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Editors:
    Loredana Bercuci
    Karla Csürös
    Maria Bica

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Matei Dimonu
1st year, American Studies M.A.
University of Bucharest

ANALYZING THE POWER STRUCTURE OF LYNDON BAINES
JOHNSON'S "PEACE WITHOUT CONQUEST" SPEECH

Abstract

In the April of 1965, the president of the U.S., Lyndon Johnson, held a speech about America's need to go to war in Vietnam. The aim of this article is to analyze the speech from the perspective of Borgström's discussion of persuasive techniques in order to understand the inner workings of the speech and measure whether or not it was successful. I will take into consideration what Benjamin Quail (2021) called 'the Johnsonian style,' a speech-writing manner that prioritizes agreement, and how it is employed in the speech. I intend to show how the style in question makes use specifically of Borgström's discursive strategies pandering to democratic society. The effectiveness of the speech will be judged by the approval ratings vis-à-vis the president and the United States' military involvement in South-East Asia as reflected in the Gallup Poll.

Introduction

Regarding Lyndon Baines Johnson's April 7th 1965 address at Johns Hopkins University *Peace Without Conquest*, in which the president informs the American public about the newly-begun war in Vietnam, my aim is to find out which tools the speech tries to use in order to convince its audience and to find out how successful it was in doing so. For achieving these tasks, I will take offer a brief overview of some of the points made by Johnson related to the need to go to war and an in-length analysis of what Benjamin Quail (2021) called 'the Johnsonian style,' a speech-writing manner that seeks agreement at all costs. It is my intention to prove that the president's style uses, among others, what Bingt-Erik Borgström (1982) identified as persuasive techniques that, pandering to a democratic society, always seek to gain the support of the audience, and do not rely on authority in order to realize such a feat, as it happens in non-democratic government.

I will also discuss whether the speech was successful with the American public, and the word "success" is used here in the sense of fulfilling Borgström's definition of "speech as persuasion," as being "a process through which a politician is able to gain and retain the audience's sympathy and approval" (Borgström, 1982: 313). I intend to measure this ability of retaining sympathy and approval with the aid of data published by the Gallup corporation regarding the public approval in the United

States of both America's involvement in Vietnam and the president's job between August 1964 and November 1965.

Historical Context of America's Involvement in Vietnam

In the wake of the Second World War, there begun what British historian Robert Young calls 'The Third Age of Postcolonialism' (2016), a period of time in which a political and territorial detachment occurred between the old Colonial Empires after the 20th century. Historically, this detachment often came by means of armed conflict, and The First Indochina War can serve as a very adequate example for this reality of the second half of the 20th century.

In the 1950s, the country currently known as Vietnam used to be divided along the 17th parallel, between North, leaning towards the Socialist Bloc and The People's Republic of China, and United States-aligned South, both having broken off from the French Empire in the aftermath of the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954. Following the defeat of the French and the separation of the two countries, tensions would rise between the governments of North and South Vietnam, tensions that would ultimately result in what is certainly remembered by all sides involved as a tragic chapter of history – a conflict that would last ten years, between 1965 to 1975.

Robert McNamara, after serving as the eighth United States secretary of defense, wrote extensively about the conflict into his retirement. McNamara's account of the events rarely omits mentioning (1995: 143, 151, 364, 457) the United States DESOTO patrol operation that was carried out in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin. Due to his extensive recollection of pre-war Vietnamese politics (1995: 70-105), it seems that McNamara's opinion is that the origin of the conflict is a crucial point of discussion when explaining the War in Vietnam, and one could argue that, for the purposes of this this article, looking at the events that led to the speech in the first place should offer valuable insight for the analysis.

At precisely 9 PM, on the 6th of August, 1964, after what was then perceived as repeated harassment by the North Vietnamese Navy of the United States water patrols, the presidential cabinet emitted a resolution that stated that "the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force" in aiding South Vietnam in "defense of its freedom" (U.S. Congress, 1964). It was unanimously voted upon the next day by the Congress.

After prolonged debate with former president Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was an advocate for using military intervention in order to contain Communism (McNamara, 1995:183), and United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, Max Taylor, President Lyndon B. Johnson finally ordered a bombing campaign in North Vietnam on the 2nd of March, 1965. Six days later, the first ground troops arrived at Da Nang, officially beginning America's ten-year struggle in the region. A month later,

president Johnson would hold the speech "Peace Without Conquest" at Johns Hopkins University, in a lecture hall full of students.

Quail's 'Johnsonian Style'

When it came to Johnson's style of talking to a large audience, American Studies expert Benjamin Quail speaks about the president's desire of be perceived in a positive light:

> He wanted to ensure that the crowd was alongside him from the moment he started speaking, and to this end even had one of his assistants, Juanita Roberts, record the length of applause that he received for each point that he made during the speech. (Quail, 2021: 102)

This constant seeking of approval from the audience is, according to Quail, a central characteristic of Johnson's style of speeches, and the applauses anecdote stands as proof for the fact that it mattered a great deal to Johnson. One may see the 'Johnsonian Style' as a means of maximizing agreement.

Quail uses the speech at John Hopkins University as a case study to discuss the main traits of the style. When discussing the points made by the speech, it could be valuable to take into account Quail's observations on the speechwriting strategy employed here. Firstly, Ethos is used in the form of "emotive language to galvanize public opinion" (Quail, 2021:104). Secondly, it employed a "carrot and stick approach" (Quail, 2021:116) in the sense that it argued that going to war would be a risk for aggression, but there would also be potential for a beneficial resolution, such as medical aid for the North Vietnamese in the event of a ceasefire (Quail, 2021:116). Finally, an "almost compulsive need to know that he [Johnson] was being well received" (Quail, 2021:105), acting as both a possible indicator for this research. Whether he was popular or not after the speech could help us establish if the speech was successful or not, and a valuable insight into the president's personal ambition that coalesced into the 'Johnsonian Style' in the first place.

Exemplifying Some Strategies of Persuasion employed by LBJ in "Peace Without Conquest"

For the sake of exemplifying the traits identified in the previous section, I have chosen three sections of the speech in order to provide the reader with examples for each instance of the Johnsonian Style being used in the at John Hopkins University address.

"The Nature of the Conflict"

In this section, Johnson describes the origin of the conflict: China is "an old enemy" (Johnson, 1965) that enables "violence on every continent" (Johnson, 1965), arguably making this war matter of communist influence versus a containment policy in the region, North Vietnam's objective is "total conquest" (Johnson, 1965), but what one may interpret is that this mere description of international news does not lack bias on the speaker's part. When describing the conditions experienced by the South Vietnamese, Johnson does not omit mentioning the fact that "[w]omen and children are strangled in the night because their men are loyal to their government" (Johnson, 1965). The language is very emotionally charged, so the description and discomfort brought upon the audience by the idea of women and children being harmed due to political struggle grips the listener.

On another occasion, the emotional language is paired with the authority of history: "Tonight Americans and Asians are dying for a world where each people may choose its own path to change. This is the principle for which our ancestors fought in the valleys of Pennsylvania" (Johnson, 1965). The audience is invited to look at two wars as being closely connected. One may interpret the near and dear American War of Independence as being not so different from the military struggle against communism in South Vietnam. The condition of the "emotive language" (Quail, 2021:104) is fulfilled by the kind of language presented above, and, arguably, the "stick" of the "carrot and stick approach" (Quail, 2021: 116) may be the suffering South Vietnamese civilians and South Vietnamese and American troops.

"Why Are We in Viet-Nam?"

The next section deals, again, with emotion and history, but this time it may be seen as having the purpose of justifying to the audience America's presence in the region. Why is the military in Vietnam? It is the call of duty, as Johnson put it: "We must say in Southeast Asia – as we did in Europe – in the words of the Bible: 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.'" (1965) This may be interpreted, again, as an appeal to history, possibly a nod to America's involvement in the Second World War, a war which was won by America and her allies, among other things, claiming that the evil of Nazi Germany had been defeated.

Again, historical parallels seem to be the preferred tools for this kind of speech as this Europe comment could be seen as equating the fight against European Fascism with the United States' policy of containment of communism. Further quotes, such as "there is no end to that argument until all of the nations of Asia are swallowed up" (Johnson, 1965) seem to indicate that this is true. Johnson seems to be saying that an imminent threat like this one is nothing America had not already defeated in the past. For the second time, a familiar war is brought close to a new one, and what is notable

about those parallels is that they both refer to wars which have been won by the United States of America and her allies, perhaps Quail's emotive dimension being drawn out of a sense of national pride this time around.

Furthermore, it probably should be noted that the Bible is quoted, bringing another extremely familiar and hard-to-disagree-with dimension (the privilege of quoting the Bible in a Christian-majority country) to a new context. A conclusion to be drawn out of the two sections mentioned so far could be the fact that agreement is clearly sought after, a threat is being clearly communicated through affirmations related to global politics (the 'stick') and the language belongs to the discursive strategy of Ethos.

"Our Objective in Viet-Nam"

Finally, the last section I have selected deals with the president describing to the audience what the government seeks to achieve in Vietnam by sending the military there. It is probably adequate to acknowledge now that Johnson mentions three times throughout the speech that the United States of America seeks no territories in Vietnam, nor anywhere else, reaffirming that the objective is, seemingly, only that of keeping the peace and not allowing other countries to be stripped of their freedom. This could be interpreted as Quail's 'carrot' of the "stick and the carrot approach" (2021: 116).

The concept of 'peace' is uttered more than a few times throughout the speech, and the wants of the South Vietnamese people are presented in a rather plain, easy to grasp language: "They want what their neighbors also desire: food for their hunger; health for their bodies; a chance to learn" (Johnson, 1965). I believe this to be another sign of the traits identified by Quail for the Johnsonian style: the desire for agreement (Quail, 2021: 105), as both peace (as in lack of war, but perhaps it could also be read as in lack of interference from foreign governments) and the ability to develop as a nation are reasonably impossible to disagree with, as those two goals are objectively desirable things for a nation to have.

This sub-section and the previous two to constitute evidence that "Peace Without Conquest" uses a language appealing to Ethos, has a "carrot and stick approach" and seeks agreement from the audience.

Power Structure and Political Speech

In the essay, "The Approach of Power Structure and Political Speech," Bingt-Erik Borgström analyzes pragmatic processes that belong to different political speeches within different political structures, uttered by the same speaker, King Birendra of Nepal. Birenda served as monarch of Nepal both before and after the

Panchayat system (absolute monarchy) had been abolished, and Borgström, among other things, used the similarities and differences between the king's speeches in order conclude that it is a characteristic of democratic society to persuade, rather than rely on mere exercise of authority (Borgström, 1982: 325).

I find Borgström's approach to be relevant to the primary source at hand on account of those aforementioned pragmatic processes being presented by the article's author as relevant to democratic society at large (1982: 325). As the United States of America is a democratic society, and it is Borgström's conclusion that, in this kind of society, "[a] politician will use speech strategically, and […] try to claim more power than he actually possesses in order to mold his audience's perception in his favor" (1982: 325), Johnson's speech may be subject to interpretation through the processes identified by Borgström's study of Kind Birenda's speeches.

The element of Borgström's approach to power structure that can be applied to "Peace Without Conquest" is especially the theory of 'communitary we' and its effectiveness: "The I is exchanged for a 'we' and persuasion is at a premium" (Borgström, 1982: 314-315). The single most effective means of convincing the audience, according to Börgstrom, is placing the speaker within a community with the audience – it is not one single citizen or group of citizens being targeted to go to war, but a unitary *us*. One may agree that, as far as the linguistics of the speech is concerned, the Johns Hopkins students present in the hall as the speech was being uttered and the speaker were brought quite close to each other. This could be seen as a relevant trait of speeches belonging to democratic society on account of utterances such as: "Why must we take this painful road?"; "This is the principle for which our ancestors fought in the valleys of Pennsylvania."; "We must say in Southeast Asia – as we did in Europe…" (Johnson, 1965).

"Peace Without Conquest" uses all pronouns denoting the first-person plural, Borgström's premium persuasion model of persuasion (1982), one hundred and one times throughout the speech. Firstly, I believe this to serve as evidence that, at least as far as the approach of "Power Structure and Political Speech" is concerned, the speech follows the rules necessary for success with the audience. Secondly, Quail's analysis of the president's manner of speechwriting, with its characteristic desire for agreement (Quail, 2021), could be described as fitting Borgström's description of persuasive, democratically-oriented speeches.

The Presence of Popular Consent

The previous two sections described the content and power-structure of the language employed by President Johnson in his speech at the beginning of the War in Vietnam. As much as the theory could be involved in this discussion, Johnson's speech acts as a strong example of some of the strategies that were employed by other

successful speeches from within the democratic tradition that attempt to convince their audiences: agreement, emotion, and community. However, one should also measure the success the speech with the American public, and it could also be argued that a fair, and possibly, effective way of measuring political success is through verifying opinion polls.

The Gallup corporation, responsible for the Gallup Poll, asked a thousand Americans (via telephone) whether they approve of the way in which president Johnson is handling his job. According to the Gallup Poll, between November 1964 and March 1965 the number of people that agreed with the actions of the president fluctuated between 68% and 71% (Gallup, 1972). Some may argue that this is a quite comfortable position. However, after March 1965, the president's popularity started to diminish, going from 70% to 69%, and then to 64% (Gallup, 1972), beginning a downward trend that could be associated with the initiation of direct warfare between the US and another country.

His popularity would soon be restored back to 70%, according to the first opinion poll published after "Peace Without Conquest," showing signs of a growth by 6%, potentially a sign of growing approval in the American public, thus, saving some face for the administration. In addition, at the end of 1965, 'Lyndon Johnson' was the most frequent answer given by Americans to the question "What man that you have heard about, living today in any part of the world do you admire the most?" (Gallup, 1972), providing further evidence that as far as this poll can be trusted to give a representation of the American public's opinion, the Johnson administration did not lack public approval.

Moreover, even closer to the matter of the speech's subject, the War in Vietnam, another question was periodically asked throughout the period of the Vietnam War in the Gallup poll was: "Do you think the USA is handling affairs in South Vietnam as well as could be expected, or do you think we are handling affairs there badly?" (Gallup, 1972). Just like the president's popularity, the war's popularity dropped from a comfortable 66% in March 1965 to a 55% in April 1965 (Gallup, 1972). The first published poll after "Peace Without Conquest" in April shows that this downward trend in approval ended after the speech, going from 55% to 58%, and continuing to climb back around 64% in November 1965 (Gallup, 1972), bringing the approval rate of the government's actions in Vietnam close to those from before the war even began.

