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The Human Beyond Repetition: Cloning, Identity, and the Limits of Techno-Humanist Optimism in Caryl Churchill's *A Number*

Tekrarın Ötesindeki İnsan: Caryl Churchill'in *A Number* Oyununda Klonlama, Kimlik ve Tekno-Hümanist İyimserliğin Sınırları

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ABSTRACT

Caryl Churchill's play *A Number* explores the emotionally charged relationship between Salter and his cloned sons—Bernard (B1), Bernard (B2), and Michael Black—against the disquieting backdrop of human cloning. While previous scholarship has focused on themes of identity, familial rupture, and ethical accountability, this article offers a distinct perspective by situating the play within the framework of techno-humanism—the belief in using technology to enhance or redefine human nature. Rather than endorsing this vision, Churchill maintains a critical distance, exposing the psychological and ethical dislocations that cloning entails. Through close textual analysis of key scenes and supported by bioethical and philosophical reflections, this study argues that *A Number* presents cloning not as a scientific triumph but as a site of existential destabilisation. By foregrounding the tensions between technological possibility and human meaning, the play offers a powerful and unresolved interrogation of what it means to be human in the age of biotechnology.

Keywords: Caryl Churchill, *A Number*, Cloning, Techno-Humanism, British drama

ÖZET

Caryl Churchill'in *A Number* başlıklı oyunu, Salter ile klonlanmış oğulları—Bernard (B1), Bernard (B2) ve Michael Black—arasındaki duygusal olarak yüklü ilişkiyi, insan klonlamasının rahatsız edici bağlamı içinde inceler. Önceki araştırmalar kimlik, ailevi çöküş ve etik sorumluluk temalarına odaklanırken, bu makale oyunu tekno-hümanizm çerçevesinden değerlendirmekte ve böylece özgün bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Tekno-hümanizm, insan doğasının teknolojiyle dönüştürülmesini savunan bir düşünce olarak ele alınırken, Churchill bu görüşe mesafeli yaklaşarak klonlamanın yarattığı psikolojik ve etik sarsıntıları görünür kılar. Oyunun temel sahnelerine dayalı yakın okuma ve biyoetik ile felsefi yaklaşımlar çerçevesinde yapılan çözümleme, *A Number*'ın klonlamayı bilimsel bir ilerleme olarak değil, varoluşsal bir istikrarsızlık alanı olarak sunduğunu öne sürer. Oyun, teknolojik olanaklarla insan anlamı arasındaki gerilimi öne çıkararak, biyoteknoloji çağında insan olmanın ne anlama geldiğine dair güçlü ve çözülmemiş bir sorgulama sunar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Caryl Churchill, *A Number*, Klonlama, Tekno-Hümanizm, Britanya tiyatrosu

1. INTRODUCTION

Amid accelerating technological developments that challenge long-held notions of human nature, questions surrounding identity, personhood, and ethics have become increasingly urgent. In this shifting landscape, the human being is no longer seen solely as a singular and autonomous subject, but as a modifiable construct, open to intervention, enhancement, and even replication through scientific means. Techno-humanism, as a prominent philosophical outlook, encapsulates this vision by promoting the use of technology to overcome perceived limitations of the human condition.

Caryl Churchill's 2002 play *A Number* explores these issues through a tightly constructed dramatic framework centred on a father who has authorised the cloning of his son. While the play

unfolds within a domestic setting, its thematic reach extends into broader philosophical territory. Churchill confronts the techno-humanist ambition with characters who struggle to maintain a coherent sense of self in the aftermath of scientific replication. Rather than offering a narrative of technological triumph, the play exposes how such interventions may fail to resolve human flaws and instead deepen existential instability.

This paper contends that *A Number* stages a compelling critique of techno-humanism by illuminating the emotional disintegration and ethical ambiguity that can arise from technological interventions into human life. The play presents a provocative space in which post-biological futures are not idealised but interrogated, where identity is not discovered but imposed, and the human subject is rendered vulnerable rather than perfected.

While *A Number* has often been read through the lenses of identity, familial breakdown, and the ethical dilemmas of cloning, this study takes a different approach by positioning the play within the framework of techno-humanism—a mode of thought that envisions technological advancement as a means of reshaping or enhancing human nature. Previous scholarship has explored a range of concerns: Campos (2012) highlights the play's resistance to epistemic closure and its staging of ethical failure through acts of looking; Griffin (2012) focuses on fatherhood, alternative reproductive technologies, and the psychosocial repercussions of cloning; Kritzer (2003) reads the work as a study in paternal guilt and identity fragmentation; and Klotzko (2002) emphasises Churchill's evocation of the Doppelgänger and the metaphysical anxieties surrounding replication. While these readings open valuable avenues of interpretation, they tend to leave unexplored the ideological critique embedded in the play's portrayal of technological intervention. By foregrounding the tensions between techno-humanist optimism and the emotional, moral, and ontological disorientation that cloning provokes, this article contends that *A Number* offers a sustained and unsettling interrogation of human perfectibility and the ethical limits of biotechnological progress.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study approaches Caryl Churchill's *A Number* through a literary-philosophical lens that foregrounds the interplay between dramatic structure and conceptual critique. Central to the methodology is a close textual analysis of the play, with particular emphasis on the ruptured dialogues between Salter and his cloned sons. These exchanges are read not merely as dramatic interactions, but as articulations of broader philosophical concerns—identity, autonomy, and ethical responsibility—within a techno-humanist context.

