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SHAKESPEARE AND THE CARNIVALESQUE UNDERSTANDING THE THEMES OF FOLLY IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS THROUGH A BAKHTINIAN FRAMEWORK. A CASE STUDY OF *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Abstract
The aim of this study is to explore one of the most fascinating Shakespearean themes, that of folly and of the fool, by using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin regarding humor and the carnivalesque as a theoretical framework. The main purpose of this approach is that of rooting Shakespeare's plays in a their proper historical contexts and analyzing them as such, rather than their being used as a starting point for individual interpretations. By observing the concepts of the carnival world, dialogism and the lower bodily stratum, we seek to demonstrate that, contrary to certain contemporary critical approaches, folly, as seen especially in Shakespeare's comedies, does not merely act as a license for excess, even when outrageous elements are on full display, but rather the desired effect is that of creating a "secondary world", deprived of the rules of the "official world", in which a dialogue between different spheres of life and society can be thoroughly established and sustained. The methodological approach of the presentation will consist of both a theoretical section, which focuses on explaining the most important concept of Bakhtin's theories, and also an applicative one, focusing on both a comedy, namely *Twelfth Night*, and a tragedy, *The Tragedy of King Lear*.

The theme of folly is one with which many thinkers and writers have been preoccupied with throughout the centuries. This might have to do with the fact that long before anyone started to philosophize on human foolishness, people of all kinds encountered this phenomenon in their day-to-day lives. In spite of this, the answer to the question "who or what is a fool?" remains highly subjective, as throughout the ages, people's perception of folly has been greatly influenced by the ideological sphere of their times, a fact which is reflected in the way in which literary works from different eras tackle and make use of the topic. In the Middle Ages, for example, a fool would have been defined as "a person whose behaviour suggests a lack of intelligence, common sense, or good judgement; a silly person, an idiot" (Oxford University Press 2025). Not only that, but given the influence of Biblical doctrine on society and culture, human folly was often associated with sin and depravity. As Barbara Swain calls him, the "erring man" (1932: 10), the one who, through his lifestyle and his morality, fails to conform to social and religious norms and is, as a result, ostracised from his community. Such a foolish figure stands in stark contrast with the "wise" man, the virtuous and noble individual.

William Shakespeare is one of the main points of reference when it comes to authors who take interest in the theme of folly in their works. Not only does he present a plethora of characters who are either "professional fools" or simply act

foolishly or madly, but he also manages to approach this theme in a unique manner, namely by creating a stage of fools through the world of the carnival. The aim of this paper is to provide a case study on William Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night* which seeks, on the one hand, to explore the world of the Carnival as a subversive mechanism that distorts the traditional dynamic between the wise man and the fool and invites the reader to a reflection upon the self in relation to the other, and, on the other hand, to provide an adequate framework through which the modern reader of Shakespeare's plays can understand the theme of folly in a context much closer to the author's reality and extract meanings that are not shaped and distorted by subjective critical interpretations.

The world of the carnival is, in essence, a foolish one. It is a world of joy and liberty that often transgresses societal norms of etiquette and, in some cases, even those of decency. Mikhail Bakhtin Bakhtin sees the Carnival as containing "a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (a l'envers), of the 'turnabout', of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" (Bakhtin, 1984: 11). Indeed, from the earliest manifestations of the carnival, one of its specific features was the freedom of indulging in what would otherwise be condemned by society. This has led some critics to argue that the carnival can be reduced to an event that exclusively allows for the licensing of sexuality and vulgarity. Sir James George Frazer analyses many European and extra-European festivities, noting that many celebrations can be viewed as times of renewal, which offer all members of society a license to manifest themselves freely. He states that:

> many peoples have been used to observe an annual period of license, when the customary restraints of law and morality are thrown aside, when the whole population give themselves up to extravagant mirth and jollity, and when the darker passions find a vent which would never be allowed them in the more staid and sober course of ordinary life (1983: 763).

Frazer goes on to mention that often, mere celebrations of joy and liberty would degenerate into obscener feasts, in which the people would indulge in sexually repulsive acts, such as orgies, or even partake in criminal activities. The non-orthodox character of the Carnival manifestations remained well acknowledged throughout the ages. In describing the atmosphere of the 18th century manifestations of the carnivalesque, namely the festivities known as masquerades, Terry Castle notes that these masked assemblies more often than not created contexts in which certain "societal violations" could take place, including "the indiscriminate mingling of the social ranks and the sexes, the collective return to various sorts of atavistic behaviour, the upsetting of erotic taboos" (1986: 52). Furthermore, when it comes to Shakespearean plays, such as *Twelfth Night*, critics such as Thad Jenksins Logan (1982: 224) agree that the carnivalesque can be transposed as to constitute a literary

device through which the world of the play is shaped into a dark festivity that dictates the main motifs of the comedy, which are, in his opinion, sex and what he calls "revelry", meaning all elements that appeal to the individual's bodily desires, such as drinking, eating, entertainment, and dancing. These elements are closely linked to the traditional moralistic view of folly, while also being intrinsic to carnival life.

What these points of view omit is the fact that the society of the 16th and 17th centuries remained ones in which Christian morality prevailed. In spite of their eccentric and often outrageous displays, carnivals were still events approved by the Church and included rituals and manifestations which were not carried out in a reprehensible manner, but rather completed and exalted lived Christian faith. In this article, I wish to argue that the carnivalesque, as it can be seen in Shakespeare, is not merely a license for excess and depravity, nor is it hedonistic or harmful, but rather a licensed secondary world that functions as a means for the renewal of the human spirit and its societal relations.

In order to understand the role of the carnival in relation to the theme of human folly in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the framework used here consists of different concepts revolveing around what the Russian philosopher Mikhain Bakhtin calls the "carnivalesque". Writing in a time when the Soviet Party sought to homogenize all institutions under the Marxist-Leninist agenda, Bakhtin saw a time much like his own, in which old structures were challenged and dethroned by new ideologies; an old world falling and a new one rising from its ashes, with new epicentres of power controlling what could and what could not be said. While comparing Bakhtin's era to that of Rabelais, Holquist notes that "they were living in an unusual period, a time when virtually everything taken for granted in less troubled ages lost its certainty, was plunged into contest and flux" (Holquist, 1984: xv). Amidst this, Bakhtin returns to the carnival, which serves, as Krystyna Pomorska notes, as both a source of interest for the author, but also as the "source of his methodology" (Pomorska, 1984: ix). Bakhtin demonstrates that the Carnival can be used to structure literature just as effectively as it achieves certain social and cultural effects, creating an art form which unifies the common people while acting as a subversive mechanism to the official discourse, thus creating a parallel world, one in which, through laughter, the dialogue that had been supressed by ruling institutions can be reinstated.

Thus, for Bakhtin, the Carnival constitutes: "a boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations [which] opposed the official and serious tome of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (Bakhtin, 1984: 4). Through the imitation of the "official" world, with its respective institutions, rituals and rules, the carnival does not merely replicate what is already present in society, but rather, through folk celebrations of laughter, a secondary world is created, in which all members of society are included, and can experience a unique sense of freedom, which was

inevitably restricted in everyday life. Therefore, the carnival acts as a source of healing and restoration from the tensions, conflicts and burdens of daily existance.

Another concept that must be taken into account is dialogism. One of the characteristics of the carnival was that "all were equal during the carnival" (Bakhtin, 1984: 10). The Medieval society was marked by hierarchical differences, meaning that not every member of society had equal opportunities for education, marriage, and employment. This social inequality was reflected not only in the power structures, but also in communication, as those who held the power, them pertaining, without exception, to the educated class as well, had greater freedom to express their beliefs, without fear of retaliation, unlike peasant, for instance, whose voices were largely excluded from the official discourse. The Carnival, then, represents the moment in which all members of society act as a homogenous entity, which creates "a special type of communication impossible in everyday life" (Bakhtin, 1984: 10). For Bakhtin, all meaning is derived not from the self, nor from an exterior, objective force, which provokes people to abide by a certain standard. Rather, meaning comes from dialogue, which is the establishment of a relationship between the self and the other. Through its heteroglot character, dialogue is an inclusive phenomenon, which engages all members of society, and far beyond it, in a universal and ongoing interaction, in a free system of diverse values and thoughts undergoing constant renewal (Bakhtin cited in Holquist, 2002: 37).

When it comes to Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the title of the play itself makes it particularly clear that we are dealing with a fictional world that is closely tied to the time and space of the carnival. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was a tradition established in the early Middle Ages, which celebrated the birth of Christ, from the 25th of December until the 5th of January. The Twelve Days provided both a physical and an emotional release for participants, who could enjoy, during the period of the festival, wealthy feasts often provided by Lords and other influential individuals. Aside from those, the festivities included plays (both religious and secular), farces, dances, fundraisers, and games to all participants (Hutton, 1996: 46). Again, it is important to note that all of these activities were not available in official settings, as they were restricted to certain contexts, particularly pertaining to a specific group of individuals. The carnival sets aside all restrictions and, paradoxically, through what might be considered "revery" liberates the human spirit, withing a framework in which people gathered to celebrate the birth and sacrifice of Christ.

The world of *Twelfth Night* is built in accordance with the carnivalesque spirit, as the boundaries between character's economic and social statuses being blurred. All characters interact without exception with each other and rely on one another throughout the whole play, as a serious political or social tension was absent, aside from the comical one, created as a result of the play's deliberate use of double identities. Beginning with the setting, Illyria seems to be nothing more than a scene, set for the comic events of the play to unfold in their respective manner. This naturalness of the play's setting is illustrated by Panny Gay, in her introduction to

the 2003 edition of *Twelfth Night*. Gay notes that in 1987, the Royal Shakespeare Company built their set for the theatrical performance of the play in a unique manner, by using both Hellenistic prompts, as well as English ones (Gay, 2003: 7). Through such an interpretation of the play, the audience is invited to participate in the rejuvenated world of the Carnival through a setting that is both exotic and unfamiliar. It generates a context encouraging for the imagination and various endless possibilities, while also containing familiar elements that remind them of their own existence in the universal play of human folly.

Furthermore, when it comes to economic status, although the play does portray different social classes, as Orsino is a duke and Olivia is a countess, both having honourable titles and servants which help fulfil their needs and desires, any significant social barriers are virtually invisible in the narrative. In spite of the servants, maids and stewards present in the play clearly being of an inferior status, their lords keep them very close and value their company. Duke Orsino laments his love for the countess Olivia in the presence of Curio and Valentine (Shakespeare, 2008: I.i). Antonio, in spite of his being a ship captain, is the one who saves Sebastian, who is of noble descent, and is willing to serve him in his endeavours: "If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant" (II.i.4. 32). Such instances demonstrate that the world of *Twelfth Night* is a carnivalesque one, in which the central unifying element is not, therefore, status, gender, sexuality, or age, but rather the universal condition of human folly.

In the carnivalesque world of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, folly and madness seem to go hand in hand. It is not, however, that madness which corrupts the King of Scotland's mind in the tragedy of Macbeth, nor is it a delirious madness, such as the one that Hamlet plays. Rather, the madness found at play in the comedy is an innocent one, akin to the vigorous joy of the Carnival.

For once, folly acts through love and ultimately helps release the tensions present at the beginning of the comedy. Fest the fool affirms that "foolery, sir, does walk about the orb like the sun, it shines everywhere", affirms Feste the fool (III.i.33-34). Indeed, as Cesar Barber points out, the literary device of mismatched identities, which creates a convoluted and dangerous love triangle, puts many of the characters not typically associated with folly in a psychical state of delusion by which they begin to question their own mental soundness and perception of the world. Upon arriving to meet countess Olivia, Sebastian is unwillingly dragged into the unresolved duel, planned to pin Cesario against Sir Andrew. He, of course, is unaware of the convoluted circumstances that lead to his being assaulted by Sir Tobey's friend; he can only assume that the whole society which he comes across is up to some sort of misrule: "Are all people mad?" (IV.i.23). It is not only pain that awaits Sebastian at his arrival, but also the unexplainable love that the countess nourished for him. For Sebastian, both the love and the violence that he encounters seem to be otherworldly, without having any palpable cause, nor any foreseeable effect of significance, just as

in a dream from which one would not want to escape, as it offers the fulfilment of every desire that might not be in his reach in the real world:

> What relish is in this? How runs the stream?
> Or I am mad, or else this is a dream.
> Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep;
> If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep! (IV.ii.53-56)

The confusion of mistaken identities reaches its climax in the fifth act of the play, when it almost becomes the cause for disaster and chaos, as both Sebastian and Olivia's marriage as well as Viola's love for Orsino are on the verge of collapse. It is only through the reunion of the two brothers and the unmasking of Viola that the comedy can resume its expected pattern and conclude the action with the fulfilment of every character's love.

Some of the more noticeable elements pertaining to the carnivalesque found in the comedy are represented through the characters Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. They appear to be in a continuous state of ebriety, which grants them a foolish ignorance that enables them to be transcended beyond the more serious troubles that other characters face. As Olivia is mourning the death of her brother, Toby, her uncle, does not understand why someone would choose to be kept in place by a state of constant grief. Talking to Maria, he states: "I am sure care's an enemy of life" (I.iii.2). For Toby, true life cannot coexist with sadness or worry, as for him, life seems to be thoroughly made up of joy, love, dancing, eating and drinking. All of these constitute realities of life which certainly resonate with the readers and the audience, who are invited to forget about their worries and join the two fools in their carnivalesque joy.

Furthermore, Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's foolishness creates the suitable context for a dialogue to be established. Through drinking and dancing, Sir Andrew and Sir Tobey are seen as continuously deepening their bond and friendship, discovering more about each other through their shared inclination for bodily joys.

Among the cast of foolish, mischievous or enchanted characters, the one that stands out in stark contrast is Malvolio. He is a character of moral balance, who is not shown to take part in Sir Toby and Sir Andrew's drunkenness, nor does he seem to, initially, want to take part in the delusion of love created between the other characters, mainly concerning the love triangle formed between Duke Orsino, Olivia and Viola, as he firmly warns Cesario about playing with the countess' affection, in spite of her growing infatuation for the disguised lady, which Malvolio, consciously or unconsciously chooses to ignore. In a world of "fools", Malvolio appears as a character who is much more grounded in reality, which goes as far as to make him unfit for finding his place in the carnivalesque world. He is described by Maria, who affirms: "the devil a puritan he is" (II.iii.24). Indeed, Malvolio condemns the cast of foolish characters, calling them "idle, shallow things" (III.iv.105). For the world of the comedy, that can be seen as a breach in the illusory spaces that each of the characters create, rather through love, or through festive manifestations, which,

although full of frenzy and foolish, contribute to the play's comic conclusion, in which all spheres are homogenized in love, truth, harmony, and fellowship. As a result, Malvolio does not get to be integrated in such a conclusion, as he represents the characteristics of the official world, which cannot find its proper place in the Carnival.