If the Gallup Poll is to be taken as acceptable evidence for the feelings and opinions of the American public in the 1960s, then, it would be reasonable to say that after "Peace Without Conquest" was given and televised on the 7th of April 1965, the opinion of the American public towards America's actions in the Vietnam War was favorable, perhaps the speech even helping the administration to garner the support necessary for the guarantee that those aforementioned actions would be carried out with the population's consent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Lyndon Baines Johnson's "Peace Without Conquest" could be seen as a successful speech from the point of view of the role that it played in Johnson's political career. The style employed by the president made use of emotive language, a strategy that mentioned the risks and benefits of following the path of going to war with North Vietnam and furthermore, perhaps the most novel observation in this article, he built a community between himself and the audience listening to him by means of the power structure the president was in possession of. According to the Gallup Poll, one can argue that the president's actions in April, including this speech and the strategy employed by it, succeeded in obtaining the consent of the governed, and this is an achievement in a democratic society like the United States of America.

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Sergiu-Caius Cîmpureanu
3rd year, English-German
West University of Timișoara

FEMALE MISOGYNY AND FEMINISM IN *THE BELL JAR*

Abstract
In this paper, I will discuss Sylvia Plath's representation of women in her auto-biographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, focusing on the patterns of internalized misogyny and feminism. Internalized misogyny is self-hatred, and my argument is that Sylvia Plath hated in other women what she hated about herself. At the same time, the novel presents certain feminist ideals.

Sylvia Plath's most challenging narrative is *The Bell Jar*, which she published the same year she committed suicide in 1963, under the pseudonym 'Victoria Lucas'. What is different from her short stories is that this novel is semi-autobiographical and thus contains images of Sylvia Plath's psyche. Hilary Clark, in *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark* (Clark, 2008: 58), mentions that autobiographies which portray mental illness were looked down upon, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, but, as time progressed, these autobiographies were evidence for the need for development in the psychiatric field.

Suzanne England, Carol Ganzer and Carol Tosone, in *Depression and Narrative: Telling the Dark* (2008: 93), found it helpful for writers to speak about their depression, sadness and suffering in order to aid in the authors' healing journeys. They mention that Plath's writings "transcended her suffering and brief life" (2008: 93), to which I would argue that the reasoning behind that idea is that her writings, though few would consider this abnormal, depict a life lived by others, a life of torment, of anxiety and of stress, the reality of at least a person at any point in time.

One of the things we can spot in Sylvia Plath's poetry, but also in her novel, is female misogyny shown through her judgement of other women. Female misogyny is nothing else but a means of self-hatred. Plath's internalized misogyny is quite prominent throughout her novel and some of her poetry. By its definition, female misogyny can be understood as a woman undermining and being prejudiced towards another woman. Even though it sounds paradoxical, internalized misogyny that some women possess was and still is present to this day. This type of misogyny is usually targeted towards women who act differently out of one's own idea of how a woman should and should not act.

Mavin Sharon (2006) tells us in "Venus envy 2: Sisterhood, queen bees and female misogyny in management" that, according to Greer (2000), if a woman is already met with prejudice from a man, in order to fit into the workplace, she would have to comply with the prejudices of men. On a broader scale, she would have to

accept the remarks or laugh them off and join in the process of misogyny in order to maintain her stability and status in the work environment. Sharon (2006) also conducted a study in the same research paper, in which three female subjects brought up the idea of patriarchy's influence and the fact that the male-dominance of this world is what affects women the most, shaking up their self-esteem and their own belief system about themselves as women. At the same time, they reported trying to take some of the weight off of these men's shoulders and blame themselves. Internalized misogyny is self-hatred, and my argument is that Sylvia Plath hated in other women what she hated about herself.

Sylvia Plath embraced her femininity throughout her texts, more so in her poems, but in *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath's character, Esther Greenwood, seems to be in conflict with other female characters, such as her mother, Joan, and other women she meets throughout her journey. She tends to have a negative comment attached to them, as is the case with an Asian woman compares herself with (Plath, 2022: 22). My aim is not to label Sylvia Plath as a misogynist, but to showcase how this misogyny inside of her, or at least in Esther, manifested itself as actual self-hatred, which further deepened Esther's sadness.

Esther's first reaction about other female characters is when she describes the living situation in New York when her and eleven other girls stay together: "This hotel – the Amazon […] These girls look awfully bored to me. […] Girls like that make me sick. I'm so jealous I can't speak" (Plath, 2022: 4). It is interesting that Esther admits to her jealousy instead of ignoring it, showing her level of self-awareness. This omnipresent jealousy manifests itself throughout the book and often takes the form of female misogyny, Esther hating things other women have, things that she does not have. She still, however, forms a bond with two other women, Betsy and Doreen, foil characters of one another, Betsy being the naïve one and Doreen being the rebellious one. Esther's bond with Doreen is the first strong bond with another female character that Esther has, feeling like Doreen is a voice for her as well, although they are different: "Doreen had intuition. Everything she said was like a secret voice speaking straight out of my own bones" (Plath, 2022: 9). Doreen also is one of the people Esther wished to be: fun, outgoing and smart. The only other relationship based on trust such as this one will be with Doctor Nolan later in the story.

Joan Gilling is probably the more interesting figure to analyze because Esther sees herself in Joan and yet she still somehow despises Joan. Buddy Willard visits Esther in March only to tell her that he cannot stay for lunch because he is there for a prom he will attend with Joan (Plath, 2022: 63-64), of whom Esther thinks poorly: "She was as big as a horse" (Plath, 2022: 65). Buddy admits to liking her and Esther becomes envious, and it is worth mentioning that envious is different from jealous; she isn't jealous of Joan because she is with Buddy, but rather envious because they went to Yale together, while she has never been there. The next mention of Joan is when she

appears to also be in the hospital Esther is in, to Esther's disbelief. Joan opens up immediately about the reason for her presence there, saying she ran away after hearing of Esther's suicide attempt (Plath, 2022: 213). She also opens about self-isolating and that she wanted to kill herself (Plath, 2022: 214) and suicidality becomes the first thing Esther and Joan have in common.

One day, Esther sees Joan with DeeDee, another acquaintance of hers she met in the hospital, and thinks about how depressing Joan looks, without being able to "even keep a boy like Buddy Willard" (Plath, 2022: 236). On another day, Esther and Joan receive a letter each from Buddy Willard, a moment in which Joan opens up about the fact that she did not even like Buddy Willard, but is more interested his family. Although Esther dislikes Joan because of "the creepy feeling" and "in spite of" her "old, ingrained dislike" (Plath, 2022: 239), Joan seems fascinating to her, as if observing an extra-terrestrial being (Plath 2022: 239).

For the first time, Esther admits that they might be alike: "Her thoughts were not my thoughts, nor her feelings my feelings, but we were close enough so that her thoughts and feelings seemed a wry, black image of my own" (Plath, 2022: 239), as if looking into a mirror. The "black image" represents Joan's emotions, similar to Esther's, but taken up a notch, becoming worse than Esther's. In this realization, that Joan is a darker version of her emotions, Esther realizes that she is not at her worst, and that, in fact, she is better. What is to add to the already discussed scene when Joan admits that she likes Esther is Esther's response: "That's tough Joan. […] Because I don't like you. You make me puke, if you want to know" (Plath, 2022: 240). Esther's answer can be both a response to Joan's attraction to another woman and also a response to Joan's emotions, and I believe it is a combination of both. This can be seen as Esther denying the dark image of herself, the extreme emotions of sadness, depression, and suicidality.

Their friendship, however, did not end there. Later, Esther thinks about how she will always cherish Joan, in spite of her beliefs regarding her (Plath, 2022: 247). In this moment, Joan tells Esther that she is going to live in Cambridge with a nurse and asks if Esther will visit, to which Esther agrees, but actually thinks it won't happen. It may seem unusual that Esther is dislikes Joan and yet she still cherishes her, but it may be a relationship based on the fact that they were together, whether by will or by necessity, in tough times and also because both have in common their dislike for Buddy Willard.

Another example of this is Esther's affair with Irwin. Because of being granted the privilege of going out by the asylum, Esther meets at random a man named Irwin (Plath, 2022: 247). Irwin takes away her virginity and Esther suffers from internal bleeding. Esther decides to go to Joan's house, bleeding still, to ask for help from the nurse Joan was living with, but the nurse isn't there. Esther decides to lie about the situation and just tells Joan that she is hemorrhaging, and they manage to get to the

local hospital, in the emergency ward (Plath, 2022: 253-255). This sisterly moment between the two, where Joan is by Esther's side, is the last moment of interaction between the two.

We do not receive information about when the next scene I will discuss happens, whether it was on the same night as the previous event or another night. One night at the asylum, Doctor Quinn, Joan's psychiatrist, taps on Esther's door informing her that Joan has been missing, making Esther unwillingly see Joan's face when she closes her eyes and seemingly mistake the wind outside for Joan's voice (Plath, 2022: 255-257). At dawn, Esther is informed by Doctor Quinn that Joan has been found hanged in a forest, and Esther's reaction seems to be disbelief before hearing the word 'dead': "She's not…" (Plath, 2022: 257). Although seemingly not believing it, it is the first thing that comes to her mind. Although angry, at some point after this scene, Esther is reassured by Doctor Nolan that nobody had killed Joan, but that she had done it herself, Doctor Nolan being again in the Parent ego state (Plath, 2022: 261-262). At the same time, Doctor Nolan's response does not mean that the one who committed suicide is to be blamed, but solely that they are the ones that ended their lives. With Joan's death, the dark feelings of Esther, her depression and suicidality, her extreme feelings of sadness completely die as well and these parts of herself end up buried in the ground and her day of freedom comes at last.

Throughout the story, Esther has both difficult relationships with some female characters and loving relationships with the others. Her misogyny towards Joan, especially, comes from a place of self-hatred, a self-hatred of what she could have become, someone worse. Although I have argued that there is female misogyny on Esther's part, what cannot be denied is Esther's feminist ideas.

These cover a wider range of topics regarding the woman of the 1950s America. Her feminism mostly comes based on the situations she is in. This version of feminism is different from modern-day feminism and is focused just on the equality between cis white men and cis white women. It is worth noting, however, that Sylvia Plath had lived through the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that fought for the abolishment of "racial segregation and discrimination" (Clayborne, 2024). Plath was no stranger to making racist comments in both *The Bell Jar* and in some of her poetry alike, although this is not my main focus. I mention this simply to accentuate the difference between her feminism and the modern day one.

When Esther tells Buddy Willard that she wants to see more hospital sights, Buddy takes her to a maternity ward. What first strikes Esther negatively is the table upon which the woman is placed: "It looked like some awful torture table" (Plath, 2022: 73). Buddy explains that the woman is drugged so as to forget the pain she was into while giving birth, making Esther judge this method because the drug is man-made to make the pain dormant inside the woman. Although she does not stand up verbally in any way for women, because she does not say anything to Buddy, she

empathizes with women who give birth and realizes the hypocrisy behind this drug. Her take is also a bit far-fetched because giving birth once does not necessarily make a woman want to have another child simply because she forgot how painless it is, but this is the first time Esther's feminist thoughts are mentioned.

When asking Buddy if he has slept with anyone, Buddy responds that he had, which shocks Esther. Although I find the idea of virginity outdated, this scene simply showcases the expectations men had of women. While society would not have judged men because of having sex with multiple women throughout their life, women had to remain 'pure.' The embarrassment Esther feels after having heard this showcases the toll this idea had on women. In her mind, to Buddy, the fact that she believed him to be a virgin is a laughing matter. Here she also mentions that when she first went to Buddy's house, his mother was "trying to tell whether" she "was a virgin or not" (Plath, 2022: 79), which might seem harmless, but it adds pressure to the woman, and this comes from another woman.

A similar occurrence took place while Esther was in Constantin's room, a language interpreter whom she fancied for a bit. She admits that she may want to have a baby herself, but that the idea is too far off and does not threaten her. She remembers an article entitled "'In Defense of Chastity'" (Plath, 2022: 91), which her mother had sent her and that focused on the idea that women should refrain from sex outside of marriage. This article also argues that men and women are different from one another, and that marriage is the ultimate gateway to balancing these differences out. Her mother seems to agree with this article, but Esther says that it disregards women's feelings: "I couldn't stand the idea of a woman having to have a single pure life and a man being able to have a double life, one pure and one not" (Plath, 2022: 91). Although it is something that her mother tried to ingrain into her morals, Esther rises against this idea that a patriarchal society brings. When thinking about what it would be like to be Constantin's wife, this life suddenly becomes unappealing, based on the intelligence she knows she possesses, calling it "a dreary and wasted life" (Plath, 2022: 95); she realizes this is what Buddy Willard's mother life is like and concludes that what a man wants is for a woman "to flatten out underneath his feet" (Plath, 2022: 95). Again, although this is not feminism per se, Esther realizes the wrongs this patriarchal society brings.

Although we know Esther wants a family and children, we are not sure if she will commit to that entirely, but she does mention that she finds it true that after having a family, it is like being "numb as a slave in some private, totalitarian state" (Plath ,2022: 95): "What I hate is the thought of being under a man's thumb. […] 'A man doesn't have a worry in the world while I've got a baby hanging over my head like a big stick, to keep me in line" (Plath, 2022: 241). The first comparison is interesting because this totalitarian state is nothing but patriarchy in this case. 'To be kept in line,' in this case, is to be restrained by patriarchy. This translates into her relationship with

Buddy Willard throughout the novel means that their relationship was based on a secret hidden by him. He was the stereotypical American white male: religious, athletic, and respectful of his parents and, aside from this, a medical student. Esther's rejection of Buddy Willard is ultimately a rejection of the predominant patriarchal norms. At the end, after Joan had killed herself, Buddy asks whether both Esther and Joan had these suicide attempts because of him and if he made women go crazy, and Esther rejects this idea (Plath, 2022: 261-262). This could be interpreted in two ways: either Buddy Willard was hoping for a no, which meant that he needed that closure, or a yes, to further boost his male ego. Even if he seeks closure, the closure is for his male ego to go unharmed, and so, it will never have the chance to get broken in either of these two scenarios.

An important scene that showcases the rape culture and the mentality of the 1950s takes place during and after Esther is sexually assaulted by Marco. As he begins assaulting her, Esther realizes that if she does not stop this, she will be raped and as he tries to do so, it is unclear whether he himself calls her a 'slut' or it is a repeating thought inside her own mind as this happens. If we go by the first interpretation, him calling her a slut showcases nothing but the way men would treat women in the 1950s, only using them as sex objects. If we go by the second interpretation, her repetitive thought of her being a slut because of this showcases the way society has impacted her thinking when it comes to sexual assault. If she is to be raped, the blame will be on her and will ultimately be considered a slut who wanted and enjoyed the sexual assault, because she wasn't married to the aggressor. It is mentioned however that Marco says to himself aloud "Sluts, all sluts. […] Yes or no, it is all the same" (Plath, 2022: 122), showing that a rapist like him would categorize all women as sluts and whether or not they interacted with him, they would still remain sluts. After losing his diamond, he threatens her life, although Esther has at this point begun to not really care, a reaction which could either be one of dissociation after what had happened or one of rebellion against her aggressor.

