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**A Structural Approach to the Monomyth in
Contemporary Action Cinema: Dread, John Wick and
Mad Max: Fury Road**

Master's Diploma Thesis

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*I declare that I have worked on this thesis independently,
using only the primary and secondary sources listed in the bibliography.*

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Author's signature

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1. General introduction

Much of the history of the humanities in the Western tradition is characterized by doctrinal antagonism in which each subsequent generation of thinkers dismisses parts or the whole of the dialectical system of their immediate predecessors. The humanities are thus locked in a perpetual cycle of opposition, where "critical schools of thought present nothing more than a series of fashion statements devoid of an internal self-corrective, such as Karl Popper's notion of falsifiability in the sciences, and thus [do] not become more accurate over time" (Parrish 649). However, once empirical theories are brought into the mix, the momentum of this cycle grinds to a halt, due to the grounding forces naturally asserted by hard proof. The empirical approach allows the steady build up of facts and the creation of theories that cannot be superseded unless a great part of the evidence that props them up is disproved. For example, Darwinian evolutionary biology - the epitome of "hard" science, has accumulated such a profuse amount of supporting evidence that disproving it is virtually impossible, i.e. it can be universally taken as fact. By using the helping hand of such "hard" sciences, the humanities have the potential of reaching for solid truths as well.

Once theoretical investigations reach the bedrock of hard empirical proof, the theoretical trajectories of deductive theories can be retraced with the help of an inductive approach, i.e. the steady accumulation of hard empirical data. This method can provide a direction for empirical investigations, through the selection of a deductive theory, and its reappraisal through an empirical lens. If supporting evidence is hard or impossible to get, that particular trajectory can be abandoned so that new, more productive investigative routes can be pursued. This thesis attempts such a reevaluation of structuralism. By compiling elements of structural theories and propping them with empirical data, this thesis aims to find evidence that the structuralist claim of

the existence of a scaffolding behind all cultural products is human nature itself - in the biological sense of the term.

This has been a newly emerging trend in literary criticism,¹ championed by literary Darwinists, and various disciplines carrying the "cognitive" moniker, e.g. cognitive narratology. These empirical and universalist schools of criticism, which are currently on an upswing, are a direct reaction to post-structuralism, in a way that is structural in its scope and inherent philosophy, yet empirical in its methodology in a way that proponents of "classical structuralism" like Lévi-Strauss never hoped to be (Pettit 117). Essentially, these approaches belong to what Kjeldgaard-Christiansen calls an "'interactionist' perspective" which seeks "consilience between the branches of learning"(3). This perspective is heavily inspired by E.O. Wilson, who heavily campaigned for opening the humanities for the valuable insight afforded by the "hard" sciences, which would make the humanities join a complete knowledge base that all humanity can benefit from (137).

In spite of its lofty ambitions, this approach has encountered stiff resistance by "classical" humanists, who consider a merger of the humanist approach with the hard sciences as a "bargain with the devil" (Parrish 649). Especially vocal are proponents of the so called "Cultural critique", which is heavily influenced by Foucault and other post-structuralist theories (Carroll, "Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism" 59). Because of this opposition by the "mainstream" of literary criticism, the notion of consilience has been somewhat marginalized, and it could be said that it stands on the fringes of literary criticism at present.

¹ Although all of these theories flirt with structuralism, none of them openly embrace the term, because of the negative, anti-scientific connotation surrounding the moniker. The next chapter (1.1) explains what exactly makes the theoretical approach used in this thesis structural.

This thesis will attempt to make a small contribution towards the reversal of this trend of marginalization and the expanding of the combined knowledge base proposed by Wilson, through the merging of elements of archetypal theory, Darwinian (adaptionist) criticism, and narratology into a unified approach that will be applied on a corpus of contemporary action films. The primary aim of the thesis is (1) to prove that these theoretical paradigms can indeed be implemented together, (2) that they can constitute an effective method of discerning glimpses of human nature in film and (3) that they can uncover the network of signification that dictates the incidence of such manifestations. It is important to mention that constructing a solid theoretical paradigm is the primary aim of the thesis and it determines its structure. Thus, the case studies in the third part of the thesis are the testing ground of the effectiveness of the theoretical framework developed in the second part.

The remainder of the introduction stakes out the domains of the thesis and provides a rundown of its structure. As the title of the thesis is *A Structural Approach to the Monomyth in Contemporary Action Cinema*, the next three chapters will go through each of the constituent parts of the title in order to explain the rationale behind the design of the thesis and how it works towards the realization of its general aim.

1.1. What makes the theoretical approach structural?

Structuralism does not necessarily bear a one to one correspondence to the "linguistic" structuralism propounded by Lévi-Strauss and the rest of the French structuralists in the 1960es and the 1970es (Hawkes 11). In the broadest sense, "the ultimate quarry of structuralist thinking" are "the permanent structures into which individual human acts, perceptions, stances fit, and from which they derive their final nature" (Hawkes 18). In fact, Hawkes traces the beginnings of this manner of thinking to the book *The New Science* by Giambattista Vico, published in 1725

(Hawkes 11). Like later structuralists, Vico too believed in the capacity of myths and art in general to carry with them a reflection of the essence of human nature, what he called *sapienza poetica* (Hawkes 12). Structuralist ideas can also be found in the work of the sociologist Emil Durkheim and the psychologist Jean Piaget, both of whom predate the linguistic or often called "classical" age of structuralism.

All of these theories only have a tentative link with empiricism, which is only natural given the fact that they are inherently deductive. Nevertheless, structuralist theories believe in the feasibility of "a science of literature based on form rather than content" (Rice and Waugh 23). More precisely, "structuralism is not interested in meaning per se, but in the conventions and principles of signification that enable meaning... the system is more important than the individual statement" (Rice and Waugh 23). A simpler way of putting this would be that structuralism is interested in the "hows" rather than the "whys" of signification - the insight gained about the functioning of our minds, whether it is through the workings of myth, literature, or film, is more important than the meaning of the work itself. Like almost all theoretical thought in the wake of Freud, structuralism too based these suppositions in the unconscious, claiming that it is there that the structure which influences so many facets of human culture is actually situated, and glimpses of this structure are revealed in art, as well as other cultural products. On the other hand, as Hay points out, "literary Darwinists seek to replace literary criticism based on Freudian psychoanalytic principles with criticism based on the more recent (and likely more accurate) theories of evolutionary psychology" (Hay 150). Therefore, for literary Darwinists, the unconscious does exist as an underlying structure but it is quantifiable and brought into the realms of empirical investigations.

The so-called "linguistic" structuralism put an emphasis on language as a key element of this underlying structure, because as a human universal, whose existence precedes and follows the lifetime of a single individual, it frames the way we think about the world. However, "linguistic" structuralism shaped its presuppositions in a such a way "that the answers to its questions [did] not seem capable of being assumed within a theory in any area outside language itself" (Pettit 113). It is this problem with "classical" structuralism that caused the post-structuralist schism - based on the gradual realization that language cannot possibly be the stable fulcrum in the center of the structuralist theoretical model, because linguistic meaning is inherently "slippery" and fluid. In the absence of such a center out of which cultural emanations could branch out in predictable patterns, discourse becomes of key importance, and the very thing that shapes reality. For post-structuralists, the mutual interaction of signifiers produces a flux so complicated that meaning is ultimately ungraspable, and universalism, or claims of the existence of solid, unchanging patterns of meaning of any kind is looked down upon.

This thesis strongly supports an outlook originally proposed by literary Darwinists, that a frame that regulates meaning does exist, but it is located in human biological nature and not in language. This is the reason why the indefinite article "a" precedes "structural approach" in the title - it is there to underline the fact that this is only one of the many possible structural theoretical paradigms. According to this "bio-structuralist" perspective, human cultural products are inextricably latched to our biological nature, which regulates their breadth and possible range. This supposition allows the reconciliation of empirical schools of criticism and structuralism, and there is no need for a rejection of a prevailing framework. The basis of this argument is that all humans can trace their evolved dispositions, including those that help regulate our perception of art, to the African savannas. According to the newest research of

evolutionary biology, three quarters of the history of anatomically modern humans took place there, before a "single, late, and rapid dispersal less than 55,000 years ago" (Posth et al. 2) spread human populations all around the world. This theory leaves plenty of time for a common behavioral network - a unified human nature, to form. Having this in mind, any search for narrative universals, i.e. recurring patterns or motifs in storytelling around the world, would reveal glimpses of this evolved human nature.

This is why literary Darwinists argue for the creation of "an evolutionary model of fiction" that "should focus on ways storytellers, as active individual strategists, maximize the attention of their audience by appealing to features that have evolved to be of interest to all human minds, to our shared understanding of events, our shared predispositions to be interested in and engaged by what others do and our sheer readiness to share attention" (Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 201). According to Boyd's understanding of evolutionary theory, storytellers, in this case the creators of the films, seek ways to appeal to as many people as possible, by implementing universal topics and story elements in the narrative. Hence, mimetic, representational genres are more capable of resonating to human nature, because, as Carroll maintains, we perceive art not for the "vicarious sensations of pleasure" that it provides, but because it gives us "a deeper, more complete sense of the forces that motivate human life" ("The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 431). Unlike Foucauldian criticism, which puts focus on cultural phenomena in the process of reception, adaptionist studies and this thesis as well, focus on much more immediate, instinctual perceptual processes.

Proponents of the "hard" sciences have directly contributed to the creation of this evolutionary model of fiction. Thus, according to Pinker, post-structuralist ideas and

experimental modernist and post-modernist art, which is informed by these theories, "are based on a false theory of human psychology, the Blank Slate" (Pinker 412). As Pinker claims, these new streams of art are unable to reach widespread audiences because they fail to appeal to the evolved dispositions that regulate our preferences for art. Pinker strongly opposes post-structuralist claims:

that the sense organs present the brain with a tableau of raw colors and sounds and that everything else in perceptual experience is a learned social construction... The visual system... does not drug us into a hallucinatory fantasy disconnected from the real world. It evolved to feed us information about the consequential things out there, like rocks, cliffs, animals, and other people and their intentions. (Pinker 412)

An awareness that all our senses, motivations, and needs answer to the imperious commands of our evolved nature, is present in both the theoretical approach and the shape of the corpus of films chosen by the thesis. Moreover, it is not only in the privileging of representational genres that such theories differ from post-structuralist criticism. Post-structuralism has also drawn empiricist criticism based on its excessive accent on gender roles, focus on groups rather than individuals, and its overall mystification of culture. According to literary Darwinists in particular, "evolutionary psychology offers models of human nature equally and universally applicable to all cultures and literatures" (Hay 150), and opens the door for a universal understanding of humanity.

1.2. Why the monomyth?

The monomyth, or the hero's journey, is a prototypical story pattern recurring in different emanations of world storytelling, from the earliest oral storytelling and myths, to modern day literature and film. The concept of the monomyth, or the hero's journey, was originally

championed by Joseph Campbell,² who was heavily influenced by Jungian psychoanalysis and comparative mythology. The primary criterion for the inclusion of this concept in the thesis is Joseph Campbell's claim that the hero's journey, as a storytelling pattern, is a human universal (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* xxv). This means that it has maintained its structure over the eons, unperturbed by the constant flux of its cultural environment. It is most likely that this story paradigm was fine-tuned over many different generations and has acquired its recognizable three act structure through a process of cultural selection - which according to Crozier resembles that of biological evolution (2). This most basic, stripped down form of the hero's journey, includes (1) a departure from the original status quo, (2) an initiation phase filled with tests and trials, and (3) a return and reintegration with society (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 34). In its essence, this story paradigm has a didactic function, trying to help the audience reconcile with their own mortality, and like the majority of rituals in human history is an attempt to project the transcendental into something within the realms of our understanding.

This is why an analysis of the monomyth must not be boiled down to mere pattern recognition. As Campbell himself understands it, this story paradigm mimics a fully realized human life, with all of its accompanying hardships. In Campbell's own words, the transformative process of the main hero is supposed to project the death of his "animal nature" and his coming back "to life as a human incarnation" (Moyers 6). This ties neatly together with the motivational forces in the perception of narrative suggested by Carroll - the father of literary Darwinism (turn to page 6), yet with an additional hint of spirituality which has no place in empirical investigations such as the one espoused by this thesis. Nevertheless, because it is streamlined,

² Turn to page 19 for more information on the origins of the term and its place in the theoretical paradigm.

with a single point of origin and with a clearly delineated final goal in mind, the monomyth is able to elicit visceral, primal sensations in the audience, which should override cultural, and directly target evolved, biological dispositions.

Moreover, although the monomyth is a run-of-the-mill story paradigm, that informs the plots of a sizeable chunk of both the canon of world literature and Hollywood blockbusters, its recognizable shape allows it to be a highly useful and precise selection criterion for the corpus of films included in the thesis. *Dredd 3D* (2012), *John Wick* (2014), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) all feature variations of the monomyth, adapted for own purposes, and their form will occasionally be compared and contrasted, not only between each other but also with other action films with a monomythic structure such as *Duel* (1971), *Die Hard* (1988), and *The Raid* (2011). In addition, comparison to other such films (not all of which follow the structure of the monomyth) will help emphasize the stylistic evolution of films along the lines of "memetics", which involves the transmission of cultural elements in approximately the same way that genetic information is disseminated, through replication and variation.

1.3. Why contemporary action cinema?

Reaction to art, whether it is literature, film, or fine art, falls within the realms of human behavior, which according to the most recent understandings in anthropology is influenced by both genes and culture - an understanding otherwise known as dual inheritance theory (DIT) (Boyd and Richerson). As Kjeldgaard-Christiansen claims, "numerous lines of inquiry suggest" that "our cultural achievements... take a strong evolutionary inflection" and "although it is doubtless true that narrative fiction, movies, and video games are products of particular cultures, it does not follow that they are *only* cultural, whatever that would mean" (3). However, certain mediums, especially film, and its constituting modes and genders, are usually more visceral, and

allow the direct manifestation of human nature in the response to what the audience is seeing on the screen. According to Davies, proponents of reader response theory such as Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish, believe that the hermeneutic process the audience is engaged in while watching films is "a) more 'automatic', where the work of perception/completion is done for the viewer, and/or b) more 'complete'" (Davies 6) than that of literature. Because film reception involves fewer cognitive gaps to fill out "it is seen as an 'obvious' medium" (Davies 6). This is not to say that reception of film is entirely automatic but that it is indeed more so than literature. As Marks claims, "film is grasped not solely by an intellectual act but by the complex perception of the body as a whole" (145) - film is the more visceral medium, while literature is more hermeneutically involved and thus post-instinctual. The idea is that both genes and acquired cultural information inform human reactions to films and literature, with the difference being that film in particular provides what may be regarded as a shortcut for human biology to manifest itself. Having this in mind, it is a wonder why films have been comparatively left out in such empirical analyses, with only an occasional case study dealing with them, which leaves plenty of opportunities for this thesis to bring something new to the table.

Especially left out in this regard have been contemporary films. The choice of recently released films for the corpus of the thesis is a deliberate attempt in tune with the overall ambitions of this theoretical paradigm to override the unfounded mystification of older films as better. Such empirical/structural theoretical patterns have a much broader outlook of what constitutes a canonical text, because after all, the key of this approach is finding out more about human nature from cultural manifestation of any shape. Theoretically, we might find out just as much from any random pick of Hollywood blockbusters, than the entirety of the Oscar nominees in a particular year, since broad appeal is what truly counts. Everyone has the same capacity of

registering the immediate effects action film has in store, while the themes and motifs Cultural critique deals with require a "finer", learned mode of perception - hence the secondary importance of critical success for empirical analyses such as this. Such dealings with "non-canonical" works have been a common procedure for literary Darwinists - for example, Boyd has contrasted the approaches of Cultural critique and literary Darwinism to a Doctor Seuss children's story (Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who"), something that suggests a significant expansion of the canon or its total elimination.

In a similar way, action cinema has been largely left out of such investigations. This is in spite of the fact that action films have been an accompanying part of cinema since its earliest days - fully utilizing their capability of vivid representation of action. Thus, from some of the earliest action films like *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), to modern films like *John Wick 2* (2017) (the sequel to one of the films in the corpus) bloodcurdling scenes and close brushes with death are a hallmark of the genre. Most importantly, "the action picture – as cop drama, fantasy adventure, or science fiction – remains the exemplar of the box-office triumphs of modern Hollywood" (Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* 113). Indeed, in the time period between 2012-2015 action films have had an average of 22.14% of the market share of ticket sales ("Box Office History for Action"), a percentage which has been more or less maintained over the past 20 years. This says a lot about the enduring popularity of the genre, which forms a large portion of the profits of the film industry in general.

Another, very interesting aspect of action cinema is that it "is defined by its persistent and detailed attention to the exerting body, a focus which shapes its audio-visual aesthetics as much as its characterization and narrative design" (Purse 2) - which in turn elicits immersion as deep as any that could possibly be provided by narrative in any form. According to Purse, action cinema

is a "body genre", together with "horror, melodrama and pornography" (Purse 43), which actually involves immediate bodily reactions to whatever is happening on screen, and the immediacy and the engagement of the genre with our pre-intellectual capacities is something that has tarnished its reputation in the past. As Purse puts it,

our bodies react in outwardly obvious ways to what is unfolding onscreen: recoiling from the sudden unexpected appearance of an attacker, tensing our bodies during scenes of suspense, shifting in our seats or ducking to dodge an object flying straight at the camera, as well as less obvious reactions – the hairs pricking at the back of the neck, the momentarily held breath, the knotted stomach. We know rationally that we do not occupy the fictional world in which these objects or situations would have purchase, but our bodies fill in the gap, fleshing out some of what that ‘being in the film world’ might feel like. (43)

This makes action films the most suitable ground for the application of "bio-structuralism" as a theoretical model.

1.3.1. Selection criteria for the films in the case studies

As it was previously mentioned, the case studies in the third part of the thesis include *Dredd 3D* (2012), *John Wick* (2014), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). In fact, the choice of the films is quite telling about the theoretical approach of the thesis. Thus, the primary criterion each of these films meets is that they are visceral, filled from beginning to end with gripping, action packed sequences. All of the films were highly successful, even *Dredd*, which, although its success on the box office was originally plagued by a poor marketing campaign (Reyes), later performed solidly in the DVD/Blue Ray sales and came to achieve cult status. Moreover, the films in the case studies were all released within a three year period, meaning that there are fewer variables at play in terms of external cultural influences on the films. When dealing with a

hypothesis which is largely dependent on narrative universals or broad, sweeping patterns of one kind or another, eliminating the number of contaminating variables is vital. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all of these films also feature variations of the monomyth or the hero's journey, meaning that they are also formally quite similar. In addition, there is hardly any academic research done on any of the films in the case studies, so the thesis will definitely be breaking new grounds in that regard. Most importantly, cultural commentaries or sub-texts are non-existent in the films the thesis is concerned with, except perhaps to the most persistent of disciples of Foucauldian Cultural criticism, whose commentaries are doomed to be counter instinctual and forced in this case.

1.4. Primary hypotheses

Taken together, these realizations put forward the following primary hypotheses that this thesis will attempt to prove.

- The latest developments in archetypal theory, literary Darwinism, and narratology are actually reverting back to a structuralist understanding of human nature, but with an empirical, less "naive" twist.
- Action cinema, as one of the "body genres" of cinema, is capable of overriding acquired cultural understandings and engage with human nature directly, which makes it a perfect genre of film for such an analysis.
- Prototypical story structures like the monomyth are at least partially based on a universal framework dictated by human nature

- The basic structure of the monomyth mirrors the individual phases of human life, and probably developed through deliberate tweaking by subsequent generations of storytellers over the course of years to achieve the strongest didactic effect possible.

Because the thesis is theoretical in its essence, the next part will provide a clear, detailed outline of the combined theoretical approach taken by the thesis. The viability of the theoretical model and the abovementioned hypotheses will be tested in the third part, through three case studies dealing with each of the films in the corpus.

2. Theoretical framework

As previously mentioned, the theoretical method of the thesis will consist of a three pronged approach incorporating elements of Darwinian criticism, archetypal criticism, and narratology. These three theories subscribe to the tenets of "bio-structuralism" as a concept outlined in the introduction, with each having a certain role to play. However, only archetypal criticism and Darwinian criticism will be given a separate chapter in this part of the thesis. There are several factors involved in this decision: (1) narratology takes the back seat in the theoretical model, and is merely there to occasionally provide the tools of the investigation; (2) narratology is widely known to be a part of high structuralism already, so enough has been said in the introduction to incorporate it in the general theoretical model of "bio-structuralism". Hence, a general, descriptive chapter about it will add little to the overall goal of the thesis; (3) narratology is a very broad theoretical paradigm, and only a handful of carefully selected theories and hypotheses by cognitive and film narratology are made use of in the thesis - whatever disambiguation is required will be provided in the case studies themselves, in the third part.

Another thing that has to be mentioned regarding the theoretical framework is that these three theories roughly correspond to the three dimensions of the investigation of film outlined by Bordwell, of which:

one dimension involves... the story world: its agents, circumstances, and surroundings... A second dimension is that of plot structure, the arrangement of the parts of the narrative as we have it... The third dimension... is that of narration, the moment-by-moment flow of information about the story world. (Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* 90)

Each constituting theory will function with an awareness of these three levels, but with literary Darwinism mainly functioning within the first one, archetypal criticism in the second one, and narratology dealing with the third one. The division is not that clear cut however, and some of these theories can function and inform some of the other levels. The overall approach is holistic, and better rounded than any investigation based on just one of these theoretical models. Over the course of this part of the thesis, it will become clear how large portions of these theories overlap and explain the same phenomena in ways that are essentially the same when seen through the prism of "bio-structuralism". Especially salient is the importance of the bodily, which all of these theories put a significant emphasis on, albeit often unconsciously.

What follows is a detailed investigation of archetypal criticism and literary Darwinism.

2.1. Archetypal criticism

2.1.1. Origins and main streams

Archetypal criticism is a heterogeneous collection of theories which suggest the existence of a generative model of story structures, which combine a limited number of elements (whether they are characters, plot points, or motifs) in the creations of stories (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan

125). Its pivotal aspect is that elements of stories can be quantified, isolated and grouped together, and that such a division might be beneficial for their better understanding. The origins of archetypal criticism can be traced back to the formulistic criticism of the 1880es, most prominent of which was the Finnish school of folklore studies (Meister 31), late 19th century comparative anthropology, especially conducted by Cambridge scholars, in particular Frazier with his extremely influential work *The Golden Bough* (Abrams and Harpham 18–9), and most relevantly - Jungian psychoanalysis. In general, archetypal criticism can be divided in two streams, formulistic and psychoanalytical.

The most representative text of the first, earlier stream, is the classification index of folk stories published by one of the major representatives of the Finnish school of folklore studies, Antti Aarne, which was later amended by American folklorist Stith Thompson to form the Arne-Thompson index of stories, still frequently used worldwide. The index consists of a large number of recurring motifs in folk tales grouped according to their mutual features. In a similar way, Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp presented an empirical model inspired by Russian folk tales, presenting the basic constituent elements of their narration and how they combine together - identifying 36 basic narrative functions in the process (Propp). His method was a significant influence on subsequent representatives of high structuralism who even though espoused the overall logic of his model, criticized its sequential, mono-linear logic of action, to which they preferred combinatory, multi-linear models (Meister 32). This essentially only differs from Propp's approach in a quantitative sense, while the logic of the model is identical, making Propp a proto-structuralist figure. Similar ideas have been recently picked up by proponents of computational narratology, (Jockers) (Reagan et al.) who, with the help of text processing, discovered a bias for six prototypical story structures in literature, providing a solid methodology

for an empirical analysis of text. Such investigations have not been conducted on film, because the audiovisual medium of cinema does not easily lend itself to such analyses; however this empirically gathered insight is crucial evidence of the existence of such structures in fiction. Since the differences between literature and cinema (existing because of the utilization of the textual and audiovisual medium respectively) are primarily located in the third dimension according to Bordwell's classification, it can be safely concluded that such structures exist in film as well. Most importantly however, even though some proponents of formalistic stream of archetypal criticism predate high structuralism by up to half a century in some cases, it is plain that on a fundamental level they are structuralists. Hence, in a similar way to high structuralists, they avoid to tackle the "whys" of the existence of such structures, meaning that there is little of consequence to be gotten from this stream, other than classification tools.