In conclusion, this analysis has demonstrated that by applying Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *carnivalesque,* we can understand the theme of folly as presented in the comedy *Twelfth Night* within the carnival life, a process that brings us closer to the author's cultural and social context. The play presents a world rooted in festivity, in which the characters' tensions are released as they are brought together through drinking, playing, farces, joyful celebrations, and love. Such manifestations are by no means depraved, nor do they reflect a sexually driven society. Instead, through what can be deemed as "revery", such as the showcase of drinking, dancing, brawling, travestied identities, and farces, there is a dialogue established between the characters, one that is not initially present, but which leads to the play's harmonious conclusion. The carnivalesque world of *Twelfth Night* reminds us, therefore, that human folly is a condition which one should acknowledge as a step towards reconciliation, with anyone refusing to do so, such as the puritanical Malvolio, not finding their place inside the "comic" resolution.

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AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER WITHIN THE INCARCERATION EXPERIENCE MINÉ OKUBO'S *CITIZEN 13660*

Abstract
Due to widespread fear and racism following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the U.S. government, citing national security concerns, viewed Japanese Americans as potential threats, leading to *Executive Order 9066*, which authorized the relocation to camps of about 120,000 people of Japanese descent into incarceration camps. This paper seeks to analyze gender within the incarceration experience as depicted by Miné Okubo in her graphic novel *Citizen 13660* (1946), through (mostly) visual and textual analysis. Throughout the Japanese American internment period, gender norms were both disrupted and maintained. During their shared experience, people of Japanese descent lost some privileges of gendered roles and expectations, seeing the efficiency of choosing to be more equal to one another, though not always. Ultimately, Okubo's work highlights the resilience of those imprisoned and reveals how gendered labor, expectations, and limitations shaped their experiences.

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the U.S. entered World War II, and the already existent anti-Japanese sentiment reached new heights. At the time, over 110,000 people of Japanese descent lived mostly on the West Coast, with the mention that two-thirds of them were American citizens (Densho, 2025). Despite no evidence of espionage or sabotage by Japanese Americans, President Roosevelt signed *Executive Order 9066* on February 19, 1942, which authorized the military to remove people from designated areas. This led to the mass relocation of Japanese Americans, many of whom were forced into internment camps for the duration of the war.

Prejudice against Japanese Americans was deeply rooted in the West Coast, stemming from earlier anti-Asian sentiments, particularly towards Chinese immigrants in the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, Japanese Americans were increasingly seen as a threat due to both racial biases and economic competition. In terms of economic competition, most Issei, i.e., "Japanese immigrants who settled in the United States" (Petruș, 2023: 38), became farmers; in time, first-generation immigrants to the U.S. had become very successful at raising fruits and vegetables in soil that most people had considered infertile.

The internment order led to the forced relocation of over 120000 people, many of whom had lived in the U.S. for generations (Tasevki, 2023). Families lost their homes and businesses, often selling their possessions for a fraction of their worth. After their release, many families returned to find that their properties had been sold, stolen, or left in disrepair during their internment. While the government did provide the Civil Liberties Act of 1987, offering $20,000 and a formal apology to surviving internees (H.R.442 – 100th Congress, 1988), the reparations still felt insufficient to

many who had lost not just property, but also their sense of security and identity. These reparations were a gesture of acknowledgement, but they did not truly make up for the emotional and financial hardships endured during and after internment.

Citizen 13660 (Okubo, 1946) is the earliest account that depicts how life was in those camps. Miné Okubo (along with her brother) spent two years in incarceration, and as she spent her days interned at the Tanforan Assembly Center and then the Topaz War Relocation Center, from 1942 until 1944, she preserved memories of her experience through drawings. She drew moments of her life right before Pearl Harbor and *Executive Order 9066* happened. The graphic novel's format "implicates deeper identification with the story" (Hock Soon Ng, 2024: 16). Thus, from her visual storytelling that is accompanied by written recounts, it becomes clear that people's structural way of life was significantly shaken during the interment.

Figure 1. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 18

Figure 1 portrays Miné Okubo as she comes to the Pilgrim Hall of the First Congregational Church in Berkeley to register herself and her brother for a two-person unit in the internment camp they were to be sent to. Due to the growing suspicion and fear towards all people of Japanese descent harbored by the Japanese government's attack on U.S. territory, soldiers stood all around the building. This choice was made because of the idea that all Japanese were dangerous, as previously explained. Before Okubo enters building, she looks up at one of the two men. She may have done this to challenge them, to make them question themselves if they were doing the right thing, to possibly make them feel shame and see the unfairness she had to face, of essentially being imprisoned. But the men do not seem to want to intimidate her or to be stern to coming to face a 'Jap', as newspapers and politicians alike described them to be spies and traitors. According to Petruș: "In given cases, the anti-Japanese rhetoric and the derogatory term 'Jap' are directly enforced in daily-life interactions" (2021: 119). Using such a term allows white Americans to be "in a position of power" (Petruș, 2021: 119), signaling their superiority over the

imprisoned Japanese Americans. Although this might be debatable, in Okubo's drawing, the men look uneasy and, judging by their eyebrows drawn downward, they have a hint of sympathy in their expression towards Okubo. After all, they did not choose this turn of events.

Figure 2. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 31

Miné writes that, upon their arrival at Tanforan Assembly Center, the people were immediately searched for weapons. Then she and her brother are separated so that men and women would be medically examined individually by nurses of their gender. Figure 2 shows Miné and a little girl being examined in just their slip, as they were ordered to undress. The drawing only shows the internment from Miné's perspective, but the most interesting part of this moment is the final line of page 31. As her examination is done, she sees her brother Toku again and she asks him what he was made to do. His answer is simple: "They made us strip" (Okubo, 1946, p. 31). This suggests that the men's examination was more invasive, perhaps out of the usual societal tendency, especially for the 1940s, to treat women with more modesty, while men are not shielded from harsher and intrusive examination. But it also could have happened because authorities perceived the men as the bigger threat, as the stronger sex. By doing so, they could have asserted their dominance over them, using humiliation as a means of control. Toku's short reply and lack of elaboration could indicate the embarrassment he felt. This reflects how gender norms made Toku feel ashamed to speak of how he felt to be degraded, but also to disclose details of that even to the person closest to him at that moment.

Figure 3. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 50

Figure 3 portrays Miné working alongside two men. She writes that everyone was put to work on building the camp, which was incompetently far from finished, and that everyone, regardless of age or gender contributed to building their future living quarters for an indefinite period of time. Everyone had to contribute, because the faster it would be done, the faster they would have a place to live. This challenges the early twentieth century norms that reserved women's work in the home, as women were now performing physical labor alongside men, the kind of labor that requires physical strength. It was in opposition to the household work that women traditionally carried out, where their efforts to maintain a presentable home were expected to appear effortless, as a reflection of their supposed comfort in that role. However, the image Miné provides is not unheard of so far, as many women had already joined the workforce to take the place of the men that went to fight as soldiers in the war. Still, the image of women and men working side by side, each contributing with as much as they can, remains special.

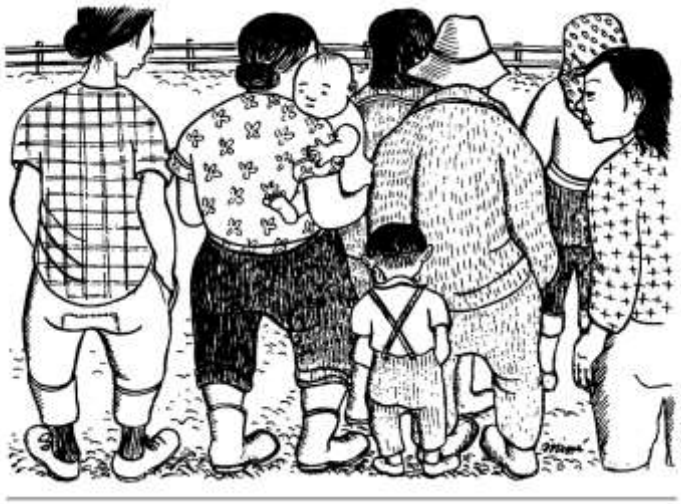

Figure 4. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 52

Following Figure 3, in Figure 4 all the women are portrayed as having given up their dresses in favor of pants to make their work easier and more comfortable. This is another change of the imprisoned people as they abandon gender norms. Because of forced labor, efficiency and survival take precedence over gendered expectations, even if women were also responsible for the labor of taking care of their children. Whenever Miné mentions or draws a baby, like the one in Figure 4, they are always in the arms of a woman. There is the possibility that the mothers in *Citizen 13660* were single mothers, or that the fathers were sent to other camps. But still, the lack of mention of any male figures acting as fathers, where in turn female figure act as mothers is hard to miss. Despite the necessity of women adapting to hard labor, their primary association with caregiving remained unchanged. This reflects the concept of the "double burden" where women are expected to contribute to economic survival while continuing to fulfill domestic responsibilities.

Figure 5. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 59

Although Miné Okubo primarily drew women as caregivers, like the mother with the child on her back being central in Figure 5, this image is also an exception, with the image of a male figure bathing a child also being there. This moment suggests that caregiving responsibilities, while largely placed on women, were not entirely exclusive to them. However, the rarity of such depictions in the book still implies that caregiving was primarily women's work.

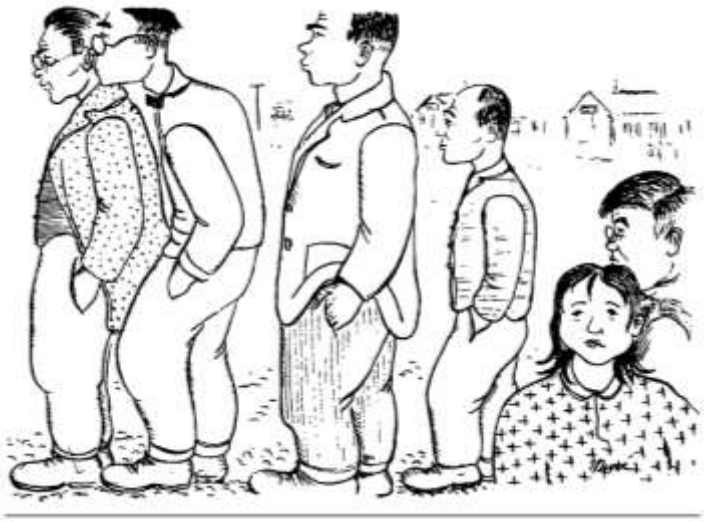

Figure 6. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 78

Miné Okubo writes that many Japanese American young men volunteered for military service in the war, even if their country persecuted them, as seen in Figure 6. Their choice is not condemnable, as they took advantage of this opportunity to gain freedom of movement or to gain respect from the people persecuting them and to convince them that they were not 'disloyal', that they should not be viewed with suspicion. This was one path that the men chose to prove their 'loyalty', while others were granted to find work and relocate. These men choosing to prove their 'loyalty' through military service align with the view of masculinity being tied to duty, sacrifice, and military service.

Figure 7. Okubo (1946), *Citizen 13660*, p. 104

In the camp, no one had any privacy. The drawing in Figure 7 shows four women, including Miné, gathered together with a little boy in the middle of them. The woman behind the boy is knitting and the boy seems to be interested in it. Miné writes that he kept his interest a secret, out of fear of being mocked by girls his age, because knitting is seen as a feminine endeavor. This reflects how deeply ingrained

gender expectations were even in an environment where roles were already being disrupted. In the camp, with no real privacy, men and women could not sustain their usual gender roles. Being around each other all the time, they saw they were not all that different. Spending their days side-by-side made it harder to judge how others chose to spend their time, even if it was not what was traditionally expected.

To sum up, the forced internment of Japanese Americans during World War II stands as an unjust chapter in American history, driven by wartime hysteria and racial prejudice. This event was a violation of civil liberties and cannot be justified, but nevertheless it disrupted the 'cherished' gender norms society had adopted until the 1940s. By retelling her experience in *Citizen 13660*, Miné Okubo (1946) shows that a tentative sense of gender equality happened in the camps, particularly through nonconformity to dress code, hobbies and manual work. However, the background labor of caregiving fell most of the time on women, specifically mothers.

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SUBURBAN NYMPHS
REVISITING JEFFREY EUGENIDES' *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES* THROUGH AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Abstract
Within an ecofeminist theoretical framework, this paper argues that *The Virgin Suicides*, a novel written by Jeffrey Eugenides, explores the inextricable connection between the subjugation of women and the destruction of the environment. The associations made between femininity and nature materialise in the tragic coming-of-age story of the Lisbon girls, set in a middle-class American suburb, creaking with premonitions of an imminent collapse. The phenomenon of (sub)urbanisation, which inherently reinforces the obliteration of nature and the Other, as well as the complete erasure of history, enables the establishing of a patriarchal system that is centered around a rigid social hierarchy, seclusion, and corrosive individualism. In Eugenides' prose, the pervasive influence of hegemonic masculinity is portrayed through the gradual deterioration of the Lisbons' house and its surroundings; the fragile, hermetic universe of the five sisters—similar to a matriarchy and existing for a brief amount of time—quickly collapses under the weight of male scrutiny, as it is captured through the intrusive observation of the collective voyeur-narrators.

In Jeffrey Eugenides' novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, the pervasive influence of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987:184), which is portrayed through the gradual deterioration of the Lisbons' house and its surroundings, leads to the emergence of a mythologized image of the Lisbon girls: the *Suburban Nymph*. Within an ecofeminist theoretical framework, this paper argues that Jeffrey Eugenides' début novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, explores the inextricable connection between the subjugation of women and the destruction of the environment through the tragic coming-of-age story of the Lisbon girls, set in a middle-class American suburb, creaking with premonitions of an imminent collapse.