Coming back to the idea of Joan liking Esther romantically, when Esther asks Doctor Nolan what a woman sees in another woman, Doctor Nolan responds with "tenderness" (Plath, 2022: 239). It is worth mentioning that this type of mentality displayed by Doctor Nolan was a step towards an improvement in the feminism of the time, and although there were more moments in which Esther criticized other women, the presence of her feminist ideals is undeniable. Feminism which, again, in today's standards, would be considered white feminism.

Esther at one point goes for a fitting at a gynecologist and for the first time she sounds a lot more hopeful than she had ever done: "I climbed up on the examination table, thinking: 'I am climbing to freedom, freedom from fear, freedom from marrying the wrong person, like Buddy Willard, just because of sex, […] I was my own woman'" (Plath, 2022: 243). This isn't just a step towards overcoming trauma, this is also a step

further in Esther's feminism, Esther finally becoming free of the chains of oppression holding her down. For Esther to call herself her 'own' it shows that Esther finally found autonomy over her body.

Esther decides to go to Joan's funeral and, after the snow slowly covers Joan's grave too, Esther thinks: "I took a deep breath and listened to the old brag of my heart. I am, I am, I am" (Plath, 2022: 265). This 'I am' signifies the fact that Esther is alive, that she is present. In the situation mentioned previously when she had tried to drown herself, the same words are repeated now, showing that Esther has a need to feel alive, regardless of her suicide attempts. Her suicide attempts were mere attempts at taming the sadness in her heart, not to end her life entirely and whether she was in a clear mind or not when she took the pills, Esther is now more alive than she ever had been. In front of the door of the doctor who was going to deny or accept her request for leaving the psychiatric unit and be free, she says: "There ought, I thought, to be a ritual for being born twice – patched, retreated and approved for the road" (Plath, 2022: 268). Esther's revival came with Joan's death, the 'black mirror image' of her emotions. The burial of Joan was the last step in Esther's emotional rebirth and her ticket to freedom.

The Bell Jar is a testament of Sylvia Plath's own emotions regarding society. Besides her views on society, she also shares with the world her hopefulness for a better future. The novel approaches the taboo subjects of suicidality and mental illness, in order to raise awareness of the 'unspeakable' subject. With her immature character Esther, she shows how fast one must adapt and mature in order to survive. Besides portrayals of mental illness, the showcase of femininity and its struggles is present, ranging from situations in which a woman has to deal with being sexualized or even raped, up to the female hatred of another woman, which as discussed, was nothing more than insecurity and self-hatred.

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Iulia Bandac
Second year, American Studies
West University of Timișoara

DIMENSIONS OF GOODNESS IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S *GREENLEAF* AND
EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE

Abstract
Flannery O'Connor was one of the most successful Southern Gothic writers of the 20th century. Her Roman Catholic upbringing reflects the way in which she constructs her narrative and character typologies. Through her short stories she attempts to reveal the hypocrisy of Southerners in reaction to the social and racial changes during the 1940s-1960s and finds redemption as the ultimate solution. This paper aims to analyze the way goodness can take many forms for the main characters in "Greenleaf" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." Mrs. May, Julian and Miss Chestny believe themselves to be good towards others but fail to recognize their own faults up until tragedy unfolds. Their conversion transpires only through violence in order to be ultimately touched by grace.

Flannery O'Connor is one of the best known Southern Gothic American writers of the 20th century due to her tackling of issues such as race, faith and class relations. Her characters are usually either mentally or physically flawed or come to suffer gravely because of their sins. Her upbringing as a Roman Catholic reflects the moralistic layer of her stories as God punishes those who are hypocritical or to paraphrase Taylor Black's words, are displaced from Him (2022: 115). The two short stories I chose to focus on are "Greenleaf" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." The two stories present five different protagonists who are too absorbed in their fixated ideas that they cannot prevent their own fall.

In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Miss Chestny and her son Julian have a conflict over racial equality. The mother is the typical conservative while the son tries to teach her a lesson on black emancipation. "Greenleaf" presents us a dysfunctional family. Mrs. May is very proud of her fairly elevated social status and looks down on the Greenleaf family, whom she considers white trash. However, her sons behave towards her with contempt and refuse to help her in managing the family's dairy farm. Both mothers die in violent ways but with the purpose of being absolved. In this paper, I argue that the two narratives show how goodness can be used in different contexts but it has meaning only if the characters have religious principles.

First of all, the factor that determines Mrs. May and Miss Chestny to be resistant to change is their common background. Both are part of the middle-class white Southerners whose education taught them to think themselves superior over people from other social environments. In "Greenleaf" we find out from the narrator that Mrs.

May was not born in the countryside and that her late husband was a businessman (O'Connor, 1971: 319). Her attitude towards the Greenleaf family was from the beginning a non-egalitarian one because the father came to her farm for work. Thus she considered she had the right to talk to this family in the manner she wanted. Conscious of her privileged position as a W.A.S.P. (i.e. white Anglo-Saxon protestant) also explains the condescending attitude towards the African-American who works on the Greenleaf brothers' farm because her social category used to own slaves and undermine their intelligence.

Similarly, in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Miss Chestny's bus issue is generated by having lived most part of her life as a wealthy white woman whose family gained wealth due to the same racist system. Segregation is imbued in her mental framework and she feels uncomfortable when African-Americans share the same space with her. Her fears are irrational and her reactions when her son Julian decides to sit next to a black person reflect a narrow-minded mentality. However, she is not conscious of her wrongful thinking and that makes her naïve to believe giving a penny to the young boy would be met with recognition. Although the world in which they live is changing to a more democratic paradigm, the two female protagonists are still stuck in their old ways. This conservativeness may be explained by a wish to protect themselves from potential degradation of the world that advantaged people like them.

Secondly, both women's mentality is reflected by their condescending behavior towards those around them. Donald E. Hardy, in an article about the politeness strategies characters in O'Connor's stories employ, explains how they use them to preserve a "social distance" between them and others from different social classes whether they are between blacks and whites or whites from different social strata (2010: 536). At the same time, he says that this "isolation" through politeness varies depending on the characters' relational distance (2010: 534). That is why Mrs. May does not care to ask Mr. Greenleaf to get his sons' bull out of her lawn because they had already been acquainted with each other for fifteen years. She does not feel the need to soften her talk in order to make her intentions known.

On the other hand, Hardy says politeness also reflects power positions and gives as example the conversation between Mrs. May and the African-American farmworker who talk to each other in order to avoid a too close class interaction (2010: 533, 541). I could also add that something similar happens before their encounter, when she meets O.T. and E.T.'s children. Despite the fact that she expects them to respond at her honking, the Greenleafs have a late reaction and are not talkative to her. In order to stir their attention, she compliments the youngest girl of the group in a rather unoriginal way: "You're mighty pretty" (O'Connor, 1971: 324). Then, she tries to find out where their father is but the boys barely tell her about his absence. She insists on knowing where the African-American is by referring to him as "the colored

man" (O'Connor, 1971: 324), to which the children do not react, probably not knowing who she is talking about. Mrs. May cannot stand this apparent lack of politeness and goes herself to search for the black man.

This episode has a comical effect on the reader because of the discrepancy between the female character's expectations and the children's response. Mrs. May wants to be polite but at the same time she makes her appearance at the Greenleafs' house unexpectedly, without having met them before yet believing the young inhabitants will acknowledge her social superiority and respond appropriately. Nevertheless, Mrs. May's tone is noticeably patronizing and from what the narrator suggests, the children are too young to have acquired a sense of class distinction. The protagonist, though, still behaves like a baroness and that makes her seem ridiculous.

On the other hand, the politeness equals goodness in Miss Chestny and Julian's eyes as well. The latter is also given as example in Hardy's article because of his pretend democratic act of sitting beside an African-American but who eventually fails to gain his sympathy (2010: 540). His mother behaves similarly but in the opposite frame of mind. She avoids African-Americans on the bus with much certainty but believes herself entitled to their children's attention. The nickel she gives to Carver is a traditional sign of generosity but one which actually connotes socio-economic power. By giving money to an African-American child, Julian's mother actually expresses her will for maintaining the same social hierarchy.

Nevertheless, even though these two conservative ladies are the embodiment of hypocrisy, their liberal sons do not prove to be more enlightened. Wesley and Scofield May along with Julian treat their mothers with the same contempt the latter treat members of lower social classes. Olivia Gatti Taylor defines them as "self-anointed and self-centered messiahs" who believe through their creeds they will help their community evolve but who actually come to cause more harm than good (2005: 2). Mrs. May's two sons, Scofield and Wesley, pursued higher education but do not love their mother, with whom are perpetually in conflict. They express their admiration for the Greenleaf family as the latter are more united and faithful than what their mother seems to be.

Their claims, however, are made maliciously in order to hurt her feelings and deflect focus away from their own flaws. When their mother wants to bring them down to earth by telling them how she fought with an "iron hand" to keep the dairy farm business going to their own benefit, they answer with mockery: "'Look at Mamma's iron hand!' Scofield would yell and grab her arm and hold it up so that her delicate blue-veined little hand would dangle from her wrist like the head of a broken lily" (O'Connor, 1971: 321-322). In addition, she expresses her concern about their future after her death because, like every parent, she wants her children to have a life without worries yet they do not know how to maintain the farm. In contrast, they seem to be sure about how their life is going to look like although for the moment their

situation is not that blissful: Scofield pursued higher education but cannot find a girlfriend while Wesley chose a career in teaching but despises everything about being an educator. Moreover, they vehemently reject working and Wesley would not put any effort into taking care of the animals they inherit (O'Connor, 1971: 321).

In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Julian is too absorbed in his own liberal aspirations in order to prevent his mother's death. Although mentally she does not tolerate an egalitarian society, that does not entitle him to treat her as an inferior especially since she cares about his career. Although he would be a good advocate against racial segregation, he is not capable to form deep human connections. Julian seems to not understand that what cannot be changed should not be forced upon. He does not improve the situation by reproaching her all the time. Also, the reform Miss Chestny's son wants the society he lives in to adopt cannot be applied at the pace he wants because, as the narrative depicts, there are still people like her who believe segregation was a positive thing (O'Connor, 1971: 412). Even the African-American man in this story is not willing to immediately accept a white man talking to him, especially if he is inconsistent in his intervention. Instead of giving his mother a lesson, he could have taken care to not let her be slapped by the African-American woman because the latter rejects interaction with white people as much Miss Chestny avoids social intercourse with those of her race.

Moreover, their mothers' lack of goodness towards others may be explained by their context. After her husband died, Mrs. May was left with a farm she had to manage on her own. A single woman running a dairy farm and raising two children in the American South may have put a lot of pressure on Mrs. May and caused her to constantly think about money and have less consideration for others. Furthermore, Mr. Greenleaf was probably a good resource for making fortune and if he found another job it would leave her without a helping hand. Similarly, Miss Chestny lives in her own world when she avoids African-Americans on the bus but that does not take away the fact that she is an engaged mother. Although Julian has not yet become a writer, she supports him and talks proudly about him with strangers. The two female protagonists sacrificed themselves for their family's own wellbeing and now they have to tolerate their sons' selfish ambitions.

The same Gatti Taylor who named Julian, Scofield and Wesley parodic versions of Jesus Christ, considers their mother's imperfect versions of Virgin Mary. She believes the latter are meant to sacrifice themselves and offer redemption to their sons primarily and eventually to themselves. When Julian's mother dies, the latter's endeavor to teach her a lesson no longer has any meaning (2005: 3-4). Moreover, I believe the mother's death is a relief for her as well. If Miss Chestny did not want to change probably that is because she could not have survived in a more liberal world. At the same time, although we do not know what kind of future will prevail in Scofield and Wesley May's life, we may say that at least the Greenleafs' bull ended her

suffering. Her late husband's farm had been a burden on her shoulders for such a long time and her boys' lack of empathy "pierced" her "in the heart" (Taylor, 2005: 5). Thus if she had lived, she might have grown old and lonely.

Furthermore, the use of goodness within the social dynamics presented in these two short stories reflects Flannery O'Connor's own views on its relevance. Robert Detweiler separates the characters from O'Connor's fiction in four main categories: "the Pentecostals," "the militant atheists," "the religiously unconcerned" and "the conventionally religious" (1966: 239). At the same time, Taylor Black considers that all the characters the author chooses to portray are "freaks" in the sense that they "lack self-awareness" regarding their own flaws (2022: 116-117). O'Connor believes this characteristic to belong to anybody and the only manner to no longer be in that state is through "conversion" that appears in a "blasting annihilating light" (qtd. in Black, 2022: 119). Scofield, Wesley and Julian are part of the second category, Mrs. May is clearly from the third while Miss Chestny is a model of the latter.

All of them believe themselves to be righteous yet not participating in a real spiritual experience like Mrs. Greenleaf, for example. Their goodness would be more essential not just apparent if they would follow the model of Christianity in an authentic way. Julian's mother and Mrs. May experience in this conversion transpires through violent death. This may sound extreme but one can take it metaphorically because this conversion means the death of sin and being touched by what Detweiler and Gatti Taylor write about in their articles: "grace" (1966: 238-243; 2005: 5-7). The former states that in the Southern Gothic writer's fiction, the grace of God is a moment of selflessness that touches the characters whether they search for it or not (2005: 242). Julian can also be included in this category because when his mother dies he enters "the world of sorrow and guilt" (O'Connor, 1971: 420) meaning that he gives up his ongoing reproaches and replaces them with "self-recognition" (Black 2022: 119). Therefore, true goodness means a renunciation of the self while being in touch with the divine.

To conclude, in "Greenleaf" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge" goodness is claimed in various contexts but the characters do not carry within them religious motivations. Miss Chestny, Julian, Mrs. May with her sons Scofield and Wesley have embedded in their minds a certain view of the world and consider themselves entitled to be right. Due to the fact that they face social changes which may destabilize the world they knew, the two mothers' behavior may be better understood by readers. Nevertheless, for Flannery O'Connor only those who manifest goodness with religious motivations experience God's grace by their own will. O'Connor's characters are all ignorant of it because each of them considers himself or herself superior. Thus they need to have revelations in unexpected, brutal ways for their interior to be transformed.

