

Examine the view that 'as wives Emilia and Desdemona have much in common.'

In Shakespeare's 1603 Aristotelian tragedy, 'Othello', Emilia and Desdemona are presented as the victims of Othello and Iago's violence in their respective marriages, suggesting they have a common, tragic end, although with differing attitudes to some aspects of marriage. This could be as a result of the view at the time that women were deemed subservient to men and should be 'help-mates' in the household, rendering them powerless against their husbands.

Within Act 4, scene 3, it could be argued that, as wives, Emilia and Desdemona appear to have little in common. Desdemona appears to be naïve and inexperienced, demonstrated when she asks Emilia if 'there be women do abuse their husbands in such gross kind?', suggesting she has very little experience of the world, and of marriage. The verb 'abuse' indicates the seriousness with which Desdemona regards adultery whilst the adjective 'gross' conveys her vehement distaste towards infidelity. This could be Shakespeare's way of demonstrating how many girls of high status within this era were kept unaware of the realities of the world, potentially using her ignorance to critique this way of raising women. In contrast, Emilia is portrayed to approach both marriage and infidelity in a more pragmatic and experienced, way, calling 'such a deed' a 'small vice', implying that, to her, adultery is not the worst sin, which directly juxtaposes Desdemona's devout attitude to fidelity. It also suggests that, as a wife, Emilia does not feel as passionately about Iago as Desdemona does Othello. A similar portrayal of marriage can be seen in 'Pride and Prejudice' through the character of Charlotte Lucas, who understands her place in the world and her duty to marry, when she accepts Mr Collins' proposal, despite not loving him. This is in contrast to Lydia, who runs away to marry Mr Wickham, and Elizabeth who falls in love with Mr Darcy, both of whom could be similar to the character of Desdemona. This comparison further highlights Emilia and Desdemona's differences, displaying Emilia as a more experienced, cynical wife and Desdemona as hopeful and naïve. These differences are further highlighted in this scene through the way in which Emilia dominates the conversation, highlighting her experience of marriage, compared to Desdemona's more limited lines. This is accompanied by the use of blank verse in her long monologue, aided by Shakespeare's use of complete syntax that establishes Emilia as an articulate speaker, in comparison to Desdemona's frantic exclamations.

Moreover, in Act 4, scene 2 when both women are killed by their respective husbands, they are depicted as contrasting directly in their attitudes towards the perpetrators. Desdemona protects Othello when, in a final act of love as she declares, 'No one, I myself', when questioned by Emilia as to who was responsible for her death. This illustrates to the audience that, despite everything, Desdemona loved her husband and would do anything to help him, even condemning herself to hell, which was an act of great sacrifice in the highly Christian Jacobean society Shakespeare writes within. On the other hand, when Emilia is faced with a chance to expose her husband, she declares that she 'will speak as liberal as the North,', despite knowing she 'will ne'er go home'. This act of defiance in her last moments clearly highlights the difference between the two women.

However, whilst it can be argued they have opposing attitudes to marriage, both female characters are presented as having the desire to care for and protect their husbands. This can be seen when Desdemona exclaims 'No, by this heavenly light!' when asked if she would commit adultery. The use of heavenly lexis conveys Desdemona's view of her love with Othello as pure and holy and suggests she would not let 'all the world' disrupt her unwavering fidelity and loyalty. Contrastingly, Emilia says she would 'make her husband a cuckold' but only 'to make him a monarch'. This could imply that Emilia is unfalteringly loyal to Iago, to the point that she will defy expectations to help him gain status, shown previously in the play when she takes Desdemona's handkerchief to please her husband. This is exemplified by her declaration, 'I should venture purgatory for't', suggesting that

she would suffer a miserable judgement in the afterlife for her husband. A similar sacrifice can be seen from Desdemona in Act 1, when she gives up her life of comfort and stability in Venice to follow Othello to Cyprus. This depicts to the audience that whilst Desdemona and Emilia have differing attitudes to marriage and how to help their husbands, they are both keen to serve their husbands, in accordance with the tradition of the wife as the 'help-mate' in Jacobean times. This is mirrored in Lorca's play 'Yerma' through the tragic female hero as she tries repeatedly to please her husband in any way she can, becoming increasingly confused and frustrated as he fails to reciprocate, suggesting that, in literature throughout time, women are expected to help their husbands with very little reward.

Furthermore, it can be argued that Emilia and Desdemona are both objectified by men in their lives, and are eventually powerless to stop their tragic ends, similar to Ariadne and Phaedra in Jennifer Saint's 'Ariadne' where both sisters meet a tragic end as a result of their husbands' actions. Whilst Thomas would argue that 'Emilia is a foil to Desdemona', in Act 5, scene 2 their shared tragic deaths could illuminate the unfortunate similarity between the women, especially when considering the emotive image of them lying, side by side, on their shared death bed, as highlighted in the 2015 Royal Shakespeare Company's production of 'Othello', where both women lie, dead, on the floor.

Ultimately, Desdemona and Emilia are shown to be similar as wives because they are united through their tragic fate. This could be Shakespeare's way of critiquing how women were viewed in Jacobean England, suggesting that no matter the wife's attitude, tragedy can still occur.

Word count: 986

How SSRI drugs work and their side effects

Depression is an increasingly prominent problem within today's society with 280 million people worldwide impacted by this mental illness according to WHO (World Health Organisation). This is an especially important matter due to the link between depression and other conditions including an increased risk of heart disease and suicide; hence in 1987, as part of the medical response, SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) were introduced. SSRIs are a class of medication most used in the treatment of depression, but also used to treat numerous other mental health conditions such as Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder etc. They are a particularly desirable treatment due to their safety, efficacy and relatively low side effect profile.

Serotonin is a monoamine neurotransmitter that helps regulate human sleep cycles as well as mood and anxiety levels, promoting a happier outlook on life. Therefore, it is thought that a lack of serotonin is linked with conditions such as depression and anxiety. When serotonin is released into the synaptic cleft, it will either be absorbed by receptors on the postsynaptic neuron, reabsorbed back into the presynaptic neuron, or broken down by monoamine oxidase. Usually, a lack of serotonin is due to too much of the neurotransmitter being reabsorbed from the synapse back into the presynaptic neuron by the serotonin transporter SERT. SSRIs work to prevent this by competitively inhibiting the reuptake of serotonin, increasing the concentration of serotonin in the synaptic cleft. This consequently results in an increase in the serotonin stimulation of the postsynaptic neuron, allowing the subsequent signal to travel through the central nervous system towards the brain resulting in improved mood regulation. This competitive inhibition occurs when an SSRI molecule binds to the SERT via non-covalent forces such as hydrogen bonds, hydrophobic interactions and van der Waals forces, all of which are easily broken allowing for the SSRI molecule to disassociate. The SSRI is specific to the SERT, so it should not interfere with any other neurotransmitter systems, a trait that distinguishes it from other antidepressants, reducing the risk of side effects. In addition, the SERT has a higher affinity for the SSRI drugs than serotonin, allowing this class of antidepressant to be very effective. Research has also shown that when the SERT is less active, as a result of SSRIs, more of the protein ITGB3 is released, which then works on increasing the rate of neurogenesis and synaptogenesis. 'The neurogenesis hypothesis of depression' states that the increased rate of neurogenesis plays an important role in the treatment of major depression as well as the ability for proper mood control further demonstrating the efficacy of this drug class. Over time, the brain experiences neuroplastic changes due to increased serotonin levels. This includes adaptations in synaptic strength and neuronal connectivity; both of which allow for efficient and effective transmission of signals that are vital for coping with chronic stress, a risk factor for depression.