The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' can be traced back to Raewyn Connell's theorization of gender from a sociological perspective:

> In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, ''hegemony'' means […] a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. […] Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth. (1987: 184)

Supporting the idea of the entrenchment of connections between masculinity and power, Hobbs highlights the shared position of Raewyn Connell and Michael Kimmel, noting the following:

> Hegemonic masculinity, like any gender identity, is fluid and performative; it is reinterpreted through outside agency and is dependent on the environment that surrounds it. Yet whatever its attributes, it is important to stress that *this form of masculinity will stabilise rather than deconstruct the gender order.* (2013: 386, my emphasis)

Masculinity defines itself in opposition to and dissociates from the natural, physical realm, while, as Philips states, "women, nature and all else that do not conform are 'othered' to confirm and justify their subordination" (2016: 472). These power dynamics are reinforced through sets of "hierarchical dualisms" (Plumwood, 1993, qtd. in Philips 2016: 472). Simone de Beauvoir's works are a remarkable prefiguration of ecofeminist discourse, exploring the subordinate relation between Man, Woman, and Nature. Patriarchal structures are not only appropriative, but also destructive towards nature and femininity:

> Before him, man encounters Nature; he has some hold upon her, he endeavours to mould her to his desire. But she cannot fill his needs. Either she appears simply as a purely impersonal opposition, she is an obstacle and remains a stranger; or she submits passively to a man's will and permits assimilation, so that *he takes possession of her only through consuming her* – that is, through destroying her. (…) [The woman] opposes him with neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard requirement of a reciprocal relation; through an unique privilege she is a conscious being yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. (de Beauvoir, 1956: 159-160, my emphasis)

According to the male schema, both nature and femininity are othered, and hence become tools for patriarchal gain. Therefore, ecofeminism argues that masculinity preserves its dominance by perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and subjugation that harms both the environment and women.

The American suburbia can be regarded as the embodiment of patriarchal values, through its hegemonic mechanisms. The suburb functions not only as a residential district for "the American everyman and his ever-expanding brood" (Murphy, 2009:5), but also as a gendered space in which Man can take control of the Object, represented by everyone who opposes him – women, the environment, and the Other(s). This phenomenon, which inherently reinforces the obliteration of nature, as well as the complete erasure of history, enables the establishment of a patriarchal system that is centered around a rigid social hierarchy, seclusion, and corrosive individualism.

According to Murphy, the American Suburbia is "a breeding ground for discontent and mindless conventionality" (2009:5). Its obsession with perfection annihilates individuality, self-expression, and diversity, thus oppressing The Other.

The middle-aged narrators of the novel reflect upon the insidiousness of their hometown:

> our entire neighborhood [was] like an overexposed photograph. We got to see how truly unimaginative our suburb was, everything laid out on a grid whose bland uniformity the trees had hidden. (Eugenides, 2021:236)

Although the plot of *The Virgin Suicides* falls within the category of the coming-of-age story, its protagonists are far from fitting into the mold of the novel of formation. The Lisbon sisters do not accept the "destiny assigned to [them] by nature and by society," yet they do not repudiate it completely; they are, as Simone de Beauvoir explains, "too much divided against [themselves] to join battle with the world" (1956:349). Instead, they seek refuge in a world of their own, a gynaeceum. The fragile, hermetic universe of the five sisters—similar to a matriarchy and existing for a brief amount of time—quickly collapses under the weight of male scrutiny, as it is captured through the intrusive observation of the collective voyeur-narrators. The overwhelming dominance of the androcentric society, which is perfectly embodied by the American suburbia, ultimately results in the disintegration of the self-contained space of femininity and vulnerability inhabited by the Lisbon sisters.

The narrators reframe the suicides as acts of existential rebellion rather than isolated, personal tragedies, thus acknowledging the girls as revolutionaries attuned to a world permanently scarred by patriarchal values:

> They had killed themselves over our dying forests, over manatees maimed by propellers as they surfaced to drink from garden hoses; they had killed themselves at the sight of used tires stacked higher than the pyramids; they had killed themselves over the failure to find a love none of us could ever be. In the end, the tortures tearing the Lisbon girls pointed to *a simple reasoned refusal to accept the world as it was handed down to them*, so full of flaws (Eugenides, 2021: 239, my emphasis).

The interpretation offered by the male narrators is grounded in environmental grief, revealing the repudiation of a destructive system that maintains its hegemonic power through rampant consumerism and exploitation.

The psychological condition of the five sisters is mirrored by the physical decline of their home and neighbourhood. The simultaneous deterioration of both the Lisbon house and the suburb indicates that the suicides were not merely a particular, unusual incident, but also an outward expression of the social, economic, and moral decay of the American society.

> More and more people […] put the deaths down to the girls' foresight in predicting decadence. People saw their clairvoyance in the wiped-out elms, the harsh sunlight, the continuing decline of our auto industry. (Eugenides, 2021: 238)

The narrators recall making sense of the girls' accumulating mental turmoil by surveying the state of their home: "the growing disrepair of the Lisbon house constantly reminded us of the trouble within" (Eugenides, 2021:90). The corresponding disintegration of the Lisbon sisters and their sanctuary reveals the confined nature of femininity, which is traditionally associated with domesticity. The Lisbon house eventually becomes uninhabitable, both physically and spiritually. As Mrs. Lisbon "shut the house in maximum-security isolation" (2021:136), their safe haven would go on to become "one big coffin" (2021: 158) meant to slowly hinder their autonomy.

Consequently, the way in which the community relates to the tragedy highlights the disillusionment of The American Dream. The permanent sense of impending doom brought on by the 70's becomes apparent to the citizens, pervading all aspects of day-to-day life: from late mail, unfixed potholes, and unkept lawns, to social injustice and civil unrest:

> They said nothing and our parents said nothing, so we sensed how ancient they were, how accustomed to trauma, depressions, and wars. We realized that the version of the world they rendered for us was not the world they really believed in. (Eugenides, 2021: 52)

The narrator's comment on the superficiality of the Detroit suburb, which is shaped by emotional repression, a faulty coping mechanism that ultimately led to the suicide of the Lisbon girls. As Old Mrs. Karafilis remarks, hypocrisy permeates the lives of Americans, who "pretended to be happy all the time" (Eugenides, 2021: 169).

What is more, the Dutch elm disease is not only another testament to the decaying suburb, but also a striking parallel to the infectious disease of the Lisbons (i.e., their suicidal tendencies):

> After denuding the trunk, the men left to denude others, and for a time the tree stood blighted, trying to raise its stunted arms, a creature clubbed mute, only its sudden voicelessness making us realize it had been speaking all along. (Eugenides, 2021: 173)

In both cases, the neighborhood makes desperate attempts to contain the infections in order to preserve their fragile world, as anything that could signal the decline of the American Dream would lead to the disintegration of an already debilitated community.

It becomes relevant, then, to introduce the notion of the *Suburban Nymph*, a man-created myth, shaped through immanence, desire, and need of control. Animism is the means through which Nature is anthropomorphized, taking the form of nymphs, sirens, fairies etc. As the woman is "the privileged object through which [Man] subdues Nature" (de Beauvoir, 1956: 175), she is also required to embody an ideal, to assume a manufactured and socially-desirable identity. Her value is

inherently defined by conformity and the ability to serve male pleasure. Similarly, Nature is perceived as an entity whose sole purpose is seduction and submission.

The American Suburbia and patriarchal structures exert similar effects on nature and women, as both fall under the category of the Other: control, destruction, and, most importantly, commodification. The Lisbon girls are thus confined to a space of conformity, condemned to an existence imagined by patriarchal logic. They become *Suburban Nymphs*:

> As a member of society, [the young girl] enters upon adult life only in becoming a woman; she pays for her liberation by an abdication [of her individuality]. Whereas among plants and animals she is a human being; she is freed at once from her family and from the males—a subject, a free being. (de Beauvoir, 1956: 359)

However, once a young girl realizes she is the Other and acknowledges her lack of agency and her passivity, she tries to cope through various forms of escapism: nature, idolatry, and, as a last resort, death. The intimate connection between the Lisbon sisters and nature is encapsulated in the episode during which the girls link around the elm tree of the family, protesting against the decision of the Parks Department. The resemblance to the first ecofeminist conservation effort—the Chipko Movement—supports the ecocritical implications of the novel.

The objectification of women is directly linked to the inherently masculine desire of possession. If a woman is not herself attainable—emotionally or physically—the man constructs an image of her which he can completely control.

As the suburbia starts to fall apart and they lose control over their own lives, the male neighbours feel the need to exert ownership onto the girls. Kostova points out that "as voyeurs, these men can also be classified as bystanders, located between the categories of perpetrator and victim." (2013:49) Therefore, the Suburban Nymph is a byproduct of male grief, designed to alleviate the melancholy caused by change and maturation. Thus, by consuming the girls as myth and memory, the adult narrators can remain boys indefinitely, surrendering to ignorance and nostalgia. Because of this, the five Lisbon sisters are portrayed as amorphous, incorporeal beings, whose existence satisfies the adolescent yearning of the male narrators, to which they confess in the last pages of the novel: "It didn't matter in the end how old they had been, or that they were girls, but only that we had loved them" (Eugenides, 2021: 243).

This reinforces the virginal myth, which is, as Simone de Beauvoir states, "the most consummate form of the feminine mystery," equal parts fascination and disturbance (1956: 171). The mystery and inaccessibility implied by virginity renders the girls spectral, almost specular - they become blank slates onto which the group of boys can project their ever-changing desires. The miscellaneous collection of exhibits that the boys had got hold of during their "strange curatorship" (Eugenides, 2021: 181) is illustrative of the appropriation of the girls' identity. In other words, their memory is preserved and reshaped through items and objects that they can

attribute meaning to; in this way, the men gain complete control over the narrative of the girls and their tragedy. Rather than retelling the story of the Lisbon sisters through their testimonies, they chose to piece together their own recollections of the 18 months leading to the suicides. Essentially, the voyeur-narrators became "custodians of the girls' lives' and deaths" (Eugenides, 2021: 219).

To conclude the examination, this paper has proposed an analysis centered around a variant of "the Eternal Feminine" (de Beauvoir, 1956)—i.e., the Suburban Nymph—set within an ecofeminist interpretive framework. The irreversible disrepair of the Lisbon house reflects the collapse of a seemingly perfect suburban landscape, in which hegemonic masculinity lays claim to female individuality and transforms it into an abstract, mythologised representation. As a result, the Suburban Nymph serves as "a symbol of what was wrong with the country, the pain it inflicted on even its most innocent citizens." (Eugenides, 2021: 226)

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THE MULTIFACETED ROLES OF INTERTEXTUALITY IN ALI SMITH'S *SUMMER*

Abstract
Since Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in her essay, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" (1980), it became a dominant idea in literary theories that texts are in dialogue with their predecessors. My paper examines the role of intertextuality in Ali Smith's *Summer* and decodes the specific intertexts, with a special focus on the works of William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. I argue that their cyclical revisitations are intentionally used by Smith. Through these authors, she aims to understand the post-Brexit divided state of the nation and provide a social critique of contemporary British society. Consequently, I posit that Smith employs intertextuality to demonstrate the interconnectedness of past and present and to connect historical events to contemporary dilemmas.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the strategy behind the intertextual dialogue with Shakespeare's later worksand Dickens's works in Ali Smith's *Summer*. I argue that Smith deploys historical examples via intertexts to reflect on present-day challenges and critique post-Brexit Britain. This paper will first examine the role of Shakespearean intertexts, focusing on *The Winter's Tale*, before examining the Dickensian references. Finally, it will briefly consider other intertextual elements before concluding how these echoes help the reader to interpret the current events and shape their understanding of the now.

Shakespearean Resonance

The seasonal revisitations of Shakespeare's later works start in *Autumn* with *The Tempest*, then in *Winter* Smith refashions *Cymbeline*, in *Spring* she uses *Pericles* as a frame for her novel, and in *Summer*, she reimagines *The Winter's Tale*. In my view, the reason why Smith uses the latest, and, in a sense, most mature plays of Shakespeare is twofold. Firstly, all of these plays are family dramas, and, at the same time, the volumes of the *Quartet* are centered on the complexities of relationships. Secondly, while tragic elements are inherent in every Shakesperean (romantic) comedy, they are ultimately resolved. Each starts with a breakdown, followed by recognition, and ends in reconstruction and reconciliation.

Similarly, *Summer* begins with a breakdown and tension between the members of the Greenlaw family: the divorce of the parents, and the opposition between the siblings. However, later comes the, perhaps unconscious, recognition of

the problem, when they decide to join the strangers, Art and Charlotte, who are characters from *Winter* on a trip to Suffolk. While no grand transformation happens, the reconciliation of the Greenlaws at the end of their journey is conspicuous: Grace finds her way back to herself and to her teenage children, and the siblings reinforce that love is an unbreakable bond in the family.

Ali Smith's choice of *The Winter's Tale* is not coincidental, but quite predictable as one of the epigraphs on the first page of *Summer*: "O, she's warm" (Smith, 2020: 1) is from this very play. This line refers to the final scene and greatest miracle of the play when the statue of Hermione comes to life. However, this is not the only reference to the virtuous queen of Sicilia.G race, the matron, and mother of the Greenlaws, a former actor, played Hermione in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* on a summer theatre tour. Similarly to Hermione, Grace also has a daughter, Sacha, who represents and advocates for the future generation of women.

By choosing *The Winter's Tale*, Smith creates a parallel between *Summer*'s feminist content, and the overpowering male voice and misogynistic treatment of women represented in the Shakespearean tale through the treatment of Hermione by her husband, Leontes. The tyrannical Leontes accuses his innocent and pregnant wife, Hermione, of unfaithfulness, but, in reality, he fears her agency over her body, and her sexual freedom. In Shakespeare's late play, the representation of womanhood is pivotal. Moreover, the culmination of the play is when Leontes's violence against Hermione is resolved in his "punishment", namely that because of the tricks of two women, Hermione and Paulina, he becomes a changed, family-oriented, and remorseful man. Therefore, Shakespeare, in this play, celebrates the wit of oppressed women.