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Teodora Leon
2nd year, American Studies MA
University of Bucharest

VIDEO GAME SIMULATIONS OF REAL-LIFE ISSUES IN SHAWN LEVY'S *FREE GUY*

Abstract
Human existence can be taken as a media form because it gets to encapsulate all the artistic products that people "consume." When it comes to video games, they can be perceived as adaptations of life itself, since they rely on works, ideas, patterns and problems that individuals encounter on a daily basis. Given these aspects, the following paper will highlight how a video game adaptation as such has the capacity to ingeniously showcase the way in which humans deal with a capitalist society and approach issues involving their own agency and free will. The analysis will be conducted by looking at the *Free City* video game that is featured in Shawn Levy's 2021 movie called *Free Guy*.

The transition from static forms of art to dynamic ones is, undoubtedly, an intriguing matter to delve into, but the situation can prove to be even more compelling when we take into account a transfer occurring between equally dynamic mediums. In this respect, I am considering video games and *human life* as two examples of media wherein people seek to gain agency through various means. One's existence can be easily deemed as a media form, since it ends up being a collection of all the (artistic) products that an individual gets to consume. It is often the case when video games are thought to be self-standing, when in reality, they could be regarded as adaptations of life itself, heavily relying on patterns and problems that people are confronted with on a daily basis. In this paper, I will be looking at how a video game adaptation of life can serve valuable insight into how humans operate in a capitalist society, one that has altered the way in which free will and agency are understood. The reference will be the *Free City* video game featured in Shawn Levy's 2021 movie called *Free Guy*.

In the beginning, it is worth noting that *Free City* does not just come across as an adaptation of life in general, but it is also a conversion of another video game from the film, interestingly entitled *Life Itself*. This product is the creation of two friends and indie game developers, Millie (played by Jodie Comer) and Keys (Joe Keery), who describe it as such: "*Life Itself* [is] essentially a fishbowl game. People aren't playing it, they're watching it grow. It's a strictly observational experience where computer-generated characters interact and evolve" (*Free Guy*, 2021: 0:21:26 – 0:21:38). While "players" might have been mere spectators to this atypical game, the characters would have become valid models to be followed, encouraging viewers to be more involved in their own real lives.

In Levy's movie, it is revealed that the source code of *Life Itself* is stolen and illegally reused by the CEO of a high-profile gaming company called Soonami Studios. As a result, in order to win a lawsuit, Millie and Keys keep on trying to find proof of their code having been used for the inception of *Free City*. There is a definite clash between financial gain (alongside mass appeal) and artistic expression, a collision that is visible in films and video games, as indicated by scholar Kevin M. Flanagan, in the article entitled "Videogame Adaptation," from *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*: "As with feature film production, videogames are caught between being a capital-intensive profit engine within a larger media marketplace and an incubation chamber for artistic ideas about how we interact with the world" (Flanagan, 2017: 442). *Free Guy* undeniably falls into the category of movies that showcase "Hollywood's rare intellectualization of a videogame trope" (2017: 444). In this situation, the trope is the characters' ability to respawn, having more lives at disposal, an aspect that references the repetitive nature of one's life. The very recurrence of certain daily moments invokes the effects of capitalism, and *Free City* happens to be an actually better representation of life itself, bringing forth the idea of people being "slaves" to capitalist tendencies.

Through video games, there can be an enhanced inclination towards escapism, since individuals have the chance to directly refashion themselves in a world that offers them significant control (unlike the real society they are part of). *Free City* hosts players who are opting for lavish avatars, suggestive of a desire to express a sense of freedom and idealism. One such escape allows them to exercise a form of free will, by signing up for missions and switching among them at ease. Given these circumstances, it can be noticed how non-playable characters (abbreviated as NPCs) in *Free City* end up resembling real-life people the best, in fact, all the way from their ordinary clothes to the notion that NPCs do not have agency in the game and are tricked into feeling satisfied with their own lives. The protagonist of the *Free Guy* movie (played by Ryan Reynolds) – and yet, merely one of the side characters in *Free City* – is one of the people that claim with full confidence that they are living in paradise, with everything they need.

By having the simple name of Guy, he comes forth as a contemporary Everyman, emblematic of a bland life and resembling a "trapped" person in today's society. One may also reconsider the word "free," accompanying "Guy" in the movie title, having the audience members wonder whether they are dealing with an adjective or an imperative verb, a plain observation or a call to action. Both options could be fitting, as we encounter a figure that urges his listeners to collaborate with him and avoid blaming all of their shortcomings and issues on destiny, the belief that people are programmed to stick to a specific lifestyle that does not actually benefit them.

With *Free City* seen as an adaptation of life itself, we are to discern how the latter can be viewed as a narrative or textual medium, more specifically because of its

collage of intertextual references. In his study called *Postmodernismul românesc*, Mircea Cărtărescu mentions that, in postmodernist terms, reality is "dissolved, becoming coplanar with countless virtual worlds that a person inhabits simultaneously" (Cărtărescu, 1999: 13-14, my translation). In other words, each individual gets to live, at the same time, in multiple worlds that are offered by past and contemporary cultural products.

Admittedly, people have different frames of reference or combinations of cultural items that they turn to, but what remains the same is the core purpose of an adaptation, namely "to make texts 'relevant' or easily comprehensible to new audiences and readerships via the processes of proximation and updating" (Sanders, 2006: 19). With video games, there is a heightened fascination towards them, since they constitute modern products, with an "elegant balance of representational artistry and their scientific and technological precision" (Flanagan, 2017: 442). It is precisely their digital context that automatically makes room for more agency on behalf of the consumer; in connection with video game adaptations of life, we are to keep in mind how "most videogames function under the logic of 'remediation,' a tendency within digital media to incorporate, contain, reform, and re-establish old media forms for a new cultural moment" (Flanagan, 2017: 441). This helps us better understand the underlying logic of *Free City*, as well, indirectly harking back to movies that have shaped the way in which we regard a capitalist society or the sense of imprisonment that we may experience.

Scenes revolving around Guy, in particular, can have the audience recall movies such as *The Truman Show* (1998, dir. Peter Weir) or *They Live* (1988, dir. John Carpenter). In the former example, Truman Burbank (played by Jim Carrey), is unaware for a large portion of his life that every single activity he has ever done has been broadcasted constantly for the entire world to watch (as part of a revolutionary reality TV show). The film sees him gradually discovering that he has always been stuck in a huge studio, a fake enclosed city called Seahaven, with all the rest of the inhabitants being aware of the truth. As soon as Truman becomes sure that he does not lead an authentic life, he ventures to do unexpected actions, straying away from a certain "script" and chain of patterns, and perturbing those around him. A line of his – "I guess I'm being spontaneous" (*The Truman Show*, 1998: 0:48:10) – can immediately be comprehended under a new light if we consider the association between the True Self and spontaneous gestures (1965: 148), a connection made by Donald Winnicott in his study entitled "Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self." Spontaneity reveals one's unfiltered side, unrelated to what society expects of somebody; in this case, both Truman and Guy get to be "reborn" and break out of a cycle by taking small steps at first. Truman's above-mentioned line can be paralleled with Guy's own remark when he orders a cappuccino instead of his usual coffee – "I just thought I'd try something different today" (*Free Guy*, 0:09:29).

In the respective scene, all the other NPCs are seen panicking and glancing towards Guy, "targeting" him as a potential threat to the illusory order of their world. However, the protagonist's interactions with his fellow NPCs do end up having an impact on the latter group because Keys happens to discover that they have begun to establish private lives, as self-conscious forms of artificial intelligence: "One of the baristas learned how to make a cappuccino through trial and error. […] And the bombshell character in the game wrote a memoir that's a searing indictment of gender roles, the patriarchy…" (0:50:18 – 0:50:33). It comes down to personal nudges that alter the codes of such characters and reprogram them to gain new outlooks – and this can definitely be translated into real-life people developing (self-)awareness.

Picking up on this aspect, we would notice how the film *They Live* touches upon this theme. It introduces sunglasses as objects through which the main character, Nada (played by Roddy Piper), finds out that there are hidden messages in magazines and on billboards, all hinting to the idea that capitalism has some people obeying, being controlled and staying "asleep" in a symbolic way (*They Live*, 1988: 0:33:33). In the meantime, rich individuals hide the fact that they are robot-faced aliens, another fact disclosed by sunglasses (1988: 0:34:34). In *Free Guy*, the same item helps the protagonist stumble upon all of the perks that are available in *Free City*, from side missions to first-aid kits that boost the players' health. More so than ever, Guy also revolts against the violence that is promoted in the game, by making use of the sunglasses and becoming a good hero, having some of the real-life viewers rethink how they exercise their power in a virtual context (mostly in a malicious manner, by flaunting their authority and taking their anger out on NPCs).

Guy's public appearance under the spotlight does change the game's climate and reputation, alongside bringing a new atmosphere within the real-life gaming company. Antwan (Taika Waititi), the CEO, envisions a whole line of sequels and does not seek out to create a new game, exposing an attitude that fits the "commoditized" culture that Horkheimer and Adorno famously speak of in the study *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The commodification of goods is set to result in a commodification of the human mind, with people being spectators that "need no thoughts of [their] own [since] the product prescribes each reaction" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 109). The intrinsic role of Guy is to have individuals like him realize how the world around them unfolds, but it undoubtedly proves to be a substantial challenge because some may willingly choose not to live with(in) the truth.

We have the case of Buddy (Lil Rel Howery), Guy's best friend, refusing, in the beginning, to put on the sunglasses that playable characters would wear, since he feels that he is not deserving of more than what he has (*Free Guy*, 2021: 0:33:25). This sustains the narrative of people who are aware that they "[allow themselves] to be manipulated" and easily surrender to the features of the entertainment they are exposed to (Bissell, 2010: 46). For this reason, the eventual digital walkout of the NPCs

in *Free City* has stronger reverberations than one might expect at first; with background characters going on a strike, the real-life players are left in a vulnerable game that cannot function properly without all of its "components" (*Free Guy*, 2021: 1:19:14 – 1:19:49). The peaceful rebellion is to be taken as a model for laborers who refuse to be further exploited and can attest that a capitalist society would essentially collapse without them. It is a matter of people acknowledging that a viable solution would be for them to lean more on their position as prosumers, consuming the products around them, while bringing their personal input to these and, most importantly perhaps, actively contributing to ensuring a more qualitative life for themselves.

As a conclusion, with the help of the imaginary *Free City* video game presented in Levy's *Free Guy*, the audience is shown that life can be deemed as a textual medium, a collection of old forms of art that are revisited and re-explored in time, so as to receive new connotations, adapted to contemporary needs. Their "relocation" in dynamic spaces, such as the ones provided by video games, can prompt individuals to "borrow" the same agency that they resort to in digital realms, and apply it in real-life contexts, especially those which tend to be dictated by capitalism. The stifling of one's potential should be combated as much as possible, through the recognition that self-awareness in itself already implies a significant step in the good direction, with the promise that certain issues are to be solved progressively when the passive, virtual NPC is symbolically transfigured into an active, real-life player.

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Mara-Cristiana Moldvai
3rd year, English-Romanian
West University of Timișoara

THE URBAN SHELTER
AN ECOCRITICAL/ECOPHOBIC ANALYSIS OF POE'S *THE MURDERS IN THE RUE MORGUE*

Abstract
The aversion and fear of nature determine the human individual to develop various coping mechanisms in order to be able to deal with the supposed threat. The tendencies of the person fluctuate from either an attempt to reclaim their dominating position to the act of fleeing the space they formerly inhabited as a last resort. While going against the ill-intended nature usually brings along a violent resolution, the outcome becomes more intricate and more interesting once the individual decides to flee the setting. As portrayed in E.A. Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," one particularly interesting variant of it is the retreat into the urban setting, a place of industrialization and control where the dynamic of the world rarely ever allows any natural disruption. From an ecocritical perspective, the entire process of urbanization can be attributed to this need of control, hence the urban setting which provides protection from the fluctuations of the unpredictable nature.

Introduction

When reading Poe's short story, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* through the lens of the ecocritical framework, it is not difficult to draw conclusions from an ecophobic perspective. The story is abundant with themes which explore multifaceted representations of masculinity, the portrayal of female characters as victimized and isolated individuals, and also the dichotomy between rationality and irrationality (or instinctual behaviour). Such elements collectively contribute to the construction of a narrative that is rich in ecophobic undertones and suggestions, illustrating the rejection of not only nature in its traditional sense (by positioning the story within the brutally urban landscape), but also through the rejection of societal norms and traditions (which translates into a disruption of the natural order).

Defining ecophobia

To begin with, it is fundamentally important for the analysis conducted throughout this paper to define the concept of "ecophobia" and to have a certain global perspective regarding this term. According to the Collins Dictionary, the concept of

"ecophobia" defines a fear, a withdrawal or even the action of running away from one's surroundings and more specifically from a natural décor. One of humanity's greatest mistakes was its constant attempt to integrate nature within definite boundaries, to limit said nature and restrict it, an attempt which essentially leads to no positive result. Therefore, "We need to be clear here: nature is not moderate. It is often characterized, Elizabeth Grosz explains, by 'an invariable tendency to superabundance, excessiveness, the generation of large numbers of individuals, in the rates of reproduction and proliferation of individuals and species." (Estok, 2018:21) Needless to say, nature becomes an immovable force but also a force that cannot be contained by the human individual.

Therefore, we find ourselves on the territory of a spectrum which allows an orientation both towards biophilic and ecophobic manifestations – for the time being, the focus will remain on the ecophobic perspective because, due to the status of the modern world/society and its reflections in artistic expression, it has a more intricate influence.

The Murders in the Rue Morgue – an analysis

A pioneer of the detective narrative, the story of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" debuts with an unnamed narrator who starts by introducing Auguste Dupin, an analytical and calculated man, whom he names his "friend" and that he met while "[r]esiding in Paris during the spring and part of the summer of 18-" (Poe, 2023:143) They both end up getting involved in the investigation of the gruesome murders in Rue Morgue and as the wrong man is arrested, Dupin becomes increasingly more invested in pursuing this crime investigation. He is utterly fascinated by the seemingly contradictory clues of the murderous scene and, by the end of the story, after an unexpected turn of events, Dupin manages to prove that not only was the wrong man arrested as a suspect, but also that the criminal wasn't man at all – it was an orangutan.

The first ecocritical aspect worth taking into consideration through the ecophobic lenses of analysis for this short story is the orangutan's manifestation and embodiment of the murderous force of nature. As a crucial element in the narrative, the escaped ape is portrayed as an incontrollable force of nature multiple times, in various ways. Its physical strength and savagery are most often reminiscent of the motif of untamed forces of nature, which can trigger (as we've previously discovered through the ecophilic/ecophobic spectrum) both awe-inspiring and destructive, frightening reaction at the level of the individual's perception. This is best illustrated by the parallel in the reaction of most people and Dupin's avid interest for the matter. While most interrogated witnesses tend to feel repulsion and horror at the mere description of the murders, Auguste Dupin is captivated by the ambiguity of the case and the constant contradictions in the testimonies. His analytical capacities, rather

methodical and schematic than obsessive and impulsive (as they will become in future representations of detective media), are the ones which allow him to have a more global perspective over the matter and therefore to determine the degree of inhumanity (in the utmost literal sense) it took for the murders occur. Therefore, it is the bestiality of the criminal and its unhinged character which trigger amazement and curiosity in Dupin.