Despite their selectivity, treatment with SSRIs can sometimes result in side effects, some of which are fatal whilst others have minor impact. One of the more severe side effects is serotonin syndrome, commonly caused by using two or more serotonergic drugs simultaneously. Frequently serotonin syndrome has only mild side effects, symptoms being increased heart rate, myoclonus, fever etc. However, it can also be deadly when taking specific medications such as monoamine oxidase inhibitors in combination with SSRIs; in this case fatalities are due to the necessity for monoamine oxidase as without it the body is unable to break down excess neurotransmitters meaning they can build up to potentially deadly levels. If neurotransmitters do build up in synapses, unregulated impulses will be repeatedly sent, disrupting the usual communication between neurons. Another potential side effect is SSRI discontinuation syndrome which occurs when a patient who has been taking SSRI medication

rapidly reduces their dose or stops completely. It is thought that the severity of the syndrome is related to the half-life of these drugs as SSRIs with longer half-lives (such as Fluoxetine) show less signs of SSRI discontinuation syndrome, hypothesised to be due to the drug slowly clearing from the body. Symptoms of the syndrome can include trouble sleeping, sensory changes, and even depression. These symptoms can sometimes be prevented or reduced by gradually discontinuing the medication, or by transferring to a medication with a longer half-life and gradually discontinuing that if an antidepressant with short half-life was previously used. A more common side effect of SSRIs is sexual dysfunction, with symptoms including erectile dysfunction, genital numbness etc. This is a particularly negative psychological side effect, as many people experiencing depression already suffer with a low sex drive which can put a strain on their relationship, further worsening their condition. Sexual dysfunction can also deter some patients from continuing this medication, which may sometimes result in incorrect use of SSRI including erratic dosing or sudden termination, potentially causing SSRI discontinuation syndrome.

A US study conducted in 2005 and analysed in 2022 showed that 38% of SSRI users experienced side effects with 25% of those having experiencing side effects they deemed 'a significant burden'. However, SSRIs cause less harmful side effects than previously recommended antidepressants such as tricyclic antidepressants. These can cause cardiovascular complications, most commonly being orthostatic hypotension which is associated with other more fatal conditions. Furthermore, SSRI overdose is moderately frequent but due to their high safety profile and tolerability even when they do occur, it is rarely fatal. This was shown in a 2016 study by The American Association of Poison Control Centre which included over 50,000 overdose cases where SSRIs were mentioned, with only 102 being fatal.

To conclude, it is evident that SSRIs are an effective drug in the treatment of depression especially when compared to some other antidepressants. However, it is extremely important that all patients are made aware of the potential side effects that may occur due to SSRIs, as well as the correct way to use this medication to help avoid the possibility and severity of some side effects.

(997 words)

The implication of Russia's "special military operation".

On Thursday 24th February 2022. The Russian federation undertook a military action with ramifications far beyond those even its premier Putin himself could foresee. No longer content with having seized the ethnically Russian Crimea and oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbass. Perhaps Putin was emboldened by the limited backlash from the international community which led to him attempting a takeover of the whole country including attempting to seize Kiev the capital city and unseat Zelensky the Ukrainian President.

This war has had many far-reaching implications that extend far beyond Ukraine and Russia's local neighbourhood. The chief of which is it highlighted numerous deficiencies in the Russian armed forces. Despite having a significant numerical advantage in man and material early in the war the Russian land forces failed to take control of Kiev and whilst they made some advances in the east and south of the country, they only managed to seize one regional capital Kherson which was then retaken by the Ukrainian army. These battlefield defeats were in part caused by a lack of preparation by the Russian army. The Russian army expected to be welcomed as liberators and did not anticipate the ferocity of Ukrainian resistance. The Russian Airforce and navy proved to be even more ineffective as the Russian air force failed to achieve air superiority over the country despite having a numerical advantage in combat aircraft of over 10 to 1. They also suffered substantial naval losses in their Black Sea fleet notably the Moskova cruiser sunk by a Neptune anti-ship missile and a Russian nuclear submarine destroyed in port by a British supplied storm shadow cruise missile.

This had a deleterious effect on Russia's reputation diplomatically. It overtook Iran to acquire the dubious honour of becoming the world's most sanctioned country. It was cut off from the global financial system and global trade being relegated to a pariah state. The UN general assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine. With only seven countries many of whom were also shunned by the international community voted against the resolution. Perhaps more significantly than this was the ruinous effect it had on the perception of Russian military power. Once lauded as the second most powerful military in the world the Russian army was stopped in its tracks by a country much smaller and on paper weaker than itself albeit with substantial external support in both military equipment and financial resources primarily originating from Europe and North America.

It is this military and financial aid from NATO countries and their allies which were the key factor in the continued failure of Russia to subjugate the whole of Ukraine. The western provision of many key weapons systems including Main Battle Tanks (MBTs), missiles and all manner of other armaments and munitions that have helped stem the Russian advance and allow the war to descend into a stalemate. A stalemate which has yet to be broken and it would be premature to declare that Ukrainian victory is inevitable. Russia still has an overbearing man and material advantage over Ukraine. If the supply of weapons from the Western Powers ever started to slow the Russian armed forces could still breakthrough and win a decisive victory in the war. The very fact Ukraine is reliant on external powers to sustain its war economy puts it in a vulnerable position as its aid is contingent on internal politics of those countries which Ukraine has no control over. It also leaves Ukraine beholden

to the will of those western powers and has delivered a lot of pressure on the Ukrainian armed forces to see battlefield success to justify continued provision of military aid.