The other, less empirical side of archetypal criticism, is influenced by Jungian psychoanalysis, and beside Jung is represented by Joseph Campbell, the creator of the concept of the monomyth, and Northrop Frye. Despite having some ideas that might be interpreted in a biological sense, Frye is not a universalist in the same sense that the theoretical approach of the thesis is - "for Jung, [an archetype] is symbol shared by all humanity... for Frye it is a symbol shared by those within a particular tradition." (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 26). Therefore, the inclusion of his ideas in the thesis is limited.

Although Jung's theories were very influential, his ideas were not entirely original. Thus, his theory of the collective unconscious and archetypes is partially derived from the theories of Adolf Bastian, an anthropologist who suggested the existence of so-called elementary ideas. He claimed that "cultural traits, folklore, myths, and beliefs of various ethnic groups originate... according to laws of cultural evolution and are essentially the same, merely differing in form

because of geographic environment" (Editors). For example, God is "the ultimate elementary idea of man" (Moyers 3) - a basic archetype common to all humanity. Seen in this light, Jung's work seems as a psychoanalytical reinterpretation of a theoretical framework that was already structural in the first place. According to Dutton, the major deficiency of Jungian archetypal theory is its failure to provide answers for the patterns of signification it proposes (just like proponents of the formulistic archetypal criticism), and that Darwinism could theoretically fill that void (136). However, some proponents of Jungian archetypal theory already seem to have done so instinctively, most particularly Christopher Booker.

It is clear that for him, "the ancient river beds along which our psychic current naturally flows" (Booker 12) are shaped by our biology. For example, he noticed a parallel between Jung's claim that "we are psychologically constructed in the same essential way" and the fact that many of our everyday actions are owing to the fact that we are "genetically 'programmed'" (Booker 12) in a certain way. In both cases, human individuality is a superficial element of a larger backdrop, over which we have no control.

Dutton claims that:

Booker has not discovered archetypes in the Jungian sense, hardwired blueprints, for story plots: what he identified is the deep themes that fascinate us in fictions. An analogy make this clear: survey the architectural layout of most people's homes and you will find persistent patterns amid the variety... These room patterns follow not from mental imprints but from the functions of the rooms themselves, which in turn follow from other values of family relationships, preferences in food preparation, attitudes toward sex, possibilities privacy, and so forth. (137)

A careful consideration reveals similar opinions in the work of Joseph Campbell.

2.1.2. Joseph Campbell and his disciples - the monomyth

Myths are Joseph Campbell's main subject of investigation. At first sight, Campbell follows the main tenets of Jungian psychoanalysis quite closely - for example he claims that "myths and dreams come from the same place... from realizations of some kind that then have to find expression in symbolic form" (Moyers 2). However, he seems to find the origins of these "realizations" in the realm of human biology. For example, he claims that "mythology is the song... of the imagination, inspired by the energies of the body" (Campbell and Moyers 39). In addition, he claims the uncanny similarities between myths in different parts of the world can be explained with the fact that "the human psyche" and "the human body" are "essentially the same all over the world, with the same organs, the same instincts, the same impulses, the same conflicts, the same fears" (Moyers 3). This hint of a belief that mythology panders to our evolved dispositions is further enforced in his adoption of the idea that human birth has a bearing on the threshold moments and transformative processes often involved in myth (Rank). Such transformative threshold moments, which mimic biological processes abound in the films covered in the case studies.

However, later on in his life, Campbell adapted his understanding of the concept to include the "diffusion" (Moyers 3) of myth. For example, as agriculture spread throughout the world in the incipient stages of human civilization, so did agriculture based creation mythology, along with different variations of the Earth goddess, the Sun god etc. Campbell does not mention this rationale for the spreading of myth in the 1949 edition of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, but he does so in interviews in the late 80s, meaning that his opinions on the subject evolved, probably under the influence of Dawkins's theory of memetics, which was gaining traction in this

period. This thesis supports both of Campbell's claims, which are not necessarily irreconcilable, and deals with them in detail in the next subchapter.

Additionally, Campbell's dealing with the bodily, or the biological realm, does not mean that he took an empirical approach in dealing with myth. He is not merely concerned with the structural implications of myths, i.e. the fact that they reveal elements of human nature, but also with a certain ethereal, spiritual quality they possess. For example, he claims that our processing of myth includes a search for life experience or "feeling the rupture of being alive"(Moyers 1). Still, this spiritual significance can be seen to be closely related to the didactic function of myth, which Campbell devotes great attention to. For him, the fact that there are "life principles embedded in the structure of stories" (Vogler xv), is primary function of myth, through which subsequent generations are taught how their predecessors lived out their lives. As storytelling paradigms, myths embody all the possibilities that consciousness, and human life in general can provide, and are thus a major factor that has facilitated social learning in human populations since time immemorial.

Campbell similarly puts great emphasis on initiation rituals, as cultural products which imitate biological processes, and are essentially "enactment[s] of myth" (Moyers 2). According to him:

The purpose and actual effect of these (rituals) was to conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also of unconscious life. The so-called rites of passage, which occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.), are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. Then follows an interval of more or less extended retirement,

during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn. (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 8–9)

With rituals being only a shell of their former selves in the modern world, the transformative processes with which they formerly enriched the spiritual lives of the people, can now best be accessed through stories, the most notable which is the monomyth.

Campbell borrowed the term from James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 30), and is meant to stand for the fact that it represents the synthesis of many different stories into one. Just like rituals are enactments of myth in terms of performance, the monomyth is playing out myths in the form of a story, and embeds the same phases and elements of rituals in its structure. As Campbell claims, "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 34). This formula, which serves as the primary scaffolding of the story, is further filled out with different phases, listed below.

Act	Joseph Campbell - The Hero with a Thousand Faces	Christopher Vogler - The Writer's Journey
I. Departure	1. The Call to Adventure 2. Refusal of the Call 3. Supernatural Aid 4. Crossing the Threshold 5. Belly of the Whale	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure 3. Refusal of the Call 4. Meeting with the Mentor 5. Crossing the Threshold to the Special World
II. Initiation (Separation)	6. The Road of Trials	6. Tests, Allies and Enemies 7. Approach to the Innermost

	7. The Meeting with the Goddess 8. Woman as Temptress 9. Atonement with the Father 10. Apotheosis 11. The Ultimate Boon	Cave 8. The Ordeal 9. Reward
III. Return	12. Refusal of the Return 13. The Magic Flight 14. Rescue from Without 15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold 16. Master of Two Worlds 17. Freedom to Live	10. The Road Back 11. The Resurrection 12. Return with the Elixir

Figure 1. The separate stages of the monomyth according to Campbell and Vogler

In its essence the monomyth consists of a departure from the original status quo, entering the new or the other world where the hero unlocks the potentialities of a fully idealized life, and a return and reintegration with society which is "indispensable to the continuous circulation of spiritual energy into the world" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 34). Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and Odysseus have all followed this structure in their respective journeys. Since their times, we have had the same biological aspects guiding our motivations - the same stages of life, bodily functions, and overall behavioral "programming", which explains the enduring popularity of these myths. The monomyth is essentially "one deed done by many different people" (Moyers 2). This collective quality of this story paradigm suggests its prosocial aspect - a hero is someone who has given his life for something bigger than himself, or other

than himself" (Moyers 2)³ in which the fate of the main hero is closely tied to that of his society. Both *Dredd 3D* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, heavily rely on this topic, while *John Wick*, which relies on the vengeance, is more personal.

Overall, the monomyth can be a physical deed - a physical act of heroism, or a spiritual deed - the hero has learned or found a way of experiencing life and went home to communicate it, thus forming a cycle. Since the thesis deals with occurrences of the monomyth in action cinema, the monomyths of the films of the corpus tend to be of the former variety, although a dose of the former is indeed retained. Besides being "able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms" the second task of the hero "is to return... transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 18). This puts an emphasis on the cyclicity of the monomyth as a story paradigm - it has to begin and end in the same place, but a change has to be enacted in the intervening period. The cyclicity of the basic structure of the monomyth reflects many processes found in the natural world - the cycle of life, water, etc. and it is no wonder why Jung termed it one of the most universal symbols that "incorporates totality, source and end" (Moyers 6). As an extension of the motif of cyclicity, what the monomyth, rituals, and "all myths have to deal with is a transformation of consciousness" (Moyers 2). This transformation, or change of the status quo is best achieved with trials - hardships which violently disturb it and leave an opportunity for change. Most commonly this transition is effectuated by a transition from selfishness to altruism, (which will be further developed in the next chapter), the latter of which

³ as we will later see on page 37, this is a reinforcement of the hero's high welfare trade-off ratio (WTR) which makes him likeable and makes the audience root for him

is instinctively considered to be the paragon of human behavior (Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* 154).

All of the instances of the monomyth are different in one way or another - after all, "without individual variation, natural selection would have nothing to select from - and nor would social competition, artistic attention, or cultural selection" (Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 203). If small variations from storyteller to storyteller did not exist, there would have been no room for refinement of the stories at all. This tendency of long standing story paradigms to produce different variations of themselves accounts for differences in individual style.⁴ In *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell is simply enumerating different plot points which might fill up the skeletal structure represented by the three acts mimicking the individual phases of initiation rituals, "separation—initiation—return" - while the individual "stages can be deleted, added to, and drastically shuffled without losing any of their power" (Vogler 19). Throughout his book, Campbell does not provide a single story which has every single one of the seventeen stages outlined in his version of the hero's journey. Probably the most brilliant thing Campbell did with his monomyth from a rhetorical point of view, is leaving it vague enough to both fascinate and to be constantly reinterpreted. Thus, he had a much less literal understanding of the individual stages of the monomyth than subsequent critics which popularized the term in late 80s, which is understandable considering the fact that Campbell's book is much more a book of comparative mythology than an investigation of narrative per se.

⁴ As we will later see cultural selection is not entirely based on human biology and cultural factors can have an influence on general trends in which story paradigms are developed.

Therefore, although Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* is not a perfect scholarly text (his background is in screenwriting rather than in academia), it is still a text worth considering, as unlike *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, it puts a focus on the story aspect of the monomyth rather than its anthropological significance. His main contribution to this issue is that he added directionality and definition to what was originally vague. Another important thing is the fact that Vogler was actually actively involved in the production of numerous Hollywood blockbusters (Vogler x), and his terminology has not only entered deep into popular culture but into Hollywood as well, which adds legitimacy to his monomythic paradigm. However, this poses an interesting dilemma - Hollywood productions may include the hero's journey as a mold, not because it is ingrained in the unconscious of the filmmakers, but because they read Vogler's or Campbell's work, saw its potential, and consciously included it in their work. As mentioned earlier, even Campbell was aware of this probability, when towards the end of his career he flirted with the notion of "diffusion" of myth.

Indeed, this may be how the monomyth spread around the world - through memesis. Many of the stories featuring the monomyth mentioned by Campbell are found in regions that have always maintained cultural ties and a more or less open flow of influences and information. Even periods of cultural isolation due to geographic conditions can be explained with the fact that oral storytelling can present stories in more or less unchanged form for thousands of years. For example, Australian aboriginal stories feature details of inundation events that happened some seven thousand years ago (Nunn and Reid). This may mean that the monomyth has a single place of origin and it spread from there, of course aided in this process by its pandering to universal, biological processes. This may be the universal aspect of the monomyth that is behind

lingering appeal to new audiences. This problem will be further explored in the following subchapter.

2.1.3. Archetypes, tropes, and memes

Although this theme is a subject of interest of both archetypal criticism and literary Darwinism, it would be most convenient to place it here, as it largely relies on terminology provided by the former theoretical paradigm. The main purpose of this subchapter is to contribute to finding a balance between the notions of diffusion of myth and its inherent existence in every single person, both proposed by Joseph Campbell. Taking Campbell's claim as a supposition - that biological universalism and cultural propagation exist simultaneously, this thesis differentiates between three concepts, based on preexisting terms, in order to cover the full spectrum between biological universalism and cultural propagation with appropriate terminology. Thus, we can differentiate between:

- Archetypes, that are wholly shaped by human biology and are kept in their entirety in the unconscious. Because there is only so much information that can be stored in instinct, they tend to be simpler and mimic biological processes, patterns, or character types. Thereby, archetypes can "pop up" in different cultural manifestations without the help of diffusion. For example, Campbell's archetype of the crone - an old wise woman, who often provides guidance to the main hero, is obviously inspired by the universal of basic family structure. In addition, the three main phases of the monomyth directly imitate a fully realized human life and might be considered archetypal.
- Tropes are not entirely contained in the unconscious, but their diffusion is aided by biological factors. Because of their liminal status, they tend to be more semantically complex. Unlike

archetypes, which are truly universal and have the longest life span, tropes begin with the discovery of an author or a filmmaker of something that panders to our evolved dispositions that then gets taken up and promulgated in subsequent cultural productions. As they are steeped in aspects that pander to our evolved dispositions, cultural selection favors their propagation over some of their counterparts that do not do so. One such example is the common trope of death by falling of high buildings, which uses the narrative potentialities of basophobia in key moments of the narrative for maximum effect.⁵ Similar processes might have shaped up the individual stages of the monomyth beyond its skeletal three act structure.

- Memes on the other hand are "analogous to genes" and represent "fundamental units of culture that spread through a population and persist through time and, occasionally, across cultures", for example "melodies, clothing styles, and theological beliefs"⁶ (Hay 152). Memes are entirely cultural and their proliferation is often dependent on random, non-biological factors, which often makes them ephemeral and with shorter half-life than the previous two terms. An example of a meme is the intrusion of the phrase "for the sake" in the chorus of Auld Lang Syne, which happens due to the phonetic characteristics of the sibilant 's' which is "notoriously obtrusive" (Dawkins 324). When performed in a quoir, the hissing sound of this phoneme "lags" behind the rest, giving the appearance of an other, extra words in the chorus. Because of this, "the refrain is, essentially always nowadays, sung as 'For the sake of auld lang syne', whereas Burns actually wrote 'For auld lang syne'" (Dawkins 323).

Thus, a slightly altered variation of the original cultural product (Burns' poem) has spread far

⁵ Turn to page 69 for a detailed explanation of the phenomenon in *Dredd 3D*, *Judge Dredd*, and *Die Hard*..

⁶ According to the above stated classification, theological beliefs are not memes, but tropes. They are indeed spread through diffusion, but they always latch onto issues that are biologically directed.

and wide, and has almost superseded the original as far as everyday use is concerned. This example deals with a very insignificant instance of cultural transmission, in its most primitive form, but it must be kept in mind that certain deeply ingrained notions of our culture that we take for granted have been brought to prominence through such diffusion. Thus, Campbell highlights the fact that 12th century troubadours were the first to introduce the concept of a personal love that almost functions on a spiritual level and is rid of the notion of birth and reproduction. Previously, love was merely eros or the zeal of the organs for one another (Campbell and Moyers 128). Obviously, some memetic notions can circumvent and trump biologically conditioned motivations. This notion was later expanded throughout the western world, and as an accompanying part of this concept was an emphasis of individualism, it later contributed to Western Europe's technological superiority over the world and the introduction of capitalism. All of this was kick-started by such a seemingly small and insignificant cultural transmission.

Another key point to be made in this section is how Moretti's claim of the existence of "two entirely different perspectives in the study of literature, one on plot and one on style" (qtd. in Hay 153) relates to film. According to Moretti, "plots 'travel' incredibly well, maintaining recognizable identities when reproduced across languages, cultures, and times" while "style... is inherently a local property; it often translates poorly between languages, and stylistic conventions are historically variable" (qtd. in Hay 153). If we overlay this claim on Bordwell's three layers, it means that in literature, the first two are more supportive of "travelling". However, the fact that film is an audio-visual medium, makes aspects on all three levels just as likely to "travel", since the third layer is free of the containing forces asserted by text.

Empirically measuring this is beyond the scope of the thesis, but a general hunch does exist and it will be put to the test in the case studies.

2.2. Darwinian criticism

2.2.1. Origins and main streams

Evolutionary criticism was established at the peak of the "crisis of the humanities" in the mid 1990s, when "news of the successes of biocultural critique in other disciplines reached a small number of literary scholars who were dissatisfied with the explanations post-structuralist theory presented, but were as yet unsure of how they could supplement or replace the established postmodern assumptions" (Parrish 650). Some of the earliest forays into the discipline were done by Joseph Carroll and Robert Storey, and had two primary suppositions in common: "that people share much of their mental and motivational makeup... humans being more similar to one another than different" and "that our minds have been shaped by evolution to provide us with mostly valid information about the world, rather than operating purely through arbitrary convention" (Parrish 650).

Much of what was published in the early days of literary Darwinism aimed to defend the stream from attacks on the ground of its scientific merit. After all, the amount of empiricism included in the work of this theoretical stream is extremely unconventional, and much of it is not part of the standard academic training of the humanities. This brings to mind a dilemma in the film *Armageddon* by Michael Bay. With the world in peril by a massive asteroid, a team needs to be sent to drill a hole in its surface and insert a nuclear device to destroy it. Who should do this crucial task? Is it easier to teach astronauts how to drill, or oil drillers how to go to outer space? The same question applies to who ought to carry out the empirical analysis of cultural products

like literature or film - whether it should be done by proponents of the relevant "hard sciences", or literary critics, respectively standing for the astronauts and oil drillers in the film. It is hard to objectively tell, but literary Darwinists have opted for the latter scenario, for better or worse, a decision which has garnered criticism in much the same way Michael Bay's decision to prioritize the oil drillers did.

Hay provides a compromise:

evolutionary psychology and the literary Darwinism developed from it are not particular scientific theories in themselves. They are instead what philosopher Imre Lakatos termed "research programs," a term Boyd has embraced. A research program is more premise than conclusion; it is a postulated perspective on the world that guides the path of future research. The evolutionary psychology promoted by literary Darwinists is just such a program. (154)

For Hay, whatever investigations literary Darwinists engage in can merely serve as a framework, a premise, with the resulting gaps of empirical evidence being too big for literary scholars to fill, which makes support from hard science an absolutely necessity. However, hard empirical studies, i.e. experimental end products, have indeed been completed by literary Darwinists, (Carroll et al.), occasionally in consultation with members of the social sciences.

There have been some attempts made to categorize Darwinian criticism according to (1) the way it treats its subject, and (2) its overall ambitions as a stream of literary criticism.

Parrish (651) distinguishes two varieties of literary Darwinism, in terms of how they treat their subjects, "Weak Literary Darwinism" and "Strong Literary Darwinism". The first, "appreciates that biology and culture should both be taken into account in order to better understand literary works and uses evolution as one of many possible lenses or heuristics (like feminism or post-colonialism)" while Strong Literary Darwinism "is a paradigm shift, subsuming all other approaches under evolutionary biology... including culture... which flies in

the face of current assumptions that culture is the most important influence on artistic endeavor" (Parrish, 651). The approach taken by the thesis stands somewhere in the middle - it is clear from the previous chapter, that albeit some cultural products are completely tied to human biology, most of them are either partially or completely detached from it, even though the principles of their transmission are similar to biological processes. Anything capable of having slightly different copies of itself made is capable of evolution, with "biological evolution [being] slow" and "cultural evolution [being] fast" (Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* 48). This difference is owing to the fact that living things accomplish this with the help of genes, and culture through memesis, the latter being based on units that can replicate and perish at much faster rates than the former. If we see culture in general as an extension of this same process, it can easily be brought into the investigative scope of literary Darwinism. In terms of the application of this paradigm, this thesis tries to follow in the lines of Hay and "include a more historically attuned (rather than purely universal) focus on the evolution of literary form, the kind of focus being championed by Franco Moretti and the Stanford Literary Lab" (Hay 155). Moretti's computational fusion of formalism and historicism, is difficult to transpose on analyses of film, so this thesis would have to resort to a "manual" form of the same approach. Thus, it will expand on notions of evolutionary literary criticism "constrained either to narrative (i.e., characters, plots, and settings) or to author-reader relationships..." that fit "into an older tradition of exclusive attention to narrative... that has featured critics like Vladimir Propp and Joseph Campbell" with a measure of empiricism (Hay 155). According to Hay, the adoption of Moretti's work will be the necessary incentive that would propel literary Darwinism towards higher appreciation in literary circles.

Carroll thus outlines three scenarios for the further development of literary Darwinism, ranging from its complete isolation of literary Darwinism, a partial merger, or complete penetration of mainstream literary study (“Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism”). The third scenario includes the notion that evolutionary criticism can serve as binding agent - logically linking diverse concepts and theories that have thus far been investigated separately.

First and foremost, this would signify an integration of social sciences and literary studies with the help of an evolutionary perspective, which corresponds to the notion of "consilience", already mentioned in the introduction. Therefore, this thesis practically fits in the third scenario depicted by Carroll, since existing disciplines (archetypal criticism, evolutionary criticism, and narratology) are adapted and reshaped by evolutionary concepts. The main criterion, which distinguishes the third from the first two scenarios, is its adoption of a softer Weak Literary Darwinist stance, which has a bigger potential of resonating with established literary criticism. Proponents of cognitive poetics, a stream closely related to literary Darwinism, have already done the same, which "has allowed them to live more peacefully among proponents of the established, mainstream critical theories" (Parrish, 651). Even Carroll himself admits that works of literary Darwinism often adopt “the traditional humanist methodology of discursive interpretive analysis” (Carroll, “Adaptionist Literary Study: An Introductory Guide” 30) which together with its quantitative and empirical methods forms a hybrid method using the best of both worlds.

Despite disagreements on the basis on its scientific merit, literary Darwinism gets into disagreements with poststructuralists as well, something already mentioned in the introduction. Unlike them, literary Darwinists believe that "beneath all of the wild surface variety in all the stories that people tell - no matter where, no matter when - there is a common structure... a bony

skeleton that we rarely notice beneath its padding of flesh and colorful garments" (Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* 61). This is quite obviously a structuralist notion, and the reason why combining literary Darwinism with other structural paradigms comes so naturally. Most poststructuralist disputes over the existence of human universals fail to see the mutual interaction of biology and culture, through their overemphasizing of differences often under the influence of ideological considerations. Because of the absence of this link between biology and culture, Cultural critique overplays the differences between genders, and operates on a scope often incompatible with the ways art is both perceived and produced. According to Boyd, "in its preoccupation with the group or society" Cultural critique "overlooks both the species and the individual" (Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 205), the locus of most evolutionary processes. As Parrish claims, evolutionary criticism "allows for multiple levels of interpretation of a text" - "the individual, the cultural, and the universal" (Parrish, 651). The individual is covered by the investigation of personal motivational factors owing to the workings of our "selfish genes", concerned only with their propagation; the cultural is dealt with by bearing in mind both our evolved human sociability, and the workings of cultural transmission, while the universal is covered by the understanding that our evolved dispositions create a common background for all human behavior, and by extension culture. This realization, together with the fact that literary Darwinism downplays the extent of cognitive transcendence (the conjecture that our evolved intelligence somehow makes us radically different than other animal species, and thus Darwian principles do not apply to humans) leads to demystification of culture and especially literature, something especially prevalent among post-structuralists.

Despite its rather turbulent state, publishing of Darwinian literary studies is in its renaissance now and in the last few years it is undergoing almost exponential growth (Carroll, “Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism” 54).

2.2.2. Basic tenets and domains of investigation

According to Carroll, in order "to qualify as Darwinist, a reading would have to bring all its particular observations into line with basic evolutionary principles: survival, reproduction, kinship (inclusive fitness), basic social dynamics, and the reproductive cycle that gives shape to human life and organizes the most intimate relations of family" (“Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism” 59). These principles are based on a supposition of the existence of a unified human nature that "has changed little in the past ten thousand years" (Hay 151) and "fundamentally constrains all cultural formations" (Carroll, “Adaptionist Literary Study: An Introductory Guide”).

Narrative itself is an excellent investigative ground in the search for glimpses of this nature, as after all "narrative itself is a human universal, as all known cultures produce it" and is "likely to have emerged between 30,000 and 100,000 years ago"(Parrish 652). A key part of the theory is that the network which enables communication between the author/director and the reader/audience is independent of culture and has biological foundations, at least in part. Thus, "in its core elements, character, plot, perspective, [narrative] draws on aspects of life that predate verbal and visual art" (Boyd, “The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who” 203). Uncovering the workings of this network constitutes the majority of Darwinian endeavors in the study of literature and film.

