

# **From Prophecy to Precarity: Sightlessness and the Politics of Cecity in Western Cultural Imagination**

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## **Abstract**

Western cultural traditions have persistently represented sightlessness not as an embodied form of special ability but as a symbolic condition burdened with metaphysical, moral, and emotional excess. From ancient mythology and classical tragedy to early Christian thought, medieval allegory, modern drama, and cinema, sightless figures are repeatedly framed as prophets, moral transgressors, divine instruments, or objects of vulnerability. Such representations deny Cecity its legitimacy as a perceptual orientation and instead transform sightlessness into a narrative device that reinforces visual normativity. Drawing upon cultural criticism and critical studies of embodiment, this paper traces a chronological genealogy of sightlessness in Western myths, literature, drama, popular culture, and film. By analysing concrete characters across historical periods, the study demonstrates how Western cultural imagination consistently privileges metaphor over materiality, thereby marginalising special ability. The paper ultimately argues for a critical re-reading of Western representational traditions in order to reclaim sightlessness as Cecity—an embodied, agentive, and socially situated mode of perception rather than a condition of lack or tragedy.

**Keywords:** Sightlessness; Cecity; Special Ability; Western Myth; Cultural Representation; Embodiment.

## **1. Introduction: Sightlessness Between Representation and Erasure**

Western cultural imagination has rarely permitted sightlessness to exist as a socially embedded and embodied form of special ability. Instead, it has been repeatedly abstracted into metaphor—used to signify prophecy, punishment, ethical failure, or emotional fragility. Across Western myths, literature, drama, and cinema, sightlessness functions less as a lived condition and more as a symbolic instrument through which cultural anxieties about knowledge, morality, power, and vulnerability are negotiated.

This persistent symbolic appropriation results in what may be described as the erasure of cecity. Sightless figures are denied ordinariness, agency, and perceptual legitimacy; they exist primarily to serve narrative or moral functions. As a result, Western traditions construct a representational economy in which sightlessness must either be redeemed through supernatural compensation or justified through suffering.

This paper examines how such representational strategies operate across Western cultural history, tracing their evolution from ancient myth to modern cultural forms. By foregrounding concrete characters and texts, the study exposes how sightlessness is systematically transformed into spectacle, warning, or excess—while the possibility of recognizing cecity as special ability remains foreclosed.

## **2. Conceptual Framework: Reclaiming Cecity as Special Ability**

The term cecity is employed in this paper as a critical alternative to deficit-based interpretations of sightlessness. Rather than understanding sightlessness as absence, cecity foregrounds it as a distinct perceptual orientation shaped by embodiment, environment, and social interaction. This conceptual shift challenges the long-standing Western tendency to equate vision with reason, autonomy, and truth.

Western representational traditions frequently rely on what may be termed symbolic substitution: sightlessness is used to signify something other than itself—moral insight, divine punishment, or existential collapse. Such substitutions deny sightless figures the possibility of existing as complete subjects with adaptive capacities and perceptual agency.

By using the language of special ability, this paper resists medicalised and hierarchical frameworks and instead emphasizes human variability. Cecity, in this sense, is not exceptional or compensatory; it is a legitimate mode of being that Western culture has historically failed to imagine outside metaphor.

### **3. Ancient Greek Mythology: Sightlessness and Prophetic Authority**

Ancient Greek mythology establishes one of the most influential paradigms for representing sightlessness through the figure of Tiresias. Appearing in *Odyssey* (Book XI) and later in *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*, Tiresias embodies the cultural assumption that loss of sight must be compensated by supernatural insight.

Tiresias' cecity is never represented as an embodied condition shaped by social context. Instead, it is elevated into prophetic excess, reinforcing a binary between physical sight and inner truth. Such representation implies that sightlessness can be culturally tolerated only when redeemed through extraordinary epistemic power, thereby denying its legitimacy as ordinary special ability.