If Russia is able to win the war it would have far reaching consequences geopolitically. It would put an end to the peace dividend that came about the end of the Cold War where it was widely believed wars of conquest for territorial expansion were a relic of a more violent dangerous past. If Russia is able to win the war in Ukraine it will show the international community that wars of conquest are still a valid method of territorial gain and to resolve political disputes. Therefore, other states will be more emboldened to take aggressive action against each other if they feel there will be less backlash from the international community. It would also have the risk of increasing nuclear proliferation worldwide. This is because it would show other potential hostile states that if a country possesses nuclear weapons such as Russia which retains the largest stockpile in the world. It is able to act with near impunity as other countries are reluctant to engage in direct military action in opposition to it due to the deterrent value nuclear weapons hold and the leverage it gives to nations who threaten its use.

Alternatively, if Ukraine wins it will be a great victory for NATO and its allies who will have defeated their chief geopolitical rival without the loss of any troops and without any direct military intervention at all. The defeat of Russia on the battlefield of Ukraine would be symbolic of the end of Russia as a great military and diplomatic power and it could be argued such an event would finally constitute the true end for the Cold War and the triumph of East over West.

Overall, the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine goes far beyond the geographical constraints of the war itself but is a global affair which has further galvanised the split of the international order into two main alliance blocks of the world US led NATO and Russia, China and their allies. Whilst the outcome of the conflict is still uncertain what is known is that the far reaching ramifications of Putin's misadventure into Ukraine will continue to impact the world long after hostilities cease and long after Putin lives out the rest of his natural lifespan.

'Assertive Women are Doomed Women'

In light of this view, explore how Shakespeare presents women in *Othello*.

In Shakespeare's Aristotelian tragedy 'Othello' women are frequently presented as strong and quite assertive. However, as the play progresses, we see Desdemona increasingly portrayed as more of a stereotypical female of the time while Emilia continues to display assertive characteristics. Nevertheless, both eventually die at the hands of their husbands, suggesting that both women were doomed due to the assertive nature they portrayed.

At the start of the play, it is clear Desdemona is depicted as somewhat assertive towards the men in her life. This is evident when she justifies her choice of husband to her father: 'But here's my husband, and so much duty as my mother showed to you, preferring you before her father, so much I challenge that I may profess due to the Moor my lord.' This phrase shows Desdemona to be manipulating her father slightly using his and her mother's relationship as leverage so he will agree to her marriage to Othello. This strongly conveys to an audience her assertive nature as she is not afraid to stand up for herself and her husband even when she could lose her reputation, which was prized in Jacobean England. Moreover, the amount of speech she has in the play, especially when talking to Othello in the first few Acts, provides more evidence to support the idea that Shakespeare intended Desdemona to be seen – at least initially - as an assertive woman with power over the men in her life.

This idea of Desdemona being depicted as assertive and independent is also shown in Act 3, scene 3. When Desdemona says 'I will do all my abilities in thy behalf' the first-person pronoun here suggests Desdemona's confidence as she believes she will be able to restore Cassio to Othello's favour, and the long sections of speech she has suggests she is in control of the situation. This is not typical for the time period as women did not have as much power as men had, and the fact Cassio is going to her for help conveys to the audience Desdemona's strong-willed nature. However, some audience members may interpret what could be seen as independence and assertiveness, to in fact be Desdemona conforming to society, she wants to help Cassio as she knows this will help her husband and this would reflect how woman at the time were meant to help and support their husbands. Therefore, it could be argued we see her conform throughout the play and that she is only acting in her husband's best interests, as befits a woman of the era.

Although Desdemona displays strong characteristics and is seen to have power over the men in her life, as the play continues to progress, she increasingly conforms to the social constructs of the time period. This is prevalent in Act 5 Scene 2 where Desdemona says, 'Nobody; I myself' just before her death, demonstrating her loyalty to Othello as she refuses to betray him, despite what he has done to her. Her conduct here reflects Shakespeare's understanding of the expectations of women in this era and similar parallels can be drawn with the romantic heroine Jane Eyre and her unwillingness to compromise her integrity despite also facing pressure due to societal expectations. Despite this she challenges these expectations, by refusing to become a mistress to Rochester or succumb to the male domination and class hierarchy within the book. Moreover, the fact that Desdemona willingly lies while on her death bed solidifies this idea of her wanting to be a faithful wife, as for a Jacobean audience she would effectively be condemning herself to hell as deceit was considered a sin.

Emilia is also presented to be a strong-willed and assertive character and this is plainly shown in Act 5 where she defies the convention of being a loyal wife by betraying Iago. She talks of how 'He begged of [her] to steal [the handkerchief]'. The verb 'begged' suggests Iago's desperation to have the handkerchief demonstrating clearly her assertive nature as she is confident in going against her

husband, despite this being frowned upon by a Jacobean society and the fact that he could harm or kill her for this. Additionally, when her husband commands her to 'charm [her] tongue', she replies 'I will not'. The defiant tone in this phrase effectively conveys Emilia's refusal to obey or conform to the behaviour expected of a Jacobean woman or wife and again clarifies to the audience she is asserting herself over her husband, despite the fact that he should have control and ownership over her.

However, as a consequence of her betrayal of her husband, Emilia is stabbed in the back by Iago and dies soon after. This links back to the theory posited that 'Assertive women are doomed women' as it could be postulated that Emilia was doomed due to the fact she stood up for herself against her husband. She even acknowledges this herself, saying 'Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home'. The adverb 'perchance' suggests she recognises she has only a little time left yet still continues to fight for Desdemona, again suggesting her assertiveness. We can draw a parallel to Catherine in 'Wuthering Heights' who also shows an assertive nature but similarly dies as if she were 'doomed' to do so.

Emilia is murdered by Iago for standing up to him and Desdemona is murdered by Othello due to jealousy that stems from her being confident and independent. Therefore, it could be claimed that Shakespeare presents women to be assertive but also shows how this dooms them. We could infer from this that Shakespeare's tragedy served as a warning to women of Jacobean England that to defy The Great Chain of Being, where women occupy a position below men, would only lead to suffering and that they should instead submit to the expectations placed upon women of the time period.

Word Count: 977

An Essay on Capitalism

Capitalism is an economic structure that addresses the fundamental economic problem of scarcity through mechanisms of private ownership (*Campaignserver.co.uk. (2021)*). Under capitalism, individuals and businesses can own and control resources, land, and markets. These markets run based on supply and demand, allowing for an efficient allocation of resources. Capitalism is driven by the goal of maximizing profits and individual gain.

While that may sound ideal, capitalism also faces criticism. Karl Marx, the author of ‘Das Kapital’ (1876) (*Illustrate to Educate (2023)*) argued that capitalism leads to income inequality as wealth often accumulates in the hands of a few. Marx viewed capitalism as inherently exploitative. He argued that capitalist systems are characterized by a hierarchical class structure consisting of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. According to Marx, capitalists exploit workers by paying them wages that are lower than the value they produce through their labor. It was his belief that capitalism would lead to its own downfall as workers would eventually become aware of their exploitation and revolt against the capitalist class.