When watching a film, the viewers' brains not only "[catch] whatever emotions [are] being enacted on the screen" (Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*

69), mirroring whatever the depicted characters were feeling at a particular time in the narrative, but also collect operation plans for possible future scenarios, essentially making them "the flight simulators of human social life" (Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* 66). This suggests that like all narrative, film can also serve an "educational function" (Parrish 652), something Campbell was quick to perceive as well (turn to page 20). This is essentially the fulcrum of Carroll's opposition to what he calls "pluralism" - the "chronic symptom of theoretical confusion in the humanities" ("Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism" 58). It involves a differentiation between a physical world, whose processes can be scrutinized by modern science, and an imaginative world whose experiences and products are outside of its domain. For literary Darwinists, both worlds are more intimately related, with the second being a direct reflection of the first. A key feature of evolutionary criticism is that it takes the characters in narrative as simulations of actual people, instead of merely dismissing them as existing within a separate reality, because "when readers respond to characters in novels, they respond in much the same way, emotionally, as they respond to people in everyday life" (Carroll et al. 51). This means that evolutionary psychology can be applied on the characters in fiction in much the same way that they can be applied to real people, outside of fiction. It is precisely because of this quality of fiction that "the psychology of each point of view character in a work of fiction is notably human" (Parrish, 651). According to Boyd, "a focus on agents and goals" ("The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 203) is essential to narrative, and it is accordingly the main preoccupation of the theoretical stream.

2.2.2.1. Agents

Our inherent sociability is what causes us to empathize with the depicted characters and is one of the main factors behind the immersive effect of fiction. This instinct is not limited to

humans only as "even rats and monkeys have a natural default response to others of their kind, not just their kin, whom they see in distress, and human children 'by one year of age... spontaneously comfort people in distress'... an impulse over which we exert no control: it grabs us instantaneously, like a reflex"(Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 199).

According to Kjeldgaard-Christiansen morality has biological roots and "moral psychology" has an influence on both the creation and the reception of fiction. This is because:

humans, like other primates, evolved to live and thrive in groups that constitute cooperative units. Moral intuitions built on a foundation of kin selection and reciprocal altruism pushed us into a hypersocial ecological niche by allowing us to avert the so-called Tragedy of the Commons whereby all agents are motivated to always be selfish. This evolutionary logic is largely captured in the concept of welfare tradeoff ratios that govern our intuitions about how we ought to treat others and how they ought to treat us. But because we have evolved intuitions to bring us together, we have also evolved adaptations to ensure that cooperation is not undermined by free-riding exploiters, antisocial individualists, and competing coalitions. (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 7)

It seems that the preference of altruism in the audience is because of evolved human sociability, owing to living in close, cohesive, social groups, where the fate of the group dictated the welfare of the individuals. Thus, "the dispositions that produce an egalitarian social dynamic are deeply embedded in the evolved and adapted character of human nature" and are one of the principal reason that distinguish "human social organization from the social organization of chimpanzees"(Carroll et al. 69). This evolved egalitarian ethos consists of the fact that unlike chimpanzees whose "social organization is regulated exclusively by dominance", human " social organization is regulated by interactions between impulses of dominance and impulses for

suppressing dominance", which " had, at a minimum, a hundred thousand years in which to become entrenched in human nature"(Carroll et al. 69).

The mechanisms of this ethos are dictated by reciprocal altruism, or a so-called "Tit for Tat" algorithm, which prioritizes cooperation as a scenario for the general benefit of everyone in the group. However, "from the perspective of individual organisms... the very best scenario is to derive fitness benefits from interactions without reciprocating" which can engender "selfish exploitation even in a context of cooperating altruists" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 4). Through engaging in high-risk/high-reward behavior , these "free riders" may endanger this delicate social equilibrium, which is why transgression-gauging mechanisms such as gossip have evolved, whose purpose is to locate violators of this social equilibrium, spread the news of the violation, isolate the perpetrators and do damage control of the potential antisocial behavior by these individuals. Thus, "the fundamental payoff matrix of cooperation and defection undergirds the rich human moral tapestry, including feelings of gratitude, honor, guilt, and righteous indignation" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 4).

This is in turn reflected in the so called "'agonistic' structure:⁷ the organization of characters into protagonists, antagonists, and minor characters" (Johnson et al. 716). According to this hypothesis, we tend to classify characters in fiction according to a fixed grid. Thus, "protagonists and good minor characters... form communities of cooperative endeavor and... antagonists... exemplify dominance behavior" (Carroll et al. 51), or in other words, the characters who follow the principles of our evolved "egalitarian social ethos" are classified as protagonists, while those who do not are considered antagonists. Kjeldgaard-Christiansen mentions a so called

⁷ The agonistic structure will be extensively used in the first layer of Bordwell's investigation of film, reserved for the circumstances, agents, and surroundings of the story

Welfare Tradeoff Ratio (henceforth referred to as WTR), which is higher when individuals are willing to trade their own welfare for the welfare of others and vice versa (4). In addition to the presence or absence of altruism as a mechanism for classifying protagonists and antagonists, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen further identifies (1) "empathic deficits", the furthest extents of which is psychopathic tendencies (2) "pseudospeciation", most commonly materialized through the creation of otherness through the use of a foreign language, (3) "Baumeister's notion of a 'myth of pure evil': an attributive stance whereby humans consider injurious actions the products of evil essences in others", and (4) disgust, which is primarily effected "through a cognitive conflation of disgust toward potential contaminants and moral disgust toward social transgressions" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 1).

2.2.2.2. Goals and motivations

According to Carroll, "the [human] species as a whole has a characteristic structure of 'life history' that entails a species-typical set of motive dispositions and emotional responses, and along with them a species-typical range of personality characteristics - individuals can and often do vary from the species-typical, but the species typical provides a common frame of reference" ("Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism" 61). This is in fact the driving force behind folk psychology – "the common, shared, basis for the understanding of intentional meaning in other human beings... the lingua franca of social life and of literature" directly derived from the mutual interaction of many humans within a society but still constituted from the interactions of many different individuals (Carroll, "Three Scenarios for Literary Darwinism" 62). While making calculations about the future behavioral patterns of individuals, whether they are in the real world or the screen, we always have our evolved referential framework to rely on, shared with other members of the species. This is why the motivational forces behind the actions of

characters tend to concern matters salient to survival. These motivations also inform the broadest focus of literature and film, which "in its pursuit of audience attention, has tended to focus not on all phases of life but on those phases that offer the greatest consequences, those that lead to reproduction or survival, and those that offer the most local unpredictability, through conflicts of will, especially when they have love or death, or both, at stake" (Boyd, 274).

A case in point is the fact that reproductive success is largely absent of fiction targeting children, as sexuality kicks at around the age of eleven or twelve, and before that age these cannot be expected to be salient topics for them. Similarly, the events leading up to sex, rather than child bearing itself, represent are the ones most filled with excitement. Similarly, "actual or threatened 'death' in fictional narrative disproportionately focuses, not on its most common modern human forms, dying peacefully of old age or painfully of disease, but dying prematurely, especially at human hands, one's own or those of others, and usually involving some violation of social norms" (Boyd, 269). Although this is just a general tendency as often culture can act as a "contaminant" and "can inflect the bias of stories in many ways" (Boyd, 274), all three films included in the study seem to follow the abovementioned principles quite closely.

Similarly to how certain phases of life are "privileged" in narrative, the same goes for violence as well. Although it takes up relatively short periods of time in the real world, as conflict avoidance is the primary evolved instinct (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 416), it is allotted a much bigger portion in narrative representations. Since conflict, the principal propellant of narrative, arises from "motives in active opposition, stories tend to focus disproportionately on conflicts of wills around love (mate choice and retention) and death (social oppositions and transgressions)" (Boyd, 267). It is these factors that are the primary shaping forces of narrative stakes. In addition, when used in

narrative, violence mainly serves an instrumental function, just like it does in real life, "either to assert social dominance, to suppress dominance in others, or to punish transgressions against equitable behavior" (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 425). This is also the most important category of violence encountered in the three films in the case studies.

This gives a general idea of the theoretical trajectory of Darwinian criticism which will be further expanded in the case studies.

3. Case studies

Having outlined the theoretical approach of the thesis, this part will put it to the test. The films will be dealt with in chronological order, according to the date of their release. For a more precise examination of the theoretical model, the case studies will have an almost identical composition. Thus, for the sake of convenience, each case study begins with a synopsis of the relevant film. The make-up of the three further subchapters in each of the case studies is dictated by Bordwell's three layers of the analysis of film (turn back to page 14 for additional details about his classification). Finally, the takeaways of the case studies will be summarized in the conclusion, i.e. the fourth part of the thesis.

3.1. Dredd 3D (2012)

3.1.1. Plot overview

In a world devastated by a nuclear holocaust, the survivors live in overpopulated "mega cities", where crime is rampant, and the justice is kept by "Street Judges", an elite force of judges, juries, and executioners. Joe Dredd, a particularly successful member of this group, is

assigned to mentor Cassandra Anderson, a "rookie" who happens to be a particularly gifted psychic. While on a routine patrol, the duo enters Peach Trees, a massive building complex with 75 thousand residents, just in time to witness three drug dealers executed by the local drug boss - Ma-Ma. In an attempt to investigate the triple homicide, they arrest Kay - one of Ma-ma's henchmen, on whom Anderson promptly administers a mental probe and realizes that he was involved in the murder. Afraid of what Kay could reveal about her operation, Ma-ma orders the exit sealed, and instigates her goons to hunt the two judges down. Dredd and Anderson are forced to fight for their lives through incoming waves of hostile attackers, with their hostage in tow. However, when they realize that Ma-ma is actually heading the sole drug operation that produces slo-mo, an extremely potent drug that is slowly taking over Mega City 1, Dredd decides to go on the offensive. The duo fights their way up, making quick work of Ma-ma's henchmen. Realizing the full extent of the threat, Ma-ma is forced to call the help of four corrupt judges - Dredd and Anderson struggle but eventually defeat them and kill Ma-ma. Dredd seems to leave Peach Trees with a newfound hope and increased empathy, while Anderson passes the test and leaves the building a certified judge.

3.1.2. First layer - "story world": circumstances, surroundings, and agents

3.1.2.1. Circumstances and surroundings

It must be kept in mind that the film itself is based on a well established universe, with its setting and most characters originally shaped by the comic books published in the late 70s, and then reinforced in an earlier film version - *Judge Dredd* (Cannon), released in 1995 and starring Sylvester Stallone. Like many other film productions in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, *Dredd* is a reboot, a rehashing of the same universe with a fresh twist. In the period that the films

dealt with in the thesis were released, film studios were more likely to take the easy way out and recycle already established movie franchises, whether in the form of remakes, sequels, or reboots. Thus, in 2010 "eight of the top twenty-five films [were] sequels, including four of the top five" (Redfern), and in 2013 "a record 31 sequels and 17 reboots" graced the big screens, most likely due to "the reluctance of studios to take risks on original concepts follows a series of disastrous results" (Allen), which constituted of several consecutive flops of big budget films based on original screenplays released the previous year. After all, "the entertainment industry is just that: an industry" with "economic motivation" affecting most of the creative process (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 88). The fact that the film is essentially a patchwork of archetypes and tropes of all kinds,⁸ not exclusively limited to the Judge Dredd universe, makes this film a perfect example of Dawkins's theory of memetics. It is no coincidence that the most quoted failures of *Judge Dredd*, the unnecessary love interest, the ridiculous twists, and the unnecessary comic relief, were not kept in the reboot. In fact, the only vestigial similarities between *Dredd 3D* to *Judge Dredd* and the source comics can be found on the first investigative level, limited to the "story world", while the second and third level, dealing with the structure of the plot and the moment by moment narration respectively, have underwent significant alterations. Thus, the story itself is original, with the monomyth chosen by the filmmakers as a tried and tested story structure, which with its persistent success over the eons obviously appeals to human nature. The borrowing is not restricted to only archetypes and tropes - the later version has also adopted some of the plethora of memes *Judge Dredd* is sated with. For example, many of the one-liners of the original film have found their way in the reboot, like Dredd's famous "I am the law", while

⁸ turn to page 26 for an explanation of the differentiation this thesis sees between these two terms

others like Dredd's "choke on this" when he kills one of the corrupted judges, can only be interpreted as nods to the comics and the 1995 film.

However, it is not only from the Judge Dredd that this film heavily borrowed - it owes many of its plot elements to the Indonesian film *The Raid* (Evans), released in 2011, and the 1988 action classic *Die Hard* (McTiernan), starring Bruce Willis. Probably the main feature shared by all of these films is the constraining force asserted by a limited venue in which the action takes place. Peach Trees, Riyadi's apartment block, and Nakatomi Plaza, all serve as a sort of purgatory, which cleanse the main hero of his burdening ego, and serve as a catalyst for his transformation. The setting also helps the development of the monomyth - if we see the monomyth as an extended allegory of initiation rituals, these apartment buildings serve as the temples in which the transformation takes place (Moyers 3). In the same way that the temple is supposed to restrict sensory experiences or impose completely new ones on the initiate, the high-rises ward off the outside world, and allow the heroes, through their own personal agency, to affect their transformation. Another key ingredient for the transformation to take place is violence. *Dredd 3D* is absolutely drenched in it from beginning to end, something established from both the title sequence and the expository car chase. The difference between the other films and *Dredd 3D*, is that in the latter film, the building does not represent the oasis of violence as it does in the others - in Mega City 1 there are "twelve serious crimes every minute, 17,000 per day" (Travis). One hallmark of the post-apocalyptic genre is the fact that from very early on there is an emphasis on excessive violence, with the judge being desensitized to it. However, the difference in *Dredd* is that this violence suddenly acquires focus, and it is channeled in a productive way, since by stopping Ma-ma's operations, the judges nip in the bud what could potentially become the most powerful crime syndicate in Mega City 1. So there is a

transformation of the senseless, directionless, futile violence of Mega City 1, into its meaningful and directed form in Peach Trees. When it is directed, and used as a corrective of social transgressions, and what might be perceived as psychopathic tendencies, violence is tolerated, and even hailed by the audience. Patterns and attitudes towards violence also shape the audience's sympathies or aversion towards the characters, as can be seen in the following subchapter.

3.1.2.2. Agents - agonistic structure

Agonistic structure, or the different factions of characters that emerge over the course of the narrative, is a common investigation subject of literary Darwinists (Carroll et al.) (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen). According to these articles both the filmmakers, or the creative agents of any work of fiction on one end, and the audience on the other, instinctively divide characters into a stipulated structure.

According to Boyd, "two essential forces behind the power of plot to command our continued attention to a story, and that these forces are best explained in evolutionary terms: first, our interest in whether or not agents achieve their goals, which arises from the natural sympathy creatures at a certain cognitive and social level can have for others of their kind; and, second, our unique human interest... in knowing the full situation that will explain the whole story" ("The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 205). A crucial element for every such story therefore would be the early establishing of an emphatic connection between the audience and the protagonist. That is the most immediately human element of our immersion in any work of fiction. It is important to note that the monomyth has embedded this "natural sympathy" Boyd refers to in its own structure. The second force proposed by Boyd, closely tied to human curiosity, functions on the second and the third dimensions of film.

Dredd 3D obviously has a dearth of investigative material as far as gender roles are concerned, because the protagonists and antagonists form partnerships across different gender and age groups - based on mutually shared goals, something supported by the findings by Carrol et al. Similarly, Kjeldgaard-Christiansen claims that "evolved cognitive dispositions inform and constrain the archetypal villain of popular literature, film, and video games"(1), and by extension we can conclude that the same goes for the archetypal protagonists.

This manipulation of the readers' sympathies perfectly mirrors *The Raid*, where ten minutes into the film it is revealed that the main hero actually has a pregnant wife, to whom he is quite obviously attached, while the main antagonist summarily executes six prisoners. Stories like this always have a reinforcement of the high WTR (turn to page 38) of the main hero and the low WTR of the main antagonist. *Dredd* perfectly mirrors both of these scenes - the first glimpse of Anderson that we are shown is of her holding a photograph of her family, while the first scene Ma-ma is featured in has her cold-heartedly ordering the flaying and execution of three thugs who opposed her supremacy in Peach Trees.

When dealing with the agonistic structure it is best to start with the protagonists, something which every single one of the films included in the thesis seems to do as well, and seems to be the general rule of thumb. The two main protagonists *Dredd* and Anderson, not only form the classic mentor/disciple duo, so common in stories featuring the monomyth, but also form a binary opposition in which *Dredd* stands for society in general while Anderson has a deep connection to nature, which perfectly demonstrates Campbell's point that in world mythology, women tend to be "vehicles of nature" while "men are vehicles of society" (Moyers 3). The structural foundation behind this is the fact that women are the ones who give birth, and their transformation leading to maturity is triggered through a biological process, i.e. menstruation,

while faced with the absence of a biologically mandated threshold moment, men have to simulate it through a social ritual. Hence, Anderson is a psychic, and as such, she more keenly sensitive to the ebbs and flows of life than the average person - in a way, she can be seen as a prophet, or a demi-goddess. Moreover, her empathy seems more instinctive and to come from a more natural place than Dredd's, who seems to be emphatic mostly because of social obligations he took upon himself to maintain, as a member of the Justice Department.

For Campbell, the hero, i.e. the protagonist, needs to stand out from the crowd in some way, and is "a personage of exceptional gifts... frequently [s]he is honored by his society, frequently unrecognized or disdained. "(Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 35). Anderson fits the bill on all accounts. Her exceptional gifts are her psychic abilities, acquired due to radiation exposure while growing up in the fringe slums of Mega City 1. Her rare talents attract the attention of the Chief Judge, who has great trust in her abilities, but on the other hand she is a cadet, who barely qualified for the final examination administered by Dredd. In the comic books Anderson was not a "rookie" but a well established, certified judge. What this film has done is to fit her as the hero of the monomyth and as the student in the mentor/ student archetypal binary opposite, and has the dual charm of simultaneously being both special and an underdog. As such she is definitely a key part of the protagonist faction and this is clearly achieved through several devices which pander to our evolved dispositions.

Probably the easiest way of establishing an agonistic structure is through narrative perspective - something which is the primary mechanism of directorial interference with the sympathies of the audience. As mentioned previously, Anderson clearly displays empathy in the very first scene she is featured in, something that sets the scene for how she is treated for the remainder of the film. On top of being more instinctively empathic than the other judges,

Anderson is more objectively empathic as well, and thus more capable of attracting the sympathies of the audience.

Over the course of the film, Anderson displays her high WTR on multiple occasions - she shows lenience to a homeless person, and prioritizes the murders over locking him up for three weeks in the iso-cubes (prison), empathizes with Cathy, the wife of one of Ma-ma's henchmen, whom she previously executed, and shows mercy to Ma-ma's computer expert after discovering that he was forced into collaborating with her. But most importantly, she is able to channel her empathy on something more than individuals, and claims that a desire to make a difference in Mega City 1 was the reason she decided to be a judge. This ability of hers is distilled into hope, something that Dredd initially characterizes as "admirable" (Travis) in his recognizable deadpan delivery but latter adopts in the final stages of his transformative process.

Dredd himself perfectly follows Campbell's "rule" of the exceptionality of the hero. After the early chase scene where his skill and intimidation factor are established, Anderson inspects his mind and claims "I can feel anger, and control... but there's something else, something behind the control, something almost..." (Travis). This deliberately vague statement, envelops Dredd in an air of mystery, and also reveals the deficiency that is to be mended over the course of the monomyth. The unstated is most likely Dredd's potential for transformation, a glimpse of hope that will surface by the end of his journey.

The air of mystery is further enforced by the fact that, unlike Anderson, who represents the more human, relatable part of the heroic duo, Dredd constantly wears a mask, representing the faceless force of justice. His personal identity is almost non-existent, and he solely exists as the vessel through which society inflicts corrective action on violators of social norm - proving Campbell's claim that unlike women, the direct embodiments of nature, men are "servants of

something greater than themselves" (Moyers 3). This aspect of the story has an interesting Darwinian aspect - "legal execution is partly instrumental—it aims at deterrence—and partly a form of collective revenge" and "when it serves the purposes of 'poetic justice,' legal execution can be neatly folded into the emotional satisfaction with which a story concludes" (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 427). Seeing norm violators get punished is a satisfactory experience for the audience, and in a film whose action is almost entirely driven by this force, it becomes a major factor of audience enjoyment.

Dredd himself is a faithful representation of the heroic mime or silent protagonist meme. What this device manages to achieve is to remove any identifying features of the character which may stand in the way of full audience identification with the main character. The fact that he wears a mask adds a certain featurelessness to the character, and most of his lines (which are few and far between) and actions have an understated quality that the audience is left to fill out on its own. As it will be shown later on the title characters of the other two films are designed to provide a similar effect.

Despite these features, Dredd does get a chance to show his empathy and altruism, which might also be the hidden aspect of his personality that Anderson saw in him before - thus, he merely stuns a couple of kids who attack him, and turns a blind eye to Anderson's lenient sentencing, which goes against the criminal code on two occasions. The most profound act of altruism on his part however, is his decision to sacrifice his personal well-being for that of a fellow judge, and also for the collective well-being of Mega City 1. This happens at a crucial point of the story, where the duo is cornered by heavy machine gun fire. Disregarding his personal safety, and facing insurmountable odds, Dredd goes into the mists alone, dispatches several of Ma-ma's henchmen, including her second in command, and rejoins Anderson. This

motif of sacrifice, is found in many stories featuring the monomyth, and usually has a moral objective - "that of saving a people, saving a person, saving an idea... he is sacrificing himself for something, that is the morality of it" (Moyers 3).

Nevertheless, his altruism does not register with the neutral denizens of Peach trees, and the fear the ordinary citizens have of the judges is frequently emphasized throughout the film. Part of it is probably due to their inability to connect with the Justice Department on a personal level because of the faceless, stern facade presented by Dredd and the other judges. But most importantly, these people merely engage in self-preservation, aiming to simply escape unscathed from the main conflict raging between the protagonists and antagonists. The fact that the "neutrals" prefer the status quo over expressing high WTR ratios is what distinguishes them from the protagonists.

This is perfectly explainable in Darwinian terms. Thus, some evolutionary psychologists "argue that sedentism, a prerequisite to agricultural and industrial economies, has selected for personalities less prone to violence" (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 415). Thus, most societies function in an equilibrium which discourages violence of any kind, and the priority is conflict avoidance. This indicates that societal change could potentially exert survival pressures, or in different words, that we have tamed ourselves thorough technological advancement. A character who personifies the neutrality of the civilians is TJ - the Peach Trees medic. Initially he is a helper figure to the judge duo, and divulges the WTR ratios of the antagonists through "gossip", which evolved in order "to assess the association value of in-group members through communal coregistration of offending behaviors" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 4), thus sifting them from the common civilians. However, as he refuses to help the judges at a key point in the narrative, which can be seen as the refusal of the

call phase, TJ's story might be seen as an abortive version of the monomyth because he does not engage in a transformative process. Eventually he meets his demise by the hands of the corrupt judges, with the irony of conflict aversion and improper judging of the WTR ratios of antagonists being reason for his death.

On the opposite end of the "agonistic" spectrum are the antagonists, who are deliberately painted as evil, for the purposes of eliciting a particular effect. If the fact that "folk psychological evil emerges as *an antisocial agentic designation that licenses extreme retributive action* (sic)" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 5) is taken in consideration, there has to be a complex pattern of negative cues established in order to work up audience disdain for the antagonist. The more evil the main character is, the more satisfying the pay off becomes in case the protagonists eventually prove victorious.

Unlike *Judge Dredd*, which based its story on the rivalry between the Dredd brothers, utilizing the traditional evil twin archetype, *Dredd 3D* created a completely new villain which similarly panders to our evolved dispositions. Although background information is indeed provided about her, there is little to no effort invested in making her relatable - in the "gossip" sequence, when Dredd and Anderson are introduced to Ma-ma's background, she is shown brutally blinding the computer expert, which she stronghands into subordination for the majority of the film.