Similarly, the idea of fighting against injustices towards women and the struggles of modern womanhood reverberate in all four books of the *Quartet*. However, it is important to note that the feminist content in *Summer* is not about the milieu of contemporary feminism but focuses on the experience of women's oppression (Coward, 1999: 155-156), and, in my view, serves political purposes. For instance, Grace recalls an atrocity a Muslim woman had to face in the UK after Boris Johnson's article in *The Telegraph*, in which he compared Muslim women wearing burkas to letterboxes and bank robbers (Johnson, 2018). The comment led to an incident, witnessed by the mum of Sacha's friend:

> She told me a terrific thing, about a man who stopped her mother in the street outside their dry cleaners and pretended he was trying to post a letter into her eyes then tried to get everyone passing in the street to laugh...He just looked like a lunatic. But it's what actually happened to them after that article. It made mad people go even madder (Smith, 2020: 92).

This attack doubles as a comment on the emerging xenophobia and the mistreatment of women in general, as well as a political critique on the controversial and hostile comments of the then Conservative MP.

The seemingly paradoxical decision of refashioning *The Winter's Tale* for a novel entitled *Summer* showcases Smith's wit and comical skills. Nonetheless, as Grace concludes, "*The Winter's Tale* is all about summer, really. It's like it says, don't worry another world is possible. When you're stuck in the world at its worst, that's important. To be able to say that" (Smith, 2020: 300). Grace's message is meant for the people of the COVID-blighted, post-Brexit era; it says that even in the darkest of hours hope should not leave one's side.

Alternatively, this can be interpreted as a reference to the second part of the play, which is set in spring-summer and is connected to the literary tradition of seasonal archetypes, where summer stands for rebirth and romance. This archetypal criticism has a long tradition from the death-rebirth myths of ancient Greeks, such as the abduction of Persephone, who has to spend half of her life in the Underworld with Hades, and the other half on Mount Olympus with her mother, Demeter. In the latter half of the year, spring and summer occur, whereas during her time with Hades, it is autumn and wintertime on Earth. However, the in-depth analysis of archetypal criticism is outside of the scope of my research, thus I refer to the archetype of summer represented in both *The Winter's Tale* and Smith's *Summer*, with the words of Northrop Frye, who interpreted summer as the "archetype of comedy, pastoral and idyll" (1951: 104). While Smith's *Summer* is not set in idyllic times, the interpretation of summer, given by the author fits perfectly with the novel. She explained that the "[E]nglish word for summer comes from the Old English *sumor*, from the proto-indo-european root *sam*, meaning both *one* and *together*" (Smith, 2020: 263). Smith's definition of summer indicates that the motif of summer serves as a bridge between the characters, and as a point of stability in the permeable timeline.

Furthermore, the choice of Shakespearean intertexts employed by Smith in *Summer* also has a connection to the gist of the novel since intertextuality helps to understand the chaotic events of today through the lenses of previous crises, and functions as a bridge between different eras. According to Attila Kiss, William Shakespeare's plays witnessed one of the most critical turning points of social and cultural history, and people at that time experienced the collision of two completely different world models, the symbolical and the mechanic world model, and the gradual transition from the first one to the latter (2007: 18-19, 136-137). This transition brought uncertainty and an epistemological crisis in society.

Similarly, to the Renaissance era, contemporary society experiences a knowledge and truth-seeking crisis. This crisis derives from the impacts of social media on truth perception, and the current political culture that appeals to emotions and beliefs instead of reason and facts. These factors create similar anxiety and uncertainty in today's post-truth society, as the world model change did in Shakespeare's time. Smith also questions the postmillennial generation's relationship with authenticity and credibility when Sacha wants to use a quote for an essay, presumably from Hannah Arendt, but fails to give an evidence-backed and trusted source for this quote. Moreover, she does not see why her mother finds it concerning

to use Brainyquote, Goodreads, or Facebook as a source in an academic paper, after all, she says: "[t]he internet is the primary source" (Smith, 2020: 10). This assumption accurately portrays the above-mentioned knowledge crisis and problematizes contemporary society's inability to distinguish between falsehood and truth.

Another example of this knowledge and identity crisis that society faces today is Sacha's watching of a show where celebrities wear masks to hide their real identity. This example evokes in Sacha connotations to politicians when she states that everybody wears masks nowadays, but the real mask is the one that is worn by the planets' liars, which is an innuendo to today's political leaders. Smith makes another comment on the distorted reality of current times through the reappearance of SA4A. This sinister organisation that has different branches, from controversial detention centres for immigrants to national power services, stands for the faceless, automaton megacorporations. Along with the concealment of the true self by 'masks' in the post-truth world, this made-up company serves as a symbol of the fear of today's unknown, mysterious, police-like firms monitor and examine every digital footstep of the citizens to provide protection and create the false feeling of security in people.

Dickensian Threads in *Summer*

The linking pattern of intertextuality between the seasonal volumes also appears in the form of references to Charles Dickens's works. *Autumn* features the historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, in *Winter* Dickens's famous festive tale, "A Christmas Carol" appears, *Spring* refers to *Hard Times* and finally *Summer* rephrases a line from *David Copperfield* as the main question of the novel. The opening line of *David Copperfield* is "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (Dickens, 1966: 1). *Summer* also starts with a feminist rewording of Dickens's line "Whether I shall turn out to be the heroine of my own life" (Smith, 2020: 7). By changing the original 'hero' to 'heroine', she reinforces female agency and women's rights and power to shape their own narrative. Additionally, Smith challenges herself to make a change with *Seasonal Quartet*, and direct the reader's attention to the contemporary crises. Moreover, Smith also challenges the readers and asks them whether they have the power to make a change and take action themselves.

However, *David Copperfield* is not the only Dickensian reference in the book. Smith borrows the ending line of *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*. The ending line of *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*, "Lord keep my memory green" (Dickens, 1996: page), was used as one of the epigraphs at the beginning of the novel. Using this line as a motto for her novel, Smith foreshadows an important theme of her book: memory and the interconnectedness of past and present. In Dickens's tale, the protagonist, Redlaw, makes an appealing bargain with a spirit that offers to take

away all his painful memories. However, he realises that the absence of one's memory does not bring joy to him as he loses his emotional connection to humans. In a similar manner, Smith pleads for keeping humans' memory alive, so that everyone can remember not only the joyful events, but the bitter ones, too, as each piece of memory plays a formative role in human life. This reinforces her goal of maintaining an ongoing dialogue with previous texts, namely, that people can only change if they learn from the lessons and mistakes of the past, and for that, one must remember them.

Smith also includes implicit intertexts from Dickens's *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*. However, in these cases, the connections between the two texts are harder to identify and cannot be translated or understood as effortlessly as the explicit quotes. With that, I believe Smith plays a game with the readers, and challenges them to recognise these intertexts, which makes the reading experience more interactive. One of these implicit references is the first line of *Summer*'s prologue, which alludes to the first line of Dickens's work, "Everybody said so" (Dickens, 1996: page). In Smith's version, it is followed by a question mark and includes a colon: "Everybody said: so?" (Smith, 2020: 3). Besides transforming it, she also does not include a quotation mark or the author's name; thus, the author invites the reader to engage on a more immersive level with the text and investigate these somewhat hidden connections.

Another allusion to Dickens's *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* can be found in Daniel's letter to his sister, Hannah when he mentions that he reads "[a] little Christmas story by Dickens too where a man asks a ghost to take his memory away so he will stop feeling sad about painful things he remembers" (Smith, 2020: 188), which is a brief summary of the Dickensian story.

Further Intertextual Echoes: Woolf and Mazzetti

After the targeted analysis of Shakespeare's and Dickens's textual appearance in *Summer*, I investigate further important intertextual elements in the novel. Smith includes the opening line of Woolf's *Between the Acts* among the epigraphs: "It was a summer's night and they were talking, in the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool" (1969: 3). By choosing this line as one of the mottos of her book, Smith foreshadows two significant traits of it. Firstly, her tale is not about the idyll of summer, but about the harsh reality, in the metaphor of Woolf's 'cesspool'. Secondly, the tension between beauty and ugliness serves as a reminder that everything is more complex than it seems to be at first. In addition, Smith uses this single quote to anticipate the ambition of her book, as it warns the reader to examine every idea and narrative from multiple angles and to always remain skeptical, instead of accepting a single, definitive truth.

Apart from the references to other literary pieces, Smith includes intertexts from other media. Each book of the *Quartet* pays tribute to a female artist in *Summer*,

namely to the Italian, post-war immigrant filmmaker Lorenza Mazzetti. First, Smith refers to Mazzetti's film, *K* (1954) in her prologue (Smith, 2020: 56). Then a revisiting character from *Winter*, Charlotte mentions a silent film with two men speaking without words, this film is called *Together* (1956) and was directed by Mazzetti (Smith, 2020: 125-127). Smith closes her frame story by introducing the reader to Mazzetti's works in more depth (2020: 255-264).

Conclusion

To conclude, intertextuality is significant in Ali Smith's text for two different reasons. Firstly, the intertexts from the novels of Charles Dickens and the plays of William Shakespeare link *Summer* to the other three seasonal novels, enhancing the wholeness of the *Seasonal Quartet*, reinforcing its concluding position, and mirroring the interconnectedness of seasons in nature. In addition, this very reunion of all the previous characters, and the shared universe of the four novels are essentially Shakespearean. In his late comedies, the final acts are the celebration of love and forgiveness, the restoration of social order, and the reinforced unity.

Secondly, Smith uses intertextuality to comment on contemporary social and political issues. With Shakespeare, she reflects on the similar epistemological crises society faces nowadays, which is similar to the change of world models in Shakespeare's era. Dickens, with *David Copperfield*, brought to the forefront the inequality of Victorian groups of society, the hardships of the poor, the exploitation of children, the harsh reality of debtors' prisons, and the flaws in the legal system. In a similar manner, Smith comments and raises awareness of the contemporary social, economic, and moral problems in *Summer*. Through the lenses of the Greenlaw family, she sheds light on current issues, such as climate change, the immigration crisis, the political division of the British nation after the Brexit referendum, the impact of social media and technology on knowledge, and the changes in human relationships because of the COVID-pandemic.

In summary, apart from their connective power, the intertexts of Shakespeare and Dickens also invite the reader to explore the thematic connections between *Summer* and the works of the referred authors, and they mark that the mistakes of the past can teach humankind lessons in the present and determine its mission in the future.

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PETER HILL'S STARGAZING: A JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

Abstract
Peter Hill´s novel *Stargazing* is a remarkable representative of memoir writing, blurring the lines between his personal reflections and insightful storytelling. Set in 1970s Scotland, the author gives an account of his time as a lighthouse keeper, while providing an original outlook on topics such as friendship, personal identity, and the symbolism of lighthouses. This paper aims to examine the intricacies of Hill's writing style and how his vivid characterization enriches the story, pushing the novel beyond its conventional boundaries of its genre. In addition, the analysis considers how Hill situates his experiences within the broader context of globalism and historical events through pop culture and intertextual references. Finally, the paper demonstrates how Stargazing distinguishes itself in the oversaturated contemporary memoir market by adopting a stance of authenticity and emphasizing the importance of self-discovery and growth.

Peter Hill's *Stargazing* is a forgotten gem of the memoir genre. With its gentle lyrical prose and technicolor view of life, it captures the experiences of a young adult in 1970s Scotland, attracting the reader and treading the line between memory and imagination.

The memoir genre has managed in recent years to reshape the entire literary landscape. Bookstores have been flooded with memoirs, and many celebrities have either written or recommended one to their audience. And while this has its benefits, especially when it comes to educating the public, it has unfortunately also opened the floodgates for literary works that may or may not fall short when it comes to categorizing them as memoirs. This has led to an oversaturation of the market and a fall in the quality of the genre as a whole. In his 2012 article for *The New York Times* entitled "The Problem with Memoirs", Neil Genzlinger has a scathing take on the current trend of memoirs, as he describes it:

> Memoirs have been disgorged by virtually everyone who has ever had cancer, been anorexic, battled depression, lost weight. By anyone who has ever taught an underprivileged child, adopted an underprivileged child, or been an underprivileged child. By anyone who was raised in the '60s, '70s, or '80s, not to mention the '50s, '40s, or '30s. Owned a dog. Run a marathon. Found religion. Held a job. (Genzlinger, 2012)

In the same article, he reinstates the fundamental rule of memoirs: self-discovery. If a memoir does not help the writer discover themselves and connect with the reader, then it might not be an honest memoir.

This article aims to explore the potential of Peter Hill's memoir, *Stargazing*, by analyzing its unique elements and understanding what makes it stand out from the myriads of others.

Peter Hill (b. 1953) is a Glasgow-born artist and author who wrote *Stargazing* as a way to capture the paradoxical nature of lighthouses. There seems to be a misconception that lighthouses are tranquil and easy to manage, but as Hill himself discovers, there is nothing easy about them. He spends the summer of 1973 working as a lighthouse keeper on three different islands: Pladda, Ailsa Craig, and Hyskeir. With a wide array of characters, each bringing their unique personality to the forefront, and with the political turmoil of the '60s and '70s as a backdrop, Hill manages to create a world that is based on his personal experience but reads and feels like fiction. It combines various elements, some of which will be discussed in this paper, to create a memoir that does not feel boring or disingenuous.

In 1973, a young Peter Hill saw an advertisement in *The Scotsman* regarding a summer job as a relief lighthouse keeper. While his peers were protesting war and marching the streets, he was on one of Scotland's tiniest islands. With themes of automation, patriotism, morality, and self-discovery, Hill jumps from one topic to another without disrupting the flow of the text. The people he encounters are vivid and authentic: from a God-fearing head lighthouse keeper, to a TV-obsessed eligible bachelor with a cocker spaniel. They go beyond basic characterization, enabling Hill to come to his own personal growth. His identity at the end comes together as a mélange of memories and lessons.

The dynamics of the characters could be described as rough-and-ready. Their camaraderie feels sharp, especially in the beginning, but with each tale told they soften to one another and thus round themselves off:

> In the early days of my apprenticeship it was difficult to know when I was getting my leg pulled, precisely because so much of what sounded far-fetched eventually proved to be correct. Stories I heard on one lighthouse would be confirmed months later on a different light with a different crew. This camaraderie contrasted with our internal lives, our solitary thoughts, our three in the morning musings, and especially our readings. (Hill, 2012: 61)

Regardless of their differences, when it came to taking care of the lighthouses they functioned like a well-oiled machine, anticipating each other's needs and supplementing if necessary. Hill later commented on these lighthouse dynamics, stating that, as a keeper, one had to be willing to set their differences aside to get the job done (Turnip, 2003). The interactions between the characters create a type of humor that comforts the reader. The clash between them brings to mind the comedy of manners, which critiques the dynamics of contemporary society.