On the other hand, Adam Smith had a more optimistic view of capitalism. He believed that the pursuit of self-interest and the operation of free markets through competition could lead to economic prosperity and overall societal well-being. Smith argued that individuals, in their pursuit of profit, unintentionally contribute to the welfare of society. He emphasized how the division of labor and specialization in a market economy can increase productivity, competition and thus innovation, eventually improving living standards for everyone.

While both figures have contrasted viewpoints, they both seem to settle on the fact that capitalism leads to ultimate inequality over time. Firstly, in a capitalist system, capitalists can accumulate capital by reinvesting profits into acquiring more means of production. This concentration of capital allows a few individuals or corporations to control a sizable portion of resources, giving them disproportionate economic power.

Similarly, Marx argued that capitalism necessitates the extraction of surplus value from workers. While workers receive wages for their labor, capitalists appropriate the surplus value created by the workers' labor as profit. This dynamic can lead to an unequal distribution of wealth and power between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

Finally, capitalism's reliance on market forces and competition does not guarantee equal opportunities or outcomes for all participants. Factors such as unequal access to education, resources, and social support can create barriers that hinder social mobility.

It is essential to note that modern capitalist systems, such as those used in the US, UK, and Singapore, incorporate various regulatory measures, social safety nets, and policies aimed at addressing the inequality. These measures seek to protect the public from major and minor exploitation and help to embed consumer protection laws. While no country can have a truly free market economy, Singapore is seen globally as the country with the ‘freest market economy’ (*Heritage.org. (2023)*). Having a *free market* refers to an economic system in which individuals and businesses can freely set prices and exchange goods and services with minimal governmental interference. They are a key component of capitalism. The advantages of operating as a *free market* are numerous, notably, they entail increased competition, efficiency, and innovation. Now, while free markets and capitalism can be associated with wealth and power inequality, it is important to note that the relationship between capitalism, free markets, and patriarchy is multifaceted.

Capitalism's concentration of wealth can exacerbate existing power imbalances, including gender-based power structures. Historically, patriarchal norms and biases have limited women's access to education, resources, and economic opportunities. In fact, in low-income countries, for every hundred boys who continue their education after high school, only fifty-five girls do the same (*Macmillan, P. (2021)*). As a result, they face significant barriers to participating fully in the market economy, thus perpetuating the already existing gender inequality.

Similarly, capitalist economies often rely on a division of labor, which assigns different roles and responsibilities to individuals based on perceived capabilities or social expectations. Traditionally, women have been assigned roles related to unpaid domestic work and caregiving, while men have been assigned roles in the paid workforce. On average, women globally spend more than twice as many hours as men doing unpaid work (*Macmillan, P. (2021)*). This division reinforces gender norms and contributes to a gender pay gap and limited female representation in influential positions of power.

Additionally, free markets operate based on the principles of supply and demand. However, gender biases can manifest in market dynamics. For example, gender-based stereotypes and discrimination can impact hiring practices, wage levels, and career advancement opportunities, leading to unequal economic outcomes for women. In 2021, women's gross hourly earnings were on average 12.7 % below those of men in the EU (*Europa.eu. (2021)*).

It is worth emphasizing that capitalism itself is not inherently patriarchal or unequal. The specific outcomes depend on numerous factors, including cultural, historical, and policy contexts. Yet, in summary, Marx and Smith's conflicting views shed light on the debate surrounding the impact of capitalism on inequality. Capitalism exacerbates societal norms to a colossal level, leaving women and those of the lower class, helpless and alienated. Although contemporary capitalism may currently work around the world, it is not without the aid of countless policies and legislative decisions made by the government. Thus, building on the values of Karl Marx, it is my belief that capitalism eventually renders itself useless.

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Final word count including citations: 1000 words

Citations:

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Game day. I draw the curtains to be greeted by the overcast, dystopian beauty of urban England, a simply euphoric shiver deploys throughout my body. The cigarette numbs the throbbing of last night and the gash on my left hand, ready to be exploited to its fullest potential later on in the day. I am simply fuelled by the aspect of violence, pain and abuse that will come as the day progresses, the arms and legs shake in raw exhilaration and anticipation. The three hours before kick-off are always the highlight of my week, a home game under the lights against the local. It simply doesn't get better than this. I work only for this feeling, the work that only slaves and animals should be presented to. But this feeling makes it worth it, and I would work thousands of extra shifts just so this feeling stays intact for the rest of my life. I take one last drag of the shrunken cigarette and chase it down with my final bottle of Smirnoff, the bitter taste awakens my body to the realisation that today was going to be one to tell the grandkids.

Staggering out of my room at turning right to the front door, the wife pierces my left ear, and a sudden fire is ignited in my stomach. The cloud of the cigarette stalks me as I enter the kitchen area to confront my wife, I trip over a toy car through my blurry glare. I am simply immune to the words of her, they will never break my focus on a day like this. I eventually get fatigued of encompassing my raw adrenaline, and leave the house having presenting her with a right hook and a kiss on the cheek, also grabbing the kitchen knife that was left in the hands of my missus. The Merseyside breeze clogs up my lungs as I trudge through its beautiful streets to my home, I practise my spit length and head movement which could come in extremely handy later on in the day. The harsh atmosphere of the city stings the cuts through my ripped jeans and gashed arms, a sensation that sends further exhilaration through my spine. Sickly sharp notes of the River Mersey pervade my nostrils as I walk upon its presence, getting ever closer to the promised land. I enter, with the fresh and vibrant scent of Stella rushing to cling onto my shirt and suffocate my surroundings. The boys are perched in the corner of the palace and are gagging for their next sip of alcohol. None of us mutter a word to each other, as we all dream of the blue and white blood on our hands come the end of the day, an image that has been embedded into our dreams for months upon months. We sink pints like they are water, and are fuelled for the necessary business that will take place later in the day.

2:00. We strutted out the gaff, ambling from side to side as we crack the knuckles and apply the rings upon the fingers. The heavens had opened with the refreshing trickle of water streaming down my face, a picture-perfect setting that could almost foreshadow the events of later. The home ground towered over us as we waited in downpour, praying we had timed its arrival correctly. 2:15 came and arousal levels had spiked at the perfect time, with the cackle of the bus indicating their arrival in the distance. Knives were drawn upon the sound, the wind shoved us closer to their location. A congregation of blue and white dispersed and treacherous, disgusting harmonies had greeted our ears. A red flame was deployed as we stood metres away from them, security were blinded and spluttered on the smoke. Striding through the cloud the kitchen knife was raised, and with a kiss of the badge and a downward strike of my right arm, the reds were winning one nil.