This unpredictability plus the discrepancy between the manifestations of the crime (the given clues) and the expectancies of the investigation officers are meant to highlight how the behaviour of the ape is exclusively governed by primal instincts rather than human rationale. At first glance, this strongly contrasts with other cases in which the reckless and ruthless force of nature has been provided with the suggested sense of agency. But if we take into consideration the uncommon display of the animal instinct within the enclosure of the urban setting it is exactly this translocation, this appropriation of the wild specimen to the human dominated space which challenges the degree of agency in the narrative progression of the crime. The orangutan's inescapable influence and its ruthless acts are also testimonies of the character's allegorical manifestation, meant to symbolize not only the immensely unexplored potential of the natural force, but also its indifference. Nature, though often at times personified and humanized, is essentially indifferent and amoral when it comes to human evolution matters; and this short story manages to showcase its powerful and impartial aspects. The orangutan's behaviour thus serves as a mirror for human nature, illustrating the parallel between civilization and savagery. Nature, no matter how independent and unpredictable, is still part of the human structure and vice versa; the murderous ape acts as the embodiment of the repressed human dark instinctual behaviours.

Another ecophobic aspect worth taking into consideration is the overbearing male energy which appears to dominate the urban space, now becoming not only a landmark of human agency, but also one of male supremacy. In Poe's short story, women are often seen and depicted as ostracized individuals and victims of violent acts. There is a clear societal separation between men and women, who, in this case, are also unmarried and seen as the frail sex, as the weaker link in the chain of natural order. As we slowly enter and progress towards the urban setting of male domination, women slowly turn into burdensome individuals who reach an ultimately tragic and dramatic conclusion. We once again presented with the stereotypically antagonized unmarried woman (stereotype which has also been present before in Madeline's case) who has to eventually be exterminated and removed from the space she inhabits since she doesn't follow the natural order of marriage and male submission. Women such as Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter find themselves isolated within the privacy of their own chamber, while the rest of the male population dominates and roams the streets of the urban enclosure. Not only are they isolated from the rest of the world in

their own home, but also end up ripped away from each other through their own violent deaths – after further investigation, the corpse of the daughter is found "head downward" (Poe, 2023:148) in the chimney, "having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance" (Poe, 2023:148), while the body of her also deceased mother, at first nowhere to be seen in the proximity of the living space, is eventually discovered "into a small paved yard in the rear of the building" (Poe, 2023:148), severely mutilated. Their unfortunate physical vulnerability leads to them becoming targets of objectification and helplessness, unable to defend themselves in the face of the unpredictable and ruthless force of nature that the orangutan as the killer embodies. The matter of these two unmarried and related women (unworthy of even being named beyond their last name, L'Espanaye) living together, without the overbearing influence of a male authoritative figure becomes such a scandalous topic that, within the boundaries of Poe's self-sufficient man universe, they essentially have to be removed. Their deaths remain in no way just that though, and they definitely do not occur in dramatic silence as the murders gain the character of sensationalized tragedy. The suppression and ultimately the murder of women becomes the catalyst for the male progress. In their attempt at a separation from natural superiority, Poe's characters rarely ever turn to violent rejection approaches, as they would rather defy through fleeing and suppression of all that contributes to the apparent natural agency.

It is extremely important for the ecocritical analysis of the narrative and the setting of this short story to develop a more in-depth examination and a more global overview of the male-centred society Poe's city consists of, and the various ways in which masculinity not only rejects femininity, but it also manifests itself through indicators of homoeroticism, fragile masculinity and the oscillation in the social hierarchal structure.

When talking about the subtle homoerotic suggestion exhibited throughout "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," we first and foremost need to clarify that Poe never explicitly addresses or confirms the presence and manifestation of any romantic interest between the two main characters (or any other participants in the narrative). Poe doesn't seem to be actively involved in or intentional with these rather explicit indicators, which render specific interactions inclined towards a homosexual interpretation. However, the relationship and connection of the two protagonists, the unnamed narrator and Auguste Dupin, constantly challenges the heteronormative condition of male companionship. As the narrator reminisces about their meeting and the development of their bond in the very beginning of the short story, he takes the liberty of subjectivity in illustrating not only Dupin's character through the lenses of self-perception as someone who is emotionally involved with the latter, but also the utmost intimate aspects of their attachment. This narrator harvests profound admiration for Dupin's intellectual capacities and, as he follows his close friend's investigation of the Rue Morgue murders, he progressively becomes more invested in

his detective work. He is very frequently mesmerized by Dupin's analytical abilities, as he puts it, and is shocked upon realizing that at one point his companion manages to read his mind perfectly, based only on outer clues and reactions. It's not only this emotional intimacy and dependency which hint at the possible non-platonic relationship between the two, but also their physical proximity and the tenderness which they often tend to express in interaction with each other. Dupin and the narrator share the same close living space, they spend a significant amount of time in each other's presence and engage in deep, philosophical and intellectual conversations during the nighttime. These characteristics of their connection and the intense affection that both of them carry for the other, in addition to the lack of interaction they share with female individuals, all participate in developing a possible insinuation that the protagonists' relationship is based on a romantic, homoerotic undertone. And we should definitely not dismiss this prospect, as it would properly align with the ecoqueer/ecophobic discourse presented earlier.

In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe actively decides to depart from the previous heavily natural setting, entering a new, urbanized area of the narrative. Raw nature is no longer there, in its traditional sense, to protect the heteronormative individual in its struggles against society – the ecophobic perspective determines one to dramatically shift and reject nature, to retreat in the enclosure of the urban world - and it is mainly the man who now embraces his presence among other men, rejecting femininity (discarding it completely with uttermost indifference) and going against the natural, basic order of heteronormativity. In the end, it is not explicitly showcased whether Dupin and the narrator are blatantly non-platonic, yet the ecocritical - and more specifically the ecophobic – theoretical and analytical framework allow us to highlight particular undertones and suggestions.

Elements of fragile masculinity are also essential aspects, worth taking into consideration when analysing the tendency for an ecophobic depiction of masculinity in Poe's short story. The fragile vulnerable male figure is particularly easy to identify in the reactions and behaviours of the most important male characters presented (which are few as far as detailed description is concerned, but very suggestive). Displays of valued intellect and confidence, of fear and emotional vulnerability, of dependency or even the ways in which men react in response to failure are only a few of the potential manifestations of fragile masculinity depicted in this short story, antithetical to a previous traditional model of both the rural and the settled urban man. Such an example is illustrated early in the story, more specifically in its first chapter, where the unnamed narrator introduces details regarding his primary interactions with Auguste Dupin: "I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervor, and the vivid freshness of his imagination" (Poe, 2023:143). In opposition to images of physical/emotional strength and discarded feminine traits, this new concretization of

masculinity anticipates what we will later on address as the "dandy aesthetic," which centers around the dandy man (a man who mainly focuses on his appearance and his clothing preferences in order to emulate a specific pretentious aesthetic) but extends beyond that and ultimately designates the entire spectrum of an aesthetic category, favoring what previously might have been perceived as feminine and fragile (such as emotional transparency and openly affectionate relationships between men of the same social group). For instance, if we can take Dupin's intellectual preoccupations alongside his self-confidence, we can identify a certain tendency to challenge the traditional depiction and notion of masculinity, essentially synonymous with physical/emotional power and strength and in opposition to valuable intellect and rationality. His character and those of the police officers are skilfully set in contraposition as he is perfectly capable of developing an understanding and overview of the apparently inexplicable murder of the two women (in contrast to the police's lack thereof and incompetence). Even their response to a potential failure at unmasking the perpetrator of the evil act illustrates ineptitude, as they become increasingly more desperate and frustrated.

It might also be of importance to note that other male characters of the story (such as the narrator in the incipient stages of the investigation, some of the professional investigators and even the sailor as the story approaches its conclusion) find themselves terrified and vulnerable in the face of the murders, not knowing how to cope with the lack of suggestive clues provided (at first glance) by the crime scene and with the prospect of it remaining unsolvable. A traditional depiction of the male individual, leaning more towards the pole of toxic masculinity, would have no reason to undermine the capacities of the male participants, rendering them more as secure heroic figures – Poe's characterization of them goes against the natural traditional manifestation of masculinity though, and it doesn't steer away from fragility and vulnerability. Therefore, we can also interpret the previously discussed dependency of the unnamed narrator on his close companion Auguste Dupin not only through homoerotic lenses, but also from the perspective of the fragile masculine. The former bases his entire conviction and trust on the latter's intellect and investigatory skills, more or less placing him on a pedestal. The narrator has absolutely no urge to question Dupin's credibility at any point in the narrative and thus follows him blindly in the attempt at uncovering the true criminal. It comes as a clear outcome, from both their interactions throughout the events of the story and from the fact that they share the same physical living space, that the two protagonists furthermore defy the standard of individualism and independence which conventional masculinity entails. Having considered all of these indicators of fragile masculinity, it's easy to draw parallels between the ecophobic rejection of the natural order and the constant dismissal of the traditional male, exhibited throughout the entire chain of events in this short story.

As we move on to other indicators of ecophobia depicted within this text, we stumble upon a fairly interesting juxtaposition which Poe establishes between one of the two main characters, Auguste Dupin, and his counterpart - the escaped orangutan. If we place this parallel within the boundaries of a more abstract framework and representation, it is fundamentally meant to encapsulate the contrast between what would be perceived as reason and instinct, to explore the tension which exists between rationality/intellect and primal, animal instinct (irrational action). Auguste Dupin, as formerly mentioned, is supposed to embody logical sense and the rationale. When discussing and theorizing about the characteristics of the analytical minds in the first chapter of the story, the narrator asserts that "The analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkable incapable of analysis." (Poe, 2023:142), with obvious intention of linking it to his close companion, as he himself states a few paragraphs later: "At such times I could not help remarking and admiring (…) a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin" (Poe, 2023:144). A highly rational and analytical thinker, Dupin relies mainly on his logic and ability of deduction not only when it comes to retracing the steps of the crime he fixates on but also in his interaction with other people (as we've seen it in relation with the other protagonist, the narrator, whose mind he seems to be able to read). His approach is rather methodical and his character is defined by his capacity for rational thought and since "the analyst is necessarily ingenious," his investigation extends beyond the limits and boundaries of the mundane.

On the other hand, the orangutan bases its action solely on instinct – primal instinct and untamed nature. Due to its animalic irrational nature, it acts impulsively and violently with no purpose, which only furthermore reflects the notion of the incontrollable force of nature, situated at the core of the ecophobic theory. However, while reason is completely out of the animal's reach, behavior resulting from impulse and pure instinct is not totally separated from the human individual, as the orangutan's careless and irrational conduct is supposed to remind us that primal instinct exists within all beings. It is the mere decision to (or not to) act upon said instinct which ultimately determines and influences the outcome.

As a conclusion to this, since these two characters manage to highlight each other's contrasting traits while at the same time somehow serving as opposing instances in the parallel between reason and impulse, we might even consider them foil characters. Their opposing nature and their motivations underline the strong contrast between what would be considered intellect/rationality and primal impulse/irrationality; yet, they also complement each other from a thematic perspective, since it's the orangutans wild and incontrollable actions that initially trigger Dupin's logical investigation. Throughout the entire navigation of the case,

there's an obvious need for a methodical and reasonable approach in order to control and overcome the chaotic manifestation of pure instinct.

These two characters also tend to complement each other from a symbolic perspective, as both of them potentially encapsulate and portray different sides of the human psyche and deeper nature – Dupin, for instance, is clearly supposed to symbolize the human capacity to develop intellectuality and the human pursuit for demonstration, justification and truth using all logical capacities; the ape signifies both a darker, more primitive aspect of humanity and the irrepressible force of the natural world and setting. The intrusion of the orangutan all the way through not only the boundaries of the urban territory but also through the limits of the intimate living space of the mother and her daughter are also highly symbolic, illustrating how the inner, most primitive urges of any individual may sometimes break through their rationality and wreak havoc. This once again falls under the umbrella of ecophobic displays in Poe's short story, as it demonstrates the feebleness and vulnerability of all that is human and human-centered in the face of pure, immovable natural force.

Conclusion

Having taken into account the previously elaborated considerations and the various manifestations throughout the narrative it is not difficult for us to draw conclusions from an ecophobic perspective regarding Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Whether expressed through various interpretations of masculinity (homoerotic tendencies and innuendos or fragile masculinity), through a victimization and isolation of the female individual (objectified to the point of complete negligence and even physical violence), or even through the contrast between rationality/reason and instinctual behavior, this short story is abundant in ecophobic suggestion, as it portrays a rejection of not only nature itself (by taking place within an exclusively urban setting) but also a rejection of convention and tradition, considered the societal equivalent of the natural order of events. Dupin's realization and conclusion regarding the identity of the murderer can be symbolically translated to the human epiphany related to instinctual behavior and how primal the deepest, darkest inner nature truly can be.

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Alina-Elena Astăluș
1st Year, American Studies Master
University of Bucharest

DREAMSCAPES IN FICTIONAL WORLDS

Abstract
This paper delves into the captivating realm of dreamscapes as portrayed in the works of author H.P. Lovecraft, manga creator Junji Ito, the television series *Twin Peaks,* and the video game *Bloodborne*. These creators transport audiences into enigmatic dimensions where the boundaries between dreams and reality blur, offering glimpses into unsettling, surreal landscapes that linger in the mind long after the pages are read or the screens are turned off. By analyzing these specific works from these creators, the importance that dreamscapes hold in popular media will be highlighted and discussed, especially the ways in which it can evoke fascination, fear and introspection within the reader or watcher.

The goal of this paper is to showcase the importance that dreams have in the creation of fictional works and worlds, and how using them can allow creators a special type of freedom to push or even break boundaries and convention of traditional writing. For this purpose, I have selected four different stories in four different mediums: literature, with H.P Lovecraft's "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" (1943), followed by the TV series *Twin Peaks* (Lynch 1990)*;* comics with Junji Ito's *Long Dream* (1997), and finally looking at the interactive medium of video games with Hidetaka Miyazaki's *Bloodborne* (2015). The works that I have chosen lean more towards the horror genre, although some of them may also be considered "weird" fiction.

Blurring the boundaries of reality, dreamscapes are a way for authors and artists to escape the confides of their surroundings and create worlds that do not conform to the readers' expectation. The term "dreamscapes" is a combination of "dreams" and "landscape," denoting something extraordinary, created from the fantastical, defying the laws of nature.