### **4. Classical Tragedy: Sightlessness as Punishment and Ethical Rupture**

The tragic imagination intensifies this logic by aligning sightlessness with guilt and moral collapse. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus acquires sightlessness through self-inflicted violence, framing cecity as the visible mark of ethical transgression.

Oedipus' transformation does not open a space for adaptive perception or renewed agency. Instead, sightlessness signifies the annihilation of political authority, social belonging, and selfhood. Tragedy thus converts cecity into destiny, reinforcing the notion that

loss of sight marks the end of meaningful existence rather than the beginning of a different perceptual life.

### **5. Hellenistic Epic: Sightlessness and Divine Retribution**

In *Argonautica*, the prophet Phineus represents another influential configuration of sightlessness. His condition is explicitly described as divine punishment, accompanied by relentless torment.

Phineus' sightlessness functions as moral spectacle rather than embodied experience. The narrative reinforces the idea that cecity must be explained through suffering and that special ability cannot exist without ethical justification. Such representations further entrench the association between sightlessness and cosmic displeasure.

### **6. Early Christian and Medieval Thought: Cecity as Trial and Endurance**

Early Christian and medieval traditions inherit and reconfigure classical paradigms by framing sightlessness as spiritual trial rather than prophetic gift. Biblical narratives often depict loss of sight as a temporary affliction intended to restore moral clarity, while medieval allegories use sightlessness to symbolize human fallibility.

A notable example appears in medieval hagiographies, where sightless saints endure bodily limitation as proof of spiritual resilience. While such figures gesture toward endurance, they still deny cecity material autonomy. Sightlessness remains meaningful only insofar as it points beyond itself—toward redemption, miracle, or divine intervention—rather than being recognized as special ability in its own right

### **7. Early Modern Drama: Violence, Masculinity, and the Moralisation of Cecity**

Early modern English drama intensifies classical paradigms by converting sightlessness into a visible spectacle of punishment, moral reckoning, and social degradation. In this period, cecity is no longer merely symbolic but violently inscribed upon the body, reinforcing the ideological equation between ethical failure and corporeal destruction.

A paradigmatic example appears in *King Lear*, where the Earl of Gloucester is subjected to deliberate mutilation that results in sightlessness. Gloucester's loss of sight is framed as retributive justice for political misjudgement and moral error. Prior to this act, he repeatedly fails to discern deception, mistaking treachery for loyalty. Shakespeare literalises this metaphorical failure through physical injury, collapsing cognitive misrecognition into bodily punishment (Shakespeare 3.7.80–90).

After acquiring sightlessness, Gloucester is denied the possibility of adaptive perception. His identity becomes synonymous with suffering, dependence, and despair, culminating in a desire for self-annihilation. The play offers no alternative model of cecity as special ability; instead, sightlessness functions as moral spectacle, reaffirming the supremacy of visual normativity and masculine authority.

This logic is further consolidated in *Samson Agonistes* by John Milton. Samson's sightlessness is explicitly attributed to moral weakness and divine judgement. His condition is persistently associated with shame, humiliation, and the erosion of heroic masculinity. Although Samson ultimately reclaims symbolic power through destruction, his cecity is never re-imagined as special ability. Instead, it remains a sign of spiritual failure and bodily abasement (Milton 202–205).

## **8. Enlightenment and Nineteenth-Century Literature: Pity, Sentiment, and Managed Cecity**

With the Enlightenment and the rise of realist and sentimental literature, overt theological punishment gives way to emotional management. Sightlessness is no longer violently inflicted by gods or rulers but is aestheticised as an object of pity and moral instruction. Yet this shift does not challenge visual normativity; it merely softens its enforcement.

In nineteenth-century fiction, sightless figures frequently appear as passive recipients of benevolence, designed to evoke sympathy rather than respect. In works such as *The Old Curiosity Shop*, bodily difference—including sightlessness—is framed through sentimental excess. Characters are rendered morally pure but socially dependent, reinforcing the notion that cecity requires guardianship rather than recognition as special ability (Dickens).