In the same sequence it is also explicitly mentioned that sadistic violence is her trademark, something which definitely helps point out her low WTR, with this type of violence being a clear indicator of villains. The most important thing here is Ma-ma's lack of empathy, and an accent is put on her willingness to inflict pain and harm on others, which makes her a perfectly evil antagonist. For example, when ordering the execution of the three thugs she orders

them flayed and thrown off the topmost floor of the building. When asked whether "slo-mo" is to be used in the process (which would slow down the victims' perception of time to 1% of its real value, making their suffering of biblical proportions) she merely replies "slo-mo? Sure!" (Travis) which truly achieves an eerie effect of inhuman cruelty. Her low WTR is further emphasized at the very end of the film, when she puts on a detonator synced with her heartbeat, which could take 75 thousand other lives along with hers. Similar low empathy is shown by the thugs at the very beginning, especially Zwirner, who indiscriminately fire their weapons and with no consideration for the well-being of what Dredd terms the "innocents" (Travis).

Two further traits that solidify psychopathic tendencies are " dominance and hedonic gratification" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 9). The very first scene Ma-ma is featured in, she is seen enjoying a bubble bath, and the high provided by slo-mo. In addition, she lives at the very top of the building and hoards the general goods, acquired in the sale of slo-mo, while the vast majority of the inhabitants of Peach Trees wallow in poverty. Similar tendencies can be seen in the antagonists of *John Wick* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Another very obvious technique involved in making Ma-ma an antagonist is making her face badly scarred. Here "disgust acts as a detractor of moral capital and a condition of dehumanization... it is easier to de-rationalize or assume missing the exculpatory motivations of a disgusting antagonist..." who "may disgust by looking infected or appear and act beastly" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 10). This dehumanization is the primary mechanism of disgust, and "when an agent is disgusting, human affective adaptations for pathogen avoidance kick in and loosen the moral tug of that agent" (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 7). This is owing to an adaptation which makes us flinch and avoid organisms displaying potential signs of contagion, and instinctual repulsion is later rationally attributed to otherness. This instinct has often been used to

underline the evil nature of the villain in both literature and film: Richard III in the eponymous play, Scar in the *Lion King*, and Two Face in the Batman universe, are just a few examples. Cultural critique would try to redeem these characters, claiming that their antagonistic features are owing to a complex motivational network shaped by external, societal factors. This reading of these characters ignores a key point, that features that elicit disgust are included for their immediate, knee jerk effects on the audience. The audience may engage in rationalization of the antagonistic features of the characters, but such musings have to be secondary and post instinctual.

The corrupt, or dark judges, play off the "‘evil kin’ archetype that plays to a discordant relationship between high kinship index and a low WTR" - "an antagonist is maximally evil if it combines cues of a high WTR setpoint (consanguinity plus superficial prosociality and normative behavioral alignment) with deception that ultimately betrays a low WTR setting." (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 10). Their perceived high WTR and high kinship index makes their threat especially acute, which is why Dredd and Anderson's encounter with them is placed in the climax of the story. They essentially fit in the same "evil twin" niche as Rico in *Judge Dredd* - a proud member of the Justice force is swayed by the overwhelming corruption in Mega City 1. However, there is a major difference in execution - Rico Dredd is "evil" because of chemical imbalance during gestation which transferred all positive attributes to his twin brother Joe Dredd, while the corrupt judges in *Dredd 3D* lost hope and succumbed to the temptation of "freeloading" as literary Darwinists would put it. This puts emphasis on the hero status of Dredd and Anderson, who as we will see in the next subchapter, successfully resist temptations of similar kind in the initiation part of their own monomyths. The success or lack of success of "freeloaders" is by a large extent dictated by their ability to hide the discrepancy between their

real and perceived WTRs. Because they are the chosen ones so to speak, both Dredd and Anderson, who encounter judges separately, are able to properly evaluate the real WTR ratios of the "cheaters" and dispatch them. The fact that Dredd manages to see through the subterfuge of the first corrupt judge because he did not ask for Anderson's status, and thus failed to show concern for the well-being of a fellow judge, further proves Kjeldgaard-Christiansen's point.

3.1.3. Second layer - graphing the monomyth

The first thing that stands out as far as the structure of the monomyth in the film is concerned is that two characters embark on the hero's journey.⁹ Dredd's and Anderson's monomyths are mutually interacting, yet separate and distinct - their journeys have different starting points due to the uneven power relations at the very beginning, and this in turn shapes their individual stages. Moreover, each of their journeys has a different didactic niche to fill out. Anderson follows the usual maturation story progression, along the lines of the *bildungsroman* of 19th century literature, while Dredd's story is one of overcoming the existential ennui of adulthood and discovering hope and purpose.

Over the course of the film there are frequent references to cyclicity of life in Mega City 1. For example, one of the dark judges, refers to Mega City 1 as a "meat grinder" where "people go in on one end, and meat comes out the other" (Travis). Unlike the protagonists, the antagonist cannot fathom a city that has hope. This is how hope acquires a transformative function - those that have it are capable of undergoing the transformative process. Both Dredd

⁹ in fact in both Dredd and Mad Max: Fury Road feature this "polimyth" in which more than one hero undergoes a transformative process. This may indicate the existence of a trend in which the need for the existence of a male/female duo is combined with the benefits of the monomyth as a story structure.

and Anderson enter Peach Trees with a symbolic deficiency, but emerge transformed - the antagonists cannot do so. Another, more technical aspect that enforces this cyclicity of the film is that it begins and ends with a narration by Dredd himself, which is more or less the same on both the beginning and the end. At the beginning, the speech emphasizes the word mega, which helps establish the postapocalyptic setting, while in the end, it drives home the message of increased hope - "only one thing fighting for order in the chaos - judges!" (Travis). This effectively unites the narrative voice and the hero of the monomyth.

Something that might also indicate a conscious inclusion of the monomyth in the film is the fact that Peach Trees consists of two hundred levels, which provides a neat structure of the route the principal characters have to go by. This is quite clearly a conscious nod to video games, which feature the same neatly outlined gradation of the plot in the shape of levels. Although each level, or set of levels, does not necessarily correspond to each of the stages of the monomyth, they do contribute to the indication of an upward progression through the building, and to a certain goal.

The following table shows the structure of their individual journeys over the course of the film. For the sake of clarity, only the three acts are put forward as separate subchapters, where the individual stages will be analyzed, compared, and contrasted. In addition, because there are multiple monomyths at play in the story, the separate stages are coded, with the hero in question indicated by a letter, while the individual stage is indicated by a number (e.g. A1). The same system will be utilized in the two other case studies.

Act	(A) The phases of Anderson's monomyth	(B) The phases of Dredd's monomyth
I. Departure	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure

	3. Meeting the Mentor 4. Crossing the Threshold to the Special World	3. Refusal of the Call 4. Crossing the Threshold to the Special World
II. Initiation	5. Tests, Allies, and Enemies 6. "Woman" as Temptress 7. Approach to the Innermost Cave 8. The Ordeal 9. Apotheosis	5. Tests and Temptations 6. Approach to the Innermost Cave 7. The Ordeal 8. Apotheosis
III. Return	10. The Resurrection 11. Return with the Elixir	9. Rescue from Without 10. The Resurrection 11. Return with the Elixir

Figure 2 The structure of the monomyth for the two protagonists in *Dredd 3D*.

3.1.3.1. Departure

The Ordinary World (A1, B1) is a pre-call phase, where the journey has not started yet - hence its value is mostly expositional. Everything that we are shown of the ordinary world at the very beginning is marked by extreme narrative economy - in only a few shots, the entire contextual background is provided: the cursed earth, or the aftermath of the nuclear holocaust, as well as the densely populated, riot ridden cityscape of Mega City 1. It is made quite clear that the world teeters on the edge of utter chaos. Immediately after that, we are shown Dredd right in the middle of a car chase. The ordinary world is not necessarily a safe haven, what it needs to be in any case is the status quo, the initial state of the world. Although this may seem uncharacteristic for a stage named the Ordinary World, the hero does not need to have led a boring, uneventful life prior to the events of the story. As an example of this type of stories, Campbell refers to King

Arthur's quest of the white hart (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 49), which occurs in the aftermath of many other adventures. Similarly, this is far from Dredd's first rodeo so to speak.

This initial phase does an excellent job in establishing the power relations involved in the diegetic universe, particularly by showing just how intimidating Dredd and all judges are, both through presenting the fear the criminals have of him, and through Dredd's, short and simple refusal of backup, even when faced with what obviously is a dangerous situation. The amount of violence and wanton killing going on from the very start is a hallmark of the Dredd franchise but also it serves as an excellent exposition for the rest of the film. It also distinguishes this phase from its counterparts in other iterations of the monomyth, as already mentioned in the earlier subchapter.

The Chief Judge is the one who initiates the Call to Adventure (A2, B2), and plays the archetypal role of the herald, who has "the important psychological function of announcing the need for change" (Vogler 57). Both Dredd, and the "rookie" he is supposed to mentor are unusual - this is not a mere traineeship. According to Vogler, this is exactly what the Call to Adventure is supposed to do, to establish "the stakes of the game, and make clear the hero's goal" (11). For Anderson on the other hand, who is shown passively waiting for further instructions in her Ordinary World phase, the Call to Adventure is a more pronounced transition from a passive to an active state. Anderson's threshold moments are more pronounced in general, since she is after all the "rookie" of the duo, and the one for whom the monomyth plays out in its more literal form.

When told that Anderson scored three points below the threshold required to qualify for a judge, Dredd wonders "what is she doing in a uniform" (Travis). This constitutes his early

Refusal of the Call (B3). Dredd initially deals in absolutes, a part of what constitutes his symbolic deficiency. According to Campbell, "in fairy tales this may be as slight as the lack of a certain golden ring, whereas in apocalyptic vision the physical and spiritual life of the whole earth can be represented as fallen, or on the point of falling, into ruin" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 35). Just as Mega City 1 is on the verge of collapse, and in which hope is all but gone, so has Dredd virtually given up on it, and he covers the absence of hope by a stern facade. Like in the 1995 film version, Dredd is presented as overly strict in his enforcement of the rules, which by the end of the film is reversed - in order for a transformation to be effectuated, there has to be something about the hero that requires change. The Refusal of the Call also obviously plays a role in increasing suspense, by playing with what Smuts calls desire-frustration (Smuts 281). Basically, the emphatic network discussed in the previous subchapter, creates certain narrative desires for the audience, the realization of which they have absolutely no control. So when obstacles on the way off the successful realization of those desires come across, for example like the momentous appearance that Dredd would refuse to mentor the rookie, the audience is powerless to do something about it which creates frustration, and therefore suspense.

In Meeting the Mentor phase (A3), the two heroes meet, and despite the initial coldness, it instantly becomes clear that both of them will make a connection based on mutual goals - a crucial principle of agonistic structure (Carroll et al.). The mental probe that the Chief Judge bids her do on Dredd, serves as a sort of mental binding between the two characters and serves to establish a link between the two since the very beginning. What archetypal characters like the mentor or the disciple signify are well established interhuman relationships which are universal and dictated by human biology - there is not a single society that does not have the basic structure that this archetypal pattern is trying to emulate. Hence, it is no wonder that "the

relationship between hero and Mentor is one of the most common themes in mythology, and one of the richest in its symbolic value... it stands for the bond between parent and child, teacher and student, doctor and patient, god and man" (Vogler 11). Dredd fulfils his mentorship in the most literal sense as well, since "the function of Mentors is to prepare the hero to face the unknown...they may give advice, guidance or magical equipment" (Vogler 12). He brings Anderson up to date with crime statistics, gives her the background information of Peach Trees, and a sense of the stake involved - "one in five (of the rookies) don't make it past the first day" (Travis). But this relationship is not always a one way street. Dredd and Anderson form a symbiotic relationship in which one provides the other with experience and advice while the other provides hope. The insufficiency of each hero is cancelled out by the strength of the other, and by the end of the film each of the protagonists gains what the other part of the duo possessed all along - increased empathy for Dredd and experience for Anderson.

Although clearly distinguishable, multiple events can be individually interpreted as the Crossing the Threshold into the Special World (A4, B4) - either Dredd's stern "your assessment starts now!" (Travis) - clearly indicating the point of no return, choosing Peach Trees as a crime fighting scene, and passing through its gates, with the beggar as a threshold guardian. Such blurring of the individual phases of the monomyth through the clustering of several events that serve the same purpose is a common occurrence in other such stories.

According to Campbell, the crossing of this threshold can be "a deliberate abandonment of the initial world, initiated by the main hero's own volition, it can be triggered by a herald figure, and it can also happen by accident" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 53). An example of the first paradigm would be the monomyth of Telemachus, while the second is frequently encountered in Celtic myth - the main hero is on the trail of some animal when

suddenly he finds himself in an unknown part of the forest and it is there that his trials and tribulations begin (Moyers 3). It is interesting how both possibilities can be seen in this phase of *Dredd 3D*. Although there is herald, and the judge duo is roused to action, there is agency in their choice of Peach Trees - the justice force is so overwhelmed with crime that only 6% of the crime can be attended to by the judges. Dredd urges Anderson to select a crime to respond to, and she chooses to investigate the triple homicide in Peach Trees. By choosing the venue of her transformation, the entire journey gets a prophetic, deterministic tinge, especially given the fact that she is a psychic.

In addition, when urging Dredd to accept the mentorship, the Chief Judge tells him to "chuck [Anderson] in the deep end", "sink or swim" (Travis), to which he responds "it's all the deep end" (Travis). This is a clear allusion to water symbolism, which despite being a common metaphor for the mechanisms of the psyche, can obviously involve danger as well, probably as an evolutionary remnant of the increased dangers of drowning in deeper bodies of water.

3.1.3.2. Initiation

The act of initiation begins with Tests and Temptations (A5, B5) both heroes have to go through on their way to spiritual transformation. Although present in the monomyths of both heroes, this phase is especially pronounced in Anderson, and less so in Dredd, since after all she is the student in the duo. Tests are merely there to measure the capabilities of the hero - he or she can either pass it or fail it - in *Dredd 3D* this basically takes a literal form since Anderson needs to pass the judge exam and enter the Justice force. Tests in particular form what Purse calls a "narrative of becoming" (Purse 32), based on similar principles as the stylistic device of gradation, a gradual increase of the intensity of the narrative leading up to the climax.

An essential function of the spectacular sequence in the action film is, then, to display the extraordinary capacities of the action hero... we need to believe that the hero is, or will become, capable of overcoming the ultimate obstacle the narrative puts in place, and the action sequences are the primary method by which an action film convinces us of this. Action sequences are not, then, a series of stand-alone tests of the hero's endurance, stamina, strength and ingenuity. Instead they operate developmentally across the action film to construct the hero's 'becoming-powerful', what I would like to call a 'narrative of becoming' that articulates the protagonist's physical and emotional trajectory towards achieving full occupation of the heroic action body. This narrative of becoming is an integral part of the main narrative thrust that moves the film towards its resolution. (Purse 32–3)

This process is basically identical to what the monomyth is supposed to stand for - the gradual transformation of the consciousness of the main hero through the overcoming of whatever obstacles are placed in his way. This is yet another indication of the existence of underlying patterns or truths that different critics and thinkers reveal independently and by using different methods. Since it is previously made clear in the exposition that Dredd has already achieved mastery, this process of gradation is best seen in Anderson's character arc. Each subsequent fight Anderson is engaged in serves to prove this point. This is especially emphasized in the mirrored exchanges between Dredd and Anderson when the duo is about to face potentially life-threatening combat - one in the early phases of the second act, which goes "Ready? Yeah! You don't look ready"(Travis) and one in the late stages of the third act: "Ready? Yeah! You look ready"(Travis), which highlight the transformative process both heroes go through.

Temptations are also marked by gradation, as they start small and end up major. The first temptation Anderson is up against is whether to keep Kay in tow, or "cut him loose" (Travis), i.e.

kill him, since he was quickly becoming a liability for the duo. Anderson is only 99% sure that Kay was involved in the murder, and the judges are only allowed to administer the death penalty when there is no doubt that the suspect committed the crime. Therefore, killing him would be breaking the law, something completely unthinkable for Dredd. By trying to circumvent the law, Anderson almost succumbs to this temptation, which would mean a preference for her personal well-being over the collective well-being of Mega City 1, but is prevented from doing so by her mentor. Another temptation is her interaction with Cathy, the wife of Japhert, one of Ma-ma's henchmen that she previously executed. As opposed to the previous situation, it is her empathy, which now poses the danger of pushing her off the path towards full realization. Anderson is clearly shaken by the misery she inflicted on a family which like many others in Peach Trees is forced to resort to criminal activities as a source of income. Being a judge frequently entails brutality after all, and the civilian population is often affected in negative ways. Nevertheless, she decides to push on in the name of justice, led by hope. She does not veer of her emphatic track, but only modifies it to fit the realities of the Mega City 1.

Some of the temptation phases further morph into other phases of the monomyth. For example, "Woman" as Temptress (A6) is essentially the prototypical temptation pattern, but is subverted and adapted for a female protagonist, where actually a man (Kay) acts as the tempter. According to the lore of the Dredd universe, the judges are supposed to be pursue a life of celibacy, which makes them particularly vulnerable to such temptations. Thus, Kay tries to lead Anderson astray by imagining sexual imagery during one of the mental probes she administers on him. However, Anderson successfully resists.

Another and probably the ultimate temptation phase is The Ordeal (A8, B7). In this phase, the two heroes are separated, and they are forced to face their biggest challenges alone,

without the symbiotic link that binds them. Anderson manages to resist the final temptation by Kay, who tries to break her spirit by trying to convince her of her worthlessness. Albeit, alone and disarmed, Anderson keeps a cool head when Kay tries to use her gun to execute her, and when everything seems lost the booby trapped gun senses a stranger's DNA and detonates, killing him. The thing that saves Anderson may seem like a *deus ex machina* to those unfamiliar with the Dredd lore, but booby trapped guns are a firmly established part of both the comic books and *Judge Dredd*. This event also firmly establishes the inextricable symbolic link between the hero and his weapon, which is a common trope in world literature and film. On the other hand, Dredd has a single major temptation, in the final face-off with the corrupt judges, where they make futile attempts to win him over to their side by flaunting the financial gains they got by switching sides. The temptation is especially severe since his extremely high WTR is clearly a suboptimal survival strategy - while he is risking his life for the good of Mega City 1, and almost takes the role of a martyr, there are elements within the Justice force that are richly rewarded for betraying it. Nevertheless, Dredd is stalwart in the face of temptation.

Bracketed by tests and temptations on both sides is the Approach to the Innermost Cave (A7, B6), which is an extension of the depth or water symbolism, mentioned on the passing of the threshold between the ordinary and the special world. This is a phase that precedes the Ordeal and is characterized by being the place of the biggest danger for the protagonists - the symbolic imagery here is one of depth and distance from safety. This is when Dredd does his most daring feat, and the symbolism of the phase is realized through both the risk factor involved, as well as the low visibility in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by Ma-ma's Gatling guns.

Before the return phase of the monomyth, both heroes have their own version of Apotheosis (A9, B8). In the scene immediately following the one mentioned above, Dredd understands that Ma-ma must be hiding something in Peach Trees if she is ready to go to such lengths in order to kill two judges. Thus he begins to interrogate Kay, and with the help of Anderson comes to the realization that "Peach Trees is the manufacturing base for all the slo-mo in Mega City One" (Travis). Given the fact that the audience has had access to this information since the beginning of the film, the discrepancy of information available to the characters and to the audience was contributing to the creation of a feeling of suspense all along, and the final removal of this discrepancy is a rewarding experience for the audience. For Hitchcock, this disclosure of information to the audience, but not to the characters is "the most effective method of arousing suspense" (Smuts 281).

Realizing that he is provided with an opportunity to make a difference, Dredd changes plans - deciding to go after Ma-ma herself instead of trying to merely survive. This is Dredd's first explicit display of altruism functioning on the level of society instead of those immediately around him, which also makes it his first glimmer of hope. This event is made even more profound by the fact that just couple of scenes before that, there is a scene especially designed to increase the stakes of the story. Ma-ma's main henchman Caleb, enthusiastically states: "this drug shifts like nothing I've ever seen... if we play this right we could take the whole fucking city" (Travis). The interference of the judges at such a critical phase of Ma-ma's operations, is indicative of what is at stake - if the judges fail, the organization which is based on violence, pure greed, and sadism might spread its operation throughout the city, further deteriorating the safety of Mega City 1, maybe to a point of total collapse. The story that we are witnessing has the potential of saving the city. If we consider the fact that "the greatest suspense is felt in cases

where the outcome is very uncertain and the stakes are very high" (Smuts 282), and that suspense is one of the crucial constituent elements of audience enjoyment of the film, the efforts of the filmmakers to increase the stakes become completely justified.

On the other hand, Anderson's apotheosis happens when she puts the burden of passing the exam behind her. Thinking that she has already failed for losing her firearm, Anderson is free of the constraints of the exam, and capable of expressing her high WTR in its pure, unadulterated form. The turning point of the narrative is thus stimulated by her unconditional altruism.

3.1.3.3. Return

This "liberated" Anderson, manages to arrive to Dredd's rescue in just the right time, and shapes the Rescue from Without (B9) phase of Dredd's monomyth.

Mere seconds before her arrival, Dredd is at the lowest point in his storyline, and seems on the verge of succumbing to the temptation of the corrupt judges. While injured on the floor, he tells the corrupt judge to wait as he moves to execute him. This action serves as a delay mechanism - the viewers are made to feel that Dredd finally breaks and is about to "turn to the dark side", something which would prematurely end Dredd's journey in a stunning anti-climax. However, as it turns out he only did it for Anderson to get more time to kill the traitor judge. This technique puts a temporary obstacle in the way of the narrative desires of the audience, lasting just long enough for the payoff to outweigh the frustration engendered by the obstacle. The effect of this technique is compounded with the timely arrival of Anderson - Dredd is both rescued and does not succumb to the final temptation.

The Resurrection (A10, B10) phase is something both heroes go through in the film and it serves to emphasize the change that occurred in the hero through providing one last threshold to pass through. This phase aims "to cleanse heroes of the smell of death, yet help them retain the

lessons of the ordeal" (Vogler 198). In *Dredd 3D* the resurrection of both heroes is helped by the other part of the duo, in the form of healing wounds acquired in combat, thus literally enacting Vogler's metaphor. In addition to cleansing from whatever limitations have burdened the heroes thus far, this phase strengthens the symbolic link between them. It is worth noting that the apotheosis and the resurrection are essentially two sides of the same coin, which Vogler interpreted as "two climaxes or death-and-rebirth ordeals, one near the middle and another just before the end of the story" (199). The apotheosis serves to kick start, and the resurrection to reaffirm the transformative process. All three films included in the thesis follow this paradigm.

In the final, Return with the Elixir (A11, B11) phase, Dredd and Anderson, return to society with a renewed hope. The phase is again clearly marked with Dredd's stern "your assessment's now over!" (Travis) which once again is intended to mislead the audience. Only after Anderson leaves does Dredd tell the Chief Judge that "[Anderson]'s a pass!" (Travis), and the Chief Judge mirrors the most probable reaction of the audience, by saying "I knew she would be!"(Travis). Anderson successfully completes her trial - the monomyth is complete, and if we take into consideration the fact that the destiny of the hero often has a close symbolic link to the destiny of society as a whole, Mega City 1 becomes better off for the efforts of the two judges, and has a potential for further positive change. This is why the ending narration puts such an emphasis on the fate of the city instead of the individuals involved in the monomyth.

The film also ends with Dredd riding off in the distance, similarly to the beginning, which puts an emphasis of the cyclicity of the story. This is a clear nod to the "riding off into the sunset" meme which has been commonly used in westerns, for example in *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Eastwood) - with the sunset supposed to symbolize the rebirth of the hero. In *Dredd 3D* the sunset element is removed, with the not so important "riding off" aspect of the meme

retained. This is not an extreme case of the phenomenon because other ways of indicating the cyclical and transformative function of the ending are used, but as we will later see, cultural transmissions in which the symbolic connotation of the meme is left behind, with only its formal shell kept, is a fairly common occurrence .