What is more, pop culture is a significant element in this memoir. Hill references many pop culture moments and icons. The intertextuality allows the reader to decipher and interpret Hill's journey as a collage of experiences and

emotions that aren't necessarily his own, but which he uses to describe his personal coming-of-age process. By mixing different styles and themes, Hill manages to paint a more accurate picture of his journey, also adding an extra layer of symbolism to the text. From the Beat Generation reference to George Harrison, each is used to convey tiny details that enrich his personality.

The 1970s were marked by uncertainty and anger - from people marching against the Vietnam War to newspapers and broadcasters sharing updates on the Watergate Scandal. It is no surprise that Hill incorporates these topics, which speaks of the sheer power those events had on society. Even in the lighthouses he worked at, tensions ran high when those discussions came up:

> Like many of my generation the war in Vietnam had weighed so heavily on my mind and disillusioned us about the 'straight' world that we'd sought to form an alternative world of our own. During my months on the lighthouses I found I was rejoining a shared reality, filling in the many gaps in recent history and what was soon to be called 'popular culture', an overly-academic term for entertainment (…). (Hill, 2012: 49)

Hill refused to engage with the media, but part of maturing is transitioning from an idyllic mindset to a more pragmatic, realistic one, even if the transition is uncomfortable. This recalibration occurs on two fronts: internationally, which pertains to the aforementioned scandals, but also nationally. As stated previously, Peter Hill grew up in Glasgow, Scotland and as proud as he is of his Scottish identity, he admits that during his formative years he learned very little about Scotland's history:

> And over the next half an hour he gave me chapter and verse on that same history. I sat there, a young Scot, transfixed by this most liberal of Englishmen who told me more about the history of my own country in thirty minutes – or so it seemed – than I'd absorbed in six years at secondary school. (Hill, 2012: 159)

The underlying fear of every lighthouse keeper back then was the prospect of automation. That meant for many of the keepers not just losing a job, but their sense of purpose. For some, lighthouse keeping was the sole skill honed throughout their lives, so entering an era that was threatening to replace them was dangerous for both their mental and physical wellbeing.

Although this memoir delves into complicated and heavy topics, it never loses its lyrical, playful tone. Hill's descriptions are a mélange of humor and beauty. His obsession with color can be easily identified in his style:

> Television was black and white, text in books was black on white, crossword puzzles, dominoes, Buster Keaton movies, and all the images from the past, from history, came down to me in grainy death camp black and white or nineteenth-century etchings illustrating Dickens, The Hound of the Baskervilles, or scenes from the

> Crimean War. I wanted colour. I absolutely longed for colour. And in my naivety I think deep inside me I just accepted that colour had only come in to the world with the invention of colour photography. So I actively searched for colour. I found it in tubes of paint. Liquid colour, screw off the cap and there it was. (Hill, 2012: 13)

Therefore, according to what we have previously stated, we can conclude that the memoir's main purpose is to highlight the author's qualities, while at the same time, acknowledging their shortcomings, thus creating a balanced portrait of themselves. Hill does not fall into the trap of self-pity or blame, but instead tries to analyze his choices and beliefs in accordance with the times. Romanticizing his experiences as a lighthouse keeper by using an array of literary devices, Peter Hill exceeds the limits of the memoir genre by allowing himself to create an intimate connection between himself, his imagination and the reader.

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MARXIST AND ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON *THE ELEPHANT MAN*

Abstract
Argued in the merged Marxist and ecocritical lens, this paper holds demonstrates that David Lynch's 1980 portrayal of John Merrick in the film *The Elephant Man* is an image of systemic capitalist oppression and ecophobic fears within Victorian England. Drawing on Marx's alienation, commodification, and commodity fetishism, combined with ecocritical conceptions of ecophobia and ableism, the paper closely reads core narratives (e.g., Merrick's conditional acceptance in upper-class society and the midnight exhibit scene) to show how Merrick's body is constructed as a marketable commodity and shown as "unnatural." His journey from "freakish" fascination to sympathetic curiosity demonstrates how the bourgeoisie justify the domination of wild nature and humans "outside the norm" for the sake of profit and order.

Introduction

David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* remains an effective film due to its compassionate portrayal of John Merrick, a man with severe physical disabilities, living during Victorian England. Although earlier research has mainly focused on its portrayal of disability (Darke, 1994), and its biographical aspects, less attention has been given to an analysis which, in addition, emphasizes Marxist arguments against capitalist commodification as well as ecocritical arguments about ecophobia. This paper aims to close that gap by demonstrating how Lynch's narrative and visual practices articulate the dehumanizing rationality of market society ,as well as the culture of fear of the "unnatural" pervasively used across a variety of contexts from attitudes toward the non-human world to reactions against disabled bodies.

An important insight to the treatment of Merrick as a commodified spectacle is provided by Marx's theory of alienation, commodification, and commodity fetishism. Human dignity in capitalist society is eroded, Marx argues, where labour and its products are seen as commodities with only exchange value (Marx, 1977; Musto, 2010; Lavalette & Ferguson, 2018). Merrick's body is a sideshow, medical oddity, and ultimately a philanthropic spectacle, each of which illustrates how economic demands substitute for human nature. Equally, ecocritical theory illustrates how Merrick's "deviant" body evokes panic about wildness and chaos. This aspect can be exemplified through Simon Estok's theory of ecophobia as fear or dislike of that which disturbs boundaries between the human and the non-human (Estok, cited in Deyo, 2019). Ableism as a social prejudice that positions disability as dangerous overlaps with ecophobic theory, demonstrating how Victorian morals went about domesticating or banishing what could not be quite easily categorized.

Theoretical Framework

Karl Marx asserts that one of the main characteristics of capitalist society is alienation. Although the idea has a long history, Marcello Musto (2010: 79–80) points out that Marx was the one who made the significant change to concentrate on the material realities of labour. According to Marx, alienation is a tangible state based on "the sharpest critique of the capitalist mode of production" rather than just a sense of estrangement (Musto, 2010: 94). Quoting Jimmy Reid, Lavalette and Ferguson (2018: 197-198) highlight how alienation makes people feel as though they are under the influence of "blind economic forces beyond their control," meaning they "have no real say in shaping or determining their own destinies." Since "labour-power is a commodity that the worker is forced to sell in order to live and the product of his activity [is] not the object of his activity," this results in what Marx called commodification, the process by which things, and even people, are valued not for their intrinsic worth but for their exchange value in the market (Marx, 1977: 202). Marx's theories indicate that under capitalism, the exchange of commodities mediates social interactions and results in "commodity fetishism," in which labour-intensive objects seem to have an independent life, masking the human labour that produced them (Lavalette & Ferguson, 2018: 201-202). As we will see, Merrick's incredible exchange value overshadows his humanity, making him the ultimate commodity.

Simon Estok's definition of ecophobia provides a crucial perspective for comprehending how society responded to Merrick. According to Brian Deyo (2019: 442), Estok defines ecophobia as a "contempt for the natural world," originating from "deeply irrational fears that animate our species' relations with the nonhuman." Anything that makes it difficult to distinguish between the human and the non-human, the orderly and the wild, is a source of this terror. Ecophobia is roughly a fear or anxiety about the natural and unpredictable forces of life, including bodies that are seen to be "unnatural" or "monstrous."

Social prejudice and discrimination against people with impairments, ableism, is directly connected to this concern. Paul Anthony Darke (1994: 327) contends, in his objection to *The Elephant Man*, that disability is socially constructed and not a biological fact. For him, disability is routinely used metaphorically by directors, "constituting disability as inhuman so that others, normals, can be made human." Despite its sympathetic treatment of Merrick, Darke's analysis demonstrates the film ultimately reasserts an "ideology of normality as 'common sense' and abnormality as inhuman and 'unbearable'" (Darke, 1994: 327). By viewing the film, we can analyse the manner in which Merrick's body is both a place of capitalist exploitation and a metaphor for nature feared and repressed.

Merrick as Commodity and 'Unnatural' Body

The Elephant Man's first scenes immerse the audience in Victorian capitalism, a world of industry, steam, and the harsh realities of the marketplace. In this setting, John Merrick is initially seen by Dr. Frederick Treves as a commodity to be bought rather than as a patient. Treves's first meeting with Merrick's "owner," Bytes, is an apt illustration of commodification. Merrick is a "thing" which can be bought to display in the name of science, not a man. The film's major Marxist motif, dehumanisation, when one is treated solely by their worth as economic entities, is presented in this first meeting. As Taylor (1996: 227) describes, Marx regarded Victorian England as the typical account of an economically advanced society that would result in exploitation and class conflict. Marx's critique of exploitation continues to be a useful guide to the social processes of the time, although his predictions of revolution failed to materialize in England. Bytes, the archetypal capitalist who views Merrick as nothing more than a source of revenue, serves as the visual representation of this exploitation in the movie. He is the sole owner of Merrick, and his right to use and profit from Merrick's body is portrayed as a logical progression of property rights, which Musto (2010: 79) notes is a crucial component of the historical interpretation of alienation through the "transfer of property ownership."

Merrick's relocation to the London Hospital just modifies the conditions of his exhibition; it does not release him from the logic of commercialisation. At first, he is a medical curiosity, the medical establishment reading and deciphering his body as a manuscript. Treves takes part in this process by introducing Merrick to his coworkers in a lecture hall. The scene serves as a potent example of "medicalisation," the process by which a person's identity is absorbed by their diagnosis, as defined by Darke (1994: 327). Merrick is submissive here, his sickness first over his humanity as his body is examined and laid out.

Financial considerations are considered when the hospital decides whether to keep Merrick. He is initially a money-wasting, incurable presence that cannot be accommodated by hospital governor Carr Gomm. Merrick's position at the hospital will only be safe if he gains the favour and sponsorship of the upper classes and bourgeoisie. This development also highlights the destructive impact commercialisation has in bourgeois society. Merrick's worth is now expressed in terms of donations, and he is no longer a freak show but rather an exhibition of charity. Therefore, his ability to make money, whether in the squalid backstreets or the elite's drawing rooms, remains essential to his own survival.

An ecocritical interpretation of Merrick's situation is unavoidably related to this commodification. Merrick evokes both awe and dread, which stem from his apparent "unnaturalness." Victorian civilisation attempted to tame and control the wildness, and his defects are viewed as a chaotic and hideous departure from the human form. The sharp contrast between Merrick's body's "disorder" and the clean, industrialised environment is emphasised by the film's black-and-white

cinematography. This ecophobia is evident in the screams and fainting that occur when people first encounter Merrick. They respond not only to his appearance but also to the horrifying implication that the line separating chaos and order, human and animal, is not as clear-cut as they think. This link between Merrick and the animal world is furthered by the movie's reference to the made-up myth that Merrick's mother got scared by an elephant while she was pregnant, which puts him outside the boundaries of what is regarded as genuinely human.

Analysis

The two pivotal scenes, Merrick's tea at Treves' house and the break-in into his hospital room, encapsulate the main conflicts between normalization and exploitation of the film. Combined, they lay bare the unbreakable fact of Merrick's commodified life and the vulnerability of his manufactured humanity.

Merrick's visit to Frederick and Anne Treves is a display of bourgeois domesticity. Treves gets rid of the mirror in his front hall in preparation for the visit, which is said to protect Merrick but also excludes an “unnatural” or disturbing reflection inside the neat house. The most significant response is that of Anne, who was clearly shocked but conceals it beautifully and simultaneously assumes the role of a respectful hostess by smiling and putting out her hand. Merrick's sensitive soul is shattered by this courteous gesture, so foreign to him. His tears, which reflect the high level of his alienation, are provoked by an act of mere humanity on the part of a lovely woman, not by grief. The teatime ritual, the classic symbol of English propriety and form, is the subject of the scene.

Merrick is introduced to norms of “normal” social behavior. This concept continues to be explored through the subject matter of the family photographs. By showing photographs of their family, the Treveses preserve their heritage and social standing. Merrick tries to engage in this ritual when he asks tentatively, “Would you… would you like to see my mother?” In the moving dialogue, he displays the little photo of the “angel” who would “love me as I am” if only she could see him then, among “lovely kind friends.” In response, Anne's tears are a transformation of feigned sympathy into real empathy. It is, however, Merrick's ability to accommodate to the middle-class Victorian sentimental and domestic norms that makes such a moment of empathy possible. Because he is a charitable man and tragic figure, he is a safe outlet for sympathy and pity, and therefore his acceptance is made contingent.

The visit to the Treves' home is turned around unimaginably when The Night Porter gets his way with Merrick. Merrick's hospital room is turned into a backdrop of sadistic exploitation, whereas the Treves' home was a haven of pretended decorum. Merrick is alone when the scene starts, performing in secret. He holds a cigarette box in his hand, puts on a ring, and styles his hair using the mirror. “Hi, I'm John Merrick,” he rehearses the greeting. It is a private rehearsal of the normalcy that

he longs for, a poignant attempt to consume and imitate the bourgeois stature that he has learned. The Night Porter interrupts, shattering this performance. Suddenly, the surroundings turn into a blinding spectacle of Marxist commodification. The Porter has sold access to Merrick, and his pockets are ringing with coins now: "My friends. The Elephant Man." He shouts as he pulls Merrick over to the window, peeling away the humanness he had been attempting to erect. The insults and laughter of the drunk horde are a prime instance of the ecophobic look turned aggressive. They are not merely observing an event but a spectacle. As Merrick is made to drink alcohol, kiss a shivering prostitute, and endure physical maltreatment, the profane is exaggerated. His former master, Bytes, reappears, viewing the commotion as danger to his "treasure" rather than a man. Merrick's model of the cathedral, his striving towards an ordered self, is thrown on the floor in the climactic moment of havoc and breaks into several pieces: "Here. Treat yourself to something sweet." This is the last insult, a last transactional act that markets Merrick's nightmare-filled night as a paid act. The Night Porter does this by throwing a single coin to Merrick. Merrick's body eventually amounts to nothing but property to buy, sell, use for profit and pleasure in the economic order that rules his world.