Cloning, in this analysis, is not treated as speculative science fiction but as a concentrated metaphor for the ambitions and anxieties of techno-humanist thought. The clones in *A Number* are emotionally unstable individuals, shaped as much by the conditions of their creation as by the existential implications of being replicated. This conceptual framing directs the selection of scenes and underpins the interpretive strategy.

The methodology also draws upon interdisciplinary scholarship from bioethics, philosophy of technology, and contemporary cultural theory to situate the play within ongoing debates about biotechnology and the redefinition of human nature. These sources provide a critical scaffold for analysing how Churchill's dramatic choices—her sparse dialogue, fragmented subjectivities, and emotional voids—interrogate the limits of technological rationality and the unintended consequences of human enhancement.

3. THE HUMAN BEYOND REPETITION: CLONING, IDENTITY, AND THE LIMITS OF TECHNO-HUMANIST OPTIMISM IN CARYL CHURCHILL'S *A NUMBER*

3.1. Techno-Humanism and *A Number*

In Caryl Churchill's *A Number*, the intersection of biotechnology and identity is treated through a haunting domestic conflict: a father's decision to clone his son leads to a surge of ethical, emotional, and existential consequences. In an era increasingly shaped by technological interventions in human life, Churchill's play invites us to confront the paradoxes of techno-humanism, a vision that aims to elevate humanity through artificial enhancement yet often erodes the qualities it seeks to improve. This paper approaches *A Number* as a philosophical site where techno-humanist ideals, centred on improvement, replication, and control, are not embraced but critically interrogated from the perspective of human vulnerability, familial rupture, and fractured identity.

Rooted in Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress, techno-humanism reimagines the human as a project open to technological refinement. It maintains the centrality of the human subject, yet redefines it as emotionally, cognitively, and even genetically modifiable. As Yuval Noah Harari (2017) suggests, techno-humanism does not seek to transcend humanity but to upgrade it, placing technology in the service of human enhancement (section "The Odd Couple"). However, this vision blurs the line between improvement and manipulation. In *A Number*, Caryl Churchill presents this tension by portraying clones who are not superior versions of a human ideal, but fractured selves, destabilised by the viewpoint intended to perfect them. The play reveals that technological intervention, though framed as a tool for empowerment, may in fact undermine autonomy and ethical coherence.

Caryl Churchill's *A Number* evokes cloning as a techno-humanist desire to refurbish or improve human life through technological means. Yet the emotional displacement and moral ambiguity experienced by the cloned sons demonstrate techno-humanist concerns about the human cost of enhancement. Moreover, the existence of multiple selves, fragmented perspectives, and the feeling of being just one of many copies connect the play with critiques of identity. Drawing attention to these complicated issues, this study will discuss the play *A Number* from a techno-humanist perspective and present how *A Number* transforms into a philosophical space where techno-humanist ideals are not merely spelt out but scrutinised critically.

3.2. Cloning as a Techno-Humanist Practice and Philosophical Paradox

Cloning, as portrayed in Caryl Churchill's *A Number*, is not simply a speculative concept but a revealing expression of techno-humanist ambition. It represents the drive to override biological chance with calculated design, aligning human life with technological precision. Within techno-humanism, cloning offers the illusion of mastery of being able to replicate what is lost, fix what is broken, or improve upon nature's flaws. Yet Churchill undermines this illusion by focusing not on success but rupture. The clones in the play are not perfected beings but disoriented, emotionally unstable individuals whose existence calls into question the notion that human identity can be engineered without consequence.

The existing literature, which this study will explore in the following sections, engages with the ethical, social, and philosophical implications of human cloning, raising critical concerns about its potential impact on individuality, uniqueness, and human dignity. Scholars frequently question whether cloning undermines the concept of personhood by replicating genetic identities, while simultaneously affirming that clones, despite genetic similarity, are autonomous individuals shaped by distinct environmental and experiential factors.

Techno-humanism envisages humans as evolving and improvable projects through biotechnological and computational means. Within this frame of thought, cloning emerges aligned with key techno-humanist ideals by allowing reproductive autonomy, bypassing biological

randomness, and opening the door to fabricating or replicating desirable traits. It marks the human endeavour to take control of biological fate by moving from naturally dispositioned to a goal-directed existence through technology.