Game day. He helps me to my feet as I am in anguish from the scar on my stomach and head. He draws the curtains and I'm greeted by the glistening, omnipotent presence of the sun which heats the room in a matter of seconds. I snatch at my crutch and am brought to my feet, blessed to be able to witness another match day morning. The gash on my left hand had healed, as I followed my morning painkillers down with a swig of water. He pulls my beloved shirt over my hunched upper body and sits me down in my chair, ready to be transported back home. As we approach the front door, my shrivelled and split left ear is pierced by a shriek of a baby, and he says his goodbye with the kiss on the cheek of the child and his wife. We leave the house, and the Merseyside breeze dampens the racket of the city and fills my degraded lungs with sweet air that propels my body in the chair. The tranquil Mersey River bathed under the mellow yellow sun and reassured me that my constant pain would soon be distinguished with the thing I loved most in the world. We strolled past my former home, a place which had brought such comfort and suffering to myself, but none the less a place I still loved. He pushed me round the corner and through the park, until she once more overlooked our miniscule presence. The locals greeted me as we advanced into the ground, the occasional pat on the shoulder which made me wince in agony. A familiar harmony ascended in the distance, one which brought raw nostalgia and contentment to me. A gust of red smoke had ignited in the distance, and like a magnet, was forcing its way through the crowd just to be upon my presence. As I sat in the familiar cloud, reminiscing on my long adoration for the beautiful game.

ISA – Science and Technology

What are the connections between structure and function?

Structure is the physical composition of a system and it is inextricably linked to the job it performs – its function. These two aspects can either overlap positively or contradict each other.

Firstly, structure can allow for efficient function with minimal energy input and maximal result. Created three million years ago¹, hammers elegantly display the simplicity of this idea: the long handle acts as a lever that generates a comparatively large turning force and has a high strength-to-weight ratio, so it can withstand repetitive compressive loads. Furthermore, the metal head is positioned as far from the pivot as possible and is thus the focal point of the weight distribution, resulting in an even greater turning force, maximising function. Indeed, modern hammers are made with carbon fibre handles to intensify this effect². It is clear that structure can greatly enhance function and is key to the longevity of a design.

However, structure can hinder a machine's function. Car side mirrors are designed to jut out for visibility and create almost 7% added drag³. This reduces efficiency and negatively impacts fuel consumption. In the case of Formula 1 cars, any unnecessary bodywork restricts velocity. Often, there is a delicate balance between net gains and losses due to structural resistances. That said, if the resistive anatomy is responsible for safety, a permanent impact on performance is inevitable. Figure 1 highlights that the side mirrors are the car's most invasive piece of non-performance bodywork⁴. Many modern road cars – such as the Audi E-Tron or Hyundai Ioniq 5 – have mitigated this by having digital side mirrors. The air resistance of these cars is 10% lower than cars with traditional glass mirrors⁵. Moreover, these mirrors can even improve safety by offering improved visibility and zoom that varies with speed. A possible limitation is that of electrical faults. Ultimately, safety and convenience need to be considered in order to create a successful product; function is often compromised for structural necessities.

¹ Haus of Tools, 'The History and Evolution of the Hammer' (*Haus of Tools* 31 December 2018) <<https://hausoftools.com/blogs/news/the-history-and-evolution-of-the-hammer>>.

² DeWalt, '10 Lb. EXOCORE™ Sledge Hammer' (*DEWALT*) <<https://www.dewalt.com/product/dwht56029/10-lb-exocore-sledge-hammer>> accessed 28 December 2023.

³ Abdulkareem Abdulkareem Sh. Mahdi Al-Obaidi, Lim Chin Hong and Stephanie Lai Shen Ai, 'Effect of Size and Shape of Side Mirrors on the Drag of a Personal Vehicle' (2016) 770 <https://lindseyresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/NHTSA-2019-0082-1985-Effect_of_Size_and_Shape_of_Side_Mirrors_on_the_Dr.pdf> accessed 6 November 2023.

⁴ Giorgio Piola, 'The Group Mirror Test That Hinted at 2023 F1 Rule Change' (*www.motorsport.com* 7 September 2022) <<https://www.motorsport.com/f1/news/the-group-mirror-test-that-hinted-at-2023-f1-rule-change/10365118/#gal-10365118-m0-mercedes-w13-mirrors>> accessed 29 December 2023.

⁵ Car & Performance, '2019 Audi E-Tron SUV Virtual Exterior Mirrors - HOW IT WORKS' (*www.youtube.com* 18 December 2018) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7PE4HcMPWQ>> accessed 24 March 2024.

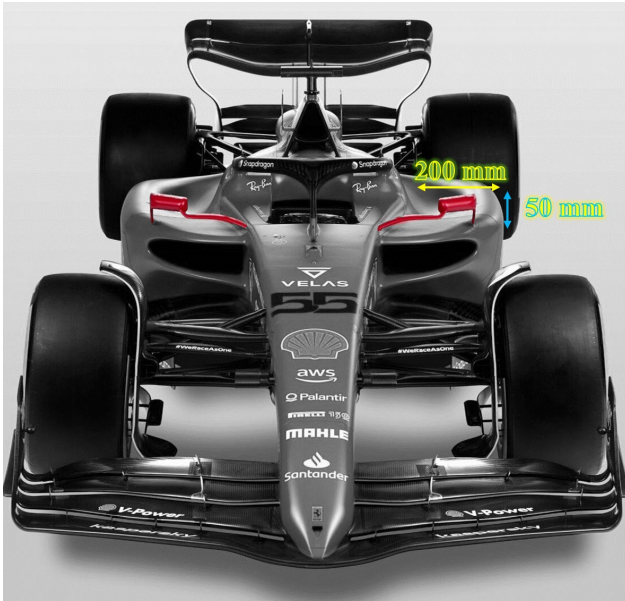


Figure 1: The protruding nature of side mirrors and their struts – shown in red – contributes to drag and restricts the car’s velocity^{6 7}.

The relationship between structure and function can be even more profound. With structural power composites, an aircraft fuselage – a load-bearing structural component – can be made from a material that stores energy⁸. Due to the power-to-weight paradox outlined in figure 2, electric aircraft would require batteries with an energy density 50% greater than dynamite, presenting inhibitory safety concerns. With structure and function intrinsically connected, these safety issues and technological restraints become smaller limiting factors; the intertwining of structure and function represents a new frontier for aircraft design because it mitigates the practical issues that have made electric aircraft largely unfeasible until now.