3.1.4. Third layer - mise en scène, moment to moment narration

Unlike most other action films, *Dredd 3D* features understated action sequences, especially those involving the eponymous character. Thus, the moving action body which is a vital constituent part of audience immersion in action cinema, is comparatively inert. This is understandable considering the fact that in combat, Dredd's distinguishing feature is his excellent marksmanship. However, mastery is indeed achieved, and becomes even more intimidating for the fact that it is done in a minimalist way, which perfectly fits Dredd's austere persona. Thus, while most antagonists struggle, and are engaged in intense physical strain while confronting him, Dredd breezes through unscathed. For example, in the confrontation with Zwirner, there are clear differences in the tone of their voices, representative of power dynamics in which Dredd is far superior. For the purposes of establishing this dynamic, the extradiegetic background music, which is a constant accompaniment of the plot in *Dredd 3D*, is occasionally toned down for such audio markers of mastery to be inserted.

As Fischhoff claims, the inclusion of music is not merely a matter of style, since "we learn to connect a piece of music with an emotional event" and it can also be "a subtle tool with which to manipulate the audience" (4). This means that, according to Fischhoff, music in film is just a matter of convention, and thereby entirely a product of culture. This is true only in part, as the underlying mechanism which correlates quick action sequences and high intensity music has biological foundations. Thus, research has shown that the tempo of the music can affect the heart

rate of the audience (Agrawal, Makhijani, and Valentini) which may create sensations which might be read as suspense in combination with what is shown through the visual medium. *Dredd 3D* seems perfectly aware of this fact, and makes ample use of it. For example, when the duo is just about to approach Cathy's apartment, there is a sense of impending danger effectuated by the complete absence of music. When the uncertainty is gone and antagonists indeed appear, the music resumes, and the achieved effect is that of releasing one's breath after moments of anticipation. In this way, the use of extradiegetic background music plays a crucial role in the creation of suspense. Action sequences also benefit from the inclusion of music. In the opening chase scene for example, extradiegetic music fits the individual phases of the action sequence like a glove - changes in the beat directly correspond to changes of the camera angle, and mimic the dynamics of the scene, which allows the adrenaline rush of combat to be presented to the audience in a more palpable form.

In addition, "a music score is particularly useful when it helps provide a dimension of meaning that is implicit rather than explicit in the script" (Fischhoff 4). Thus, music is used as an empathy marker, with soft music playing in the scene where we are introduced to Anderson. On the other hand a unique fast paced theme is reserved for Dredd's moments of mastery, and an ominous, bass-driven theme accompanies scenes centered on the corrupt judges.

The mutual interaction of music with other stylistic features is also worthy of investigation. Thus, the sequences indicating Anderson's mental probes, particularly those done to Kay, feature the combination of a muted color palette, and airy, atmospheric music in order to give an effect of heightened reality. In a similar way, extradiegetic music always stops when the drug slo-mo is used. Extradiegetic music is supposed to "externalize the internal" (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 61) and mirror internal mental processes, which in turn contributes to a better

immersive experience for the audience. This means that if extradiegetic music stops in the exact moment when slo-mo is used by the characters, the internal space previously occupied by extradiegetic music suddenly gets replaced with the effect of the drug. In addition, because time slows down at the very moment that a character is actually using slo-mo on screen, it actually functions as an intradiegetic effect, and it comes across as a seeing the world through the perspective of the person who uses the drug at that time.

Slow motion achieves a mismatch of real time versus perceived time, and using it change both the pace and the focus of the narrative. Because the drug itself manages a hundredfold decrease of the rate time elapses, the audience perceives the scene in the same way. Although, it serves the obvious function of occasionally fulfilling the need for respite from intense action sequences, the visual effects supervisor of the film admitted that using this technique meant walking a thin line, with the constant danger of slowing down the narrative a little too much: "there was a bit of trepidation initially about how long can you hold on a slow-mo shot for... most films do the speed ramp thing in and out of the slow-mo to keep the energy going"(Failes). It is precisely because the inclusion slo-mo seriously affects the overall pace of the film, which is so vital in the audience reception of an action film, that every time this technique is used it serves an important function.

Thus, such scenes are used to provide an aesthetic element to instances of pure violence. They also provide crucial details which would otherwise be difficult to isolate and fully absorb at real time speed. For example, the slo-mo shot gives additional time for us to focus on the antagonistic evolutionary markers which distinguish Ma-ma (mentioned on page 51) in the first time she is introduced, and provides a causal link between her and the thugs Dredd encounters in the exposition. Slo-mo is also used "in order to freeze for a moment the power relations between

them in a three-dimensional tableau" (Purse 69). For example, when the duo of judges barge into the first hideout on level 39, the slow motion shot provides a glimpse of the surprise element of their attack and signals their mastery.

Another instance when slow motion is used in death scenes, is Ma-ma's execution, an excellent example of the death by falling trope (refer to Figure 3), which has often been a go-to way of defeating antagonists in film. This kind of conflict resolution is relying heavily on basophobia, or fear of falling, which is a human universal, and glimpses of which are also revealed in dreams. Including this aspect in film is a classic case of audience manipulation.

Figure 3 Hans Gruber in *Die Hard* (top) and Ma-ma in *Dredd 3D* (bottom), ending their character arc in a similar way.

The shot itself is so iconic in *Die Hard*, that it has been called "the Hans Gruber shot" (ScreenCrush Staff). What slow-motion achieves in such scenes is prolonging the punishment the antagonist is getting for her anti-social behavior, which in turn increases the narrative payoff of the resolution. In fact, although the evolved disposition that dictates the use of this way of conflict resolution in stories is indeed universal, diffusion is the main way through which it "travels" from one cultural product to another. In short, human fascination with this manner of dying perpetuates its use. This makes it a trope, according to the terminology developed in the theoretical framework (turn to page 26). Thus, the editors of ScreenCrush, have discovered a trend in cinema reaching back to the 40s, consisting of death of the antagonists by falling down a some form of a deep chasm, accompanied by slow motion. The list includes films such as: *North by Northwest*, *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*, and even *Judge Dredd*, where Rico meets his demise by falling down the Statue of Liberty.

3.2. John Wick (2014)

3.2. 1. Plot overview

After the death of his wife, John Wick receives a puppy as a final gift, supposed to serve as a consolation for his grief. He and the puppy immediately bond until a gang of Russian thugs led by Iosef Tarasov, kill his new friend and steal his '69 Mustang, now the second most important thing in his life. Little do they know that they invoked the wrath of a legendary hit man, who becomes hell bent on wreaking vengeance on Iosef and his gang. Iosef's father - Viggo Tarasov, the head of the biggest crime syndicate in the city, preemptively sends out a hit party that John easily dispatches. Tarasov is then forced to go on the defensive and lure John Wick into a trap. After this attempt fails and Iosef barely escapes with his life, Viggo acquires the services

of two other assassins, Perkins and Marcus, the latter of which used to be John's mentor, and accordingly breaches the contract with Viggo and helps John escape a sneak attack by Perkins. Afterwards, John attacks Viggo's safe house, where he keeps his wealth and blackmail material on the city. After a brief firefight, John Wick is taken as a prisoner but escapes with the assistance of Marcus and forces Viggo to reveal his son's location, after which he kills him. Viggo now wants to avenge his son and kills Marcus. John then hunts Viggo down and kills him after virtually defeating all of his henchmen. While attempting to mend an injury he received in the last fight with Viggo, John visits a veterinary ward where he adopts a dog supposed to be put down. The last scene of the film is of John walking side by side with his new dog where he used to with his wife, apparently coming to terms with her death.

3.2. 2. First layer - "story world": agents, circumstances, and surroundings

3.2.2.1. Circumstances and surroundings

Unlike the other two films included in the case studies, *John Wick* is not a reboot, but an original creation - most likely the first part of a trilogy, with the sequel already in theaters as of the time of writing of the thesis. This is perhaps why the film frequently relies on a wide array of archetypes, tropes, and memes (turn to page 26) - as a way of compensating for the lack of a solid thematic pool to draw inspiration from. This is similar to how George Lucas approaches filmmaking - by not entirely basing his work on previous films, he heavily relies on bits and pieces of other cultural products, with the monomyth as a principal scaffolding. Thus, by utilizing the workings of cultural transmission, a wider pool of human creativity is available to draw inspiration from, and with an added novelty to the equation that reboots cannot possibly provide.

Thus, a good part of the overall atmosphere of the film is owing to the work of "Jean-Pierre Melville, who pioneered the subgenre of the existential hit man movie with *Le Samourai*, and whose *Le Cercle Rouge* receives an homage in *Wick* in the form of a nightclub called the Red Circle" (Wickman). The fact that no specific borrowed elements of these films can be identified in *John Wick* goes to show how cultural transmission can often function in rather abstract ways, with the much more elusive concept of atmosphere "travelling" from one cultural product to another through replication with variation. The setting of the film is also to a large extent influenced by the French filmmaker, with the assassins having their own separate subculture in a modern day metropolis, away from the sight of the "common" people - analogous to the backdrop of *Le Cercle Rouge* (Wickman). Owing to their specificity, and foundations that are not biologically conditioned, such influences can only be categorized as a memes.

Similarly, Kolstad was directly inspired by "*Point Blank* with Marvin, *Death Wish* with Bronson, and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* with Eastwood" (Paul) when writing the script, which also did not materialize in specific, identifiable influences, with only the prevailing motif of vengeance being utilized. Thus, the taciturn protagonist suffers a wrong within the first quarter of the film, and for the rest of its duration he is trying to get his comeuppance. Just like literary authors, filmmakers seem to frequently utilize revenge as a motivation behind the hero's journey, with Vogler identifying it as one of its most common incentives (Vogler 11). It is no wonder that this is so, as revenge is a hardcoded instinct that appears to be a human universal, found virtually in all cultures (McCullough 78). It is also not a trait exclusive to humans, as other primates (79), and even fish (82) are proven to have it. This means that revenge is a perfect instance of an archetypal motif.

Currently there are two major theories about the motives behind the punishment that is a constituent part of vengeance - that it can either be "a forward-looking deterrence of future norm violations" or "a backward-looking retributive desire to harm" (Crockett, Özdemir, and Fehr 2279). The former is probably the original reason for the evolution of this instinct, with the latter being simple hard-wired to it, and albeit it is essentially a "destructive behavior that is sub-optimal in terms of deterring future harms" (Crockett, Özdemir, and Fehr 2285), it is still widespread, and a common companion of the primary instinct. This is exactly what happens in *John Wick* - vengeance does not have a corrective function but only aims to punish a past wrong. What is even more interesting is the relative insignificance of the wrong suffered by the vengeful protagonist. Unlike *Point Blank* (Boorman), *Death Wish* (Winner), and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Eastwood), where the protagonists avenge dead family members, John Wick avenges his dog. In this way, the destructiveness of his fixation is emphasized, and, as will be shown later, a symbolic network is established, which equates him to a destructive force of nature. However, if we consider the main reasons for revenge proposed by Carroll - "indignation at personal injury, offended pride and harm to kin or lovers" ("The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 426), John Wick may be said to have just cause for embarking on his vengeful crusade.

The biological roots of revenge make it a fascinating motif for authors/filmmakers, readers/audiences, and other creators/ receptor duos stretching back to oral literature. Thus,

though often moralistic on other themes, many literary authors display a strikingly tolerant attitude toward revenge as a motive. Revenge looks like a basic form of justice and often gives a feeling of emotional satisfaction to readers. If that were not the case, "poetic justice" would not be so widely used as a plot device. Poetic justice occurs when "good" characters are rewarded and "bad" characters made to suffer. Judging by the relative frequency of plot structures, we could reasonably

infer that readers can more easily tolerate a plot in which a “good” character comes to a sad end than a plot in which a “bad” character lives happily ever after. (Carroll, “The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War” 427)

In addition, "neuroimaging studies have demonstrated activity in reward circuitry, including the striatum and medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC), during punishment of norm violators, consistent with the notion that humans derive pleasure from punishment" (Crockett, Özdemir, and Fehr 2280). Keeping in mind the Darwinist notion that audiences vicariously experience the emotions felt by the characters depicted on the screen (Carroll et al. 51), it can be deduced that they do experience satisfaction from such penalization of norm violators, consistent with the magnitude, frequency, and type of the violations. Correspondingly, this punishment, i.e. death of norm violators, is usually placed in carefully selected places in the film to provide a feeling of gradation, for the purposes of maximizing the narrative pay-off. There is also a general rule of thumb that those who make the biggest transgressions meet the most gruesome deaths. For example, John Wick drowns one of Iosef's friends, an event which compensates with the gruesomeness of the death, for the fact that it is placed in the middle, rather than the end of the story. It must be kept in mind that these impact calculations on the part of the audience happen instantaneously, and are not conscious, but guided by instinct. The mechanisms in the perceptive process of revenge plots being enacted on the screen is thus not much different than how the concepts unfolds in real life scenarios.

Moreover, the stakes involved in revenge plots also play a prominent role (“Life History into Story” 276), and accordingly, the main protagonist of the film is an assassin with a legendary status and nearly preternatural capabilities, while the antagonists are running the largest crime syndicate in the city.

3.2.2.2. Agents - agonistic structure

A good deal of the agonistic structure in *John Wick* is dictated by narrative perspective. As Kjeldgaard-Christiansen argues, "we think that someone doing wrong by us is evil because we do not have access to their exculpatory motivations and backgrounds, making us prone to the fundamental attribution error, and because self-serving cognitive biases on both sides of an offending interaction create a 'magnitude gap' that distorts its perceived intensity" (5). This is indicative of the near instantaneity of the hermeneutics that distinguish between good and evil - it is easy to see how a change of perspective favoring Viggo Tarasov (Iosef is burdened by too many antagonistic markers to be redeemed by narrative perspective), could easily override the other agonistic markers that make John a protagonist and Viggo an antagonist. Nevertheless, the story has the shape that it has, and it is the perspective on hand that reveals any agonistic markers on both sides. Thus, the entirety of the storyline surrounding John's wife explicitly serves a purpose to make his plight relatable. After all, grief over the death of close family members is most definitely a human universal, theoretically capable of engendering empathy in everyone. Hence, shots of John watching a video of his wife on his smart phone are strategically placed over the course of the film: one is used early on, so the audience's sympathies are timely put in the right place.¹⁰ At a different time it is used, when John is getting a much needed respite from violence in the Continental, it is not only an excellent technique to present the workings of memory and sorrow without resorting to editing, but it also serves as a reminder of his high WTR right before the subsequent fight with Perkins in order to make it more suspenseful for the audience.

¹⁰ This is a rather common technique, a similar form of which is used to introduce Anderson in *Dredd 3D*.

John's relationship with the dog is also highly indicative of his high WTR. The dog's behavior is subtly anthropomorphized in order to make it more likable, and to highlight the stakes involved in his death. As Boyd claims, we tend to "overread agency—it is safer to suppose a bush a bear than a bear a bush—and we humanize animal thought"(Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 204). John also shows altruism when he lets two members of the opposite faction go away unscathed - Francis, an old acquaintance, whom he catches off guard, as well as Perkins, in a crucial moment of the story, despite her actively trying to kill him. The latter action backfires further on in the narrative, proving that showing altruism is not always a beneficial behavioral pattern.

The mastery, or the intimidation factor of the main hero is not revealed through an expository scene in the same way as *Dredd 3D*, but it is done so slowly (John Wick's name is most likely a metafictional reference to the "slow burn" nature of this disclosure). This is primarily achieved through gossip, which is of some interest to Darwinists. Thus, after "awakening the dragon", Iosef is chastised by his father, who reveals John Wick's true identity, meanwhile sparing no words to emphasize the almost inhuman skills that he possesses. Those include that John is "a man of focus, commitment, sheer will", who killed "three men in a bar, with a pencil", and that he is not "exactly the Boogeyman" but "the one you sent to kill the fucking Boogeyman" (Stahelski and Leitch). From an evolutionary perspective, gossip serves the purposes of spreading awareness of perilous individuals within the group, whether they are manifested as a mismatch of real and perceived WTR, or just plain prospects of inflicting harm on others. Within social groups that reinforce gossiping circles, individuals who may be dangerous are ostracized or avoided.

In this way John's reputation functions as deterrence, and it is clear that he is "someone who has found, achieved, or done something, beyond the normal range of achievement and experience" (Moyers 1) - one of the principal hallmarks of heroes. After all, we as humans are programmed to "take more notice of the larger than the smaller, of higher status or greater powers rather than lesser, of the unusually helpful or harmful, of those with features strikingly different from the normal range" (Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 204). This is why the participants in the study by Carroll et al. about the agonistic structure of stories in Victorian fiction, pointed to, and remembered only a handful of major characters in each of the novels involved in the study. Another aspect which highlights John's hero status, is his unique black garb, which differentiates him from run-of-the-mill protagonists in other franchises. Such defining features serve as a mnemonic latch, and provide a dose of symbolism as his signature suit is in stark contrast to the frequent emphases on the fact that he acts as a reckless, destructive force of nature. In addition, Wick never actually says more than three sentences consecutively in the whole film, while remaining quite obviously the hero of the story, which, in a quite similar way to the eponymous character in *Dredd 3D*, serves to aid audience immersion in the narrative.

Because the narrative perspective so heavily favors John Wick, all the other protagonists are given only marginal screen time. However, they all display high WTR, e.g. Marcus goes back on a two million dollar bounty, risks his life, and saves John on two occasions over the course of the film, eventually getting killed as a consequence. These extreme displays of altruism by the elderly, especially after they have reached post-reproductivity, are proven to have biological foundations (Freund and Blanchard-Fields), a fact which is subsequently mirrored in fiction. Winston, the owner of the Continental, similarly displays high WTR cues, through showing great care for John Wick's well-being. He also plays a punitive role, in censuring

Perkins' transgression of the rules of the Continental, which forbid violence on the premises. Even the world of assassins has a status quo of non-violence, and its own mechanisms to preserve it.

The antagonists bear markings of the opposite nature, designed to draw out contempt from the audience. An easy way to achieve this would be to make them insensitive and with a propensity for violence towards their own kin. Viggo does exactly that, as he coldly beats his son when he finds out that he evoked John Wick's anger. This parent-offspring conflict, which usually has to do with resource allocation, is here more directly connected to survival, since an action by the child affects the chances of continued existence of both parent and offspring. According to Robert Trivers "the child's interest is 100 percent in its own fate, its own genes" (Boyd, 271), while the parents usually split their interest between themselves and their children. Therefore, when Viggo harms his son, and later even reveals his location to John in order to save his own life, he does a major breach of this general, biologically mandated behavioral rule of thumb, which further decreases the empathy the characters have for the him.

Another key aspect that sets him apart as an antagonist is the contrast between his own motivations and those of John Wick. Unlike the main hero, who is primarily led by motivations that are a byproduct of mate-selection, the antagonist seeks to hog wealth and power, which goes against our evolved egalitarian social ethos, that unconsciously makes us "stigmatize and suppress status-seeking in potentially dominant individuals" (Carroll et al. 51). Viggo even expresses wonder that John Wick would retire "over a woman" (Stahelski and Leitch), which adds a further emphasis to the disparity of their motivations.

However, unlike *Dredd 3D*, where the neutral denizens of Peach Trees engage in conflict avoidance, it is Viggo who is its principal supporter in the film. After all, "in virtually all social

groups, the amount of time spent in violent encounters is small relative to the time spent in peaceful interaction... the exercise of power tends heavily toward containing and deflecting lethal violence (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 416). Only once John refuses to back down does Viggo resort to violent behavior, his hand forced by John's high intimidation factor. Although he is the villain, whatever violence he engages in over the course of the film is instrumental - as after all, "psychopathic cruelty is relatively rare" (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 415) and survival is the primary motivation behind most human aggression.

Unlike his father, Iosef is given no redeeming features whatsoever. He shows extremely low WTR - not only is he the mastermind behind the break in at John Wick's residence, and orders the death of his puppy, but he also shows little regard for the well-being of his henchmen. When John enters the Tarasov headquarters and approaches Iosef, he escapes and leaves all the fighting to his goons, many of whom perish as a consequence. In addition, he uses a woman, and later the crowd in the nightclub as human shields, which John, with his high WTR, is unwilling to harm. On top of this, Iosef is shown as being highly incompetent, and with a highly volatile temper, which attracts censure and corrective measures from several antagonists over the course of the film. Two particular instances stand out - when Viggo punches him, and when he is chastised by one of the characters who will prove to be the greatest threat to John over the course of the film. Both cases serve to increase the intimidation factor of the respective antagonists and to establish the core power relations of the antagonistic side.

Another significant antagonistic marker is the fact that like most of the other antagonists, Iosef alternates between English and Russian. According to Kjeldgaard-Christiansen, foreign accents are "a salient low-WTR cue" and "phenotypic markers that facilitate

pseudospeciation"(10) - meaning the that they aid in the creation of artificial cultural differences between human populations, which in turn engenders "otherness" and over time, conflict. In fact, according to him, this is one of the principal instigators of intergroup differences. Thus, different dialects and languages, which form very quickly on an evolutionary timescale, initiate a negative feedback loop - language unintelligibility quickly mounts the lack of information the separate groups have about each other, which creates motivational misattributions, and broadens the perceived "otherness". It is because of this that antagonists who use a foreign language are instinctively painted as "others", once again through the instantaneous hermeneutic process of instinct.

It is interesting however, that "historical and geopolitical conditions influence which villainous accents are in vogue, and it is of course no coincidence that Russian bad guys, such as Ivan Drago in *Rocky IV* (1985), have become another Hollywood cliché"(Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 10). *John Wick* follows in the same tradition, while similarly, in *Die Hard*, all of the antagonists speak German. It must be noted that it is not only through evolutionary conditioned motifs that the villain status of the antagonists is emphasized - for example Iosef's clique is shown to look like typical thugs: they sport conspicuous tattoos, listen to braggadocious rap music, and show speech patterns and gestures usually associated with criminals.

Another significant antagonist is Perkins, a perfect example of the "false kin" archetype, much like the corrupt judges in *Dredd 3D*. Before trying to assassinate John, she is shown to be a mere colleague and acquaintance, and on neutral terms with him. However, through the means of editing and simply remaining in the focus for a few seconds too many, the mismatch of her real and displayed WTR is foreshadowed to the audience. Later, when she attacks John, she is not

only committing a sneak attack but is also breaking the rules of the Continental, for which she is adequately punished.

3.2. 3. Second layer - graphing the monomyth

John Wick has the clearest representation of the monomyth out of all the films featured in the thesis, and closely follows the structure outlined by Campbell and Vogler, despite the fact that its plot is the most complicated. Before beginning the analysis, it is important to mention that although it strictly adheres to these stages, sometimes they are multiplied, divided in phases of their own, or stripped of their symbolical value and are rid of their internal significance.

Act	(A) The phases of John Wick's monomyth
I. Departure	1. The Ordinary World 2. Meeting with the Mentor 3. The Call to Adventure 4. Refusal of the call/Acceptance of the call 5. Entering the Belly of the Whale
II. Initiation	6. The Road of Trials 7. Woman as Temptress 8. Approach to the Inmost Cave 9. Rescue from Without 10. Apotheosis 11. The Ultimate Boon
III. Return	12. Refusal of the Return 13. The Magic Flight 14. Crossing of the Return Threshold

	15. The Resurrection
	16. Freedom to Live

Figure 4 The Structure of the Monomyth in *John Wick*

3.2.3.1. Departure

The Ordinary World (A1) stage in *John Wick*, is preceded by an opening sequence, which although does not fully reveal the mastery of the hero like the expository chase scene in *Dredd 3D*, still serves as a foreshadowing of his potentialities. This opening stage of the monomyth begins with an alarm clock ringing, which serves as a boundary marker - both indicating the commencement of the monomyth, and the start of the Entering the Belly of the Whale (A5) stage later on.