Ruth F. Chadwick (1982) addresses the potential moral issues of human cloning. Chadwick examines arguments that cloning is an unnatural method of reproduction or that it violates individuals' rights to genetic uniqueness and suggests that these justifications alone do not prove that cloning is wrong. She argues that cloning should be evaluated in terms of preference utilitarianism, i.e., its potential to maximise people's preferences. In this vein, she supports the view that, in certain situations, generating a single clone may be helpful to solve genetic diseases while reducing social side effects caused by replicating multiple clones.

Christof Tannert (2006) has a comprehensive view of cloning, claiming that medicinal and curative cloning is fundamentally utilitarian, which morally justifies it as its main aim is to acquire new knowledge and find innovative methods to mitigate human disease. On the other hand, reproductive cloning is problematic as it primarily fulfils the self-serving desires of the creator while unjustly limiting "the freedom of a third-party; the clone" (Tannert, 2006, p. 240).

Francisco Ayala (2015) discusses human evolution and how biological and cultural inheritance have shaped the human species. In particular, he addresses the biological, ethical, and social implications of human cloning, while noting the potential health benefits of therapeutic cloning. Ayala claims that an individual's genes, referred to as the genome, can be cloned; however, the individual itself cannot be cloned because if an adult is cloned, the diverse life experiences faced many years later would likely lead to a noticeably different individual, even though physically, this person would resemble the genome donor at a similar age (2015, p. 8884)

Bernard E. Rollin (1999) studies the intense societal concerns raised by the potential for human cloning. Rollin argues that many of these concerns stem from emotional reactions, religious prejudices, or fear of the unknown, and are not rational ethical concerns. He argues for the importance of a rational ethical framework for biotechnological advances, addressing concerns, the alleged risks and potential benefits of cloning.

Amit Marcus (2012) examines the ethical dimensions of human cloning in narrative fiction. He emphasises how the science fiction genre addresses fundamental issues such as personal identity, family relationships, and how it can contribute to ethical debates, especially through cloning scenarios. He underlines the power of fiction to present ethical issues from different perspectives and to make readers question their assumptions. He suggests that unless the other is conceived as an "absolute other," there will always be shared traits or points of connection. Clones, however, occupy a unique category of otherness: though genetically identical to their originals, they differ in age, upbringing, and lived experience. Ethical dilemmas in bioethics about clones arise from the ambiguity between similarity and difference, and this tension is intensified in literary representations (Marcus, 2012, p. 430).

Caryl Churchill, in her play *A Number*, addresses these concerns about cloning, which poses substantial anxieties within the techno-humanist framework and provides answers to multifaceted questions. One fundamental issue is the challenge to individuality, recalling the crucial question of whether one can be copied, and whether anyone is truly unique. Harari (2017) states that another danger facing techno-humanism is that, while it considers the human will sacred, it develops technologies that can control this will. Humanism emphasises that it is not easy to determine our authentic will, that we are full of conflicting voices and that we avoid deeply questioning ourselves, as it can sometimes reveal unpleasant secrets and wishes. Humanism argues that we should listen to our authentic voice despite the challenges (section "The Nail on"). Dilge Kodak (2024, p. 2225) defines techno-humanism as a philosophical perspective that seeks to ensure technology contributes positively to human experience. From this standpoint, techno-humanism advocates for a balanced

and equitable integration of technology into society, with a continued emphasis on placing humanity at the centre. It emphasises ethical and social accountability, seeking to harness technological progress to enhance human well-being.

Taken together *A Number* reflects the contradictory nature of techno-humanism. In the play, Caryl Churchill (2014, p. 166) depicts the existence of clones "as a shock" through the dialogue between B2 and Salter, exposing the play's thematic core, the existential shock of being copied, and the emotionally intense disruption it causes. Salter acknowledges that even the existence of a single identical individual, like a twin, would be unsettling. B2 responds that while a twin might be surprising, the presence of multiple copies is something else entirely. For Salter, the idea of "a number" (Churchill, 2014, p. 166) of identical beings represents a profound existential shock.

Being a copy fundamentally disturbs the human desire to be unique, which is interrelated with the sense of dignity and identity. Being one of the many is unsettling and discomforting, recalling a duplicated identity, leading to existential and psychological anxiety. Furthermore, cloning instrumentalises human life through fabricating a being not for its inherent merit and value but as a practical replacement or emotional resolution, pointing up how technological mediation can destroy ethical grounds. In an exchange, B2 confronts Salter with the truth about a previous child who had died before B2 was born. As the conversation unfolds, it becomes clear that Salter's motivation for cloning was not simply to have another child, but to recreate the one he lost (Churchill, 2014, p. 173). This attempt to replace rather than mourn the original son underscores the emotional and ethical weight of his decision. Representing the clones as replacements is inherently dehumanising because technological replication commodifies human life, suggesting a repeatable unit rather than an irreplaceable self, as the title of the play deftly indicates, a number among the many.