Using dreams in fiction has been a long-standing tradition. The "dream allegory," used as far back as the famous medieval poem, *Piers Plowman* by William Langland, has always been a way to push the boundaries of the accepted narrative conventions. Another example, *Alice in Wonderland*, a tale beloved by both children and adults alike, takes place in a dreamlike location, devoid of logic and sense, focusing more on presenting a bizarre and enchanting world. A recurrent theme of such stories is to rely more on emotion or impact than reason, drawing the reader with their curious nature.

Dreamscapes in fictional worlds offer readers an escape from the mundane and a journey into the unknown. In these alternate realities, readers can leave behind the constraints of their everyday lives and embark on adventures that ignite the

imagination. Sometimes however, these voyages take a darker and more sinister tone, which is the case with the works that will be discussed in this paper.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) was an American writer best known for his weird and horror fiction. To this day, his works are still turned into adaptations and horror writers like Stephen King name him as part of their inspiration. His works share a fictional universe, that has been expanded upon by other contributors, known as the Cthulhu Mythos. Because the author had such a vivid imagination, and he was able to remember his dreams in the tiniest details (Tyson, 2010: 2), he created the Dreamlands, also known as by some as the Dream Realm, a different dimension from our own with its own civilization, nature and underworld. As the name implies, the characters in these stories are able to enter this space by means of dreaming, however the events that take place there are completely real. It is a vast, interconnected dream world that exists parallel to our own reality, accessible to those with the ability to dream lucidly or through various mystical means.

Lovecraft's Dreamlands are known for their vivid and surreal imagery, as well as their sense of mystery and wonder. They represent a unique and imaginative exploration of the human psyche and our relationship with the unknown. In these stories, the main character seems to always be a kind of "dream explorer," crossing the threshold from our world to that of the fantastical, strange and more often than not, frightening.

Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath, one of Lovecraft's lengthier works, follows the protagonist Randolph Carter, who undertakes a perilous and difficult journey in the Dreamland in order to find the city of Kadath, which appeared in his dreams three times and then vanished, leaving him with the obsessive desire to find it and uncover its connection to his own past. Throughout his journey, Carter encounters various surreal landscapes, strange creatures, and ancient beings, many of which are typical of Lovecraft's mythos, like the Ulthar cat inhabitants who end up rescuing him from slavers. His voyaging, while quite similar to the Hero' Journey, described by Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949),* strays from the path due to taking place in a dream. Dream logic allows Carter to narrowly escape situations by either luck or some "deus ex machina," fly over vast distances, or simply escape the old gods by remembering he is dreaming and waking up.

The Dreamlands are a manifestation of Carter's subconscious mind, reflecting his desires, fears, and memories. As Carter journeys through this dream realm, he encounters landscapes and beings that are often surreal and symbolic, representing aspects of his psyche. The city he seeks is nothing more than a childhood memory of Boston, turned unrecognisable and fantastic in the mind of a child. Similarly, another character by the name of Kuranes has turned parts of the dreamscape into Cornwall, missing his hometown. This is proof that the Dreamland can be bent and subjected to

the wills of those who inhabit them, especially the humans that either are exploring them or have taken residence there after their death in the waking world.

In the end, Dreamscapes serve as a narrative device through which Lovecraft explores the boundaries of human consciousness and the mysteries of the cosmos, filling the world that Carter traverses with impossible being, cosmic gods and eldritch abominations. In the author's stories, dreams can turn to nightmares in an instance, similar to how sometimes we experience this ourselves.

The next fictional world to be discussed, *Twin Peaks*, is a television series created by David Lynch and Mark Frost. It was one of the first TV shows considered to be a phenomenon, with a huge audience tuning in every week to follow the mystery of the death of Laura Palmer, which is how the pilot episode begins. Two seasons, a movie, and another season 25 years later make up the lore and mythology of the world of Twin Peaks. Over the course of the series, the focus is placed more on the ensemble cast rather than the solving of the mystery, which is never truly solved by design, as David Lynch has gone on record to say he never intended to reach a resolution to the crime.

As the show goes on, the events that take place in the town of Twin Peaks turn more and more bizarre and unsettling. The main protagonist, Agent Dale Cooper, is an FBI agent who has come to the town to investigate this murder. However, his life takes a turn into the uncanny with each passing episode, a situation that is not completely unwelcomed by the agent himself. He frequently experiences vivid dreams and visions throughout the series, which contain cryptic messages and clues that seem related to the investigation, fuelling his intuition and insight.

The most iconic dream sequences occur in what is known as "the red room," a surreal space where time and reality are distorted. Various characters find themselves within its walls, where they encounter enigmatic figures, including Laura Palmer herself. These sequences are full of symbolism and are dripping with an eerie atmosphere that gives the experience an otherworldly feel with their use of motifs such as owl, mirrors and doppelgangers. Characters face their inner thoughts, unresolved traumas and darkest secrets within the curtained walls of the red room. Agent Cooper himself is a frequent visitor.

One interpretation of the bizarre events is that all of the series is, in fact, a dream. In the feature length film, one inhabitant of the town does in fact say the words "We all live inside a dream." This interpretation, popular on the internet, postulated that Laura Palmer is the one dreaming and all the other characters, including special agent Cooper just part of her broken psyche. The show uses this type of surrealist dreamscape to explore the inner working of a broken mind, and uses emotions instead of logic to convey its message.

The following section will consider Junji Ito, a renowned creator known for his distinctive style and ability to evoke fear and unease in his readers. *Long Dream*, a short

horror manga, was originally published in 1997 as part of Ito's collection of short stories titled "Museum of Terror." The story follows a man named Tetsuro who is diagnosed with a rare and incurable medical condition known as the "Long Dream Syndrome." This syndrome causes Tetsuro to experience incredibly long and vivid dreams that feel like they last for years, even though only a short time (usually just a night) passes in the real world. As Tetsuro's dreams become increasingly surreal and terrifying, he becomes desperate to find a cure for his condition before he is consumed by the nightmares. As he loses touch with reality, he claims that another patient at the facility, named Mami, is his wife, with whom he has spent centuries traversing strange and eerie worlds. Soon, his body begins to change as well, in the end turning to dust. To the despair of the doctors, Mami soon begins to exhibit the same physical changes.

The story examines the psychological effects of experiencing time dilation within dreams. For Tetsuro, his prolonged and intense dreams begin to blur the line between what is real and what is imagined. This blurring of boundaries has profound implications for his mental well-being, as he struggles to maintain his grasp on reality while being immersed in his dreams, his doctor even remarking that conversing with him is like "talking with someone from another century" (Ito, 1997: 12).

Through the protagonist's experiences, *Long Dream* confronts existential questions about the nature of reality and the self. As Tetsuro's dreams become increasingly surreal and nightmarish, he grapples with the fundamental question of what it means to exist and whether his experiences within the dreamscape have any bearing on his waking life. The motif of the dream explorer is present in this work as well, similar to the way it was in the *Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*, as Junji Ito's work shares many similarities to that of H.P Lovecraft. *Long Dream* explores themes of time, perception, and the nature of reality. It delves into the psychological and existential implications of experiencing time dilation within dreams, as well as the blurring of boundaries between dreams and waking life, to create a deeply unsettling and thought-provoking narrative that lingers in the mind of the reader. It raises profound questions about the nature of existence and the fragility of the human psyche when confronted with the unknown.

The final work to be analyzed, *Bloodborne* (Miyazaki, 2015), released by the Japanese company FromSoftware, is a video game that follows the story of a Victorian-inspired city that finds itself in the middle of a disease that turns ordinary people into blood-crazed monsters. It is the player's job to hunt and kill these creatures and restore order to the city of Yharnam. The game was a massive success, becoming a best seller within the first week of release, and selling almost 8 million copies worldwide to this day. Heavily inspired by H.P Lovecraft, the story of the game is full of twists and turns, conspiracies and dark secrets buried deep under the city.

In the narrative of the game, dreams play a significant part. Through dreams, the player character is able to move from one location to another, with no need for the

two of them to be physically connected. Using item descriptions, environmental storytelling, and character dialogue, players uncover the significance of dreams within the game's universe. These are linked to cosmic entities, ancient rituals, and the nature of reality itself, adding layers of depth and complexity to the game's narrative.

Dreams (or rather nightmares) also provide another realm to be explored within the game itself, in a vein similar to Lovecraft's Dreamlands, exiting the parameter of what we know to be real. This blurring of reality contributes to the game's sense of unease and disorientation, leaving us with questions without answers at times. The game utilizes these Nightmare locations as links to hidden truths, which are obscured in the waking world. The game takes great care to emphasize the distinction between the "waking world" and the "dream world." In-game locations that belong to oneiric dimensions are not only depicted filled with nightmarish and alien creatures, but time and space themselves seem to be broken and bended to the wills of cosmic whims. Their names contain words related to sleep, such as "The Hunter's Dream," "The Hunter's Nightmare," and "Nightmare Frontier."

Through exploration, the game allows us to journey into the past, to witness for ourselves the atrocities that have been committed by what is essentially that world's highest form of government. One particular way that the game uses this dream setting is by depicting an actual river of blood (as opposed to a metaphorical one) that leads us back in time, to the source of all this destruction, the beginning point of the disease and the death toll of the citizens. Free of logical constraints, the developers of the game were able to visually portray how the killing and destruction took place, not having to rely on text or heavy character dialogue, allowing much of the story to be deduced by the player themselves as they experience this location.

Dreams are used in *Bloodborne* as a thematic and narrative device that adds to the eerie ambiance and gameplay elements, providing a framework for the context of the story. They play a crucial role in immersing players in the game's dark and mysterious world, where reality is fluid, nightmares lurk around every corner and ancient gods have cursed humanity.

With this paper, I wanted to explore how different mediums and authors use the concept of dreams and dreamscapes to create fantastical and exotic worlds, where the improbably is an everyday occurrence and the narrative structure is not bound to a traditional framework, thus allowing the artists' creativity and ideas a freedom that is hard to find otherwise. We have seen dreams as other dimensions, reflections of a character's mind or a link to a hidden past. Each of the four works I have chosen are unique in their own way, and similar in others. It is my personal hope that such works can keep being made and shared, so that we may all experience such special and peculiar worlds, with their strange but intriguing logic.

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Dariana Sârca
3rd year, English-Latin
West University of Timișoara

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY TO SUCCESS
FAMILY DISINTEGRATION AND THE AMERICAN DREAM IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S *LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT*

Abstract
This paper explores the ways in which the pursuit of a superficial American Dream leads to the decay of the American family, in which its members isolate themselves in order to deal with a joint failure on their own in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night.* In doing so, the following sections analyze how the play illustrates the loss of authenticity that the characters suffer, both on an individual and collective level, which can be attributed to the belief in the otherwise idealistic national myth that in modern times has been associated with financial well-being.

Theoretical considerations and socio-historical context

The American Dream has been defined and redefined in the last century, it has been echoed in political discourse and in great American works, which has resulted in changes to its meaning from writer to writer, characteristic which will be explored below, but its fundamental idea managed to remain unchanged: that being the promise of opportunity. The term itself was coined by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America*, being used to put into words the chances that the New World had to offer in the eyes of the first English immigrants, mainly that of having equal opportunity between the poor and the wealthy. Jim Cullen illustrates how constraining it would be for one to attach a single, final definition to the American Dream, due to the differences between what people wanted from it throughout American history. The author returns to Truslow's text and proposes that instead of there being one Dream, multiple "American *Dreams*" can be distinguished, because not only is there an array of answers as to what the notion of opportunity implies, but also due to the temporal differences between the needs and aspirations of the people (2003: 7-8). This entire idea is condensed by Jennifer Hochschild into one word, which represents the entirety of the American Dream: success. These different aspirations that Cullen uses to justify the discussion on different Dreams are explained by Hochschild as different meanings for the word success, thus suggesting that this concept derived from the American spirit describes the belief that people have in the possibility of reaching success, no matter the social background (1995: 15-16).

Fletcher describes the 1930's as a period in which most American dramatists showed great confidence in the American Dream, their writing reflecting the principle

"that hard work yields success, that the good are rewarded," preaching the American values (2005: 109). In the same period, however, playwright Eugene O'Neill started to become actively preoccupied with the motive of "American success-failure" as the trigger for the conflicts in his plays (Miller, 1964: 190). He, alongside other playwrights of the period, was interested in the position of the so-called losers that have been described in the previous section and the ways in which the belief in the American Dream lead them to ruination, claims Miller. O'Neill explores the "consequences of unquestioned […] participation" in the standard Dream that everyone was pursuing (1964: 190), deconstructing a potentially harmful aspect of American society and using drama to convey a national cautionary tale. The American Dream had started to shift towards more materialistic desires much earlier, but the sudden rise in consumerism that overcame the country during the 1940s and 1950s resulted in the altering of familial roles to switch back to those of the traditional American family, only the ideal of the father as a provider becomes connected to the "figure of the salesman," which illustrates, explains Paul, the kind of "self-made manhood" that is respected in a materialistic society (2014: 384). Thus, for the common American Dream of the period, the word success becomes synonymous with money. O'Neill criticizes the society's "substitution of material for spiritual satisfaction" (Wilmeth and Bigsby, 1999: 15) in his works, but nowhere are these values so clearly condemned as in his *magnum opus*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

The materialistic American Dream & the consequent loss of authenticity within the family

Critics have interpreted Tyrone's transition from ambitious youth to a "stinking miser" (O'Neill, 1955: 146) as the "birth of […] the economic Man" (Ki, 2009: 210), which essentially means that he accepts his role in this culture that judges his worth based on his financial status. This not only has poor consequences regarding the crippling addiction which eats at every one of his family's members, but also defines his relationship with Mary, as both husband and wife have a weakness when it comes to money: he becomes obsessed with making money after having been raised poor and she has spent her entire life spending someone else's dollars, as she confesses in the third act that her father "spoiled [her] dreadfully" (O'Neill, 1955: 114). When James Tyrone makes his first appearance in Act I, he and his wife have a brief, but tense conversation about his investments in property which the public understands has happened before due to Mary's tone and his defensive attitude. The audience gradually becomes aware through the rest of the play that Tyrone's current profession as a businessman, a figure which he tries very hard to embody, comes from a place of greed, rather than one of passion, or even inclination towards such a field, as Mary clearly says that it's useless attempting to make him realize that he is not "a cunning

real estate speculator" (O'Neill, 1955: 15). It is this obsession with money that can be pinpointed as the root of the main conflicts in the play. It is Tyrone who is blamed for Mary's morphine addiction and yet when his favorite son is revealed to suffer from tuberculosis, James refuses to look for the best medical help possible, still opting for a cheap alternative, one "within reason" (O'Neill, 1955: 148). His obsession with making money has no real end and no real purpose, as there is not something palpable that he actually wants: "I don't know what the hell it was that I wanted to buy" (O'Neill, 1955: 151). His greed is motivated by his innate fear of going back to the poorhouse as he grows up "like a pawn" in a grand consumerist culture (Ki, 2009: 210). His passion, however, was acting, and from this point of view his career peaked after receiving recognition for his role in *Othello.* Tyrone looks back at this period in his life as a successful one, his happiness also including the relationship with Mary, which hadn't yet worsened by the tragic loss of their other child.