Conclusion

Apart from its graphic depiction of physical pain, David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* is also a profoundly disturbing film because of its vitriolic attack on the social and economic forces behind our judgment of human beings. We can determine that the story of John Merrick is an allegory of the inherent exploitation in capitalist society, rather than one of personal tragedy, by interpreting the film through Marxist and ecocritical lenses. The story effectively illustrates Marx's commodification theory: individuals are commodified as their worth is determined based on their market value. It is a predictable expectation, demonstrated by Merrick's development from sideshow attraction to medical spectacle. The movie also depicts the massive ecophobia in society's response to different physical features.

Because Merrick's body is seen as monstrous deviation from the norm, it is deemed a canvas for a control-freak, fear-mongering society. The uncontrolled, the wild, and the body that defies convention are all that Merrick gets credit for. The movie thereby makes a strong comparison between the enslavement of nature and the disabled person, both being products of a system that aims to classify and conquer. While being full of poignant moments of sympathy and real human connection, *The Elephant* Man overall has a bleak message. It implies that complete acceptance of the "other," a "deviant" human form or the wilderness itself, is an unsubstantial ideal in a society driven by the double impulse of profit and normalcy. Lynch's film is a constant reminder that the battle for dignity is the battle against the dehumanizing forces which would market every life.

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MONSTROUS URGES: QUEERNESS, NATURE AND INFECTION IN *THE LAST OF US* AND *DRACULA*

Abstract
The Last of Us game series and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* challenge heterosexual and gender stereotypes by integrating nature as an element that provides an environment in which, alongside the development of infection and death, heteronormativity is challenged. In this paper we will showcase how heterosexuality and gender stereotypes are socially constructed elements that quickly crumble in these fictional universes where nature, as a primordial force, overtakes humanity. Our analysis will focus on the subtle way in which *Dracula* deals with the topic of queerness and the prominent element of nature in *The Last of Us* through the lens of queer ecology.

This paper will focus on the analysis of *The Last of Us* game franchise and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker through the theoretical framework of eco-criticism, examining elements of nature and queerness found in both the novel and the video games. Although 21st century video games and the 19th century novel seem to be fundamentally different, both of them share common themes, such as infection, nature, queerness and gender roles. Moreover, the novel has greatly influenced pandemic-themed stories in video games because "[t]he foundation of zombie and pandemic stories in gaming can be traced to Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), a novel about a vampire who moves from Transylvania to England to spread vampirism through bites." (Haddad, 2022:48). In the first part of the paper, we will analyze how *The Last of Us* game franchise challenges heteronormative conventions as nature reclaims its attributes, and the world's morals are continuously changing while zombies take over the world. Furthermore, in the second part of the paper we will analyze the themes of nature and sexuality conveyed in *Dracula*, as the novel challenges traditional norms by queering the boundaries between the natural and the unnatural.

The Last of Us

The Last of Us (2013) is a zombie apocalyptic game following the touching story of Joel and Ellie, a fourteen-year-old girl immune to zombies, as they struggle together to survive. While their sole purpose is to survive this outbreak, the storyline introduces various themes of revenge, identity and queer debates, all tied together by "environmental storytelling" (Jenkins, 2004:121). This narratological approach portrays certain melancholic events through a detailed environment, subtly hinting at the remnants of a past life: destroyed, dirty rooms in which old paintings, drawings and posters can be found. These features show a glimpse of past humanity, of a previous life unknown to the characters and now completely reclaimed by nature

and its monstrous product: zombies. Jenkins argues that such details not only in the scenery, but also in the characters' outfits and visual effects "contain affective potential" (2004: 127), influencing the players' emotional reactions to the story, "especially in those instances where the space has been transformed by narrative events" (Jenkins, 2004: 127). Furthermore, the cinematography of the surroundings portrays an uncanny universe in which nature is primordial and all-devouring, it does not only take over civilization as the urban sites are decayed and abandoned by humanity, but it also fosters monsters that deviate from humans. In this sense, nature and the environment tell their own story through the "the fungal masses that carpet many of the game's abandoned buildings in a reclamation of human environments by nature" (May, 2021), through immersive sounds, or even through zombies, which can be seen, on one hand, "as kind of retaliation of violence in which nature causes destruction against humanity" (Vasso, 2018: 24). Therefore, nature violently reclaims its possessions through zombies, these monstrous creatures causing the downfall of humans' dominance over the world as they are no longer the ruling entity, becoming obedient and subjugated to nature. Consequently, zombies are the instrument in which the previous hierarchy of power is overturned - humans are no longer the center of the world as they lose control over the civilized spaces, contrasting previous beliefs, such as anthropocentrism, which become invalid in this universe. On the other hand, zombies are not necessarily only an obstacle between nature and humanity as these monstrous creatures can depict the connection and balance between the aforementioned elements. Nature and humanity, life and death, are no longer separate entities and they become, to some extent, inseparable due to the emergence and evolution of zombies.

Furthermore, the virus in *The Last of Us* universe suggests that the symbiotic relationship between the individual and parasite collapses the borders between human and fungus. Thus, the infected represent a violent, gruesome merging between humans and nature, the virus parasitizing its host becomes a singular being, yet the host and the fungus are both interdependent on each other (Newman, 2019: 47). This repugnant unification destroys any fixed, rigid boundaries specific to our universe in relation to nature and normality, by forming a world deprived of any limitations. The zombies' physical attributes are completely disfigured by the fungus and mold growing on the skin during the four stages of infection, symbolizing "de-individualization, the breakdown of the identifiable, individual self" (Newman, 2019: 40). The host's body leaks infectious spores and the last remains of human characteristics are slowly mutilated while the fungus eats away the brain, affecting the vital parts of the body: the eyes are damaged, the nose is decaying and rotting away, the skull is forcibly torn apart by the overgrowing fungus, the head and body are completely disfigured as the four stages of the fungal infection develop. Therefore, nature is not a background element, as, on one hand, it is prosperous, beautiful and alive, and on the other hand, it creates a flourishing environment for the fungus to develop and spread.

The player explores the ruins of urban centers as the once populated roads are overgrown with weeds; the characters explore eroded, tall buildings that were once the pinnacle of civilization and are now completely consumed by fungus, becoming relics of past humanity. Consequently, as the characters scavenge for supplies or complete their missions, they end up in places that hold remnants of a previous, distant and morally constrictive world. For example, Ellie and Dina, the main protagonists and a queer couple of *The Last of Us Part II* (2020), find themselves exploring a queer-themed bookstore. As they find an erotic lesbian book, Dina jokes around stating "It's us, right?" (Naughty Dog, 2020) and is confused by the presence of rainbows in the bookstore "What's with all the rainbows?" (Naughty Dog, 2020). Although the player realizes the bookshop indirectly affirms Ellie and Dina's queer identities, the characters are unaware of it, being fascinated, but also confused on why such a bookstore should need to exist in the world before the outbreak. Dina's joke implies a naive perception of their relationship and of queerness in general, because their identities are not conditioned nor judged by society as "[t]he only visible examples of homophobia or transphobia in The Last of Us 2 come from generations who grew up before the pandemic, absorbed by a cultural discourse where LGBT people were demonized for simply existing." (King, 2020), but also by those religiously indoctrinated.

Therefore, this previous, prejudiced world is unknown to the younger characters, anticipating a shift in the social conventions and norms in the game's universe. Consequently, they do not need to affirm their queer identity nor to claim it, because there are no prejudices needed to be fought against in such a world disrupted by fungus and infection. However, homophobia is still prominent and the characters engaging in such behavior are those who grew up and lived in the world previous to the outbreak. For example, in *Chapter I: Jackson-Waking Up*, a touching scene between Ellie and Dina is interrupted by Seth, an old man, who calls Dina a homophobic slur.

Furthermore, queer relations are more than just an opposition to what is normal, such a statement being continuously affirmed by *The Last of Us* through Ellie and Dina's relationship: "Queer encounters, from a Deleuzian perspective, are not affirmations of a group of bodies who recognize themselves as other than normative" (Giffney & Hird, 2008: 30). Their queerness is not a mere objection and defiance of "normality", because their objective is not following traditional conventions but rather to strengthen relationships in a world where survival is not assured. For example, Joel becomes Ellie's father even if they are not biologically related, or Ellie and Dina develop a romantic relationship even though they are both women. Additionally, in *The Last of Us*: *Left Behind* DLC, Ellie and Riley develop an affectionate relation as they share a tender kiss in the *Mallrats* chapter. Although the player realizes the kiss is a representation of a marginalized community which the characters could be a part of, in their universe such expressions of love are unconsciously expressed and do not determine their identity. Ellie awkwardly

apologizes to Riley after the kiss, but her answer, "For what?" (Naughty Dog, 2014), reveals that their actions are carefree and do not alter nor define their identity, as their sexuality is irrelevant. Therefore, the game's portrayal of sexuality and fluidity in these subtle ways indicates the characters' openness to explore their sexuality without being oppressed or constricted by any heteronormative norms.

Consequently, heterosexuality and gender stereotypes are socially constructed elements that would quickly crumble in a world where such biases would not be taught or imposed on individuals by society. Therefore, the conservative ideology that homosexuality is not normal or against nature is simply conditioned by society and its conventions, as the game successfully deconstructs the heteronormative idea "that without a very specific form of straightness the world simply cannot go on." (Azzarello, 2016: 10).

Additionally, as nature does not reject zombies, they are not only thoroughly unified with it, but also a product of it, since these creatures transgress the boundaries of what we know of nature, of life, and even of death. Besides the fact that they are killing machines, zombies represent the embodiment of life-death-nature intertwined, becoming a singular, dehumanized entity. The abstractness of life and death combined with the physical reality of nature create genderless, asexual, self-sustaining creatures. Thus, the boundaries of gender, sex, and sexual identity are defied through the development of the characters' relationships as the story progresses. Moreover, the game successfully creates characters, both human and monstrous, which overcome the societal norms and the traditional view on humans/non-humans and their relationships through their identities. In this sense, the game answers, in a certain way, to the philosophical question "what would the world be like for us if we had never been, and will never be human?" (Giffney and Hird, 2008: XX). *The Last of Us*' characters are no longer human in the sense we perceive humanity: once infected, they become an entity that is neither human nor alien, they become neither man nor woman, neither straight nor queer. Their identities are erased as they undergo the four stages of infection, oscillating between life and death. Thus, while the uninfected characters are constantly challenged and forced to fight for their lives as the zombies continue to evolve, love is not restricted by heteronormativity and gender is insignificant. In this case, zombies represent the means through which heterosexual conventions, in their world, are no longer imposed on characters.

Besides her sexuality, Ellie's immunity is also an important aspect, as it excludes her from a definite, specific category: is she human, or is she more/less than that? She does not fall into a distinct group as she is not marginalized by society due to her "unnatural" sexuality, nor is she limited by her weak, human flesh as she is immune to the virus. Hence, according to our world's heteronormative and constrictive biases, she would be nothing more than a deviant: her identity is that of being a queer, immune, powerful woman. Nonetheless, we would argue that no survivor from *The Last of Us* fits into any particular category, as the roles we are

accustomed to have been eradicated in their universe: men are no longer the only ones expected to be strong and brave, women are no longer fragile and helpless, and children can no longer be immature and playful. Such example is portrayed in Chapter 6, *The Suburbs*, when Ellie and Sam, a thirteen-year-old boy, engage in a touching moment: after Ellie gives him a toy, symbolizing childhood and innocence, Henry, his older brother, must kill his Sam, as the parasite gruesomely takes over his body, turning him into a zombie. Shortly after, Henry kills himself as he cannot take such a burden. This disturbing, yet touching scene not only indicates that in order to survive, one cannot be exposed to moments of compassion and happiness without having to suffer afterwards, but also that men are no longer the pillar of society or stability, as it was expected of them before in the patriarchal society.

Thus, in *The Last of Us*, the lines between nature and the social norms we are familiar with are blurred, creating a universe in which "natural" and "normality" oppose our current conventions. As the storyline progresses, the game successfully combats the idea of nature imagined "to consist of one anatomical sex desiring its opposite" (Azzarello, 2016:17). Although a character's sexuality does not need to be explicitly stated, heterosexuality is the naturally assumed sexuality, due to the fact that it is the standard, conventional preference (Kwan, 2017:18). Therefore, the developers' deliberate choice to express the protagonists' sexual preferences and to manifest them throughout the storyline thoroughly challenges the heteronormative conventions, creating a world in which they are no longer relevant.

Dracula

Dracula is a gothic horror novel written by Bram Stoker in 1897. The Victorian period in which the novel was written has great importance, as some interpretations of the text, through which we can explore its portrayal of race, religion, gender, and sexuality, are related to its historical context. Thus, the latter is essential because, generally, the vampire is portrayed as a virus or as an outsider people should fear: "people feared the exotic outsider, seeing it as a disease that could weaken the Empire." (Kern, 2020: 13). Dracula makes his way into England through Lucy, her name, Westerna, suggestively embodying the West, as the Count's invasion becomes evident in the shared traits that emerge between them once she is turned into a vampire (Kern, 2020: 15).

Nature holds considerable symbolic significance in the novel, often mirroring the events and the emotional atmosphere. The moon, serving as a recurring motif and frequently used in connection to Count Dracula, emphasizes his connection to darkness and mystery. For example, throughout the 21st chapter, *Doctor Seward's Diary*, the moon is mentioned several times:

> the sharp white teeth glinted in the moonlight when He turned to look back over the belt of trees, to where the dogs were barking. (Stoker, 1993: 232)

> He slid into the room through the sash, though it was only open an inch wide - just as the Moon herself has often come in through the tiniest crack, and has stood before me in all her size and splendour. (Stoker, 1993: 232),
>
> and when the moon got up I was pretty angry with Him. When He slid in through the window, though it was shut, and did not even knock, I got mad with Him. (Stoker, 1993: 233)

In all of these sections, the moon is foreshadowing the presence of Dracula, metaphorically used to portray his uncanny side, while also associating him with the mysteries of the night.