Cloning thus reveals how improvement may come at the cost of authenticity, agency, and human dignity. John A. Robertson (1994) examines ethical questions about human cloning. He argues that human cloning, though initially perceived as strange and potentially dangerous, can be ethically acceptable. He defends this position by highlighting its possible applications, particularly in treating infertility, and addressing associated ethical concerns, such as the deliberate creation of genetically identical individuals or the use of embryos. Robertson emphasises the need for thoughtful regulation of cloning technologies, acknowledging that their development is driven both by scientific progress and by the deeply personal desire of infertile couples to have genetically related children. In contrast, *A Number* explores the emotional and moral complexities often overlooked in such utilitarian frameworks. The play delves into the psychological toll of cloning on identity, parental love, and moral accountability, exposing the blurred boundaries of selfhood and the consequences of treating human life as a replicable entity.

Caryl Churchill's *A Number* presents these concerns with intense emotional straightforwardness. The character Salter adopts cloning to rectify his failures as a father, aiming to raise a favoured version of his son. However, the clones, Bernard 1 (B1) and Bernard 2 (B2), experience existential distress, confusion, and resentment. The cloning, far from resolving trauma, triggers new psychological and moral fractures. The play implies that while the cloning process may be biologically successful, it is humanly catastrophic. Kodak (2024, p. 2235) emphasises that technological developments should not replace humanity; instead, they should empower human beings while preserving individuality and free will.

Churchill's play suggests that replicating biological material cannot duplicate emotional complexity or experiential identity. While scholars like Dan W. Brock (2002) and Francisco J. Ayala (2015) argue that genetic sameness does not negate individuality, *A Number* showcases how this sameness destabilises it. The clones' differing responses, rage, confusion, and contentment, reveal that identity is not merely biological but fundamentally relational. Churchill implies that even in a world where genetics can be copied, the self remains vulnerable, unpredictable, and ethically

irreducible. In this way, the play critiques techno-humanist assumptions by demonstrating that technological duplication does not merely challenge individuality; it fractures the very conditions that make individuality meaningful.

Harari (2017) puts forward that with the techno-humanist perspective, medicine, with all the stakeholders, doctors, clients and engineers, focuses on elevating the healthy, not curing the sick, and on enhancing the mind, not on fixing the mental problems (section "I Smell Fear"). In this light, cloning can be situated within the techno-humanist template as a representative practice and a critique. It stands for the promise of controlling life through science, and yet concurrently uncovers the limits of technological reason. Identity, emotions, and ethics cannot be manipulated. Eventually, cloning becomes a paradox: it fulfils techno-humanist aspirations while damaging the humanity it seeks to elevate.

3.3 Cloning and the Deconstruction of Identity

In *A Number*, cloning is not presented as a scientific advance to be celebrated, but as a force of philosophical disruption and emotional rupture. Rather than offering closure or redemption, the existence of multiple genetically identical sons fractures identity, breeds resentment, and deepens existential instability. The play interrogates the techno-humanist aspiration to improve or perfect the human through technology, exposing its paradox: the very tools intended to enhance life often destabilise the psychological and ethical foundations of personhood.

Yuval Noah Harari (2017) observes that techno-humanism, while promising cognitive and physical upgrades, may ultimately "downgrade humans" by eliminating the very traits that make us complex and morally unpredictable—qualities that "hamper the system and slow it down" (section "I Smell Fear"). In Churchill's play, this tension surfaces most clearly in the clones' divergent emotional landscapes: B1, the original son, is volatile and accusatory; B2, his genetic replica, is anxious and tender; and Michael Black, another clone, expresses calm detachment and rational acceptance. Their shared genetic code does not result in sameness but highlights the instability of identity when shaped by imposed design rather than lived experience.

Christof Tannert (2006) underscores the ethical dilemma of reproductive cloning: it imposes a preordained genetic identity on a future individual, which may compromise autonomy and uniqueness. His central principle—that each person has a right to freedom from the genetic will of others (Tannert, 2006, p. 239)—underscores the moral unease that underlies Churchill's portrayal. The twenty-one unnamed clones in the play, produced without consent or awareness, intensify the ontological crisis: if the self can be infinitely replicated, what anchors the individual?

Liliane Campos (2012) interprets *A Number* as a theatrical response to the "mathematisation of humanity," in which the stage becomes a space of ethical inquiry rather than analytical knowledge. Churchill, she argues, resists the scientific tendency to reduce life to quantifiable data, instead drawing attention to the dislocations caused when identity is treated as repeatable and formulaic (Campos, 2012, p. 27). The disappearance of names in the play and the repeated use of deictics, numbers, and generic terms marks a linguistic erosion of subjectivity.