The Ordinary World in *John Wick* has retained its signature narrative economy - thus, the audience is not introduced with a single character from John's "regular world" other than his wife. This is especially apparent during the funeral reception, where focus is put entirely on John, something accentuated by a "bokeh" effect while the camera zooms in on him, bringing to attention the non-importance of the other characters. As Vogler claims, it is very important for the "ordinary world to create a vivid contrast with the strange new world [the hero] is about to enter" (10). It is interesting that in none of the three main films the thesis deals with is the ordinary world a comfortable place, in which the main character willingly stays in. Thus, in addition to John's silent grief, there is also frustration under the surface, clearly shown in the scene where he engages in risky driving in an empty car lot, which constitutes an unsuccessful attempt at purification. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the eponymous character is a prisoner, treated like a slave, while in *Dredd 3D*, he is obviously discontented by the fact that he lives in a dystopia of extreme violence. This, displeasure with the Ordinary World is not exclusive to the

films included in the case studies, e.g., in *Die Hard* the main hero has a strained relationship with his estranged wife, which is gradually mended over the course of the film, until they are eventually reconciled.

The Meeting with the Mentor (A2) phase, is one of the phases of the monomyth of the film which is somewhat rid of its original symbolic significance. The rendezvous occurs before the Call to Adventure, it is very brief, and does not seem to directly aid John in embarking on the journey. Although the mentor does not train or prepare the hero for the fights to come, it seems that something similar did happen at some point in the past. If the monomyth is supposed to represent a projection of a fully idealized human life in the shape of a story, then the Mentor (who as mentioned in the previous chapter is an archetype), should embody and refer to the inevitable period of social learning. This process is always guided by a more experienced member of the group, and something every single human child needs to go through. Marcus also retains some of the qualities of a mentor, as he offers consolation, emotional support, and sage words of advice - "there is no rhyme or reason to this life" (Stahelski and Leitch). Together with the prolepsis scene in the beginning, the main purpose of this modified form of the Meeting with the Mentor stage is to play on the audience's curiosity, since Marcus appears out of the blue, and the audience is unaware of his connection with John at the time of his appearance. It is also the first step in creating an empathic network around Marcus as a character, whose death is crucial for the final unfolding of the story.

"In revenge plots, the Call to Adventure (A3) is often a wrong which must be set right, an offense against the natural order of things" (Vogler 10). As a variation of the monomyth, revenge

stories¹¹ are always triggered from the outside, and the herald, the one who signals the call or "the awakening of the self" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 47), has to belong to the antagonists. In *John Wick*, there are three separate moments which might be said to constitute the call, once again indicative of the common blurring of the boundary lines between separate stages of the monomyth. The first could be Marcus's show of condolence, which John preventatively rejects, expecting an invitation of return to his former vocation, before Marcus even communicates the call. The two other moments that can be said to represent a call, are connected with Iosef's gang, the first one when Iosef inquires about the potential sale of John's car, and the other one when he and his gang break into John's house.

The first two "calls" are followed by two separate instances of The Refusal of the Call (A4). Most of the time, this stage of the hero's journey "is about fear... the hero has not yet fully committed to the journey and may still be thinking of turning back" but "some other influence — a change in circumstances, a further offense against the natural order of things, or the encouragement of a Mentor — is required to get [him] past this turning point of fear" (Vogler 11). In *John Wick*, it is not as much a question of fear as it is a lack of motivation to embark on the journey, with the first two calls not amounting to a sufficient incentive for it to begin. However, the third time is the charm, similarly to "myths and folk tales of the whole world", that commonly include this motif of triplicity and "make clear that the refusal is essentially a refusal to give up what one takes to be one's own interest" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 55). So if the chance to make a transformation is not used by the main character (which in *John Wick* consists of going from a state of total despair to getting over his wife's death), he can only

¹¹ It is interesting that the monomyth as a story paradigm spans multiple genres, and manages to keep its recognizable shape despite its occasional adjustments to fit the requirements of the relevant genre.

suffer as a consequence. Hence, the intervening period between the initial refusal and the final acceptance makes clear that "what formerly was meaningful [becomes] strangely emptied of value" and "even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations, they [are] found unfruitful" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 51).

In addition, similarly to *Dredd 3D*, this phase puts obstacles on the way of the narrative desires of the audience, especially the second refusal, when John decides not to pursue retributive action after Iosef's clear display of verbal antagonism. The desire-frustration of the narrative desires of the audience springs from the same source as John's frustration - the lack of agency to affect the unfolding turn of events. Therefore, the transformative process initiated with the acceptance of the call, is a move to take control over his destiny - an action which gives the audience vicarious pleasure.

The Entering the Belly of the Whale (A5) stage is similarly prolonged, with three constituting phases of its own: (1) one on the side of the ordinary world, manifest with John's loss and regaining of consciousness, (2) another right on the threshold between the two worlds, marked by depth symbolism, and (3) the last one on the side of the other world, which designates the final stage of the threshold crossing and is a part of the initiation act.

Thus, during the break in, John suffers a strong blow to the head and blacks out. Such moments where the hero loses consciousness and subsequently regains it, happen at three key junctures of the film. The first one happens here, as the hero is just about to cross the boundary into the other world, the second happens in-between the Approach to the Innermost Cave (A8) and the Rescue from Without (A9) phases, and the third one happens right before the almost simultaneous Resurrection (A14) and Crossing the Return Threshold (A15) phases. What all of these junctures of the plot have in common is that they represent the lowest points in hero's

journey, moments of great peril that act as stimulants to the transformative process, since they warrant a behavioral change of some sort on the part of the hero. In addition, the use of sleep, or loss of consciousness of any sort, as a boundary marker is most likely a trope, widely used in literature as well. Thus, sleep is widely used at the end of chapters in the Victorian novel (Brown), meaning that its threshold function was not lost to earlier generations. It is no wonder that it is so as the mini cycle of full consciousness, its loss, and subsequent coming to, perfectly mirrors the threefold life, death and rebirth stages of initiation rituals and the monomyth, with a primary function of indicating a change of circumstances. Thus, when he awakes after the first such loss of consciousness, John's world is completely changed, underlined by the fact that he misses the alarm, which rings at 6:19am instead of the customary 6:00am - signaling a disturbance of the routine, and the natural order established thus far.

The second phase of the Entering the Belly of the Whale (A5) is placed at the very point where John crosses the threshold to the other world. This phase directly references the water unconscious, with everything above the surface (the staircase to his basement) belonging to the ordinary, and everything below that belonging to the other, extraordinary world. Here he descends down to the basement to uncover a container holding the tools of the trade of his past life (guns), something that happens simultaneously with a conversation between the Tarasovs designed to increase his intimidation factor.¹²

¹² The mutual interplay of the descent and the running up of John Wick's intimidation factor are a key indicator of the power of editing, and as a technicality it is accordingly elaborated in the third layer.

Figure 5 At the point where he returns to the old world, John Wick goes deep in the Belly of the Whale (A5)

John also uncovers the container in a manner indicative of the change - smashing the concrete floor with a sledgehammer, angrily yelling in the process. The journey into the other world is punctuated by a transformation from civilization to savagery and reverting to one's primal nature - something that goes hand in hand with the vengeance motif. This is a commonly referred to over the course of the film, especially apparent in numerous occasion in which Viggo urges him not to "resort to [his] baser instincts and handle [the conflict] like civilized men..."

(Stahelski and Leitch). John of course does not back down, at least not until his revenge is completed.

The final phase of Entering the Belly of the Whale (A5) consists of a descent deep down the bowels of the Continental, to enter the bar that serves as a social center for the assassin subculture. "Bars are" places where "friends and villains are introduced" and are "useful to the hero for obtaining information, for learning the new rules that apply to the Special World." (Vogler 13). The Mos Eisley Cantina in *Star Wars: A New Hope* serves a similar function, and is in fact, referenced by Campbell himself as an excellent example of the descent into the belly of the whale, and encountering the new world for the first time (Moyers 3). This is also similar to a crucial scene in *Point Blank*, a neo-noir film released in the 60s, that *John Wick's* screenwriter Derek Kolstad quoted as a direct influence, the novel *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson released in the late 19th century, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* published in the late 14th century, who has his pilgrims meet up in an inn early on in the story. Aside from the depth symbolism it is difficult to see how this scene can be dubbed a trope - it seems to be a meme, although one with long-standing tradition. Its longevity is only natural if the social function of inns is considered, which for a long time served as the primary places for proliferation of information through gossip.

Peppered throughout this stage are reminders of the significance of this threshold crossing, and its irreversibility. Thus, Winston asks John to consider the consequences of his return:

Have you thought this through? I mean chewed down to the bone? You got out once. You dip so much as a pinky back into this pond, you may well find something reaches out and drags you back into its depths. (Stahelski and Leitch)

The depth and danger symbolism of the water metaphor are especially vivid in this speech. However, at this point, John is adamant that he is "just visiting" (Stahelski and Leitch), and he will only backtrack on this stance during the Apotheosis (A10) stage.

3.2.3.2. Initiation

The Road of Trials (A6) phase in *John Wick* is quite straightforward - the hero is presented with a challenge, which he needs to successfully complete in order to prove his potential of undergoing the transformative experience. Unlike *Dredd 3D* there is a noticeable absence of temptations in the most literal sense of the word, with most of the encounters with the antagonistic faction being solely reserved to the gradation of the "becoming-powerful" (Purse 33) narrative trajectory.

For example, the prototypical temptation stage - Woman as Temptress (A7) is subsumed in the abovementioned pattern, and represents the most significant "symbolic shift" in the film. Instead of the sexually seductive aspect inherent to the symbol, supposed to lead the hero astray in his search of his higher self (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 112), in the film, Perkins is made a physical threat to the protagonist. This is analogous to semantic shift in language where the form of the word is retained while the meaning changes, e.g. "awful" originally meant 'awe-inspiring, filling someone with deep awe', as in the awful majesty of the Creator... and at some point it becomes something extremely bad, as in an awfully bad performance" (Wijaya and Yeniterzi 1). A similar process but on a higher order of complexity can be seen with symbols, complex memetic clusters, and tropes, like rituals. Thus, for Campbell, present day rituals have similarly become mere shells of their former selves, by retaining much of their original shape, but losing the spiritual significance that was the original

force that shaped them (Campbell and Moyers 115). The next two stages are both twofold, with two separate events making up the symbolic stage of the monomyth.

Thus, the first part of the Approach to the Innermost Cave (A8) features John going deep into the Tarasov headquarters in order to kill Iosef, and the second part happens when he enters the church in little Russia and breaches the vault where Viggo keeps his wealth and blackmail material. Both phases are followed by two low points of the fortunes of the main hero, with only his persistence making a difference between life and death. The first phase closely follows the symbolic frame implicit in *Dredd 3D*, representing the ultimate danger for the protagonist, and also one of depth, and distance from safety. Similarly to *Dredd 3D* this phase is essentially a trap set by the antagonist, preying on the unstoppable drive of the hero. The second phase on the other hand, represents the penetration of the "monster's" secret lair, and instead of getting the coveted material treasure featured in many such stories, John merely destroys it, further playing on the metaphor representing him as a force of nature.

The two events that make up the Rescue from Without (A9) phase on the other hand - immediately follow the lowest points of the hero. On both occasions it is Marcus, John's former mentor that acts as his guardian angel, saving him from Perkins' sneak attack, and another time when John is held prisoner by Viggo's goons. Similarly to *Dredd 3D*, right when the student is on the verge of veering off his intended track, the mentor is there to bring him/her back.

The second rescue happens almost simultaneously with The Apotheosis (A10) - John's realization that he is back from retirement and deep inside the other world, a fact that he seemed unwilling to accept beforehand. The moment stands out for the fact that it does not follow an ordeal stage or the ultimate test of the hero's capabilities - he merely makes the mistake of overexposing himself, and is hit by a car driven by one of Viggo's goons. Thus, instead of the

ultimate, epic encounter with the forces of evil being the event that draws out this realization, it is helplessness that serves as the catalyst for the Apotheosis. It is because of the seeming inescapability of the situation, that John is forced to verbalize his plight which truly ignites his passions, and is probably a further stage of the explosion of primal energy that happened in the Entering the Belly of the Whale stage. The familiar notion of desire-frustration also has a part to play in the impact of this stage. When Marcus returns his agency to him, it becomes a source of pleasure for the audience. This stage also corresponds with the moment that John kills a prominent member of Viggo's "muscle", whose importance is previously ramped up by his challenging of Iosef authority and almost defeating John in a previous encounter. This adds a further emphasis to the significance of the stage, as it presents the removal of probably the only antagonist who could challenge John in terms of his physical prowess. All of these elements align to make the Apotheosis a major pay-off for the audience.

This stage, closely followed by John's acquiring of Iosef's whereabouts by his father himself, clears the way for John to get The Ultimate Boon (A11), his revenge on Iosef. Early on, John had plenty of opportunities to kill him, but does not shoot him - one of the many indications that John is after a process of purification, rather than revenge for its own sake. In addition to going contrary to the rules of narrative, ending the journey early in the second act would have avoided key stages that trigger the transformative process and John seems aware of this fact. After the Apotheosis though, killing Iosef merely becomes a procedural matter, reflected in the way he is killed, with the fatal shot cutting him short in the middle of a sentence.

3.2.3.3.Return

With the Apotheosis behind him, and the Boon obtained, the hero prepares for the return phase. Although he is not completely fulfilled by the outcome of his revenge arc, he decides that

"it's time to go home" (Stahelski and Leitch), despite frequent remarks by most of his "helper" figures about the feasibility of doing so, now that the principal link (his wife) connecting him with the ordinary world is severed. Unaware of the fact that his purification process is still incomplete, John leaves unfinished business behind that comes back to haunt him - a usual feature of the return phase of the monomyth (Vogler 19). Thus, his vengeance triggers another one, with now Viggo resolute to engage in retributive action, as a payback for John's murder of his son and for the destructive effect he had on his organization. Viggo orders Marcus killed, and John's "meekness" costs him the life of his mentor and lifelong friend.

This leads to a Refusal of the Return (A12), and the opening of another revenge plot. This domino effect of one retributive act leading to another, shapes John's monomyth in a way which brings to mind Vogler's idea of changing "vectors of intention" (xxiv) of the protagonist. Thus, from the beginning, up to the break in, John quietly suffers his grief, with his dog as a comfort. The break in changes his intentions towards enacting his revenge on Iosef, which after he kills the Russian briefly revert to what they were at the beginning, only to switch towards avenging his mentor's death by killing Viggo. This constant moving up the hierarchy of wrongdoers in his attempts to have his vengeance, and the constant changing of his final goals and intentions is very reminiscent of *Point Blank*. If it is indeed one of the influences on the film that Kolstad mentioned (Paul), it serves as a testament of just how subtle and abstract such elements of cultural transmission can be. Nevertheless, *John Wick* does not try to force a postmodern message of the futility of revenge in the same way that *Point Blank* does, probably because it gets muddled in the complicated flux of borrowed cultural elements floating around its imaginative universe.

What follows the Refusal of the Return is an interesting twist on the Magic Flight (A13) stage of the monomyth, which in truth becomes the "Magic Chase". After killing Marcus and attempting to escape, Viggo leaves loose ends that come back to haunt him, in much the same way John did, just minutes of screen time before. Viggo's unfinished vengeance evokes John's renewed wrath, which again attracts references to his primal nature - "what happened John, we were professionals... civilized"(Stahelski and Leitch), to which he replies "do I look civilized to you?" (Stahelski and Leitch). Furthermore, the fact that John deliberately lets Viggo stab him before killing him, is indicative of his desperate search for a method of purification, in which he chooses pain - a common feature of initiation rituals as well, as its extreme power over the senses can serve as an excellent boundary marker.

Following Viggo's death there is a quick succession of phases. First is the Crossing of the Return Threshold (A14), with nothing else remaining for John, but to continue life in the ordinary world. It is here that the last threshold marked by a loss of consciousness occurs, which is in fact The Resurrection (A15), and the final stage of John's transformation, which happens in the immediate aftermath of the scene shown in the prolepsis.¹³ The prompt for John's resurrection is his wife saying "let's go home" (Stahelski and Leitch) on the video playing on his phone, which acts as a reminder of the completion of the journey back to the ordinary world, symbolically emphasized by his adoption of a dog from the veterinary clinic, which would serve as a replacement for the dog she gave him. The cyclicity is further emphasized by the last scene happening at the promenade where John and his wife are shown walking at the beginning. Thus

¹³ The cyclicity of the monomyth is further brought to the fore with the use of prolepsis, which as a technical, stylistic aspect will be dealt with in the third layer (turn to page 97)

the equilibrium is restored, and he can safely grieve in the ordinary world in the final, Freedom to Live (A16) stage.

3.2.4. Third layer - narration, mise en scène

The mise en scène in *John Wick* owes a lot to cultural transmission, much of which is difficult to adequately classify according to the terminology proposed on page 26. For example, the scene where John is tied up in the middle of an empty warehouse, is extremely common, and its lingering appeal might be explained with the fact that it limits the agency of a character that the audience has come to identify with. Hence, it is an excellent device for causing desire-frustration and suspense for the audience. The evolutionary origin of this paradigm is probably connected with the fact that getting caught in a snag which completely restricted their movement might have been a question of life or death for our ancestors. Another, yet a more speculative argument can be made about the funeral scene in the beginning of the film, which is accompanied by rain, like in many other films. A part of the somber atmosphere achieved by the inclusion of rain during such scenes, may be owing to our evolved dispositions to avoid rain since it can "be a means of spreading bacteria"(Chu) and by extension life-threatening disease. On the other hand there are scenes which are solely a product of cultural transmission, without any discernible biological foundations. For example, one such meme is the scene where Viggo calls Aurelio, while contemplatively surveying the skyline of the city.

In addition, the tendency of *John Wick* to create a disparity between the original connotation of the cultural product and its use in the film, continues in the third layer. Thus, the film opens with a radio broadcast, a common meme, which has been used by other films as expository device - providing crucial contextual information for the "storyworld" of the film. Films that embrace this meme include: *Midnight Special* (2016), *Pontytool* (2008), *Snowpiercer*

(2013), *The Edge of Tomorrow* (2014), *28 Days Later* (2002), *World War Z* (2013), *Contact* (1997), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), and many more. However, in *John Wick* it is only used as a stylistic device that completely overlooks its expositional function. Also, unlike the abovementioned films, it is intradiegetic, coming directly from the universe of the film, which makes it more directly immersive than its extradiegetic counterparts.

As it can be seen in the third layer of the previous chapter, sound in film follows the same guidelines dictated by human nature just like its visual medium, expressing the same principles of narrative tension, suspense, as well as subtly reinforcing the structure of the monomyth, key narrative semantics, and the established agonistic structure of the film. After all, "the screen for both film and television is a depthless, textureless plane...without the addition of sound, its sheer flatness can quickly alienate the spectator, deflating and distancing the projected images" (Kramer 156).

For example, in the early stages of the film there is no extradiegetic music, with merely intradiegetic EKG sounds indicating John's memories of his dying wife, punctuated by rapidly edited moments of their life together. Because the period of the film is marked by overall low narrative intensity, the absence of music serves to emphasize the contrast between the ordinary and the special world. Thus, the first two scenes when medium paced, yet intense, non-verbal, rock music is playing, is when John gets off the bus on his way to Aurelio's, and when the "body disposal unit" deals with the aftermath of John Wick's first encounter with the Viggo's hitmen. Both situations are placed in the early stages of his entrance into the other world and correspondingly, the music is definitely more intense in the second scene, marking a more advanced stadium of the movement towards the other world.

Music can emphasize threshold crossing in ways that more conspicuously aid the structuring of the monomyth - e.g. when the door to the bar of the Continental opens up for John Wick, the previously muffled music increases its volume and clarity. However, what seems like intradiegetic music up until that point is revealed to be extradiegetic when it slowly dissolves into the actual music playing in the club - the actual intradiegetic music was previously covered over by extradiegetic music. This means that the music was mirroring John's mental state at that point, an excellent example of the powers of internalization extradiegetic music is capable of.

As Kramer claims, "where speech must be minimized, in lyrical montage or narrative situations of action, suspense, or passion, music is conscripted as a further supplement" (Kramer 156). Hence, in a later scene, when John is deep in the bowels of the Tarasov headquarters, the intradiegetic music of the club aids in the creation of a claustrophobic effect, highlighted and reinforced by the limited space and the numerous dangers and obstacles in his way. Sometimes the semantics of vocal music complements the action of the film. For example, the treachery and volatility of the world of the assassins is emphasized by the prevailing theme including intense extradiegetic music with the lyrics "we're killing strangers so we don't kill the ones that we love" (Stahelski and Leitch) - which adds poignancy to the scene and emphasizes the prevailing theme of the ruthless nature of the assassin subculture. Thus, extradiegetic music plays a similar role to the chorus often accompanying ancient Greek drama, a stylistic element, or a meme, whose use is hard to classify as deliberate or accidental.

The semantics of intradiegetic music are also relevant. Thus, the villains are introduced with intradiegetic rap music, including the lyrics "gotta get that money" (Stahelski and Leitch) that immediately serves to emphasize their hedonism and hegemonic wealth hogging that is in breach of our evolved, egalitarian social ethos, and is intended to create immediate repulsion

towards them in the audience. Music also serves as a positive emphatic marker, as every scene where John looks at videos or memorabilia that remind him of his wife is tinged with soft music.

Another "technical" aspect of the film is the use of prolepsis or flash-forward at two key instances of the film, which constitutes meddling with the strict chronological flow of time that is rare for stories featuring the monomyth. The first time that it is used, it accentuates the cyclical nature of the monomyth, tying the beginning and the end of the film, but also helps introduce a strong element of suspense. Even though it happens only briefly it opens a lot of questions and leaves them unanswered, at least until the second quarter of the film. Its second use features juxtaposed scenes of prolepsis and real time, as sequences of John interacting with Aurelio are intersected with shots that happened slightly prior to that, that include dealings between Iosef and Aurelio. The juxtaposition of these scenes serves to increase the stakes, and the underlying mystery of the situation in anticipation of the reveal scene that corresponds to the Entering the Belly of the Whale stage of the monomyth. This setup is pandering to our curiosity - one of the primary forces that attracts us to narrative (Boyd, "The Origin of Stories: Horton Hears a Who" 8). The build-up achieved in such a way is the primary reason why the reveal of John's identity has the impact that it has.

John's mastery is not only alluded to, but it is also displayed, in a fighting style that has synthesized many influences into a style that is uniquely its own, proven by numerous spoofs, imitations and parodies of it in varying levels of professionalism. Derek Kolstad, the screenwriter of John Wick, has pointed out *The Raid*, another film that features a variation of the monomyth as an inspiration in this regard, especially in the way it created a seamless progression of action (Leeman). In turn, the film significantly draws from Chinese revenge films, and "gun fu, the style of close-quarters gunplay popularized by Hong Kong action flicks" (Wickman).

The fight sequences in the film can be roughly divided in two groups - those in which John Wick virtually destroys the opposition, and others which are supposed to generate suspense and anxiety about the fate of the main character. The difference is once again a matter of gradation, along the line of Purse's "becoming-powerful" - in the early stages of the film John struggles, since he is unsurprisingly "rusty" (Stahelski and Leitch) after his five year hiatus, while in the latter part he merely steamrolls past his opposition.

The narrative aspect of the second type of fight scenes is more worthy of consideration. According to Purse, "mastery is often achieved after momentary losses in the hero's control of the situation, so that we also 'feel' the loss before mastery is regained.... such temporary losses of control make the body's subsequent return to mastery register with even more force" (45). Such fluctuations of the emotional valence of the scenes, with many ups and downs, are deliberately inserted to keep the audience on the edge of their seats. Upon closer consideration, action sequences can be revealed to have mini plots on their own, imitating the overall structure of the film much like a fractal pattern. The first fight sequence is especially interesting in this regard. The fight is going rather smooth when dealing with the first hitmen, but by the time he deals with the last two, he is disarmed and forced into hand to hand combat, in which he has difficulties, at least comparatively speaking. In this way, this story pattern could be said to correspond to the "man in a hole" or either -SV1 or SV2 patterns of emotional valence (Reagan et al. 6), according to the method of empirical measuring of story structures in literature, proposed by MIT researchers.