Although there is a connection between nature and Dracula, vampires cannot be anything other than entities defying nature. Dracula can be compared to a normal predator from the animal world since he is instinct-driven, needing to consume his prey in order to survive and being a member creature within the ecological order: "Stoker clearly presents Dracula as a quintessential natural predator, but we still see the concept of the unnatural entering the picture." (Azzarello, 2008: 148). However, the relation he has with his prey contradicts the natural order, because when Mina interacts with Dracula, she does not seem to want to reject him:

> We can no longer distinguish between Dracula's desire for Mina and Mina's desire to be desired by Dracula. Implicit in this deconstruction of predator and prey, furthermore, is the concomitant deconstruction of the natural and the unnatural. Predator and prey, a foundational concept in evolutionary and ecological theory, is called into question, but it is done so through the concepts of gender and sexuality. (Azzarello, 2008: 151)

In other words, from the phrase in which Mina explains her intention - "I did not want to hinder him." (Stoker, 1993: 239) - we can draw the conclusion that she wanted to become the prey as she did not want to stop him. Therefore, their interaction opposes the conventional desires, challenging the natural order between the prey and its hunter. Furthermore, the unnatural element is illustrated by most of Dracula's traits, such as being an immortal, supernatural entity, but also having a deviant sexuality. Immortality is one aspect that challenges natural life cycles as the vampire exists outside the biological order of life and death. Additionally, Dracula's act of feeding on blood violates the moral and cultural norms of a Christian, Victorian society. In a dialogue between Renfield and Doctor Seward, the mad man repeated that "The blood is the life! the blood is the life!" (Stoker, 1993: 118). Through this line, Stoker drew a parallel between blood having the meaning of "life" and a verse from the Bible: "Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh." (Deuteronomy, 12:23). Therefore, for a Cristian society, Stoker's blood-consuming vampires are profane entities, committing blasphemous acts through their mere existence, thus challenging the social and

religious conventions by means of vampires. Both Renfield and Dracula consume blood in one way or another, although Dracula is perceived by Renfield as the ultimate consumer, the superior being by calling him his "Master". Another aspect regarding blood is its color, red symbolizing passion and lust in connection to Dracula's eyes having a "devilish passion" (Stoker, 1993: 235).

Vampirism is portrayed as a threat to heteronormativity because procreation is replaced by an act that drains life rather than creating it. Moreover, it can also be seen as a metaphor for a deviant sexuality, transcending the heterosexual norms and Victorian morality. Dracula's abilities to shape-shift and to control the natural elements, such as the weather, make him defy the laws of nature we are used to. Thus, he is a character who resists categorization, existing outside the norms of both nature and society as he "oscillates wildly between human and animal." (Azzarello, 2008:147). His ability to communicate with animals and control them disrupts the boundary between human and non-human. His existence oscillates between human and other-than-human because he is a shapeshifter who takes the form of a bat, dog or wolf, also behaving in a reptilian way when crawling down the castle wall. These transformations blur distinctions between human and animal, natural and supernatural: "Dracula does indeed exist as a *being* capable of crawling down a wall, but, and perhaps more horrifying for Jonathan, he does not signal a single, recognisable species. […] He is both human and other-than-human." (Azzarello, 2008: 147). Furthermore, neither can Renfield be classified as fully human, as he is a zoophagous character, a term invented by Dr. Seward to describe his consumption of living creatures:

> My homicidal maniac is of a peculiar kind. I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac; what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way. (Stoker, 1993: 60)

This classification reflects "the late nineteenth-century fascination with typology and the pleasure involved in 'discovering' a new classification" (Azzarello, 2008: 144), which, in Renfield's case, creates a paradox between the natural and the unnatural by blurring the line between them. Through his obsessive consumption of life, Renfield not only disrupts biological and social norms, but also challenges the heteronormative logic of reproduction: rather than producing life through reproductive means, he seeks to accumulate vitality by absorbing it from others as he has a strongly highlighted "hunger for life" (Azzarello, 2008: 144). He constructs an ecosystem based on a hierarchical food chain involving flies, spiders, sparrows (also requesting a cat to sustain and expand the structure), thus, Stoker "makes the character conform to his idea of the quintessential human by giving him the power to consciously study and alter natural processes: in this case, to imitate a food chain." (Azzarello, 2008:143). His mental instability is deeply tied to this non-normative relationship between life and death through which he mirrors Dracula's vampiric

existence: "In other words, he serves as a piece of interpretable, physical evidence for the existence of an utterly supernatural, metaphysical phenomenon." (Azzarello, 2008: 140).

Azzarello discussed the role of sexuality regarding knowledge and nature, stating that "a knowledge of nature is, arguably, always already a sexual kind of knowledge" (Azzarello, 2008:145). For the Victorian era, a normal life meant a heterosexual marriage with sexual relations intended only for reproduction. Both Dracula and Renfield defy those social norms, due to Dracula's predatory behavior and Renfield's alternative way of producing life:

> My claim that Renfield's lust to consume life is a form of queer lust is intended to be problematic, but I want to make clear that I see this textual moment as offering one particular instance in which 'the sexual' is given meaning – or, in other words, is generated – only outside of its proper domain, only outside of the confines of its appropriate space. (Azzarello, 2008: 146)

Moreover, the sensual part of the feeding process should be taken into consideration when talking about Stoker's vampires. Jonathan's encounter with the three women vampires is representative for the sensual feeding process taking place between vampires and humans:

> I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. […] 'He is young and strong; there are kisses for us all.' I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. (Stoker, 1993: 33)

Furthermore, the Daughters of Dracula can be perceived as his heterosexual mask for Dracula's own homoerotic desires: "Dracula's ungratified desire to vamp Harker is fulfilled instead by his three vampiric daughters, whose anatomical femininity permits, because it masks, the silently interdicted homoerotic embrace between Harker and the Count." (Craft, 1984: 110). They symbolize a new form of sexual identity that is not confined to male or female norms (Azzarello, 2008: 148) as they are vampires and exist outside every category or typology known by the Victorian people.

Thus, the Count, the vampires and Renfield break the Victorian taboos about non-procreative sex, homosexuality and transgressive sexuality. Gender roles are distorted and challenged throughout the novel as, on one hand, the female vampires are depicted with stereotypical male features: "Dracula's daughters offer Harker a feminine form but a masculine penetration" (Craft, 1984: 110). On the other hand, Johnathan's eyelashes are depicted through the preconceived lenses of a woman's facial features: "Jonathan begins his narrative by adopting the stereotypical role of the female during sex. He becomes passive and even his physiognomy seems to change; he now has visibly long, feminine eyelashes" (Azzarello, 2008: 148).

In conclusion, in both *The Last of Us* game franchise and *Dracula*, nature and its exponents create a flourishing environment for the zombie virus to develop and for Dracula to exert his influence on his victims. Analyzed through an eco-critical viewpoint, both *The Last of Us and Dracula* create a universe in which "the natural" and "normality" oppose our current societal biased conventions. While the characters from *Dracula* overcome the barriers between human and other than human and between life and death, the characters from *The Last of Us* overcome the barriers between human and nature. Through their characteristics, the protagonists of the games and the novel challenge traditional notions of identity and gender by their queer nature, subtly portrayed in *Dracula*, but directly affirmed in *The Last of Us*.

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THE WILDERNESS WILL HAVE ITS DUE
THE ECOGOTHIC HORROR OF *YELLOWJACKETS*

Abstract
This research examines *Yellowjackets* (2021-present) through an ecogothic and ecophobic lens, arguing that the TV series portrays ecophobia as a dual threat: both the wilderness and the characters' psychological descent into madness serve as sources of horror. Rather than serving as mere background, the nature that is depicted in *Yellowjackets* exerts an eerie, sentient influence on the stranded members of the female soccer team, aligning with ecogothic tradition in which the 'nonhuman' natural world is both horrific and indifferent to human life. Drawing on ecogothic and ecophobic theory, this study explores how nature and trauma become intertwined, and how madness and ritual blur the boundaries between external environment and internal degradation. *Yellowjackets* thus uses ecophobic horror in order to explore how nature and human psychology act in co-producing fear, this study arguing that the true horror lies not exclusively within the external landscape, but also in what the wilderness extracts from within.

Introduction

Showtime's *Yellowjackets* (2021-present) is a contemporary TV series that merges psychological terror, supernatural suggestion, and ecogothic aesthetics, as it explores the psychological and social decay of a high school girls' soccer team stranded in the wilderness following a plane crash. Over the course of nineteen months, the survivors progressively descend into ritualistic practices, violence, and even possible cannibalism, while in the timeline of the present day they each struggle with the perpetual effects of the trauma they experienced. The show's general atmosphere evokes classic Gothic tropes – such as decay, decadence, haunting forces, and madness – while also illustrating elements of the ecogothic, a subgenre where nature gains agency and emerges as a source of power and horror. The series portrays the wilderness as inescapable and sentient , and as a reshaping force for the survivors, both in a physical and a psychological sense, disintegrating what their previous identity consisted of and generating new mentalities and strategies for survival.

Ecogothic and ecohorror are subgenres that often tend to portray nature as terrifying and malevolent, having a role in the process of destabilizing the human identity. Unlike traditional Gothic fiction, where the supernatural element is frequently tied to aspects of human nature, the ecogothic emphasizes nature as an actively evil force that surpasses human control. This framework allows us to examine how *Yellowjackets* extends beyond the limits of conventionally disturbing narratives, and uses the wilderness as not only the backdrop for the events of the plot, but also as a sentient entity that consumes and transforms its inhabitants. In

Yellowjackets, the wilderness functions as an ambiguous power that blurs the limits between what is natural and what is supernatural. Through the depiction of shifting power boundaries, physical transformations, and the violence of ritualistic practices, the series aims to echo the traditional themes of ecogothic, where nature is not simply indifferent to human existence, but rather it actively takes a hold of those who dare to defy it. We can argue that *Yellowjackets* blurs the line between external ecophobia – the fear of a hostile wilderness – and internal collapse, raising the question of whether the true horror lies in nature itself or in the survivors' own descent into violence and ritual.

Ecophobia and the Sentient Ecogothic Landscape

In order to understand and capture the portrayal of the wilderness in Showtime's *Yellowjackets*, it is essential to examine and draw on relevant ecogothic and ecophobic concepts which encapsulate the theoretical foundation for specific themes and symbols tackled in the narrative of the show. Simon Estok's theory of ecophobia – defined as the irrational fear or hostility towards nature – offers a compelling lens for the interpretation of the narrative, in which the wilderness surpasses its state as a background and becomes an active and manipulative force. In *Yellowjackets*, nature is depicted as both terrifying and inescapable: the forest demands sacrifice, distorts judgment, and fosters paranoia, creating an environment where survival is transactional and it depends on submission to a higher, natural power.

Due to this depiction, this study focuses on two central ecogothic themes. The first theme is ecophobia, namely the terror of nature's agency and overwhelming power, which seems to completely dictate the actions of the survivors, aligning with Estok's (2018) definition and exemplifications thereof. The second theme is madness and the wild, as the survivors of the plane crash lose control over their circumstances, while also experiencing a profound (and at times even irreparable) loss of identity and morality, blurring the concrete boundaries between human and non-human, civility and primal instinct andculminating in ritualistic acts and cannibalism that symbolize a complete surrender to nature's authority. This study focuses on these two important themes, which, in their complexity and intricacy, highlight the ecophobic aspects of the *Yellowjackets* narrative and allow us to propose an ecocritical analysis of the material. Supported by the two central themes, the analysis of the study attempts to showcase the ecophobic trait in its dual form: both as an external force embodied by the wilderness in itself, and as an internal progressive degradation within the survivors' psyche.

Dreading the wild: ecophobia and the collapse of boundaries

Ecophobic narratives often challenge anthropocentrism, the belief that humans are dominant figures above all else, by highlighting the instability of human control

when faced with the overwhelming force of the nonhuman world. In *Yellowjackets* (2021-), this belief gradually erodes as the characters submit to the wilderness' agency, embracing ritualistic practices and even sacrifice as a means of survival.

In his definition of ecophobia, Estok explains that "[t]he ecophobic condition exists on a spectrum and can embody fear, contempt, indifference, or lack of mindfulness (or some combination of these) toward the natural environment" (Estok 2018: 1). He emphasizes that ecophobia originates from a deeply seated cultural fear having its roots in what seems to be the horrifying realization that humans are not separate from nature and in particular ideologies which illustrate nature as chaotic, threatening, and even antithetical to human civilization. This fear is intensified in the series, where the wilderness (more specifically, the forest) is not romanticized but rather illustrated as a mysterious, manipulative force that resists the survivors' attempt to adapt and domesticate it. As their survival instinct takes over reason and social norms collapse, the limits between human and non-human dissolve, reinforcing these profound societal anxieties regarding human autonomy, identity, and morality.

When analysing *Yellowjackets*, this becomes most evident in the early stages of the plane crash's aftermath, when the forest begins to act less as a passive backdrop and more as a sentient, manipulative force. This natural force, embodied by the Canadian forest, exerts agency, influencing the decisions of the group and demanding sacrifice – an 'It' that is never explicitly named or described, reinforcing ecophobic perceptions and anxieties linked to the unknowable wilderness. As Parker observes in her analysis of the ecogothic forest,

> The Deep Dark Forest is exactly that – deep and dark – and the exact source of its terrors is often mysterious, shadowy, and just out of sight. […] Indeed, referring portentously to the so-called 'horror' of the woods, but without actually stating or defining what in fact this horror is, is standard practice in fiction that exploits our fears of the forest. (2020:2-3)

Therefore, in *Yellowjackets*, the forest becomes a zone where identity and reason dissolve, raising the crucial question of whether the wilderness is the source of horror or it draws from within the survivors.

This duality is central to the show's ecophobic representation. An essential example of this is the disappearance and eventual death of Javi, Travis's younger brother. After mysteriously vanishing during a group hallucination session induced by psychedelic mushrooms (Season 1, Episode 9), Javi is believed to have been 'taken' by the forest itself, despite Travis's and Natalie's continuous search for him. His disappearance – and later, in Season 2, his death – is attributed not to a rational cause but to the unknowable, external force and 'Its' will. What the protagonists eventually claim to be the forest's hunger for sacrifice as a price for survival is amplified by the girls' increasing reliance on ritual and by the cult-like hierarchy emerging around Lottie, supported by frequent sacrifice and guided prayer, which encourages the

belief that the relationship they develop with the force of the wild is purely transactional – 'It' can only be appeased through bloodletting before consumption, card drawing, and symbolic offering of human life through hunt. The belief that the wilderness operates through transactional violence reflects how ecophobia becomes embedded in the group's moral and ethical logic, a distortion of nature into a divine and horrifying authority figure.

