



## Advancing Civilisation

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**Civilisation erodes** due to the reason that it is unable to comprehend itself. Wars break out, a Holocaust occurs and civilisation crumbles due to the fact that people are unable to not only understand the world they live in, but also, each other. Every single writer in history, whether it be the Greek tragedians — Euripides, Sophocles or Aeschylus, or William Shakespeare, or a corporal writing in his journal during the World WarII, or even a teenager writing a piece of work in our modern age, contributes to this understanding.

No text is ideologically ‘innocent’, which means that even though a text might not reflect a conscious subjective theme on the part of the composer, it will still reflect the values, assumptions and belief systems of its particular sociocultural context. Aeschylus, for example, was writing *The Choepori* merely to entertain Greek audiences, however, his sociopolitical and historical context are evident even though this has little link with his explicit theme of morality. Although he positions responders to view Clytemnestra as a ‘butcher ... who mutilated the body of Agamemnon’, based on the actions of her deeds, he is also subconsciously affected by his sociopolitical context due to the patriarchal Greek society. His writing, although not explicit, suggests an understanding of the world, or, at least, the society surrounding him.

Even if a writer’s text does indeed reflect a conscious subjective theme, this again showcases an understanding of the world around him — but in this case, consciously. William Shakespeare’s tragedies are key examples that highlight a

conflict between polarised value systems — conservative and radical. On one hand, he is a sociopolitical conservative supporting both the views of Queen Elizabeth I then subsequently James I — that monarchy had a vital symbolic function within society and that the deposing of a rightful monarch would always result in social collapse. However, alternatively, Shakespeare was also a radical humanist asserting the concept that human beings are equal in essence, that life is significant, love should be the basis for marriage, that principle and morality — not just naked use of power — are what makes us 'great'. Shakespeare's competing paradigms yet again shows both an understanding of the world as well as its influences on him.

The fall of the Roman Empire was a period that brought chaos, violence and backwardness for civilisation and a period that lacked writing, and writers. There were gradual breakdowns of economic and social linkages, and collapse in trade and manufacturing followed these. The eighth century saw trade reaching its lowest level since the Bronze Age, with the very minute amount of shipwrecks found during this period being evidence to this. Several industries that relied on trade, such as pottery, literally vanished overnight, with educational, military and administrative establishments suffering a similar fate, which lead to a rise in illiteracy — even among leaderships.

Also, in the Roman region there was a dramatic decrease in population, with a 20% decline. Systematic agriculture also vanished and was replaced by means that only gave a subsistent level of yield. All were caused by the destruction of written works and the loss of the ability to write. With no writers, and previous works having been destroyed, there was nothing that would give an understanding of the world surrounding them and thus, the slow decay of civilisation became apparent.

However, religion was able to reverse this as written works were still kept and the skill of writing was still being practised within the walls of monasteries, cathedrals and other religious structures of worship. This allowed civilisation to emerge from these crumbling Dark Ages. The Rise of Islam saw the Rise of the Arab Empire. The Franks' conversion to

Christianity saw unity of their scattered realms into the Carolingian Empire, and later, the introduction of the controlled Feudal System. These advancements, as well as several others during this period, were all on the basis of religion — which was based on interpretations of written works.

Classical education was again taught, although it was Christianised, and the written ideas that gave an understanding of the world were reintroduced. As the basic skills of writing became common again, civilisation saw the growth of things such as science and art, and the level of literacy was so high in the Byzantine Empire that it sparked the Byzantium Golden Age. The Carolingian Empire also, due to Charles the Great's education reform, saw their own Renaissance. These were all due to the re-emergence of writing, for it gave the people an understanding of their world and the people within it, as well as a craving to learn more. This period saw a dramatic decline in violence, and an increase in structures aimed to improve civilisation, with the University of Constantinople being a key example. This hunger to learn more about the world surrounding them saw civilisation advance to great heights — questioning one's society and making changes accordingly.

Written works such as the Marxist theory were created for the sake of human progression — and it was one man's understanding of the world in his context and how he questioned it and concocted an alternative solution. But every piece of writing composed by any writer will already aid humanity for all, as mentioned previously, 'no piece of work', be ideologically neutral — thus they will create an understanding about their society. Karl Marx could not have written his *Communist Manifesto* if he had no experiences of the world surrounding him — and the written work of every writer in history contributes to this understanding — thus they contribute not only to civilisation's understanding of its world and its people, but also to the vital means of progression.

Every writer's purpose, whether he is explicitly stating it or whether it is evident merely through the influences of his

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context and paradigms, is to create an understanding of the world and its people surrounding him, which in turn will eventually prevent civilisation from destroying itself, for their works are not only articles that can prevent violence, wars and other human sufferings, but also something that can allow civilisation to advance.



**Sopanna Hong** wrote this in 2008 when he was in Year 11 at Hurlstone Agricultural High School in New South Wales.