Another interesting aspect of fight sequences is the meme of an "empowered stance... posture of mastery... that [characters] adopt prior to intense moments of confrontation" that "declares the potential of the action body, its capacity for action and for mastery, freezing the

body at the moment it is about to unleash its forceful powers" (Purse 66–67). Purse traces these memes back to the early days of entertainment, when such moments could only be depicted in still images, like modern day promotional posters. The occasional freezing of such moments to indicate moments of mastery has found its way into film, both as a direct reference to the meme, and as an excellent way of showing the static power relations in the scene (something which can also be accomplished by slow-motion, as seen on page 68).

Something similar is achieved by the extremely common "preparation" sequence, which happens when John is just about to confront the hitmen sent by Viggo, and slightly later, right before the Entering the Inmost Cave stage. Similar sequences can also be seen in the opening of *The Raid* and *Dredd 3D* (the latter of which is featured alongside one of the "preparation" scenes seen in *John Wick* on Figure 6). In both, the main hero is seen donning his recognizable garb, and brandishing his weapon of choice, and happen right before the hero gets a chance to fully display his mastery. As conflict and weapons are both human universals, behavioral and technological respectively, this sequence can be dubbed a trope, and its use in fiction can be traced all the way back to the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*.

Figure 6 Dredd (left) and John Wick (right) in the "preparation" sequence, an example of a trope

The use of editing in the film is also worth looking into. According to Purse, "speed is a defining principle of contemporary editing, now that cutting has become inexpensive" (58), and "[t]oday films are on average cut more rapidly than at any other time in US studio filmmaking"

(Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It* 122). However, in *John Wick*, this technique is mostly reserved for mental processes. Thus, at the point when John decides to cross the first threshold, his intense recollection and the quick jumping from one thought to another characteristic of that process is achieved with alternating shots of prior events, some happening before the time covered by the narrative (events featuring his wife).

The film refuses to use contemporary conventions of "impact aesthetic" in its fight scenes - "a vicarious assault on the position of the viewer through strategies such as rapid editing, unstable camerawork and, in some cases, the propulsion of objects out towards the screen" (King 340). In its essence, the technique manages to blur the exploits of the action body, which serves to exaggerate the displayed mastery through confusion of the senses and locating "the spectator notionally within the three-dimensional space of the film world, 'in the thick of it'" (Purse 60). In this way, *John Wick* contravenes the abovementioned trend of stylistic evolution identified by Bordwell, through with what can merely be classified as excellent technical execution and choreography. The film manages to execute these action sequences in rather long and stable shots, which manages to represent a more vivid expression of moving "action body" (Purse 37). John always remains center frame throughout fight scenes, and the moving action body is taken in at full which definitely aids audience immersion in the fight scenes. A further technique that helps audience immersion in the film is the "intercutting one of its action scenes with shots of a first-person shooter" which "seems to acknowledge its debt to ... video games"(Wickman). The use of a technique usually reserved for a medium which allows agency for the player is indeed restrictive, but the scene lasts for mere seconds, and a further compensation is the displayed perfect mastery of the protagonist, which is vicariously experienced by the audience.

3.3. Mad Max: Fury Road (2015)

3.3.1. Plot overview

In the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust, Max Rockatansky becomes a captive of the War Boys, the army of a dystopian society called the Citadel, ruled by the ruthless Immortan Joe. When Immortan's concubines escape, led by the warrior Furiosa, the War Boys are summoned to chase them down, including Max, who serves as a "blood bag" for one of the sick War Boys - Nux. The group escapes the pursuing band with the help of an enormous sand storm, which unites Max and Furiosa, who form a loose but slowly strengthening partnership. Meanwhile, the group is joined by the recalcitrant Nux, who is disillusioned by Immortan's rule. The party is headed to the Green Place, a lush paradise oasis that Furiosa remembers from her childhood. On the way there they successfully resist the Buzzards, the Rock Riders - the guardians of the canyon, Immortan's pursuit which takes one of his wives as a casualty, and cross the Death Swamps, until they finally meet the Many Mothers. They reveal that the swampland they just went through used to be the Green Place, before its soil was spoiled by a mysterious blight. The group decides to go across the salt plains in search of a better future but Max intervenes, suggesting going back to the undefended Citadel and taking it over. On the way back, the group defeats Immortan's band and returns to the Citadel, bringing an end of his tyranny.

3.3.2. First layer - "story world": agents, circumstances, and surroundings

3.3.2.1. Circumstances and surroundings

Mad Max: Fury Road is a reboot of George Miller's *Mad Max* film franchise, which fared quite well in its initial run from the late 70s to the mid-80s, both with critics and at the box office. Its close ties to previous iterations of the film, especially with the second installment of the original trilogy (Miller, *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*), are most evident in its overall backdrop. It can even be said that the entire plot of *Fury Road* is essentially a slightly altered and expanded version of the chase sequence at the latter end of the *Road Warrior*. Furthermore, all films of the franchise share a post-apocalyptic world, in which society as we know it breaks down, with the resulting state of chaos being quite close to the state of affairs in pre-agricultural societies, and thus offers an effective, almost unadulterated glimpse of human nature. If we see the monomyth as an allegorical projection of the struggles that accompany every single human life, the post-apocalyptic setting provides a clean slate for its intended purpose.

Post-apocalyptic settings have a long history in world literature and mythology, with notable works including: *Gilgamesh*, the Hindu *Dharmasastra*, the biblical stories about Noah's Ark in the Genesis, and the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelations, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, many of H.G. Wells' stories, and many others. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the setting consists of an endless desert, with almost no water in sight, and where the elites control all the resources.

Given that much of human evolution took place in the "savannas and woodlands of East Africa where hominids split off from chimpanzee lineages" (Dutton 26), it can be concluded that human nature as we now have it was developed in a place with plentiful resources. This is why, in real life or in the perception of fiction we tend to prefer certain landscapes over others, depending on how similar they are to those we evolved in. Thus, Dutton highlights the so called "Savanna Hypothesis" according to which humans have an instinctive preference for: "(1) open spaces of low (or mown) grasses interspersed with thickets bushes and groupings of trees; (2) the

presence of water directly in view, or evidence of water nearby or in the distance; (3) an opening up in at least one direction to an unimpeded vantage on the horizon; (4) evidence of animal and bird life; and (5) a diversity of greenery, including flowering and fruiting plants"(Dutton 26). This preference is not only reflected in art, "in paintings and calendars but in many great public parks, such as portions New York's Central Park" (Dutton 26), and constitutes an ideal that post-apocalyptic landscapes tend to contravene. Thus, in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the landscape is in total opposition to what we have evolved to prefer, which in turn creates an immersive, deeper understanding of the stakes involved in the narrative, e.g. Furiosa's fixation on the Green Place becomes completely justified, once the extreme desolation of the setting is shown.

The absence of verdure in the diegetic world becomes especially poignant when the crew of the War Rig encounters a tree and Nux does not seem to know what it is. The tree in question is also dry, with a "skimpy canopy", and "non-climbable" which is instinctively less preferred as "a climbable tree was a device to escape predators in the Pleistocene" (Dutton 28). Nevertheless, it helps the crew set the War Rig free when it gets stuck in mud, which plays a part in establishing a symbolic network that attributes the transformative process in the monomyth to the workings of nature.

Despite their underlying resource scarcity and the aversion humans have for such landscapes, the post-apocalyptic setting has underlying exploratory qualities, which are a vital aspect of the didactic function of myth. Post-apocalyptic stories often include setting off into the unknown which gives a "whole new realm for the imagination to open out and live its forms" (Moyers 2).

The early stages of the film also reveal a lot about the social make up and culture of the Citadel, which is quite obviously shaped by the circumstances of the world at that time. It is a

highly segregated society, with massive wealth inequality - the elite, led by Immortan Joe, hogs all the resources: water, food, fuel, weapons and even the reproductive rights, as the best looking women are forced into concubinage. Setting can definitely influence how myths are formed and digested. Just as the transition from foraging to agriculture economy once made an impact on the myths, religion, and culture of the affected societies, so can an apocalyptic event of earth-shattering proportions do the same. Thus, since they are a vital part of survival in the desert landscape, and are the last vestiges of the technology of the old world, the mythology of the Citadel has an anthropomorphized engine - "V8" as its principal deity. The basic scaffolding of religion is always the same - "every God, every myth, every religion is true as metaphorical of the human and cosmic mystery" (Moyers 6), while the details take different inflections through an interplay of cultural transmission and the local circumstances. Most importantly however, religion is a human universal because it is beneficial for societies in group selection, as it makes them function better - i.e. every society that incorporated religion functioned better than those that did not (D. S. Wilson). It may have also been a helping factor in the creation of larger, more complex groups - evidenced by the fact that the Citadel is simultaneously both the largest society in the film, and the only one that has developed religious beliefs of any shape.

The hegemon, Immortan Joe, has wholeheartedly accepted this religion and has appropriated a prophet-like role in the spiritual life of the society. "I am your redeemer, it is from my hands that you will rise from the ashes of this world" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*) - he tells his underlings right before doling out meager quantities of water. All of this is done while he and his family occupy the top of a cliff, living a life of luxury (in relative terms), while the underprivileged wallow in the dry sands. Those worst off on the other hand, the prisoners like Max, literally have their lifeblood drained out of them. This religion also encourages boys that

suffer from radiation poisoning to engage in self-sacrificial exploits for the good of the society, preceded by spray painting chrome on their faces and yelling out the phrase "witness me" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*) - a cry directed at other members of the social group to see, and be instructed by the display of high WTR. The setting and the circumstances clearly indicate a necessity for change, which sparks the symbolic insufficiencies of the characters, and thus triggers their monomyths.

The metaphoric framework behind language can also be influenced by local circumstances. Thus, sick War Boys in need of blood transfusion are "running on empty", "ride" "on the highways of Valhalla" after they die, and are sometimes urged to cheer for Immortan Joe, or "rev it up" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*) for him. Motor vehicles seem to be the principal driving force behind cognitive metaphors in the film, in the same way that they have shaped the prevailing religious beliefs.

It is also relevant how vestiges of present day culture intersperse the diegetic universe of the film, e.g. "Fucacima" and "kamakrazee" are used as adjectives for the self-sacrificial "War Boys" - the first one mirroring the fallout disaster in the Fukushima power-plant after the 2011 tsunami, and the other one the infamous Japanese "kamikazee" plane squadrons. The slight alteration of the words, their semantic shift, and seemingly random adoption in the daily rituals of the society, provides a glimpse into the workings of cultural transmission in the diegetic world.

3.3.2.2. Agents - agonistic structure

Albeit there is a tendency in fiction to prefer certain stages of life over others, *Mad Max: Fury Road* includes all of them, including "birth, childhood, early adulthood, reproductive peak, postreproductivity and death" (Boyd, "Life History into Story" 270). In fact, it is the unconscious

awareness of the existence of such different stages of life that have probably informed Jung's concept of twelve archetypal characters (Golden), an excellent example of the close relationship between archetypal and evolutionary criticism, both of which principally draw their realizations from human biology. Nevertheless, creating factions is never based on affiliations to particular age groups. The protagonistic faction for example, features a combination of pregnant women, teenagers, a man, and old women, all of which are in search of either hope or redemption.

Mad Max, as the name implies, quite obviously suffers from psychosis, due to his suppressed guilt, stemming from his failure to uphold a high WTR at some time in the past (something revealed in the first installment of the franchise (Miller, *Mad Max*)). It was probably his inability to leave his ego behind that prevented him from saving the lives of those close to him. Mad Max also fits the Western tradition of granting a hero status to psychotic characters, such as Hamlet, who seems much more in touch with the cosmic energies of the universe than any of the other characters in the eponymous play. Moreover, this status makes him a trickster figure, albeit a more somber variation of the archetype, who according to Campbell can serve as a meta commentary on the myth, as he indicates that symbols are merely stand-ins for the underlying truth (Moyers 6). Thus, Max is the character most capable of undergoing epiphanies, as for him, the boundary between the world and the ultimate truth is the thinnest. As far as his WTR is concerned, it goes through a complete process of gradation from the beginning to end of the film, and actually has a positive impact on his psychosis, with fewer and fewer flashbacks haunting him as the story progresses and he affirms a high WTR.

The Emperor Furiosa (her title being an interesting instance of semantic shift) - is a lieutenant in the hierarchy of the Citadel, whose hero status is also affirmed through narrative perspective and a high WTR she constantly displays for in-group members. Yet, she does not

hesitate to occasionally commit treachery to outsider groups, like the Rock Riders, whom she cheats in the transaction supposed to grant her safe passage through the canyon. In her flight from the Citadel, Furiosa is facing overwhelming odds, and research shows that audiences and readers display an unconscious psychological bias for underdogs, especially when they are women (Carroll et al. 66). Furthermore, like the other females in the film, she also seems to be a personification of the nourishing energies of the Earth Goddess - a symbolic framework established in agricultural societies which links female fertility with the fertility of the Earth - the driving force of their economy (Moyers 5). Thus, it is only natural that the Vuvalini, or the Many Mothers, have an agricultural society. The economy, and thus the mythology of the Citadel, on the other hand, is mostly based on foraging and "hunting" - engaging in resource acquisition from straggling, less organized bands. Similarly, just as the culture of the Citadel has influenced its language, so does nature peek through the language of the women, e.g. Angharad calls bullets "antiseeds - plant one and watch something die" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*). As Miller has admitted being directly influenced by Campbell (Barra), these topics are obviously deliberately inserted in the film, and by "using this system of symbols, the woman becomes a regenerator"(Moyers 5).

Birth is crucial to this symbolism, but "it is a particularly risky time in the human life cycle, thanks to the uneasy trade-off between the large heads necessary for our intelligence and the small pelvises necessary for our obligate bipedality" (Boyd, 270-271). This danger, together with the resources usually required by child raising, makes child loss quite a common cause of tragedy in fiction. Thus, when the pregnant Angharad dies, it is a major affective threshold in the narrative, and a misfortune across the board, with the antagonists affected as well, especially Immortan.

The elderly Vuvalini also perfectly fit this symbolism, which becomes even more interesting if we consider the fact that "the helpful crone and fairy godmother is a familiar feature of European fairy lore" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 65). Just like Marcus in *John Wick*, the crones have a symbolic connotation with later stages of life, which should be a period of increased altruism and likelihood of self-sacrifice, something clearly displayed in the final chase sequence of the film. Another important thing is their symbolic association with life and fertility. The crones represent the guardians of life – even in such a barren post-apocalyptic world, one of the Vuvalini claims to plant seeds whenever she gets the chance (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*). In addition, there is obviously an instantaneous, almost instinctual creation of a pact between the Five wives and the Vuvalini, obviously aided by the nature symbolism that unites them.

The sacrificial aspect is also a fundamental constituent part of the monomyth, as the hero needs to die, whether symbolically or factually, in order for the story and the transformative process to take place. Accordingly, Campbell claims that stories featuring the monomyth "where death is rejected" (Moyers 4) are virtually nonexistent. This relates to the cyclical process of life and death, which makes sacrifice not always something grotesque and unacceptable. However, this seems to be in stark contrast to the Darwinian perspective on the same notion, as from an evolutionary standpoint, suicide and self-harm seem to be the most illogical activities people could possibly engage in. All violence depicted in fiction has some survival function except for suicide which is largely regarded as a breakdown of "complex adaptive systems" or a failure of the adaptive mechanisms (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 418), and quite naturally, a propensity for such behavior eliminates such people from the genepool. However, when suicide takes the form of self-sacrifice, it is a different matter

altogether. Most such acts "observed in nature are performed by parents towards their young" (Dawkins 7), for the purposes of inclusive fitness (the benefit of one's own kin), especially by individuals in the phase of postreproductivity. The rationale behind this is that because each of the children has 50% of its parent's genes, saving three of them would be "viable", as 150% of the parent's original genes will live on. Saving cousins and nephews for example, would be less "viable" as they only have 25% of the individual's genes. As most of human evolution happened when social life was limited to small groups, in which almost everyone was related to one another, threats to the survival of the group as a whole would warrant immediate acts of extreme recklessness on the part of the individual. This may be why acts of sacrifice for the good of society still make sense nowadays. In its most direct form, such recklessness can be seen in the Vuvulini, who suffer heavy casualties against impossible odds, so that the group can capture the undefended Citadel.

However, this evolved disposition can also be exploited, and Immortan Joe is not the first despot to make use of it for his own purposes. Through indoctrination, the War Boys are made to trivialize self-sacrifice which is usually an instinct reserved for situations of extremely high stakes. This is another instance of how culture can sometimes falsely trigger biological imperatives.

It is similar self-serving attitudes that make Immortan the main representative of the antagonistic faction. He is indeed a typical "hyper-individualistic" bully (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen 8), whose motivations are crystal clear and plainly designed to elicit righteous anger in the audience. His selfishness is particularly apparent through his commoditization of the people around him. "That's my child, my property" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*) - Immortan

says, when setting out to get his wives back, whom he also calls his "treasures"(Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*).

Immortan is particularly reminiscent of

the figure of the tyrant-monster... known to the mythologies, folk traditions, legends, and even nightmares, of the world; and his characteristics are everywhere essentially the same. He is the hoarder of the general benefit. He is the monster avid for the greedy rights of "my and mine." The havoc wrought by him is described in mythology and fairy tales as being universal throughout his domain. This may be no more than his household, his own tortured psyche, or the lives that he blights with the touch of his friendship and assistance; or it may amount to the extent of his civilization. The inflated ego of the tyrant is a curse to himself and his world—no matter how his affairs may seem to prosper. (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 14)

In fact, the same can be said about all the antagonists in the films included in the case studies - in *Mad Max: Fury Road* Immortan hogs all the water, in *Dredd 3D*, Ma-ma selfishly enjoys the wealth accumulated through the sale of slo-mo, and in *John Wick*, Viggo keeps his wealth in a secret vault. This is very reminiscent of the guardian dragon archetype - a powerful, selfish monster, bent on protecting a treasure that he often cannot fully enjoy. The dragon is an embodiment of fears, and slaying him is followed by a climactic release (Moyers 2)

An interest in inclusive fitness (his own immediate well-being as well as that of his offspring) is the primary shaping force of Immortan's motivations in the film. He chases his concubines because he sees them as his own slaves for breeding purposes, but does seem to have a "natural inhibition against harming [his] own kind"(Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 418), seen when he crashes his vehicle while trying to avoid running over Angharad, one of his pregnant wives. In addition, the only reason why the

War Boys do not stop the War Rig earlier is because of Immortan's reluctance to kill any of his wives, as "killing a lover, like killing oneself or one's kin, limits opportunities to propagate one's genes" (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 424). In addition, a part of his chase is because of jealousy, as the women are accompanied by Mad Max - a male in his reproductive peak. After all, "sexual jealousy leading to violence, and especially male jealousy of rival males, is a human universal" (Carroll, "The Extremes of Conflict in Literature: Violence, Homicide, and War" 423), and is a principal mechanism of what "biologists call 'mate-guarding'" (Boyd, 270).

According to Gottschall, attitudes similar to Immortan's monopolizing of the fittest females in the group can be a major source of conflict. Thus, he claims that:

patterns of violence in Homeric society are tantalizingly consistent with the hypothesis that Homeric society suffered from acute shortages of available young women relative to young men. The institution of slave-concubinage meant that women were not equitably distributed across the circum-Aegean world; they were concentrated in certain communities and, within those communities, in the households of powerful men. While Homeric men could have only one legitimate wife, the society was in fact polygynous, with high-status men monopolizing the reproductive capacities of multiple women and low-status men comparatively deprived... this... created strong incentives for men to compete, as individuals and in groups, not only for direct access to women, but also for the limited funds of social and material resources needed to attract and retain them. (Gottschall, *The Rape of Troy: Evolution, Violence, and the World of Homer* 4)

This is almost identical to the turn events in the film, with the difference being that the females are the ones who rise up against the status quo rather than the men. For Dutton, this is a "reminder of how far some religious political structures of the last ten thousand years have drawn us away from the prehistoric scene in which hunter-gatherer sexual preferences evolved" as "the

small, mobile bands of human beings that came to flourish in the Pleistocene developed... tastes that persist in our preferences in flirtation, courtship, mating" (Dutton 146). Since Immortan's behavior seriously contravenes these evolved standards, the audience cannot help but feel revulsion towards his actions.

This repulsiveness is also signaled from the very first scene he is shown in, where he is getting his rotting back seen to, which is further proof that there is a mental conflation of moral and physical corruption, which filmmakers and authors recurrently rely on.¹⁴

3.3.3. Second layer - graphing the monomyth

The use of the monomyth in this film is supported by direct evidence, as Miller himself has admitted being influenced by Campbell's work (Barra) in the creation of the screenplays for his films. Just like *Dredd 3D*, the film features the journeys of multiple heroes, and as far as the manner in which the individual stages of the monomyth are arranged, it is the most chaotic out of the films included in the case studies. Nux's monomyth is particularly interesting - it is complete with most of the necessary stages - a call, initiation, a moment of clearness that changes his priorities, as well as death or resurrection, but it seems to represent what would happen if the main hero veers of the path towards greatness, and the achieved transformation is only partial.

Act	(A) The phases of Furiosa's monomyth	(B) The phases of Max's monomyth	(C) The phases of Nux's monomyth
I. Departure	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure 3. Belly of the Whale	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to Adventure 3. Belly of the Whale	1. The Ordinary World 2. The Call to

¹⁴ This phenomenon is dealt with in more detail on page 51, in the first layer of the investigation of *Dredd 3D*.

			Adventure 3. Belly of the Whale
II. Initiation	4. Tests, Allies, and Enemies 5. Approach to the Inrmost Cave 6. Atonement with the Mother 7. Apotheosis	4. The Meeting with the Goddess 5. Refusal of the Call 6. Tests, Allies, and Enemies 7. Approach to the Inrmost Cave 8. The Ordeal 9. Refusal of the Return 10. Apotheosis	4. The Meeting with the Goddess 5. Atonement with the Father 6. Woman as temptress 7. Apotheosis
III. Return	8. The Magic Flight 9. Rescue from Without 10. The Resurrection 11. Master of Two Worlds	11. The Magic Flight 12. Rescue from Without 13. The Resurrection 14. Freedom to Live	8. The Magic Flight 9. Freedom to Live

Figure 7 The Structure of the Monomyth for the two protagonists in *Mad Max: Fury Road*

As far as the trajectory of the narrative is concerned, *Mad Max: Fury Road* is similar to *The Wizard of Oz* - a path is previously traced for the characters and they must pass over it, and it is the journey itself, not the destination that affects the transformative process. A parallel can also be made to *Duel* (Spielberg), where the monomyth is projected in physical space, and the journey takes a literal shape.

3.3.3.1. Departure

Most of the Ordinary World (A1, B1, C1) stage has all of the heroes suffering the despotic rule of Immortan Joe, with the focus primarily put on Max. This stage of Max's journey is presented in two sequences, the first one depicting Max's initial capture by the War Boys, while the second shows his attempt to escape their compound, both of them providing

expositional value about the world as a whole and about the Citadel respectively. Both sequences provide a stark contrast of setting, the first one showing the vast expanse of the Wasteland, while the second provides a feeling of constraint and claustrophobia, aimed to provide a feeling of deterioration of the circumstances of the protagonist or their going "from bad to worse". The first scene is preceded by narration by Max himself, who in the same way as Dredd, is the narrator, despite the fact that he does not say much over the course of the film. Consequently, the man who previously acted as a protector figure, is now "a man reduced to a single instinct, survive" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*). This seamlessly fits into the argument about his psychosis - by forcing himself to adopt a WTR lower than the one he is originally comfortable with, Max breaks. This phase introduces the most important characters on both sides of the aisle, and sets the stage for the Call to Adventure (A2, B2, C2), which is the moment that tips the scale and disturbs the initial status quo. As far as the beginning of the journey is concerned, only Furiosa does so through an explicit show of agency, and is something that she must have meticulously planned beforehand. This is a rarity for stories featuring the monomyth, but indeed occasionally, "The Call may... be a stirring within the hero, a messenger from the unconscious, bearing news that it's time for change" (Vogler 100). Within the context, and underlying symbolic network of the story, it is symptomatic that it is the woman who decides to make a change for the better.

Nux also displays agency at first, albeit misdirected, while Max's fortunes are completely tied with his (even though he is shown to be full of life and willingness to survive in the prologue), and is now completely helpless, evidenced by his desperate cry - "how much more can they take from me, they've got my blood, now it's my car!" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*).