Perhaps the most disturbing moment in this dual dynamic is the discovery (Season 1, Episode 9) and consequent consumption of Jackie's frozen corpse (Season 2, Episode 2). After an unexpected snowfall prevents her attempted cremation, her death is seen less as a tragedy and more as an offering of the wilderness in the form of a divine gift. In this particular moment, cannibalism is repurposed from a fundamental and desperate act of survival into a sacred communion practice (supported by the hallucination of the feast in S2, Ep. 2). The attribution of this action to a physically absent yet symbolically omnipresent entity allows the survivors to cross the irreversible ethical boundary, not only justifying their own action but also succumbing to the ritual of sacrifice and spiritual submission. However, this act does come at a cost since it marks the moment of complete surrender and the shift in the ecophobic dynamic that was previously established.

Ecophobic tension in *Yellowjackets* at the level of the landscape itself extends beyond the location – Lottie's rituals, the omnipresent carved symbol, and unnatural phenomena (such as the red river and the abnormally domestic behaviour of certain animals) suggest a sentient and hostile nature. These specific elements echo a deep cultural fear of nature's unknowable power, reinforcing it as an active and threatening force that intervenes in the development of both the narrative and the social structure of the protagonists.

Where Sanity Ends – Madness as internalized ecophobia

While much of *Yellowjacket*'s narrative illustrates ecophobia through the lens of the forest's uncanny presence and nature's sentient agency, the horror of it is not limited to the external landscape. In fact, some of the most important manifestations of ecophobia occur internally, within the psychological unravelling of the survivors.

Madness, as a central theme of the Gothic, often tends to blur the boundaries between human and non-human. In the ecogothic, this theme intersects with ecological anxieties, such as ecophobia, or the fear that the human psyche is constantly vulnerable to nature's dominance. In the TV series, madness develops as a psychological response of the survivors to the exceptional condition they find themselves in, and not simply as a descent into intense trauma, but also as a manifestation of ecophobic terror. We have established previously that, according to Estok, ecophobic narratives express a variety of negative attitudes toward nature (from fear to complete disconnection), attitudes which stem from cultural epiphanies that humans are not entirely separate from nature but rather deeply intertwined with

it and even submissive in the face of its agency. As the survivors' limited control over their environment progressively disintegrates, so does their psychological stability, determining a collapse of authority, a destruction of autonomy, and allows for insanity to creep in as the group slowly descends into ritualistic practices, brutality, and delusion.

The horror of the natural setting in this narrative lies not exclusively within the forest's implied autonomy, but also in the characters' gradual loss of stability and their inability to separate themselves from it in order to retain a sense of humanity. Even after returning to their urban lives, in the separate adult timeline, which shows us the lives of the few survivors as adults with families and various degrees of social involvement, they remain in some way connected to the wilderness, haunted even by its trauma.

The psychological interpretation of the narrative which focuses on the ecophobic aspect of the characters' psychological degradation frames the horror as a descent into trauma-induced delusion. A relevant first example of this interpretation is Shauna's repeated pattern of hallucinations and imagined interactions, including her constant conversations with Jackie's frozen corpse as if she were still alive (Season 2, Episode 1) and her seeing and hearing her son long after her miscarriage (Season 3, Episode 3). Her coping mechanisms illustrate trauma's capacity to erode reality, turning madness into a clear consequence of human fragility. As both of her losses are tremendous and rob her of the most important people in her life, we witness Shauna as she progressively undergoes more and more trauma, causing intense grief which she must adapt to in order to mentally survive. She does so by altering elements of reality and therefore, until the very last moment before Jackie's corpse is burned, she fantasizes that she can still have conversations with her former best friend, compensating the guilt of having – more or less - provoked Jackie's death in the first place. Similarly, she copes with the tragedy of her miscarriage and the trauma of giving birth in the wild by hallucinating her deceased son as being alive and well.

At the same time, Lottie's rise as a spiritual leader mirrors the group's desperate need for guidance and a hierarchical structure within the chaos that is their post-crash life. Her visions throughout the series are particularly emblematic in this process. However, although never clinically confirmed as schizophrenic hallucinations (all viewers know regarding this subject is that, prior to the plane crash, she had been medicated, but the type of medication or the affliction are never explicitly specified), they are interpreted by the group as prophetic dreams. Her possession during the séance scene (Season 1, Episode 5), when she seems to speak fluent French without previously having been able to and when she declares that '*It* wants blood', showcases how belief and trauma tend to intertwine, as their common result, fear, is projected onto unknown forces of the wild. When the group finds the corpse of the cabin's former inhabitant and concludes that he is haunting them , the

paranoia reinforces the collapse of rationality under intense psychological pressure. Lottie's authority and belief system becomes a psychological anchor.

The key shift from terror to brutality culminates in violent acts of survival, redefined as transactional ritual. Jackie's cannibalization marks an essential rupture in the characters' psyche and a turning point where they reject their past, civilized selves and embrace their newer, more violent and primal self. Similarly, Javi's disappearance and eventual demise are repurposed as mystical retribution, the wilderness' act of talking him, when in reality it might have been the group that abandoned him first. His death, especially, is not an act of spiritual sacrifice or even caused by nature – it is an act of human violence. Upon his return in Season 2, the protagonists are already on a chase hunting Natalie when Javi ends up drowning in the frozen lake due to their lack of help, taking thus Natalie's place in the line for sacrifice and providing them with the opportunity to feed. While they consequently attempt to justify Javi's death as mystical, they cannot overcome the moral degradation of having chosen him themselves to be the next 'victim' in line after Jackie. This choice marks the moment when the ecophobic horror becomes internalized as well, and the girls are no longer fearing the wilderness – they become 'It'.

The characters' fear of nature evolves into aggression, as animal hunts soon become human pursuits. *Yellowjackets* reveals that true horror can be both in the wilderness itself, and in the savagery it awakens within the individual's unstable psyche. Thus, nature becomes a reflection for the trauma-fuelled collapse of the human mind.

Conclusion

In Showtime's *Yellowjackets*, the ecophobic tendency operates on two intertwined fronts: as an external force within the natural landscape of the plane crash and as psychological degradation shaped by trauma and the collapse of morality. The characters' descent into chaos and ritualistic practice reflects not only their fear in the face of nature's agency and dominance, but also the internalization of that fear as they become increasingly violent, delusional, and separated from their former civilized selves. As Simon Estok argues, the ecophobic cultural attitude is not just the simple terror of nature, but also a factor in justifying violence toward the nonhuman world and, why not, the violence of human individuals against other human individuals from the same group (add reference). Ultimately, the forest does not only haunt them, but it also becomes them, following them all the way home, affecting their lifestyle in patterns, and blurring the previously established boundaries between external threat and internal decay.

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CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC CHALLENGES IN SUBTITLING *THE CHOSEN*

Abstract
Audiovisual translation plays a crucial role in making media accessible across cultures. This study examines the subtitling of *The Chosen*, a historical drama about Jesus of Nazareth that illustrates biblical events through a rich cultural and historical lens. By developing plausible backstories for biblical characters, the series engages viewers while conveying cultural and religious significance. The research explores how key subtitling strategies handle cultural nuances, allusions, and historical references. Through an analysis of these choices and the balance between fidelity and adaptation, this study evaluates how effectively the subtitles preserve meaning, cultural depth, and audience engagement, as well as areas for improvement.

This paper examines how cultural and linguistic challenges are addressed in the subtitling of *The Chosen*, also identifying areas that need improvement. The main goal is to show which translation strategies are most effective in conveying culture-specific terms and allusive references. In my findings, I identified a predominant use of borrowing and a source-oriented translation. This is due to the fact that the show, originally written in English, predominantly uses Hebrew and Latin loan words, and the language is influenced by Roman and Jewish culture.

The analyzed corpus is a cinematic series portraying the life of Jesus Christ. Following the biblical narrative, it is framed as a historical drama and captures the life of biblical and historical characters who lived in first century Judea under Roman occupation. Notably, *The Chosen* is the first multi-season series centered on Jesus Christ and stands as the largest video project funded entirely through crowdfunding. This funding model makes the series available for free, and viewers worldwide can choose to "pay it forward" to reach to a broader audience.

This study contributes to the field of audiovisual translation since it highlights instances of mistranslation and cultural references that are essential for understanding the message of the series. Given that the Bible remains the most widely sold book globally (Guiness World Records, 2021), and that *The Chosen* primarily targets a Bible-reading audience through its dramatization of iconic scenes, research on its subtitles can show significant insights. Moreover, no previous study has examined the localization of this unique multi-season project.

This paper is divided into two main parts. In the theoretical framework, I present key translation strategies used for handling culture-specific elements and allusive meaning in subtitling. In the analytical part, I discuss how successfully *The Chosen*'s subtitles convey meaning, cultural nuance, and relevance for the audience by examining examples of culturemes, allusions to Hebrew culture and linguistic

intricacies. The study concludes with a summary of the findings and offers suggestions for future research in this area.

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework of my analysis of subtitle translation, with a particular focus on translation theory and strategy. It draws on established contributions from Peter Newmark (1988) and Mona Baker (1992), and the translational methods listed by Vinay and Darbelnet (2004). These frameworks provide the conceptual basis for examining the translational choices identified in the subtitle data. Literal translation, according to Peter Newmark, is a translation method that takes into consideration the grammar of the target language, but cultural words are translated literally and most of the time the translation is done neglecting the context (1988: 46). As Newmark states, "[l]iteral translation is correct and must not be avoided, if it secures referential and pragmatic equivalence to the original" (1988: 68-69). Communicative translation is a translation method which primarily focuses on the target audience and less on the structure in which the source language expresses the message (Newmark, 1988: 47). Adaptation is described by Vinay and Darbelnet as a translation technique in which an equivalent term is used for a situation of cultural non-equivalence between the source language and the target language (2004: 90-92). When discussing this situation at the word level, Mona Baker suggests "translating by cultural substitution" with a target language (TL) item that would create the same effect for the target audience (1992: 31). Allusive meaning is classified by Dickins, Hervey and Higgins along other types of connotative meaning; when it comes to translation, allusive meaning is a reference to a familiar expression or a quote and it impacts the text at the level of meaning (2016: 101). This may carry significant implications in translation, especially in the context of cultural issues.

Subtitle Analysis

The Chosen portrays ancient Jewish characters in the context of the first century Roman occupation, and the Roman characters use numerous loan words from Hebrew. One example is the word *Shiva*, which denotes the seven days of mourning that follow a funeral (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). According to *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, during the Shiva period, "strictly observing mourners do not study Torah, wear shoes indoors, prepare food for themselves, or engage in sexual intimacy. Men do not shave, women do not wear makeup and some limit bathing" (Ochs 2018: 62). In Episode 1 of Season 2, John collects accounts for his Gospel after his brother had been martyred and Mary the Mother asks John why he does not observe Shiva*:* "I mean, why now… during Shiva?". The Romanian adaptation could be *doliu*, which carries a similar significance in the target culture (Dexonline, n.d.). However, the Jewish tradition focuses more on the idea of community grief and the

need to mourn in the presence of God, based on the abstinence from activities that bring pleasure. Since *The Chosen* aims to bring Jewish culture closer to the target audience, it is significant to preserve the culturemes. The Romanian subtitles translate by borrowing the term Shiva: "Adică, de ce acum… când e Shiva?".

When it comes to linguistic challenges, I will investigate the issue of capitalizing words. The Romanian Bible translations capitalize every noun or personal pronoun referring to God, and there are also a multitude of Christian writings in Romanian language where words that allude to the Divinity are written with a capital letter , but the translations of the Bible into English do not follow the same tradition of capitalization (Ursa, 2025). The Romanian subtitles of *The Chosen* opted for a communicative approach in this case. Linguistic items that refer to Jesus and God, the Father, are capitalized in Romanian, according to the tradition of the target language (see Figure 1, "Fiul tău"). However, in the Pharisee's speech, the refences to Jesus are not capitalized (see Figure 2, "ereziilor lui"). This solution was chosen to highlight their lack of reverence because they did not recognize him as the Son of God. In this way, TL subtitles respect the Romanian tradition of translating sacred texts, bring uniqueness in the subtitles and amplify the message to better illustrate the context understanding of the context.

Figure 1. *The Chosen*, Season 2, Episode 5

Figure 2. *The Chosen*, Season 4, Episode 2

I will further discuss a case where both culture and allusive meaning play an essential role in subtitling. We must take these aspects into consideration to preserve the theological implications. This scene from Episode 5 of Season 4, explores the biblical event in Luke's Gospel (Luke 10:38-42 in Holy Bible, 1982), where Jesus and his disciples visit Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus points out Mary's

choice to devote her attention to his teachings in contrast to Martha, her sister, who was busy with hospitality. Then, he looks at them and says: "I'm inviting you to something that is better. / To sit at my feet, listen carefully to my words." These lines have been translated into Romanian as: "Te invit să iei parte la ceva mai înălțător /„Să stai cu Mine, să asculți cuvintele Mele." This becomes a case of mistranslation when we take into consideration the cultural context. Jesus and his disciples, together with Mary and Lazarus can be seen in the scene and not everyone is sitting at his feet. In the Jewish culture of the first century, to learn from a master, from a Rabbi, was called *sitting at their feet* (Gracin and Budiselić, 2019: 211). Consequently, we may judge that the Teacher alludes to the tradition as spoken by Yossei, the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah: "Let thy house be a meeting place for the Wise, and dust thyself with the dust of their feet, and drink their words with thirst" (Herford, 1962: 24). The Romanian subtitles adjust the speech to the local modern culture and fail to carry the implications of the ancient Jewish mentality. For improvement, I suggest a literal translation: „Vă chem la ceva mai măreț/ Să stați la picioarele mele, să ascultați cuvintele Mele." This preserves the message and the intention of the series by showing the Jewish mentality.

Figure 3. The Chosen, Season 4, Episode 5

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mistranslation of Jewish cultural nuances in the Christian TV series *The Chosen* may result in the loss of original theological meanings. A predominantly source-oriented approach helps preserve the cultural depth of the original text, allowing the viewer to be immersed in the first-century context of the biblical events, though a communicative approach may bring the show closer to the target audience, by respecting the translation tradition. Further research could be done on this topic. It may be interesting to look at how the *The Chosen* has been subtitled from English into other languages and compare the translational approaches. This would provide a holistic view of how culturally rich contexts and loan words have been handled in translation in the case of this religious-historical drama.

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