Dan W. Brock (2002) addresses a key psychological issue in cloning: the threat not to one's numerical identity, but to one's sense of self. While rejecting genetic determinism, he acknowledges the risk that a clone may experience their life as derivative, their future constrained by the life of the genetic original. The sense of inherited expectation can distort autonomy and foster a diminished self-concept (pp. 315–316). Churchill stages precisely this anxiety through B2's growing awareness that his life has been orchestrated as a repetition, not an unfolding. His assertion, "I'm just a copy. I'm not the real one," (Churchill, 2014, p. 174) captures this collapse of uniqueness and the profound emotional toll it exacts.

Francisco Ayala (2015) draws a critical distinction between genotype and phenotype, arguing that identity is not reducible to genetic material but emerges from the interaction of genes with environment, memory, and social relationships (p. 8884). Churchill's play reinforces this idea. Although the clones share a genome, their phenotypic lives diverge sharply due to the ethical, emotional, and social conditions under which they were created. Identity, in *A Number*, is not a biological constant but a site of conflict shaped by contingency and rupture.

John A. Robertson (1994, p. 10) acknowledges that identical twinning, whether natural or artificial, is not inherently harmful. Yet *A Number* questions the psychological consequences of cloning through B2's anguish over his predetermined identity. Salter's desire to recreate an idealised child results in B2 being given "the same name" (Churchill, 2014, p. 175) and raised as a substitute, rather than as a person in his own right. This reveals the emotional and ethical dissonance between genetic replication and meaningful individuality.

Ray Kurzweil (2005), like many ethicists, considers human cloning unethical in its current form due to the high likelihood of genetic error and developmental failure (section "Human Cloning: The Last Application"). At the same time, Kurzweil expresses optimism about the future of cloning, suggesting that perfecting the technique could "defuse a sensitive ethical and political issue" and become "an ideal solution from a scientific perspective" (section "Human Somatic-Cell Engineering"). He draws a distinction between physical and mental cloning, asserting that genetic replication does not reproduce identity in a philosophical or psychological sense—memories, personality, and moral development remain unique to the individual (section "Human Cloning Revisited"). Kurzweil adopts a cautiously optimistic perspective, recognising the ethical and technical problems associated with current cloning practices, yet anticipating that future advances may resolve these concerns and uphold the distinctiveness of individual identity.

In *A Number*, Michael Black appears to embody a similar view. He maintains a rational, untroubled perspective on his cloned origin, suggesting that identity is shaped by experience rather than determined by biology. However, Churchill's portrayal complicates such optimism. Despite Michael's functional and emotionally stable life, the play underscores the psychological and existential burdens experienced by other clones. The emotional dislocation and ethical confusion voiced by B1 and B2 foreground the deeper human cost of cloning—a cost not accounted for by purely scientific or utilitarian arguments. Churchill resists the notion that technological success equates to ethical justification. Instead, she affirms that identity cannot be reduced to genetic sameness; it emerges through memory, relationship, and moral consciousness. In this way, the play privileges emotional and spiritual depth over technological feasibility.

Techno-humanism rests on the belief that technological replication can repair or improve the human condition. *A Number* systematically challenges this premise. Salter's attempt to recreate a better version of his son fails not because the cloning process is flawed, but because it disregards the emotional, historical, and ethical dimensions of human life. As Harari (2017) warns, the more we develop the ability to redesign the human will, the less stable it becomes as a source of meaning. Churchill dramatises this instability: in seeking to master life through replication, Salter forfeits the very qualities that make life meaningful—love, forgiveness, and moral clarity. The play insists that identity is not programmable and that efforts to fabricate it come at a profound existential cost.

3.4. Technological Redemption and Ethical Dissonance

In *A Number*, Salter's decision to clone his son is framed not as scientific progress but as an emotionally driven attempt at repair. What he envisions as technological redemption—a second chance to raise a child properly—becomes a catalyst for deeper emotional damage. The play critiques techno-humanism by exposing how its promise of perfection through replication collapses when confronted with human unpredictability, grief, and ethical ambiguity. The clones are not blank slates,

but individuals shaped by loss, expectation, and displacement. In seeking to master the past through science, Salter merely reproduces his failures in multiplied form.

Harari (2017) notes that techno-humanist logic assumes discomfort can be resolved and complexity simplified through technological design. Yet, as he cautions, the real challenge lies in locating "the problematic spot" and knowing how to fix it (section "The Nail on"). Salter's belief that cloning could erase his paternal shortcomings reveals this fallacy. He justifies his actions by appealing to scientific success because "I am your father, it was by an artificial the forefront of science but I am genetically" (Churchill, 2014, p. 173)—but his fragmented speech betrays the instability of that claim.