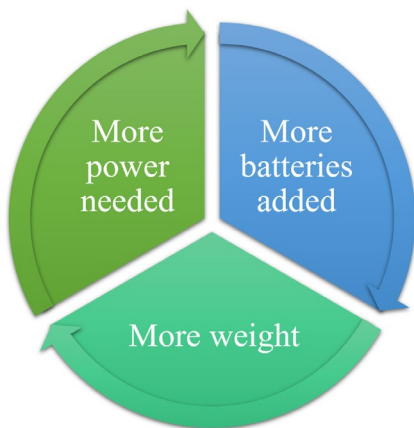


Figure 2: The power-to-weight paradox restricts the sole use of batteries in heavy machinery such as aeroplanes.

⁶ Matt Morlidge, ‘Ferrari Reveal Fierce New Car for 2022 Formula 1 Season as Scuderia Bid to Return to Winning Ways’ (*Sky Sports* 17 February 2022) <<https://www.skysports.com/f1/news/12474/12544271/ferrari-reveal-fierce-new-car-for-2022-formula-1-season-as-scuderia-bid-to-return-to-winning-ways>> accessed 19 November 2023.

⁷ Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile, ‘2024 Formula 1 Technical Regulation’ (6 December 2023) <https://www.fia.com/sites/default/files/fia_2024_formula_1_technical_regulations_-_issue_3_-_2023-12-06.pdf> accessed 28 December 2023.

⁸ Emile S Greenhalgh, ‘Structural Power Composites - the Route to More Electric Aircraft’.

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Stephen Sondheim & Cameron Mackintosh's 'Old Friends' – The Avengers of Musical Theatre

On the 26th of November 2021, American composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim passed away at the age of 91. During his lifetime he wrote 20 Broadway musicals, won an Oscar, eight Tony's, eight Grammy's, the Pulitzer Prize and is commonly known as the man who reinvented the American musical. So, what could be better than 2 and a half hours of the some of the best musical theatre performers performing his greatest works? Well, that is what 'Old Friends' at the Gielgud Theatre in London is. A masterclass in music, performance and entertainment, whilst also being a beautiful ode to the legend who is Stephen Sondheim. On the 30th of September, I walked into Gielgud Theatre, unsure of what to expect, and was I blown away. The Times described it best as 'unmissable musical theatre.'

The show is an explosion of theatrical excellence, featuring 39 of Sondheim's most famous musical numbers, from productions such as *West Side Story*, *Into the Woods*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Gypsy*, and many more. The company consists of 19 sensational performers, being led by Broadway powerhouses Bernadette Peters, and Lea Salonga, some of the most remarkable performers to ever come out of the Great White Way. To a true musical lover, a ticket to see this production is pure gold. The idea to put on this show was birthed during the pandemic as Sondheim and his lifelong friend and business partner theatrical producer Sir Cameron Mackintosh pondered on what to do when theatre was re-opened. They began to explore ideas and song choices for a concert style production. Four weeks before Sondheim's passing when Sir Mackintosh went to visit, he was still eager to continue the productions development saying, 'we really must get it done.' Sir Mackintosh then made it his mission to continue putting their last show together. The show was originally performed as a Gala in 2022 including the likes of Judi Dench and Imelda Staunton. Further production led him to open it with a modified cast on the West End, and now that their run ended on the 6th of January 2024, it is being taken to Broadway in March 2025!

What I believe is the most endearing factor of the show is that many of the older actors involved in this production have previously worked with Sondheim before (some having worked with him at the young age of 8 years old), reprising their roles and taking on new characters within his shows, the 'old friends'. Along with this are many 'new friends', young actors in the industry playing alongside established Broadway legends, showing how the past generation of the industry was so phenomenal, and how we are still in good hands with the actors at the forefront today. The show allows these actors to explore and show of all parts of their range, as they multi-role for each number, telling different stories. This is accompanied by an incredible set which takes you from a vaudevillian theatre to a Victorian bakery, even replicating the sight of famous painting 'A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte'. Along with this is an astonishing band who will bring your jaw to the floor performing the notoriously challenging 'Overture' of *Merrily We Roll Along*.

In this show you see veteran of the Broadway stage Bernadette Peters reprise her roles from *Into the Woods*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music* and more. Her updated performance of 'I Know Things Now' as a mature woman breathes new life and meaning into the song, whilst allowing her to play a new role in the musical. She shows off her comedic chops performing 'You Gotta Get a Gimmick' whilst also presenting her superb ability to deliver a ballad when singing 'Send in the Clowns' leaving me awe-stricken by her talent. Never have I heard applause as loud as when Peters accompanied by Bonnie Langford, Joanna Riding, Janie Dee and more busted out the classic belter 'Broadway Baby'. The stomps of the kick line were strong enough to cause seismic activity. As Bonnie Langford slipped into the splits at the age of 59, the audience roared in admiration, because you really can't get more iconic than that. As a musical lover myself, this felt like *The Avengers*, except the superheroes are replaced with Broadway leading ladies. Lea Salonga is trusted with the most emotional ballads throughout the show, as her ability to stand on a stage and tell a story with her voice is like no other. In addition, she shows off great range playing the iconic Mrs Lovett, a role full of character and comedy, something which she hasn't shown off much in her career. Her full array of talents is beautifully displayed.

I could pick apart every number performed as they were all a tour-de-force, however I would like to mention some highlights. Joanna Riding tackles the fast-paced lyrics and intense characterization of 'Getting Married Today' from *Company* to perfection, depicting Amy's cold feet at her wedding remarkably. Bradley Jaden makes a marvellous Tony in the 'Tonight Quintet' one of my personal favourite Sondheim songs, alongside Beatrice Penny-Toure playing Maria with silky-smooth soprano vocals, tackling the high C in that song effortlessly and Christine Allado playing Anita brilliantly. Janie Dee hilariously depicts a boozy, lustful, Caucasian woman in 'The Boy From...' She delivers the line 'Tacarembo la Tumbe del Fuego Santa Malipas Zacatecas la Junta del Sol y Cruz' priceless, reciting the name of a fictional Hispanic location ensuring soaring laughter from the audience.

Although this show may not be the traditional musical to go see, it surely was one of the most entertaining I have ever seen, a once in a lifetime spectacle. The genius of Sondheim has never been clearer than now, and it is a breath-taking way to honour his astounding contribution to music, theatre, and culture forever.

Brooks F

986 words

Why do women not enjoy equal opportunities in sport?

Most children are encouraged to play sports throughout their life. Sport provides a unique environment for children to play, learn, get involved and make friendships that otherwise they would not have. But currently, despite the encouragement to get involved in sport, should a little girl choose to take her sport further one day and potentially pursue it as a career. The opportunities available are lacking when compared to those of her male counterparts in all but a few sports, is it even possible for her to gain a successful career by pursuing her sport professionally?