O'Neill does not give the exact date as to when James' dream of becoming a good actor got replaced by his love for money, but we can notice this change in his ambition in a symbolically defining moment from his past that is recalled during his confession before Edmund. James Tyrone carries, quite literally, his dream in his wallet: "[t]he praise Edwin Booth gave my Othello. […] I kept it in my wallet for years" (O'Neill, 1955: 152). Eventually, as the prospect of financial stability began outweighing the desire to become a respected actor, there remained no space for the piece of paper that reminded him of his potential, and he focused on filling his wallet with as much money as possible. He began playing one role again and again because it provided him with satisfactory financial compensation without much bother, pursuing an American dream that Jim Cullen pinpoints as being particular to "the culture of Hollywood," one that implies wanting success without intending to work very hard for achieving it (2003: 9). It is by falling into this custom of working mindlessly for money that James' life ends up revolving around it. Moreover, by playing the same role over and over again, *Long Day* illustrates how the blind participation in the competitive consumerist Dream strips even an artistic man, for he is an actor after all, by authenticity. Once acting becomes profitable enough, the thrill stops coming from the applause, but from the check awaiting behind the curtain, making art itself an exchange.

However, the relationship between Tyrone's greed and art does not stop at him failing at being acknowledged as the talented Shakespearean actor that he is certain he is, as this thematic loss of art as a priority extends to the rest of the Tyrones. The entirety of the family once had an inclination towards art, only to fail at it and to end up giving in to the other thing they all have in common: addiction. Jamie makes the following confession in front of his brother in the last act of the play: "I once wanted to write!" (O'Neill, 1955: 164). Mary used to play the piano more often back in her father's house and at the Convent, a time when she was happier, yet the Chopin in the

last scene of the play does not brighten the atmosphere, it makes it even more peculiar. The scene is almost sinister and the men of the family all look at her in shock as she appears before them "so youthful" (O'Neill, 1955: 170) while she recalls how she failed to return to the Convent to become a nun. From this perspective, Mary failed twice, as she did not cultivate her musical talent, nor did she choose to forget James and pursue a spiritual path. The only member of the family who could succeed is Edmund, the youngest, but it is highly unlikely. Before Jamie tells his brother that he has a chance to be "the greatest success" (O'Neill, 1955: 166) out of them, Edmund confesses to his father that he is aware that his writing will not get him very far in life. Finally, it is worth mentioning that art still lingers in the family, as the three men reply to each other by quoting others, managing to disguise their inability of truthfully conversing to their family through poetry.

This loss of authenticity that the Tyrones experience can be easily attributed to O'Neill's criticism of society's inclination towards superficiality over humanism. The play portrays this in two ways. Firstly, it is seen in this surrender of artistic dreams in favor of monetary worth, which leads to the abuse of substances, and secondly, it has to do with the erasure of Irish culture, which I touch upon later in this paper. Mann argues that the last act of the play gives the sensation of being "in a mental landscape" (Mann 2009: 13), not only in the Tyrone's house. This secondary, non-physical setting also works as a cage for the family. The play does not have, and would not benefit from, a dynamic ending, as all four of the Tyrones are stuck in the lives that they've chosen, or at least in Edmund's case, that their parents have chosen for him. We leave the Tyrones in stasis, caught in a circular existence in which all they have left is the alcohol, or morphine, which helps them cope with their regrets as they look at what could have been, as Mary does in the closing scene, "[s]he stares before her in a sad dream" (O'Neill, 1955: 176). O'Neill does not tell us if Edmund gets to live, but he tells us exactly how each of them lives his life after the events of the *Long Day*: "Edmund and Jamie remain motionless" and "Tyrone stirs in his chair" (O'Neill, 1955: 176). None of them intend to rekindle their passions or change their lives, but accept this collective failure and continue to carry on individually, only meeting each other for confrontation.

Perhaps the best way in which this loss of authenticity is illustrated in the play is in the way in which the four characters are written. Even though they each have slightly different interests and personalities, especially because they represent different generations, the Tyrones are all "variations of the same character" (Mann, 2009: 12). What this means is that on a surface level they can be characterized as almost identical, as every Tyrone can be seen as falling into the typology of the one tormented by his past, they all battle with a health-related issue (disease, addiction or both), and isolate themselves, only talking to the ones that might understand them in order to argue. Most importantly, their lines are very similarly written and delivered. Mann

proposes that each character actually speaks the words of a "master voice of the speaker/narrator" through which can be heard O'Neill's own sentiments that belong to the autobiographical side of the play (2009: 12). Whether or not we accept this explanation for the Tyrones' likeliness in both characterization and speech, what is certain is that the dialogue in *Long Day* does not change from one speaker to another. It is indubitable that this presents a conscious decision on the playwright's part, as O'Neill's writing is no stranger to idiolects, which can be easily proven if one takes *The Emperor Jones* into account, or even *Anna Christie*. Similarly, because the Tyrones suffer from more or less the same problems, and are alike in personality, they react to these problems in the same way: by not confronting the source of these issues, but each other.

The other consequence of blind conformity is illustrated through the erasure of Irish culture in the play. This is relevant to O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* because of the Irish-American identity of the family and the conflict that exists between the father and his sons due to James' persistence in his Irish Catholic ways and the boys' choice to ignore it. James' attitude towards his country leads to very complex, even opposite opinions that are being voiced by him in the play. On one hand, Ireland is connected to death in his mind, as his father abandoned James and his mother in America in order to return to the motherland and die. On the other hand, it is still him who persists in defending their country in front of Jamie's mocking: "[a]nd keep your dirty tongue off Ireland" (O'Neill, 1955: 34). Even though James Tyrone likely cannot remember much about his country, he strongly cherishes Irish Catholicism and nags his sons for studying "atheists, fools and madmen" (O'Neill, 1955: 135).

Although James is so insistent in his belief, it is important to notice the fact that The Holy Bible is altogether absent from his shelves, as it is not mentioned in the generous description of the Tyrone's home library which opens up the entire play. Shaughnessy observes the absence of any sort of religious iconography or symbols on the walls (2000: 216), placing importance on that which is not present rather than on what is spoken. If we were to take James' words as truth, he would seem to be a loyal Catholic who was simply lost his way. But by carefully describing the scene, O'Neill invites us to notice that these sort of decorations which are expected from someone with his background are not present in the Tyrone's home. What is, however, displayed on the wall, is "a picture of Shakespeare" (O'Neill, 1955: 11), which very well summarizes James' character. By displaying the Bard instead of the Saints, one can notice how his poetry replaces religious texts for Tyrone, who informs his sons that "[he] studies Shakespeare as you'd study the Bible" (O'Neill, 1955: 150). This remark remains here nothing but a figure of speech, because at this point in the play one can begin to wonder whether or not he studied the Bible as well. Moreover, not only did Shakespeare replace the Scripture, but Grene notes that in order to become a

good Shakespearean actor, Tyrone had to put great effort into dropping his Irish accent, unconsciously participating to "colonial conditioning" (2005: 112). What this term means is that an unwritten condition appears in this process of following the path for success, namely that although the American Dream promises that anyone can accomplish whatever they wish, immigrants find themselves needing to adapt to the American way, leaving their cultures behind. This not only leads to the erasure of Irishness in the family, as no one seems to speak in an Irish accent, but it is also another way of depriving them of their authentic selves, as much as these exist.

Conclusion

Although so greatly impregnated in American culture, once consumption takes the country by storm, the prospect of opportunity that the national myth embodies begins to be synonymous with the ambition of getting rich. As a reaction against this, O'Neill criticizes in his *Long Day's Journey Into Night* an obsessiveness towards financial well-being that is preferred over spiritual welfare. Thus, the pursuit of a materialistic American Dream becomes the downfall of James Tyrone and consequently his close ones, through which is illustrated not only the decay of the family, but how by conforming to the standard which promises success in a consumerist culture one forfeits the particularities that make him an individual.

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Ana-Maria Pricop
3rd year, English-Romanian
West University of Timișoara

FEMININITY IN HORROR: *X* AND *PEARL* AND THE RAGE OF IT ALL

Abstract
The portrayal of women in horror movies often supports a sexist and patriarchal view, reinforcing traditional gender biases and subjecting female characters to stereotyping and objectification. In recent years, the "standard" image of the monstrous-feminine started to shift, becoming part of more nuanced narratives, and marking the beginning of the Feminist New Wave Cinema movement. A comprehensive examination of A24's *X* and *Pearl* reveals that while these films offer a nuanced perspective of gender roles, sexuality, and violence, contributing to the ongoing evolution of feminist cinema, they also concurrently challenge and reinforce traditional horror narratives and tropes. Therefore, the primary goal of this paper is to explore the reasons behind viewers' engagement with horror films, while focusing on the portrayal of the monstrous-feminine archetype. By analyzing how these representations intersect with and deviate from established horror tropes such as the final girl, the monstrous crone, and the virgin-whore dichotomy, this study aims to assess the extent to which they challenge the conventional slasher subgenre, its gender biases, and the male gaze prevalent in horror cinema.

Defining the abject, the monstrous-feminine and gynaehorror

The monstrous-feminine is the focus of Barbara Creed's book *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis* (1993). As women are often stereotypically portrayed in relation to their sexuality, the monstrous-feminine underlines the significance of gender in shaping monstrous identity (1993: 15). In Creed's vision, the monstrous-feminine is not merely a product of male fears, but a nuanced concept rooted in cultural anxieties about femininity and the female body.

The term builds upon Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, elaborated in her work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Abjection refers to the psychological and emotional reaction that occurs when someone is faced with that which "does not respect borders, positions, rules" and "disturbs identity, system, order" (1982: 4). Consequently, the monstrous-feminine can be seen as a manifestation of the abject within horror narratives, embodying the fears and anxieties associated with female sexuality and bodily functions that challenge societal norms and conventions.

In her book *Women, Monstrosity and Horror Film: Gynaehorror* (2018), Errin Harrington expands on Creed's and Kristeva's framework. Gynaehorror is defined as the subgenre of horror "that deals with all aspects of female reproductive horror" (2018: 3). This type of horror approaches themes such as virginity, sexual encounters, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, motherhood, menopause, and post-menopause, ultimately arguing that the female body is inherently abject within

patriarchal societies simply through its ability to reproduce. While Creed's theory focuses on the monstrous representation of femininity, Harrington's concept expands upon it by examining the specific bodily anxieties and reproductive fears that are often central to horror narratives featuring female protagonists.

The Universe of *X* and *Pearl*

Directed by Ti West, *X* (2022) is more than a typical slasher through its explorations of gender dynamics, societal norms, nuanced vision of its female character and human psyche, and an innovative plot that transcends traditional horror tropes and narratives. Set in the late 1970s, the film unfolds on a secluded Texas farm, where Maxine and the other film crew members clash with a sinister presence embodied by Pearl, the farm's enigmatic owner. Goth's dual performance as the protagonist and the antagonist emphasizes the thematic parallels between the characters, illustrating their shared desires and internal conflicts.

Meanwhile, the prequel *Pearl* (2022) offers insight into the origins of its eponymous protagonist, portrayed once again by Goth. Set in 1918, the film traces Pearl's journey from a sheltered young woman constrained by familial expectations to a vengeful force driven by rage and disappointment. Through Mia Goth's collaboration in co-writing the script alongside Ti West, the narrative of *Pearl* is steered towards a more feminine gaze, providing a crucial backstory that enriches the trilogy's universe and deepens understanding of Pearl's motivations and eventual transformation depicted in *X*. The trilogy will be completed with the release of *Maxxxine*, scheduled for July 2024.

An unconventional slasher

X and *Pearl* draw inspiration from classic slasher films such as *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974) and *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978), which are characterized by their focus on suspense, graphic violence, and the masked male killer who stalks and then murders a group of young and attractive protagonists, in a seemingly random and unprovoked manner. These classic slashers typically feature suspenseful chase sequences, gruesome killings, and elements of mystery or psychological tension, with the hunted group finding themselves in an isolated area, unable to call for help (Rockoff, 2002). However, while intersecting with the classic traits of the subgenre, both movies deviate from this archetype in several significant ways.

The Female Slasher and the Monstrous Crone Archetype

Unlike many classic slashers where the killer is a masked, mysterious man, *X* features the primary antagonist as a woman. Pearl is not the first female killer in a slasher film, as there are other known instances of female antagonists in the genre. However,

her portrayal as an elderly woman killer in *X* is less common compared to the traditional younger female antagonists or male killers in classic slashers.

The choice to depict Pearl as such contributes to the film's exploration of themes related to aging, decay, and the abject, taking the classic image of the monstrous crone from a static, barren, inducer of terror to a dynamic and fierce entity. Pearl's character stands out for her depiction as an old woman who is actively involved in committing violent acts. By casting Pearl as a frail and seemingly harmless figure, the films tap into the unsettling nature of the abject, i.e., the uncanny juxtaposition of the familiar and the grotesque.

The monstrous crone archetype in horror refers to the portrayal of older female characters, often depicted as frail, sinister, and abject figures. This concept is also known as "hagsploitation" (Harrington, 2018: 249), a subgenre of horror that emerged in response to the cultural impact of the Oscar-winning film *Baby Jane* (Aldrich, 1962). In this instance, the female aging body becomes a site of horror and repulsion, reinforcing societal anxieties surrounding mortality, decay, and the loss of beauty and vitality.

Thus, the monstrous-feminine is inherently abject through menopause, reducing them to non-sexual or asexual beings, being denied the male gaze: "in a sexist as well as ageist technoculture, the visibly aging body of a woman has been and still is especially terrifying – not only to the woman who experiences self-revulsion and anger, invisibility and abandonment but also to the men who find her presence so unbearable that they must – quite literally – 'disavow' her and divorce her" (Sobchack, 2000: 343). In Pearl's case, the character's aging body becomes a site of horror not only for herself, as she struggles with self-revulsion and anger, but also for the cast and crew around her who find her presence unbearable.