Salter's rationale—that B2 is "the same" as the lost child and therefore a chance to perfect the past—encapsulates a core tenet of techno-humanism: the idea that human fallibility can be overcome through technological means. Churchill exposes the emotional and ethical inadequacy of this position. For B1, the original son, cloning is not redemption but rejection. He recounts how "this painless scrape" of his cells was taken, while "the rest of me" was discarded. His outrage lies not in the cloning procedure itself, but in the implication that he was expendable—a surplus to be replaced. Salter's evasive response that "it didn't hurt you" (Churchill, 2014, p. 177) highlights the moral void at the centre of his justification.

The scene between B1 and Salter encapsulates the play's deeper question: can identity, once broken, be technologically repaired? Churchill does not answer definitively, but she makes clear that biological reproduction cannot substitute for emotional responsibility. Salter's view of B2 as a new beginning reduces him to a technological project, not a person. This instrumental logic, in which cloning becomes a means to alleviate guilt, is deeply problematic. It positions the child not as an end in himself but as a solution to someone else's failure.

David Elliott (1998, p. 27) challenges the assumption that cloning is inherently unethical, arguing instead that moral concerns arise from the consequences and context of cloning. However, *A Number* reveals that these consequences are more than speculative. When B2 realises he is just one of many cloned copies as "a number of us made somehow" (Churchill, 2014, p. 172)—the issue of consent and commodification becomes unavoidable. Salter's admission that some clones failed and were discarded reduces human life to a failed experiment. The emotional weight of B1's realisation—that he may have been just one version that "worked out all right" (Churchill, 2014, p. 178)—dramatises the cold detachment of this process.

Jeff McMahan (1999) defends the moral permissibility of terminating clones before the onset of consciousness, tying moral status to psychological development rather than biological life. However, Churchill shifts attention from when life begins to how life is valued. The adult clones in *A Number* are emotionally articulate, fully sentient individuals, yet treated as disposable products. Their existence reveals that the true ethical failure lies not in the moment of creation but in the utilitarian motives and detachment that shape it.

Churchill also interrogates the fantasy of control embedded in techno-humanist logic. Salter believes cloning allows him to reset his paternal role, correct past errors, and engineer emotional closure. But as Griffin (2012) argues, *A Number* complicates the notion of familial bonds and shows that genetic connection does not guarantee emotional intimacy. The varying responses of B1, B2, and Michael Black—ranging from rage to ambivalence—highlight the unpredictability of human feeling. When Salter seeks emotional resonance from Michael, he is met with political reflection rather than personal revelation. Salter's disappointed plea for "something from deep inside your life" (Churchill, 2014, p. 202) underscores the inadequacy of technological replication in restoring genuine connection.

Ultimately, *A Number* presents a dual ethical critique. First, it condemns the reduction of persons to programmable objects, revealing the spiritual and relational violence of such logic. Second,

it exposes the moral complacency of those who use technology to serve private needs under the guise of progress. Churchill dismantles the techno-humanist illusion that technological tools can redeem human error. Instead, she suggests that they merely displace its consequences—transforming unresolved guilt into more intricate and destabilising ethical terrain.

3.5. The Loss of Uniqueness and Human Value

One of the most insightful outcomes of cloning in *A Number* is its disruption of the idea of human uniqueness. In a world where people can be duplicated, the core belief in being unique, irreplaceable, or authentically oneself is diminished. Churchill's technologically produced characters struggle not only with the existential shock of being clones but with the loss of an identity grounded in distinctiveness. This elimination of uniqueness represents not just a personal catastrophe but an ontological crisis that defies techno-humanist expectations about progress and value.

Bernard 2's resentment is stimulated by the fact of being cloned, and by the realisation that his existence is no longer exclusive. B2 is a number, a serialised duplication rather than a distinct human being "because they said that none of us was the original" (Churchill, 2014, p. 171). Klotzko (2002) delves into the central theme of the play, exploring the implications of discovering oneself as a clone. This revelation raises profound questions about how it might impact one's sense of identity and shape relationships, particularly with the other clone (p.1043). In this context, Churchill creates a world where identity is no longer defined by biography, but by manufacture and iteration. The human being, once envisioned as possessing moral and emotional worth, is now viewed as a subject of the reproductive process. B2 explains the emotional and psychological burden of this, "you were one of the people who acquired, something like that" (Churchill, 2014, p. 172). His growing awareness—that he is one among many, lacking origin or primacy—triggers a profound crisis of self-worth, driven by the loss of ontological uniqueness.