It is interesting that the signature pace of the film dictates an encounter with the first enemies very early in the narrative, as the encounter of the War Rig with "the Buzzards" (a

roving band distinguished through pseudospeciation, as they speak Russian) happens right after the Call but before the descent into the Belly of the Whale (A3, B3, C3). The inside of the belly has definite supernatural qualities, e.g. fire spouting vortices, which accordingly serve to highlight the threshold to the other world of supernatural wonder. In fact, the sudden dust storm simultaneously contains elements of two other stages of the monomyth - Supernatural Aid and The Crossing of the First Threshold. This phase is definitely helpful for all of the heroes - it is inside that Max finally is released from bondage and regains control of his destiny, Furiosa gets a much needed respite from Immortan's pursuit, and Nux is saved from unnecessarily sacrificing himself. Nux initially mistakes this impressive natural phenomenon for an event that signals a necessity for his sacrifice, which is a typical case of pattern recognition gone awry that accompanies acts of severe irrationality. It often happens that the heroes cannot tell the individual stages of their journey apart, and initially remain ignorant of the ultimate purpose of their journeys - something similar is seen in *John Wick*, who thinking that everything is over, prematurely abandons his journey. Along similar lines, Nux mistakes the first threshold he encounters as the last one. Nevertheless, when the dust of the storm settles, the entrance in the new, other, world is finalized.

3.3.3.2. Initiation

For the male heroes, this stage starts off with regaining consciousness after a crash endured in the storm, which as shown on page 85, is a frequently used way of marking threshold moments in narrative. This is followed by the Meeting with the Goddess (B4, C6) stage, where Max sees the Five wives and Furiosa half-naked and bathing in a lavish display of water. The mise en scène is set up to resemble a mirage, which almost gives it a supernatural quality and

seems like a deliberate reference to the name of the stage itself, which is yet another proof that Miller is consciously using the monomyth.

Nevertheless, he has no time for reverence, and the temptation aspect of the phase is completely lost on Max, who defeats the women in a brief fight and by seeming to choose to carry on alone, he displays a low WTR, indicative of an early Refusal of the Call (B5). For Campbell, this stage indicates a lack of maturity in the transformative process of the monomyth, as the main hero needs to actually show a certain dose of altruism in order to actually begin the journey (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 51). The subsequent unsteady alliance with the women is born out of necessity, as Furiosa is the only one person who knows the combination of the kill switch of the War Wig, and also promises him to free him from his limiting face mask. Thus, an unstable alliance is hatched which ties the destinies of two of the heroes into one, with the earliest forays of making friendships instigated by Furiosa. It is important to note that the film has a marked absence of mentor figures, which in their most essential structure are hierarchical. Whatever partnerships exist in the film remain entirely egalitarian, with both heroes having roles of equal importance. The fragility of this coalition and lingering conflict mark the Tests, Allies, and Enemies (A4, B6) phase.

The passing of the War Rig through the canyon protected by the Rock Riders marks the first part of the Approach to the Inmost Cave (A5, B7), with the later Death Marshes being the second part. Just like in the other films the thesis deals with, the Approach consists of multiple parts, all of them marked by water symbolism, depth symbolism, or both, marking the gradual progression towards deeper danger. Thus, the first part of the stage is a threshold moment in two different ways - both as an entrance into another phase, and as a form of danger as the canyon is guarded by the Rock Riders. This peril prompts increased cooperation between the protagonists

and cements the fates of the protagonists even further when Furiosa reveals the kill switch codes to Max.

The water unconscious symbolism is particularly pronounced in the second phase of the Approach - the Death Marches. The danger implicit in the phase is embodied in the fact that it is a dark, wet place, whose waters are poisoned - what was once conducive to growth and life is now the very opposite. In addition, this area is hard to traverse, as it is full of quicksand and snags, which in a chase scenario like that in the film, makes them extremely deadly. The emphasis on death in this phase is reinforced by the stillbirth of Immortan's child, a male, "perfect in every way" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*) - a high value commodity in a world where almost everyone is handicapped in various degrees. Furthermore, one of Immortan's brothers, the leader of the Bullet Farm gets blinded by Furiosa, adding further emphasis to the darkness motif of the phase.

Sandwiched between the two phases of the Approach is Nux's Atonement with the Father (C6). According to Campbell, "the traditional idea of initiation combines an introduction of the candidate into the techniques, duties, and prerogatives of his vocation with a radical readjustment of his emotional relationship to the parental images" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 125). In other words, the transformative process has to receive the sanction from a certain parent figure. This perfectly reflects the roles of the evolved disposition of social learning, which is a human universal. Thus, until approximately one half of the film's length, Nux has a desperate fixation on winning Immortan's approval. That same obsession makes him drive out in front of the pursuit party and attack the War Rig on his own. However, when factors outside of his control make him lose Immortan's confidence, Nux reaches probably the lowest point of his story and makes him a

vulnerable target for the Woman as Temptress (C5), one of the Five wives, who wins him over to the protagonist faction.

Furiosa undergoes a similar phase, Atonement with the Mother (A6), when the group meets the Vuvalini. Unlike Nux however, her Atonement has a positive upshot, as she is immediately accepted into the fold of the Many Mothers, with whom she is quick to form an intergenerational partnership.

From a technical perspective, the Ordeal (B8) stage is definitely the most interesting stage of any of the three monomyths in the film. When running away from the blinded Bullet Farmer, the engine of the War Rig overheats, and the group become static targets for his indiscriminate machinegun fire. At this point, Max decides to take matters into his own hands, and defeat the threat on his own. The male hero takes a protective role and goes off into the unknown in order to affect change into the circumstances of the group. In what is virtually identical behavior to that of Dredd in roughly the same stage of his monomyth, he tells the group to "keep moving" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*) if he does not return in time, and goes off into the mists, taking only a canister of gasoline as a weapon. This self-sacrifice is obviously a reinforcement of Max's high WTR, perhaps for the first time over the course of the story. However, unlike *Dredd 3D*, the audience is here given the perspective of the group rather than the person undergoing the Ordeal. The resulting effect is that of increased suspense, and fear about the fate of a character they came to identify with.

In all three films the thesis deals with there is a point roughly in the middle of the film, the Apotheosis (A7,B10,C7), where the hero readjusts his or her main undertaking to the newly emerged circumstances - in *John Wick* he decides that he is definitely back in the other world, and out of retirement, at what looks to be the last moment of his life, in *Dredd 3D* it is when the

duo decides to go after Ma-ma and not hide or run away from her any more, while in *Mad Max: Fury Road* this same moment includes a 180 degree turn and heading back to the undefended Citadel. The changing vectors of intentions proposed by Vogler are here transposed in physical space as well.

The three instances of Apotheosis in the film, one per each of the characters, happen almost simultaneously. Max's stage comes first, in the immediate aftermath of his Refusal of the Return (B9). The refusal happens after Furiosa invites Max to accompany the Vuvalini on the way across the salt plains. This is the Tit for Tat algorithm in action, as the enormous act of self-sacrifice shortly before in Max's Ordeal stage was definitely not lost on her. Nevertheless, he initially refuses, preferring to make his "own way" (Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road*). This is completely analogous to his initial Refusal of the Call, a stage that Campbell claims to consist of an "impotence to put off the infantile ego, with its sphere of emotional relationships and ideals" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 57). However, as he sees the Vuvalini ride away towards the horizon, and the endless Salt planes, his psychosis returns to haunt him, and he realizes that his salvation lies in helping others. Max can only silence the voices in his head chastising him for his low WTR, by showing indiscriminate, and almost self-sacrificial altruism. A perfect opportunity for him to do so would be through helping the denizens of the Citadel in addition to his fellow adventurers.

Although hesitant at first, the group sees sense in Max's plan, which plants the seeds of hope. In that general jubilation over the newly formed plan, both Furiosa and Nux have their own version of Apotheosis. For Furiosa, it comes in the immediate aftermath of her lowest point in the film, when she realizes that the Death Marshes were actually once the Green Place, while for Nux it the first moment in his life where he can show positive WTR for a good cause.

3.3.3.3.Return

After making a U-turn, the group encounters Immortan's war band once again, with whom they engage in an almost uninterrupted fight until the final minutes of the film. This constitutes the Magic Flight (A8, B11, C8), where leftovers of the evil forces linger to pest the protagonists. There is not much to say about the fight itself other than the existence of constant collaboration between all of the crew of the War Rig, which has almost all the possible combinations of age and gender groups united behind a common cause and driven by hope. This is in fact the part of the narrative with the highest stakes, as the dangers involved are the largest, with Immortan actually ready to kill some of his wives if necessary, now with his hegemony over the Citadel in question. The increased dangers bring more casualties, with even the lives of the protagonists teetering on the brink on many occasions.

Furiosa and Max save each other's lives similarly to Anderson and Dredd, effectuating each other's Rescue from Without (A9, B12) stage. Just like in *Dredd 3D* the implicit didactic notion here is that obstacles can only be overcome through mutual collaboration, thus affirming the prosocial function of narrative. Consequently, each rescue is followed by the Resurrection (A10, B13) stage, which completes the transformative processes both of the heroes undergo. Max fully displays his altruism and literally gives his blood (a prevailing motif in the film is Max's function as a blood donor, through which he rejuvenates the recipients, Nux and Furiosa) to aid in her transformative process. Moreover, it is here that he reveals his name for the first time, thus finalizing the establishing of intimacy between the two characters. This fits in the same trend after his Apotheosis, which features a change of his original focus - mere survival, to a desire to help as many people as possible. Similarly, after her Apotheosis Furiosa changes her altruistic patterns from the local level of displaying high WTR towards the Five wives, to all the

denizens of the Citadel. Furiosa's resurrection is deliberately made more pronounced in order to highlight the established nature symbolism, a further extension of which is the revivification of society, which immediately follows her threshold moment. According to Campbell, "the effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world" which "may be represented in physical terms as a circulation of food substance, dynamically as a streaming of energy, or spiritually as a manifestation of grace" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 37). This release in the film follows in the lines of Campbell's water symbolism - with the victory of the protagonist faction, the pent up life force is released into the world, and it is some of the women who were formerly in Immortan's bondage that open up the floodgates and share the water with the populace.

Indeed, "the hero[es] come back... with the power to bestow boons on [their] fellow man" (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 34), a crucial aspect of the reintegration with society that marks the final stages of the monomyth. This connection between the individual and society is a key didactic notion, and the motif of the hero's transformation being projected on the scale of society can be traced all the way back to Assyrian and Babylonian narratives (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* xxv). Thus, the fact that a semblance of democracy is restored means that the Citadel undergoes not only a spiritual, but a social rebirth. In particular, the acceptance of individuals who are proven to have high WTR as de-facto leaders, augurs well for the future of the Citadel, and indicates that some semblance of democracy, in accordance with our evolved egalitarian social ethos, may be established. For Furiosa this represents the Master of Two Worlds (A11) stage, as she has proven her mettle on both sides of the threshold.

Max on the other hand now has Freedom to Live (B14), and most likely embarks on another quest aiming to help others. Nux's Freedom to Live stage (C9) happens a bit earlier, and

represents the ultimate fulfilling of his purpose. Previously, he fails to do so in the Belly of the Whale, and has an unsuccessful Atonement with the Father a bit later. It seems that only when the sacrifice is done for a worthy purpose, and without the haze of indoctrination stopping him from fully realizing his potentialities, is he truly free to end his life on his own terms, and completes his process of purification.

3.3.4. Third layer - narration, mise en scène

Probably the most immediately apparent feature of the film is the sheer chaos and unpredictability of its signature car chases. People slip, do irrational acts of violence or sacrifice, and actions sometimes result in effects opposite of those intended. Unlike films like *John Wick* where fight sequences tend to be miniaturized plots in themselves, the Mad Max franchise excludes any causality in the whole process, with chance playing a much more significant role. Moreover, in *John Wick* the camera is usually relatively stable, and the shots last longer, while in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, it is the exact opposite on both accounts. Its camera seems to "keep up with an unpredictable fight unfolding 'live'" with "pans and tilts" that "emphasize the force of particular actions" (Purse 50). This is a part of a staple technique of "mass-audience films today" achieved through "rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements" - something that Bordwell calls an "intensified continuity" system (*The Way Hollywood Tells It* 120–1). Purse claims that these techniques "work together in an emphatic, insistent way for a particular purpose: to focus our attention on the spectacle of the body in action, its exertions and achievements, its persistence and agility, and the environmental risks and challenges it faces at each moment" (Purse 39). Once again, this is a matter of style, or pandering to the same evolved dispositions through different sets of

techniques, as the physicality of the participating characters is emphasized in both films, but in different ways.

The way that the mise en scène in *Fury Road* is set up is very reminiscent of the classic Western *Stagecoach* (Ford) (see Figure 8)

Figure 8 A scene from John Ford's *Stagecoach* (top), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (bottom), both relying on the high stakes of human migration

Similarly to the War Rig scene in *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*, both of these scenes involve a migratory group of protagonists, heading towards a better life in the "promised land", and an aggressive pursuing party, clearly marked as antagonistic (the black to the white of the

protagonists), that are trying to prevent them from doing so, whether it is due to purely predatory motivational factors, or for the sake of stopping the migration. Considering the turbulent state of the incipient stages of human civilization, and the normalness of migratory movements, it may be supposed that the archetypal image of such events could be engraved in the unconscious. However, from a Darwinian perspective, it is clear that "images" this complex can only "travel" through cultural transmission as the underlying semantics are too intricate to be transposed to instinct in their entirety. A more likely explanation of the enduring popularity of such scenes may be the evolved instinct to avoid, and thus fear predators, which has repeatedly been utilized for the creation of high stake chase sequences in many narratives over the ages. Thus, this chase scene may be regarded as a trope, something also supported by the sheer amount of detail shared between these scenes, which had to be carried over culturally.

Such scenes are also punctuated by music, and both films share "dramatic, percussive musical score[s]" intended "to lend the sequence a breathless pace and rhythm that matches the varying rhythms of the men's movements (bursts of activity interspersed with pauses to collect body and mind)" (Purse 39). *Mad Max: Fury Road* is interesting in that it uses both diegetic and extradiegetic music, the former performed by a blind and heavily disfigured guitar player, mounted on a vehicle, and accompanied by blind percussionists. His main function is to provide a stimulus for the War Boys, and make them more eager to fight. The fact that music can be used for such a purpose in the diegetic world is closely connected to the influence music has on the audience. In addition, the blind guitar player slows the tempo of his music when the pursuing vehicles stop or reduce their pace, much in the same way that the extradiegetic music is shaped to fit the ups and downs of narrative progression.

However, according to Tan "the diegetic/nondiegetic distinction is perceptually salient to a general film audience" and "in some cases, it may lead to dramatically different perceptions of the tension of a scene, the attitudes, motives, and relationships of characters, and other judgments fundamental to one's understanding of the unfolding film narrative". Thus, her research has shown that diegetic music tends to add a visceral, more immediate quality to scenes, beyond the capabilities of extradiegetic music (Tan). Albeit extradiegetic music adds "internalization" (e.g. in the canyon, where singled out bursts of percussive, extradiegetic music serve as accents of the dramatic potential of the situation, and the sudden adrenaline rush of the focalized characters), it is still no match for the immersive potentialities of diegetic music, and Miller (the director of the film) seems perfectly aware of the fact. The included presentation factor, where the music is played by a dangling, blind, horribly disfigured, flamethrower-guitar wielding man, mounted on a speeding car, also contributes to the creation of the effect.

Perspective and editing are also crucial technical aspects of film that pander to evolved dispositions. Thus, once again the perspective of the protagonists is shown before that of the antagonists. In addition, when both Max and Furiosa are first shown the camera is positioned behind them - which achieves a matching of the points of view of the character and the audience and thus delivers an immersive effect. On the other hand, one of the earliest scenes in which Immortan Joe is shown (refer to Figure 9) has him addressing the citizens of the Citadel, while standing high on the cliff above them. This shot utilizes the natural order of things that dictates that we see individuals who are more physically imposing than us from below, which in turn makes Immortan Joe look bigger and more imposing.

Figure 9 The low shot of Immortan Joe in the early stages of the film serves to affirm him as an imposing, dangerous villain

Similarly to *John Wick*, the chronologic flow of time of the diegetic universe is frequently intersected by brief flashes of scenes from the previous life of the main character (Max), in order to present the workings of memory. In fact, in *Fury Road*, these are done with the use of much more dramatic technical elements, which represent more intense assaults on the senses, deliberately inserted in order to underscore Max's psychosis. The editing in particular very sharp and sudden, which increases the intensity of the sequences. It is interesting how his madness is almost never referred to by any of the characters, and the only evidence that Max is

even mad is provided through this use of editing. The film also often features sharp zooming in on the faces of some of the characters, done in order to emphasize a heightened emotional state. Both cases can serve as proof of the potential of film to internalize, and mimic mental processes.

4. Conclusion

Over the length of the thesis, the general theoretical paradigm of bio-structuralism has proven its potential as a viable way of approaching the analysis of action cinema. As one of the "body genres" of film, it is clearly the perfect ground for the application of the theoretical paradigm. However, the usability of bio-structuralism is not limited to action cinema, and many of its insights can be applied to other genres.

This new take on archetypal criticism, evolutionary criticism, and narratology, uses only select aspects of each of these theories, in order to fit them into a unified approach. Thus, when seen through this light, archetypal criticism suddenly gets revitalized, rid of any lingering spirituality; evolutionary criticism gets toned down and forced to make concessions which give added importance to cultural transmissions of various kinds; and narratology gets a new focus, from language to human biology as the principal shaping force of narrative, something "cognitive" narratology has already been doing for a long time.

The thesis enriches both archetypal and evolutionary criticism with new terminology, spanning biological universalism, cultural transmission limited by biological "mooring", and "independent" cultural transmission, by using the terms, archetype, trope, and meme respectively. Their use can contribute to the better understanding of cultural evolution, bridge the differences archetypal and Darwinian criticism have on this issue, and can trace a path for further research. In addition, there is a fundamental differentiation between "guttural" effects, that are biological, instinctual and have an immediate, unconscious impact, and cultural, post-instinctual

considerations, which might take a completely different turn than biologically dictated effects, but are secondary, which is very important in staking out the roles of biology and culture in the reception of film.

The case studies greatly benefit from the inclusion of Bordwell's classification of the three levels of investigation of film, which leaves no stone unturned so to speak, and allows the theoretical model to be holistic, and deal with even the minutest details. The alternating focus on the “story world”, plot (in the case of the films included in the thesis shaped by the monomyth), and moment-to-moment narration, can provide unprecedented depth of investigation.

On the first layer of investigation, it is clear that most of the audience sympathies towards the characters in the films are dictated by the patterns of altruism they show over the course of the narrative, and through narrative perspective, the two principal forces in the shaping of the agonistic structure in the film. Antagonists can be further marked through “pseudospeciation” (most commonly the use of a different language) and the creation of a feeling of disgust created by a cognitive merging of a low WTR with signs of contagion that the audience instinctively shrinks from. All of the films utilize the first two factors, while the second pair of factors is “optional”, although still frequently used. The thesis also confirms that gender issues are not as important as proponents of Cultural critique claim to be, with the characters forming alliances because of mutual interests and goals, across gender and age divides.

Another evolutionary disposition that informs narrative is the fact that audiences show aversion to all settings, both in terms of societal structure, and environmental conditions, that significantly differ from the evolved human egalitarian ethos, and the landscapes of the East African Savannas which the earliest humans, and most of our behavioral dispositions have evolved.

Essentially, all of the suppositions by literary Darwinism have been confirmed, except for its stubborn dismissal of the role of culture, which is in turn covered by the abovementioned terminology of cultural transmission. In fact, there has not been a single character in any of the films whose motivations, desires, and behavior does not directly mirror the same human processes in the "real world". This is a solid argument against the post-structuralist notion of "pluralism", or the existence of two separate realities, the real world and the domain of fiction.

The second layer of investigation is dominated by the monomyth as a story pattern. It does seem to be dictated by a universal, biologically mandated framework, but only in its basic three act structure, mirroring the three main stages of initiation rituals (initiation-separation-return), and hence that of a fully idealized human life. Thus, the monomyth itself is a trope according to the proposed classification of cultural transmission, as it has a biological shell and cultural filling, the latter adapted to fit narrative (biologically conditioned) rules such as information withholding, suspense, anticipation, narrative pay-off, etc. The monomyth can also "travel" from one cultural product to another, especially now that it has penetrated deep into popular culture. This is particularly evident in *John Wick*, but in the other films as well, as certain stages are rid of their symbolism, and merely serve as placeholders.

Most "technicalities" of filmmaking (covered in the third layer of the analysis of the films), directly pander to evolved dispositions, where issues of information withholding, suspense, anticipation, narrative pay-off are especially salient. In this way, film narratology can be used in this layer almost unaltered from its original shape, if its foundations are understood to be biological.

Finally, the light humanistic touch that has to accompany such investigations, provides an additional level of profundity with its keen eye for symbolism.

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7. Summary

The aim of the thesis is to provide an overview of three contemporary action films: *Dredd 3D*, *John Wick*, and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, through a so-called "bio-structuralist" approach - combining archetypal criticism, literary Darwinism, and narratology, into a unified, holistic theoretical model.

The thesis is divided in four main parts: (1) an introduction, that gives a rationale for the aim, scope, and the design of the thesis, (2) a theoretical framework, which provides both an overview of the theories and fits them in the general model, (3) a part including the case studies, that puts the theoretical approach to the test, and finally (4) a conclusion that gives a verdict on the feasibility of the model and summarizes the findings.

A particular emphasis is put on the monomyth as a story paradigm that all the films in the case studies share, whose combination of a biologically dictated scaffolding, and cultural brickwork, is an excellent testing ground for the theoretical model.

In addition to the attempts of revealing glimpses of our evolved nature in the plots, narrative conventions, cinematography, themes, motivations, settings, and character networks in the films, the thesis attempts to balance the hardliner literary Darwinist stance of the dominance of biology over culture, with an acknowledgement of the existence of cultural transmission and stylistic evolution. Thus, the thesis proposes terminology that differentiates between cultural units totally dominated by biology, partially tied to it, and completely independent of it, albeit spread in ways reminiscent of biological evolution.

The proposed theoretical model is shown to be a viable alternative to post-structuralist approaches as far as the study of action cinema is concerned, with its ample scope serving as its principal advantage.

Abstrakt

Cílem této práce bude rozbor tří současných akčních filmů: *Dredd 3D*, *John Wick* a *Šílený Max: Zběsilá cesta*, a to pomocí takzvaného “bio-strukturalistického” přístupu, který kombinuje archetypální kritiku, literární darwinismus a naratologii v holistický teoretický model.

Text práce je rozdělen na čtyři části: (1) úvod, který poskytuje výklad cílů, rozsahu a struktury práce, (2) teoretický rámec, v němž jsou zmíněné teorie vyloženy a zařazeny do obecného modelu, (3) případové studie, na nichž se tento model ověřuje, a nakonec (4) závěr, který posuzuje aplikovatelnost navrženého modelu a shrnuje poznatky.

Hlavní důraz je na monomýtus jakožto dějové schema společné pro všechny filmy v případových studiích, protože kombinace biologií ovlivněných základů a kulturního zdiva se jeví jako vynikající zkušební dráha navrženého teoretického modelu.

Kromě pokusu o odhalení prvků lidské evoluce v dějích, narativních konvencích, kinematografii, tématu, motivacích, lokalizaci a síti postav probíraných filmů, práce se rovněž snaží o rovnováhu mezi radikálním postojem literárního darwinismu, podle něhož je kultura podrobena biologii, a existencí kulturního transferu a stylové evoluce. Práce tedy navrhuje terminologii, která rozlišuje mezi kulturními jednotkami, které jsou úplně řízeny biologií, částečně na ni vázané, anebo na ní celkem nezávislé, třebaže jsou vystavěny způsobem připomínajícím biologickou evoluci.

Navržený teoretický model se v důsledku nabízí jako aplikovatelná alternativa poststrukturalistickým přístupům přinejmenším ve zkoumání akčních filmů, přičemž jako největší výhoda se jeví jeho široký záběr.