of selfhood. Through this analysis, the study demonstrates how *A Number*'s narrative structure and thematic content work in tandem to illuminate the profound ethical and existential dilemmas surrounding cloning, making it a powerful commentary on the limitations and consequences of scientific progress.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how Caryl Churchill's *A Number* uses Freytag's Pyramid to explore identity, cloning, and ethical responsibility. Through the structured progression of exposition, rising action, climax, and an unresolved conclusion, Churchill intensifies the emotional and philosophical depth of the play. Salter's interactions with his cloned sons—Bernard 1, Bernard 2, and Michael Black—unfold a psychological and moral crisis centered on the consequences of cloning. The rising tension and tragic climax, marked by Bernard 1's murder of Bernard 2, reveal the deep emotional damage caused by Salter's decisions, while the falling action and open-ended resolution leave lasting ethical questions.

To deepen this structural analysis, the study incorporates Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum, illustrating how cloning blurs the line between original and copy, challenging the foundation of identity and uniqueness. Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the Other further critiques Salter's moral failure to treat the clones as autonomous individuals, emphasizing the ethical consequences of dehumanization. Together, these perspectives highlight how *A Number* confronts the commodification of human life in the face of scientific advancement. By aligning dramatic structure with philosophical inquiry, the play becomes a compelling exploration of selfhood, ethics, and the fragile boundary between human innovation and moral responsibility.

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