This crisis, however, is not confined to the clones. It reverberates through Salter himself, who, in one of the play's most emotionally fragmented and psychologically fraught monologues, spirals into guilt, desperation, and disoriented self-justification. In his attempt to communicate with B1, Salter delivers a rambling speech that oscillates between denial, confession, and emotional pleading:

> What about the others? or is he the only one you hated because I loved him, I don't love the others, you and I have got common cause against the others don't forget, I'm still hoping we'll make our fortunes there. I'm going to talk to a solicitor, I've been too busy not busy but it's been like a storm going on I don't know what's gone on, it's not been very long ago it all started. You're not going to be a serial, wipe them all out so you're the only, back like it was at the start I'd understand that. If they do catch up with you, I'm sure they won't I'm sure you know what you're, if they do we'll tell them it was me it was my fault anyway you look at it. Don't you agree, don't you feel that? Don't stop talking to me. It wasn't his fault, you should have killed me, it's my fault you. Perhaps you're going to kill me, is that why you've stopped talking? Shall I kill myself? I'd do that for you if you like, would you like that? (Churchill, 2014, p. 198)

The monologue reveals Salter's psychological unravelling, his inability to cope with the consequences of his choices, and his futile attempt to repair a relationship shattered by technological interference and emotional neglect. Salter is forced to confront the consequences of cloning his son and the emotional damage that followed. His monologue is fragmented and disoriented, exposing not only his guilt but also his psychological unravelling. Through broken speech and lapses in memory, Churchill reveals a man overwhelmed by the implications of his choices. Salter's attempt to justify B1's violent actions, including the murder of B2 and potentially other clones, reflects a desperate logic: eliminating the others might restore a lost sense of uniqueness. Yet this justification fails to repair the emotional breach. B1's refusal to speak to Salter becomes a final act of abandonment, where silence functions as punishment, a refusal to participate in the false logic of replication and repair. In

this moment, Churchill shows the danger of replicating life without moral responsibility, where identity fractures, trust dissolves, and human relationships are reduced to failed experiments.

B1's rage and confusion are because of the sense of a lack or stolen identity. He is curious about the other clones, as he asks "and he looked just like me did he indistinguishable from" (Churchill, 2014, p. 178). This questioning reveals his existential anxiety caused by the destabilisation of his sense of distinct presence, as B1 has no direct part or responsibility in the replication process. B1's curiosity towards the other clones that look like him evokes the Freudian concept of the uncanny. B1 sees another being who looks exactly like himself, which creates fascination and terror. B1 confronts biological similarity that destroys the ontological uniqueness. Churchill's play challenges the techno-humanist promise of enhancement by putting forth the emotional devastation, collapsed identity, fragmented self, and disintegrated family bonds. B1 psychologically struggles against the idea of a manufactured and replicated identity, and a devalued existence.

Michael Black, the only clone in *A Number* identified by a full name and possessing a clear sense of self, stands in sharp contrast to the emotional turbulence of B1 and B2. He appears grounded and content, living an ordinary life with a job, a spouse, and two children. Unlike the others, Michael exhibits no existential distress; he is neither angry nor fearful. "I've still got my life," (Churchill, 2014, p. 204) he says simply, and even manages to find humour in the strangeness of his situation: "all these very similar people doing things like each other or a bit different or whatever we're doing, what a thrill for the mad old professor if he'd lived to see it, I do see the joy of it. I know you're not at all happy" (Churchill, 2014, pp. 204-205). His perspective points to a different understanding of identity, one that isn't anchored in genetic uniqueness but in personal experience and social connection. Yet Churchill subtly unsettles this sense of optimism through Salter's quiet confession: "I miss them both" (2014, p. 205). Despite Michael's composure, Salter remains haunted by the absence of genuine emotional intimacy. The play ends not with clarity or comfort, but with a muted recognition that technological duplication cannot restore lost human connection.

Salter and Michael Black's final dialogue captures a central theme of the play: the tension between the desire to belong and the assertion of individuality, approached here from a radically different perspective. Unlike B1, B2, or even Salter himself, Michael expresses a calm acceptance of genetic similarity. His lines, "We've got ninety-nine per cent the same genes as any other person... thirty percent the same as a lettuce. I love about the lettuce. It makes me feel I belong" (Churchill, 2014, p. 205) reflect a shift from existential anxiety to evolutionary kinship. Instead of seeking a personal emotional relationship, Michael finds comfort in biological continuity, embracing his shared origins with all living things. His sense of belonging contrasts sharply with Salter's deep attachment to the idea of uniqueness, reflected in his grief: "now I've lost him, I've lost." When Michael replies, "There's nineteen more of us," Salter's blunt rejection, "That's not the same", underscores his inability to detach identity from genetic singularity and his acceptance of the sense of distinctness clinging to the idea of human uniqueness (Churchill, 2014, pp. 205-206). This concluding exchange encapsulates the play's deeper concerns: the fragility of identity, the limits of parental love, the consequences of replication, and the meaning of selfhood in a world where human life can be duplicated.