A pivotal moment in understanding the theme of aging in *X* occurs during a discussion among the crew about their occupation, which relies heavily on youth and beauty, while also contemplating old age and its associated sexual frustration. The camera shifts to Pearl preparing for bed, creating a split-screen effect (00:46:27 – 00:48:28). As the crew revels in their youth, Pearl is depicted alone, removing her makeup, and getting undressed, her aged and defeated body contrasting sharply with the vitality of the others. The dynamic cinematography adds depth to the scene, with the shot of Pearl moving from left to right multiple times, emphasizing her isolation.

During Bobby-Lynne's rendition of "Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac, we hear the lyrics "But time makes you bolder / Even children get older / And I'm gettin' older too." The scene evokes a sense of contrast between the duality of fleeting youth and the inevitability of old age. The lyrics serve as a reminder of mortality, the fragility of life, and the swift transition from youth to old age. It prompts reflection on the cyclical nature of existence, suggesting that those who are young and vibrant now (Maxine), may one day find themselves in Pearl's shoes, while those who are older, like Pearl, were also once in the prime of their youth. The scene has an

emotional effect on viewers, making Pearl a sympathetic villain, another deviation from the typical slasher portrayal where sympathy is reserved only for the victims.

The Final Girl

Coined by Carol J. Clover in her influential essay *Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film* (1987), the final girl refers to a recurring archetype in slasher films from the 1970s onwards, a female character who typically emerges as the last female survivor that confronts the antagonist.

X contradicts the trope of the final girl by toying with the viewers' expectations through the characters of Lorraine and Maxine. At first, Lorraine meets all the requirements for the traditional Final Girl as she is shown to have "boyish" traits. She seems to be a shy, docile, and reserved person and is nicknamed "church mouse" by Wayne. As film students, she and her boyfriend are only involved, at first, in the filming and production part of the movie.

As the story progresses, Lorraine becomes inspired by Maxine and Bobby-Lynne's performance and begins to question the idea of sexual freedom. This scene represents a turning point in her development as the Final Girl, as her captivation with the idea of showing her body on camera drives her to demand a role in the movie (00:48:42-00:53:14). Despite their initial shock, everyone in the crew, except for RJ, supports her decision. She is articulated, supports her decision with clear arguments while using explicit language, and provokes RJ by asking him "When did you become such a prude?" (00:50:13).

After talking to Wayne, RJ agrees to make a script change for Lorraine, allowing her to become the third farmer sister. We see him later regretting this decision, crying over it in a display of fragile masculinity, her loss of innocence driving him to leave the farm in a frenzy, which leads to his encounter with Pearl and his eventual demise. This loss of innocence is what disqualifies her from the role of the final girl. Like in any traditional slasher, Lorraine's display of sexuality is the core event that leads to not only her death but also the death of her boyfriend.

On the other end, we have Maxine who, despite being the main actress in the production and finding empowerment in the adult film industry, becomes the real final girl of *X*. Maxine defies the rules of the final girl through her promiscuity and defiance of social order. We find out in the end that she is the daughter of the Christian preacher screaming at his acolytes on Howard and Pearl's old TV set (01:35:17-01:35:58). This revelation disrupts the conventional expectations of a slasher, by revealing that even "the black sheep," a character that engages in societal taboos associated with moral ambiguity, can become the last survivor. Maxine's father is praying for her safe return from the immoral lifestyle, as the viewers now realize that the phrase she is always repeating "I will not accept a life I do not deserve," a bible verse from Mark 10:15, is Maxine's way of turning her father's gospel into her mantra and driving force for accomplishing her dreams.

Maxine is confident in her occupation. As an adult movie actress, she is the embodiment of sexuality, using her body to get what she desires: freedom and fame. She defies societal shame by embracing her body as a source of empowerment, mostly walking around nude or in revealing clothing that shows off her beauty and youthful body. Most importantly, Maxine's survival defies the expected outcome for characters who exhibit such sexual agency in horror films. She does not die for her promiscuity, thus subverting viewers' expectations and becoming an unusual final girl.

However, unlike traditional portrayals where the final girl is often depicted as traumatized and victimized by her experiences, Maxine's fate in *X* is framed as a stepping stone towards achieving her aspirations of stardom. Maxine's character remains focused on her pursuit of fame and success rather than evolving from a passive and victimized figure to an empowered woman.

The Virgin-Whore Dichotomy

Furthermore, slasher films often perpetuate stereotypes regarding sexual morality, with women portrayed as either perverted or virginal. The trope of killing sexually active characters while sparing virgins reinforces societal stereotypes regarding female sexuality, suggesting that survival is contingent upon maintaining sexual purity (Rockoff, 2002: 19). In both *X* and *Pearl*, the narrative diverges from this pattern. None of the female characters in these films meet their demise solely because of their sexuality. Instead, the movies challenge traditional slasher tropes by portraying female characters who are complex and multi-dimensional, defying simplistic categorizations. Moreover, *X* director Ti West flips the narrative of the classic slasher by portraying the male victims as more foolish and killing them off first. This reversal of gender roles subverts traditional power dynamics and adds depth to the characters' interactions. Similarly, in *Pearl*, only four characters meet their end, half the number compared to *X*, and the victims are evenly split between two women and two men, reflecting a departure from the gender imbalance often seen in slasher films. By presenting a diverse range of characters and allowing them agency over their sexuality, *X* and *Pearl* offer a more nuanced exploration of gender dynamics and sexuality in the portrayal of women in horror cinema.

Conclusions

The analysis of A24's films *X* and *Pearl* reveals a nuanced portrayal of the monstrous-feminine through its depictions of gender dynamics, sexuality, and violence within the horror genre, contributing to the ongoing evolution of feminist cinema. The films' subversion of traditional slasher tropes challenges viewers' expectations, particularly through the image of Pearl in the prequel as a sympathetic villain, but also in *X* as an elderly female antagonist, and Maxine as an unconventional final girl. As the trilogy

concludes with the upcoming release of *Maxxxine* in July 2024, the exploration of femininity in horror continues to evolve, offering fresh insights into gender roles in the genre.

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Carmen Tuns
1ˢᵗ year, American Studies
West University of Timișoara

RELIGION, SECULARISM AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF TERMINOLOGY

Abstract
How often do we question the terminology that we use, or our understanding of it? Most of us feel at ease utilizing certain blanket terminology because we trust that our interlocutor would know what we mean, but this trust can be detrimental. This paper will look at two terms that have been widely debated – religion and secularism – and discuss their relation. The aim of this analysis is to exemplify how and why such blanket terms come to exist, and the way they impact public discourse. To aid in this analysis, I will mainly be referencing the 'Secularism' entry in Burgett's and Handler's book *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2007).

The term 'secularism' seems to have become a lait motive of the public discourse in regard to religion. There seems to be a wedge drawn between the two concepts, with secularism being often misused to express anti-religiousness. This perspective is just one of many examples of terminology being stripped of its meaning in a desperate attempt to place complex ideas in extremely narrow boxes. If we give secularism a closer look, however, we will quickly discover that this presumed divide is nowhere to be seen, or at least is not as evident as some might like to believe. Further, I will look at several perspectives on secularism, with a strong focus on religion as well. It is close to impossible to discuss secularism in any meaningful way without devoting some time to speaking about religion and religiosity, but I believe that a good understanding of the religious attitudes of the U.S. will help highlight the reasons why separating secularism from religion or, even worse, placing it in opposition, disregards some of the most important aspects of both concepts, while working to detrimentally generalize their meanings. To aid in this analysis I will be first focusing on the 'Secularism' entry in Burgett's and Handler's book *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (2007).

An important consideration that precedes this analysis is the term 'religion' as it is employed throughout. In this case, religion refers to subjectivity, practices, and belief. Though it sometimes implies a faith in God, it should be understood as a belief in a set of values rather than strictly a manifestation of piety (Warner, 2007: 210-11).

Michael Warner starts his exploration of secularism by outlining the most basic understanding of the term, namely, that it encompasses everything not contained within the spiritual, i.e. 'the temporal or the worldly' (2007: 209). Though we could easily conclude that this understanding is an implicit opposition to religion, we can look to what these terms entail in practice to quickly disprove any such conclusion. As Warner points out, 'the temporal or the worldly' (2007: 209) can be viewed as representing disestablishment, especially considering the founding ideas

of puritanism. Disestablishment only negates religion if we consider religion to be rooted in an institution or any other tangible manifestations. If we move religion from 'the worldly' into what is widely understood to be the spiritual, secularism can be understood as an important pillar of religion, as it encourages freethought. Many consider the voluntary, subjective, informed choice of religion to be the purest manifestation of religiousness (Warner, 2007: 210).

There is, however, the other face of secularism, if viewed through the lens of rationalism and anti-Christianity. It is worth mentioning that even though it is associated with the Enlightenment, the North American manifestation of this trend does not share the complete denial of religiosity that permeated the European Enlightenment. As Warner mentions, the American Enlightenment cannot be disentangled from religion, and thus attempting to represent them as antithetic negates the historical implications of secularism as it evolved in North America (2007: 211).

Another important aspect brought up in Warner's analysis is the transformation of religion within secularism. He mentions the concept of 'political religion' – meaning the concepts of 'faith' and 'belief' as they are referenced in numerous political discourses – as another aspect of secularism. For U.S. politicians, 'the divine is assumed to be personal and historical' (2007: 212), and therefore does not rely on a strong belief in 'spiritual truth' (2007: 212). This 'political religion' promotes subjectivity and personal experience in interpreting the divine, as demonstrated by the American approach of 'manifesting destiny', meaning, enacting what they believe to be a mission given by a nameless deity. As Warner points out, the conclusion of this manifestation of destiny is an intermingling in other parts of the world of secularism and religion, these becoming 'twin faces of Western dominance' (2007: 213).

In his 2010 article titled *Religion, Secularism, and Democratic Culture,* Mark Cladis names three different facets of secularism: the good, the bad, and the ugly (2010: 23-26). He takes the 'good sense' (Cladis, 2010: 23) to mean a neutrality towards religion.

He names three key aspects of good secularism, which are: not assuming another's religious perspectives, not treating religion differently than other subjects in public debate, and – as a governmental body – neither endorsing nor condemning any religious expression (Cladis, 2010: 23). He names these as positive aspects of secularism since they do not interfere with religious practice (Cladis, 2010: 23-24). Mostly, these are secular practices in the sense that they treat religion as a deeply personal aspect that should not be judged or regulated by an exterior factor, while also recognising it as a system of values that is open to criticism if the context allows. In this sense, religion exists within secularism. Thus, secularism becomes a system that encompasses a wide range of values, while promoting respect and understanding as its main tenets.

The 'bad sense' (Cladis, 2010: 25) of secularism is similarly summarized in three main points: religion as a 'sui generis phenomenon' (Cladis, 2010: 24), religion as an undebatable structure, and the privatization of religion as an accepted reality. This facet exacerbates a specific perceived trait of secularism, namely subjectivity. Cladis claims that this has led to secularism coexisting alongside a narrow, parochial expression of religiosity, that is ultimately not comparable to 'lived religion' (2010: 25). In practical terms, imposing an extreme subjectivity upon religion negates important aspects of how it functions. Secularism, in this case, works to stifle religion by designating a place for it that is outside public and political discourse.

The last facet of secularism that Cladis defines is 'the ugly' (2010: 25). This sense promotes the idea of religion as a 'relic of the past that has no place in modernity' (2010: 25). He describes how this iteration of secularism stigmatizes and villainizes religion to the point of proposing its imminent doom. In Cladis' view, this perspective is flawed for many reasons, the most important one being the persistence of religion. If secularism opposes religion so vehemently, it ought to have discovered why it propagates through time to the degree that is has, but on this front secularism has fallen short (2010: 25).

It is my understanding that Cladis attempts – and to some degree succeeds – in making the point that secularism and religion need to coexist. If we look at the aforementioned 'good sense', it would imply the best possible outcome for this relationship, a form of inoffensive tolerance on the side of secularism, and a reserved expression on the side of religion.

Cladis goes on to argue in his paper that religion and politics cannot – and should not – be separated (2010: 26). This view is – surprisingly to some – supported by the milder forms of secularism. If we look at religion as something deeply personal, it becomes part of one's worldview in such a way that distinguishing 'rational thought' from 'religious thought' will become a near impossible undertaking. In this scenario, to ask someone, under the pretence of secularism, to forfeit their religion when making political decisions is not a reasonable request.

Cladis' work is important in the understanding of secularism precisely because he separates it into three categories of thought. Understanding all sides of secularism gives way to understanding certain people's genuine fear at the word 'secular'. Solely based on Cladis' distinctions, the best scenario is ignorance, and the worst is hatred. For a religious person attempting to navigate the secular world, being presented with these options might seem exclusionary, and thus encourage the disdain for anything to do with secularism.

Another distinction to be made in regards to how we view secularism is put forth by Beard *et al.* in their article titled *Secularism, Religion and Political Choice in the United States* (2013). They highlight two types of secularism in their research: religious secularism and political secularism (Beard et al., 2013: 6).

This divide is marked by the main concerns of secularism that seem to be irreconcilable. On the one hand, we have the concept of faith and spirituality, and on the other, we have the applicability of faith and religion within practical terms.

The first category holds the 'freethought' aspect of secularism that Warner also mentioned, which entails subjectivity and personal experience and private spiritual practice. The other was more so targeted by Cladis (2010), who also attempted to explain the influence of religion within an allegedly secular framework.

These two categories – namely religious secularism and political secularism – work to demonstrate the complexity of the term. To attempt to put all traits under the same umbrella would be to erase important meanings that could aid in explaining behaviour, societal and political trends. As Beard *et al.* remark, secularism finds itself 'hinging critically upon the particular context' (2013: 6).

Both Warner (2007) and Cladis (2010) put forth – more or less obviously – the same idea as Beard *et al*.: that secularism as a singularity is a term that seems to have been stretched too thin. If we observe it too closely, we might find ourselves stuck in an unfavourable loop of intolerance. If we back up one step too many, it becomes impossible to properly assess the morality and values that are being perpetrated within societal and political spheres. Secularism is not the first or only term that has become a sort of dumping site for any and all meanings that fit a particular talking point. In practice, this generalisation works in very simple but effective ways and essentially strips terms of any complexity, turning them into buzzwords that ultimately fail to convey the complexity of a subject. For secularism, we can observe, as Warner also points out, a tendency to oppose religion (2007: 209), but only in practice. What this means is the employment of the term to signal opposition, even if key aspects of the ideological basis work in support of religion. Whether or nor secularism works in favour of religion is a discussion that becomes overshadowed by simplicity.

A certainty is that secularism and its meaning is a highly debated topic that has reached no satisfiable conclusion. However, a conclusion that could be drawn upon the topic is that to attempt to fit such varied experiences and perspectives under one single term will lead to inconsistencies. Religion can become friend or foe under secularism, and this discrepancy creates room for maliciousness. Before we move to define secularism, we should attempt to diversify public discourse to a deserved degree of complexity.

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