Misogyny in sport is as varied and as deeply embedded as in any other area of life, perhaps more so. Fundamentally, misogyny is about power; as soon as sport became more organised and pivotal to status, women began to be excluded. Misogyny is the foundation on which many of the barriers that prevent women and girls being active are built. It undermines the history of active exclusion of women from many sports and the undervaluing of women's sport today. Given that misogyny is about upholding the primary status of men, and that from a very early age boys are taught that their status is interlinked with their reporting success, it is hardly surprising that misogyny is rife in sport,

When we talk of gender inequality in sport, we tend to focus on the gender pay gap. In most sports, women earn significantly less than their male counterparts and that, even though professional athletes, regardless of their gender, put in the same amount of work. This has meant that many female athletes are often having to have full-time jobs on top of being full-time athletes to survive. The argument could be raised that the gender pay gap is never going to disappear until women are able to fully emerge themselves in their sport, it is an impossible task that no talent can overcome, a conclusion that is impossible to reach.

It could be argued that society should focus purely on closing the gender pay gap and reaching equality in other aspects of society, as sport holds less importance. However, although sport does not merely reflect society, it is a powerful means for influencing equality throughout. As it is highly visible, publicised, and one of the most powerful social institutions, sport can be a hugely effective tool in encouraging gender equality as well as the empowerment of females of all ages.

In the face of criticism towards the gender pay gap in sports, many athletic organisations have accused women athletes of bringing in less revenue, though they still pay women lower percentages of their revenue. This argument only reveals the underlying gender gap in the way women's sport is promoted and how the market is organised. The discrepancy in marketing and promotion reflects less enthusiastic and encouraged attitudes. This is what leads to fewer sponsorships, profit and ultimately lower pay.

Personal barriers are also enforced upon by women's own personal choice, but why is this? Research shows that in general, female adolescents report greater body image dissatisfaction than males. Therefore, women and girls are a lot more self-conscious to take part in sport, due to feeling they have to conform to the 'traditional' body stereotypes of a sporty female. For example, as a result of this, swimming pools and other leisure facilities might clash with cultural norms and customs. With an increasingly body-obsessed culture, women who do not feel comfortable in their bodies are frequently judged negatively, discouraging them completely. As well as this, the prospect of revealing uniforms attracting unwanted sexual attention is yet another discouraging factor which can influence all women. Sport is inherently physical and when women participate or compete, we use our bodies in ways that leave them open to increased scrutiny, criticism and objectification.

The culture of sport itself generates a problem. Many argue that sport has traditionally been defined, organised, promoted and constructed as purely a men's activity. For many girls of a young age, this can be particularly relevant as being sporty is felt to be at odds with being feminine. Therefore, if the stereotypical meaning of 'feminine' is not to be sporty, how can any woman feel comfortable with playing sport if it goes against every conventional image that they are supposed to conform to? Should they have to emotionally remove themselves from their gender to feel at ease in taking part in a physical activity that they enjoy?

Additionally, social media is continuing to exert its presence and influence in the daily lives of billions of people around the globe. For marketers in the sports industry, social media is continuing to play an essential role and maximising each team's awareness through digital means online. As an example, the men's England team has always contained videos which have an aim to entertain their audience, and highlight the personal qualities of their players. It is not until recently that the women's team has implemented this, as they felt viewers would only want to see the physical side of their players. They believed that showing women's personal qualities would actually discourage any further attention to women's football.

Women have been treated as second-class citizens in sport for too long. Misogyny has too often been seen as our problem to fix, or else not a problem at all. It is well past time sport recognised its misogyny problems and finally began to tackle it.

Midnight Revelations

Slipping the key into the pocket in her trousers, Adira crept out into the darkness, making her way to the library. She kept an eye out for anyone that might be guarding the doors, or worse, spying on any movements at night on the school grounds. Stepping up the stone stairs, Adira stood in front of the library building. The arch made a perfect shadow that covered her up from everyone, apart from one. On the corner of her eye, she noticed slight movement as she turned around with a swift move. Her heart beating quick with the thought of getting caught sneaking out, but she was met with a salty scent. The sea. She let out a breath she didn't know she was holding as she put a hand on her chest to stop her beating heart. She saw his hand moving up to his neck and tilting his head. A movement he always did when he was shy or caught off-guard. Softly smiling, she gestured for him to follow her as she opened the door to the library. She heard the door softly closing behind her before she headed to the back. Turn right, then left. *Was it left next, or right?* She stared at the bookshelves in front of her as they stared down at her, *are they mocking me too?* The scent of the sea returned as he softly spoke 'It's left, in case you were stuck.' Turning her head to meet his eyes, Adira gave him a faint smile and headed to the bookshelf with both quick and soft steps, trying to not make any creaks on the wooden floor.

Both figures stood in front of one bookshelf at the back of the library. She took a deep breath and took the key out. With her head down, she looked at the key with the faint moonlight shining on them. She rubbed her fingers on it. Fidget. She's never fidgeted in her life. Ever. Liam seemed to sense her uncertainty, he was nervous, for whatever they find might change their lives forever. He wasn't ready for this, nor was Adira. But he knew she never fidgets or gets nervous. The image of her in his head was brave, confident. Fearless. Something he wasn't. He softly placed his hand on Adira's left shoulder, earning a jolt from her. Her eyes widened before stopping her movements completely. She felt a rush of heat rising on her cheeks as she lifted her head. Eyeing the boy next to her, she saw him nodding before returning the gesture. *What if I was wrong? What if this wasn't what we were looking for?* Adira pushed the thoughts aside before pulling the books out, one by one. Liam assisted as they silently placed them on the floor. Once the hatch was visible, Adira reached a hand into the back of the shelf, placing the key into the keyhole. *Please work. This must be the key.* Click. She wanted to squeal out of happiness, but the thought of getting caught hit her before she could act. Opening the door, Adira reached in and hoped that it wasn't empty. *Bingo.* She pulled the object out slowly but confidently. Feeling Liam's stare on her back, she turned to him and grinned. He returned the smile. She looked down at her hands to find a book, it was surprisingly not covered in dust like she thought it would. Mentally preparing herself for the outcome, Adira opened the heavy book.