Victorian literary culture thus domesticates sightlessness, stripping it of threat while denying it autonomy. Cecity becomes acceptable only when it is quiet, grateful, and emotionally consumable, ensuring that the visual order remains intact.

### **9. Modernist Drama: Cecity and Existential Degeneration**

Twentieth-century modernist drama inherits earlier representational frameworks while reframing them through existential philosophy. In *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, the character Pozzo is fully sighted in Act I, where he exercises authority, mobility, and control over Lucky.

Pozzo's sightlessness is introduced abruptly in Act II. He is unable to explain when or how the loss occurred, and his condition is marked by disorientation, dependency, and helplessness. Beckett employs this sudden transformation as a theatrical device signalling existential decline rather than as an exploration of cecity as embodied perception (Beckett 81–83).

The play does not imagine adaptation or perceptual reconfiguration. Instead, sightlessness functions as shorthand for degeneration, reinforcing the assumption that loss of sight necessarily entails loss of agency, productivity, and value. Modernist abstraction thus reproduces inherited cultural anxieties under the guise of philosophical universality.

## **10. Western Cinema: Vulnerability, Trauma, and Narrative Exploitation**

Western cinema amplifies earlier stereotypes through visual spectacle and emotional manipulation. In *City Lights*, directed by Charlie Chaplin, the sightless flower girl is portrayed as innocent, dependent, and romantically idealised. Her cecity functions primarily as a narrative mechanism enabling sentimental misrecognition, reinforcing vulnerability rather than competence (Norden 143–145).

In *Scent of a Woman*, Lieutenant Colonel Frank Slade is characterised by volatility, bitterness, and emotional instability. His sightlessness is repeatedly linked to rage and self-destructive impulses, perpetuating the stereotype that cecity inevitably produces psychological dysfunction rather than adaptive resilience (Darke 185–187).

A further example appears in *Wait Until Dark*, directed by Terence Young. The protagonist Susy Hendrix is placed in a state of extreme vulnerability, with the narrative exploiting sightlessness to heighten suspense. Although Susy demonstrates strategic intelligence, the film ultimately frames Cecity as a condition that invites danger and victimisation rather than recognising it as special ability grounded in perceptual adaptation (Longmore 101–103).

## **11. Folklore, Cartoons, and Popular Culture: Caricature and Compensatory Excess**

In Western folklore, sightlessness frequently appears in the figure of the sightless beggar, minstrel, or seer—characters who exist at the margins of society as objects of charity or moral instruction. These figures reinforce dependency and social exclusion rather than perceptual legitimacy.

In contemporary popular culture and animation, such patterns persist through caricature and ridicule. In *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, sightless characters are often deployed as comic devices, their cecity reduced to confusion, incompetence, or exaggerated helplessness.

Comic book culture presents a different but equally problematic model through Daredevil. While ostensibly challenging visual normativity, Daredevil's cecity is immediately compensated through hyper-sensory excess and extraordinary physical prowess. This compensatory logic reinforces the belief that sightlessness is acceptable only when overcorrected through exceptional ability, denying ordinary cecity recognition as special ability.

## **12. Conclusion: Reclaiming Cecity from Western Cultural Metaphor**

Across Western myths, literature, drama, cinema, and popular culture, sightlessness has been persistently mobilized as metaphor rather than acknowledged as embodied reality. Whether framed as prophetic compensation, moral punishment, sentimental vulnerability, existential collapse, or compensatory excess, cecity is rarely permitted to exist as a legitimate mode of perception.

These representational strategies privilege visual normativity and marginalise special ability by denying sightless figures ordinariness, agency, and social embeddedness. Reclaiming sightlessness as cecity requires dismantling the symbolic burdens imposed upon it and recognizing special ability as an integral aspect of human diversity rather than a narrative problem to be resolved.

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