Techno-humanism often treats identity as something that can be improved or upgraded, a quality to be engineered rather than lived. Cloning, while positioned as a form of human enhancement, raises difficult questions about personal worth and individuality. Ajai Kumar (2010) argues that cloning can violate the ethical interests of the individual. He points out that a cloned person may be deprived of a basic existential right: the freedom not to know, or not to be defined by, the circumstances of their origin. This overwhelming awareness can hinder a clone's ability to evolve into an authentic self. When the clone grasps the purpose of duplication, it restricts the clone's potential for genuine growth and complicates the quest to answer the fundamental question, "Who am I?" (Kumar, 2010, p. 98). In Churchill's narrative, enhancement leads not to empowerment but

ontological redundancy. As it becomes easier to replicate humans, each replica seems less distinct or valued. Salter, in his quest to be a better father and to have the best version of his son, perceives human life as a technical configuration that can be rectified with the appropriate procedure. Churchill's play clarifies through Salter's journey that moral responsibility and emotional connection cannot be reinstated through duplication, positing that uniqueness is rooted in imperfection, experience, and singular memory, which imbue life with meaning. Without it, identity dissolves into anonymity.

A Number offers a critique of the techno-humanist pursuit of engineered perfection. In presenting a telltale vision of the future, Churchill illustrates a scenario where the worth of human life decreases as its number increases through reproducibility. The more we can replicate ourselves, the less we might grasp and respect what it means to be human. Harari (2017) argues that techno-humanism is caught in a profound contradiction. While it aspires to master the deepest aspects of human nature, such as consciousness and will, it simultaneously upholds the sanctity of human experience as the ultimate source of meaning. If full control over human nature were achieved, the very concept of the human would risk being reduced to a customisable, manufactured product. This dilemma exposes a fundamental tension: as long as human will is seen as sacred, the technologies designed to reshape it remain ethically and philosophically unmanageable (section "The Nail on"). Techno-humanism exalts the human will as the ultimate source of meaning, yet simultaneously endorses technologies designed to alter that will. If we succeed in engineering desire, autonomy risks becoming an illusion, reducing the human subject to a programmed outcome rather than a moral agent. The notion of freedom is destabilised when technology no longer serves the will but reshapes it from within.

4. CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Caryl Churchill's *A Number* outlines a disturbing exploration of how techno-humanist ideals, though rooted in notions of progress and self-improvement, can disintegrate the foundations of human identity. The play portrays cloning, fractured familial relationships, and existential confusion to expose the unintended consequences of the endeavour to improve or amend the human condition technologically. Rather than producing precision, such intrusions create fragmentation; rather than reinstating value, they risk removing what makes us valued and respected.

Through the play's narrative arcs, Churchill unravels the techno-humanist stance that combines technological advancement with humanist ideals of overcoming limitations. She deconstructs this stance to arrive at the idea that uniqueness is not an issue to be solved through technological interventions, but a truth to be honoured. The genetically identical clones are psychologically diverse, emotionally complex, morally autonomous, and distinct. Their confusion and individually discrete reactions to being clones emphasise that identity is not programmable or technologically reproducible. On the contrary, it is relational and embedded in lived experience. In this sense, *A Number* critiques the diminution of the human to a technical object, a conception central to techno-humanism.

A Number explores the ethical tensions and identity crises that arise from technological interference in human life. Through its portrayal of cloning, the play offers a philosophical critique of attempts to replicate or engineer humanity, warning against the erosion of personal uniqueness. It invites us to consider what defines us as human, and to recognise the fragility of traits like individuality, memory, and emotional depth when subjected to artificial reproduction. It suggests that we should be careful about modifying or fundamentally transforming what defines our humanity. The means we design to perfect humanity may instead erase the essence of what it means to be human. In Churchill's vision, technological salvation is a myth, and human worth cannot be duplicated.

In essence, the play resists a techno-humanist perspective that views the human condition as something to be transcended through technology, instead promoting a more cautious and balanced

approach—one that acknowledges human beings as singular and irreplaceable, to be cherished, valued, respected, and protected. The play implies an anxiety that the pursuit of technological progress might lead to the devaluation of what makes us human. As genetic science, artificial intelligence, and human enhancement technologies continue to advance, *A Number* remains urgently relevant. It prompts us to remember that in seeking to transcend our limitations, we must not lose sight of the fragile, unrepeatable nature of human life.

Nevertheless, this reading has its limitations. While the analysis foregrounds a critique of techno-humanism, it does not explore other possible interpretive frameworks such as philosophical existentialism, phenomenology of the body, or critical bioethics, each of which could shed light on the play's deeper concerns with autonomy, personhood, and moral responsibility. Moreover, one might argue that Churchill does not wholly reject technological intervention but rather stages its ambivalence—revealing moments, such as in Michael Black's calm disposition, that complicate a purely dystopian reading. Some may also question whether *A Number* critiques techno-humanism per se or simply dramatises its psychological fallout without endorsing a particular ethical position. Acknowledging these interpretive possibilities does not undermine the present argument but points to the richness and polyvalence of Churchill's work, which resists singular readings and invites ongoing reflection.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering a critical perspective on techno-humanist ideals through Churchill's *A Number*. Rather than interpreting cloning as a symbol of progress, the play is read here as a dramatic critique of technological attempts to redefine human uniqueness and emotional depth.

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