Flipping the pages one by one, she couldn't make out what was so special that the principal needed to hide it at the back of the library, with a lock as well. Until something caught her eye, she froze, not being able to comprehend the words she was reading. Liam seemed to notice her sudden distress, he leaned over to read the page. Wrong move. He was taken aback and stumbled back. The books that were stacked behind them clashed onto the floor almost immediately, the sound echoing through the silent library. Adira snapped out of her thoughts before jerking her head towards Liam's direction. Her heart pounded as she took

short breaths, stopping all her movements to listen for any footsteps coming near them. But the only sound heard was Liam's mumbles of apologies to her. 'It's fine. We're fine.' She whispered softly before approaching his figure, the book still opened. 'What do you think this means?' Adira traced her fingers along the page, reading all the names scribbled down in her head. Liam didn't hear her question; in fact, he was only focused on two words on the page. He let out a shaky breath before lifting his finger to point at the name. Adira's eyes followed his movements. She let out a gasp, twisted her head to meet his gaze and earned a soft but slow nod from him. 'Oh, Liam, I- I'm sorry.' She whispered. Imprinted under his finger was his father's name. *Vengeance Roll? What is this nonsense?* The words didn't add up, what did he do to have his name on the list? Well, that partially explains why he was here, but that didn't explain her presence. She scanned the list for more names but that was where it ended. Frantically flipping the pages, she thought that list would've somehow contained the answers. But it didn't. *No, no. This can't be the end of the list. What about me?* Liam didn't know what to do, still registering the shock and staring at Adira's erratic movements. She didn't care if she was making too much noise flicking through the pages, she needed answers. Another turn of a page before one of them came loose. It wasn't a page at all. A letter. Liam stared at Adira before extending his arm to take the book from her, allowing her to read the letter, which was now unfolded in her hands. Her eyes skimmed through the sheet of creased paper. There. Found it.

“Moonlight. Pain. And the faraway breeze of the wind... Humanity`s tribute.”

Moonlight.

So beautiful, and yet, so lonely.

But we`re all lonely, I guess. Just like the beam of light out in the dark street.

Silence. Damp weather.

Slightly cold. And yet, it`s beautifully attractive.

Nobody outside. Not a soul.

It`s just like the land has found an inner balance with itself. A balance, an equilibrium, which the nature made with the lonely suburbs of the distant town at the end of the world.

A slight breeze of wind out in the night.

A distant noise of the faraway vehicles.

A lonely beam of light out in the dark street.

Slightly lit houses, and thoughts...

Thoughts about what happened during these years, and what is about to happen.

A rare moment of silence, out in the wild storm.

Forest. A lullaby of memories, a maze of thoughts.

The place where everything sinks in, covered by a fluffy snow...

And yet, the voice of the memories, now hidden, is still sometimes heard between the branches, through the noise of the faraway wind.

However, even sound can sink in here. Get forgotten, and make everything seem sleepy, unalive out here.

Disturbed by only a slight breeze of the wind.

Yet, sometimes memories come back into the old mind of mine, defeating any boundaries such place had imposed to restrict them. To catch them.

I remember, once, we were walking right along this trail, which is now covered in snow.

The place didn`t change, yet the atmosphere, the narrative, the subtle melody of the surrounding world did. It`s almost like somebody was playing an old record player, and then suddenly, without any reason or doubt, without even slightest concern, had interrupted, cut, sabotaged the record right in the very middle of the song.

And changed side.

Now it`s a different soundtrack.

It was a summer of 1962.

The same forest.

The same trail.

Although the wind, and our mind, constantly connected with the urban society, were bringing about soon disappearance of everything we have known, that subtle magic, or probably, just pure human leniency imposed a seamless, but unchallengeable border between us, and the unravelling depressiveness of the world.

We were just strolling, and enjoying our lives, like two innocent living souls. Like a pair of gazelles, unleashed out in the wild steppe.

We were still in the process of weaving our dreams, and discovering the complexity of our relationship.

I remember we even had a picnic under that tall, millennial tree, growing near the lake.

Some golden sunbeams were cutting through its dense crown.

I can still remember us chatting, planning our future life...

Together...

All we had was a bottle of cheap Prosecco, and a few bits of Parmesan. And yet, that was all we needed.

While humanity far-away was grasping every bit of everything, while bureaucrats were plotting their next move to amass even greater sums...a spark of life-that was all we needed.

A spark of life... and love...

And the never-ending heat of the sun...

But one thing with humanity-it never values that.

Never respects those terms, as "peace" and "freedom".

To it, those are just two meaningless terms, slowing down the evolution.

The evolution, which can only be achieved through wars, and which can only lead to madness...

To void...

To nothing...

And even yet, if the humanity will attempt to settle the disputes, to correct all wrongdoings, and hide its weapons, and to try the evolution through science and discovery, through advancements in culture, this attempt will be nothing but a mere break from the never-ending cycle of mass-murder and peace, interrupted by anarchy.

Until everything will succumb to void...

To void, in its purest state...

A silence, interrupted by nothing...

Disturbed only by a gentle wind...

ATTACK WARNING RED

SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER

Darkness

Oblivion,

Spark of light

No hope

Fear,

Uncertainty,

Probability,

We took the stool and put it beside the door

We leaned our mattresses onto our window,

Where`s that radio?

Take all the food down here!

Quick!

Do we have everything?

It should be any minute now...

AT... ACK... WwwwAaRniNG Ree...

Honey, Love you,

I love you too...

Goodnight.

.

.

.

We woke up in a broken world.

Where everything`s gone,

Even the slight breeze of wind was not felt,

Amongst ruins.

I was afraid to see darkness,
Knowing that wasn't a dream,
But know, when everything's gone,
I realise, that silent death,
Was the cure from oblivion,
That is now surrounds us...

While walking across the ruins,
Surrounded by pure state of death,
I noticed that trail,
That led to the vanished tree,
Under which we so happily spent,
A few best hours of our lifetime...

Some moisture in the air...
Is this the smell of blood?
Pain?
Or is it just radioactive rain,
Some last tears,
Of the bleeding Earth?

Canterbury Cathedral,
Once beautiful landmark of history,
The majestic tribute to its virtuous architects,
Now nothing but a couple of rocks,
Burnt carcass,
Once it was a symbol of salvation,
Now it's a temple of pain.
With buried souls inside it,
Asking for mercy,
Which will never be given...

Black streets,
White sky,
A scream of despair...
Once heavily populated streets,
Are now lying in pain,

Nobody outside,
Everything is dead,
Just empty ruins of village,
Black and white soulless corpses,
Of once dense forest,
And that slanted,
Millennial tree,
Is still resting near vanished lake.

Every time I take a look at it,
Every time I cross that path,
Covered in ashes,
My soul screams in despair,
And agony...

Lonely, elderly man, under the corpse of a tree,
No one to cheer him up...
Ashes, falling from sky,
Slowly cover him up...
Dark blue tears,
Falling on the ground,
A spark of light,
A spark of bright memory,
They-under the shade of a tree,

And then-darkness,
Eternal darkness,
Memories will disappear,
And so is he...

And so is the faraway breeze of the wind,
Out in the wild steppe...