Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree programme

in European, American and Postcolonial
Languages and Literatures

Final Thesis

Negative Empathy and Dystopias: A Study on Negative Empathy in *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Their Adaptations

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Academic Year
2021 / 2022

All those moments will be lost in time,
like tears in rain.

(*Blade Runner*)

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a years-long labour, and I would like to thank the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research. Their support helped me make it through my master's degree.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my supervisor, Professor Stefano Ercolino for his support, patience, and invaluable advice throughout this journey. He has inspired me with his passion for what he does, and without his Theory of Literature course this thesis would not exist. I'd also like to thank my assistant supervisor, Professor Emma Sdegno, for her assistance and her valuable advice. Besides my supervisor and my assistant supervisor, my sincere thanks go to Dr. Anna Gasperini for her advice and encouragement. This thesis wouldn't have been the same without her insight.

To my parents, who made this possible. They gave me everything I have and encouraged me to take every opportunity life throws my way. It's thanks to you I am the person I am today. To my father and my sister, thank you for all the love and support you give me every day. Thank you for believing in me, even when I did not, for getting me back on track. To my mother, who taught me to love literature and English. She will never see this, but I hope she knows this wouldn't have happened if she hadn't shared her love for Blade Runner with me all those years ago. (Mom, you were right about Commander Lawrence. I should have listened to you then.)

To my family, for always been there for me. I'd like to thank my aunt, Antonella, and my cousin, Ester, my two personal psychology experts. They preciously helped me with the psychology aspects of this thesis, I'll give back the books I borrowed from you more than a year ago soon, I promise.

To my loyal university project(s) partner Paola. Thank you for having encouraged me to write that essay for the Theory of Literature exam, thank you for having told me to try and send that message, and that the worst that could happen was not getting a reply, thank you for the good times and all the laughs, you made these two years even more special.

To Carolina, my work bestie, partner in insanity. You are a hurricane of joy, and your good spirits are infectious. Thank you for all the love and support you've given me since the day we first met this summer.

To Connor, Karina, and Sam, for having cheered me on in this adventure even if from afar. Thank you for all the support, for all the times you had to reassure me that I had not lost my ability to speak the English overnight. I would jump in a hole for you, and I know you would do the same for me.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to Bradley Whitford. To say this thesis wouldn't be the same without him would be an understatement. This project wouldn't exist if he had not portrayed the enigmatic Commander Lawrence in *The Handmaid's Tale*. I have nothing but profound admiration for him and his work, and I find myself unable to put into words how grateful I am for the time he made, despite having an incredibly busy schedule, to have a conversation regarding Commander Lawrence that offered me great insight in the character. His work, his passion in everything he does, and his kindness have inspired and keep inspiring me both in university and in real life.

Abstract

Since its formulation by Stefano Ercolino, the concept of negative empathy as a form of high-level empathy consisting of a cathartic identification with negative characters is receiving increasing attention in academic studies. Stretching from a range of fields of study such as psychology and neuroscience to literary studies and film studies, the present thesis attempts to defining a type of negative character that is able to trigger such empathy in the audience. Described as a psychologically complex and tormented character who possesses impressive rhetoric abilities, this study will test such theoretical hypothesis on the characters of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, Commander Joseph Lawrence in *The Handmaid's Tale,* and Roy in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*. The research thesis is divided into three chapters. The first analyses the figure of Alex the droog as created by Anthony Burgess and interpreted by Malcolm McDowell in Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, underlining the negative effects that a prolonged exposure to characters' lack of remorse could have on the ability to empathise with them. The second takes into consideration the figures of various Commanders portrayed both in Atwood's novel and Bruce Miller's *The Handmaid's Tale*, with major attention given to Bradley Whitford's portrayal of Commander Lawrence. The final chapter studies the figure of an android, Roy, from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Rutger Hauer's replicant in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner,* and the ability of a machine to feel and incite human feelings.

Table of Contents

Introduction ... *1*

Chapter 1. Evil Personified: Alex in A Clockwork Orange ... *13*

1.1 Horrorshow: Burgess's world of violence and Kubrick's adaptation ... **14**
1.1.1 Stinking World: Alex's Utopia in Burgess's Novel ... 14
1.1.2 Naughty, Naughty, Naughty: Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* ... 17
1.1.3 "I was cured alright": Issues with *A Clockwork Orange* ... 20

1.2 The Old Ultra-Violence: Violence in *A Clockwork Orange* ... **22**
1.2.1 "Taking charge of the tolchocking": Alex and His Violence ... 22
1.2.2 "When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man": Free Will and Free Choice ... 25
1.2.3 Nadsat: Alex's Language ... 27

1.3 Choosing Evil: Your Little Droog Alex ... **29**
1.3.1 "I'll make me own way": Alex the Outsider ... 29
1.3.2 "O my brothers": Identifying with Alex ... 33
1.3.3 "What's it going to be then, eh?": Alex and Empathy ... 36

Chapter 2. Humanity Peaking Back: Commander Lawrence in The Handmaid's Tale ... *39*

2.1 "It Can't Happen Here": Margaret Atwood's Gilead and Hulu's Adaptation ... **40**
2.1.1 "A Study of Power": Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* ... 40
2.1.2 Adapting Gilead: Hulu's TV Show ... 43
2.1.3 Beyond Atwood's Novel: June's Story Continues ... 45

2.2 On Gilead and Commanders ... **48**
2.2.1 "I'm Just an Ordinary Kind of Guy": Atwood's Commander ... 48
2.2.2 "We Chose God's Path": Commander Fred Waterford ... 52
2.2.3 Justifying Evil: Commander Waterford's Death ... 56

2.3 The Not-So-Faithful Commander: The Character of Joseph Lawrence ... **59**
2.3.1 "He Figured It All Out": The Architect of Gilead's Economy ... 59
2.3.2 "I'm Not Gonna Do That with You": A Commander Against the Ceremony ... 63
2.3.3 Commander Lawrence: Friend or Foe? ... 67

Chapter 3. "I have seen things": Roy in Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? and Blade Runner ... *73*

3.1 World War Terminus: Dick's Dystopian Future and Scott's Vision ... **74**
3.1.1 Dick's Future: A World Revolving Around Empathy ... 74
3.1.2 Los Angeles. November, 2019: Scott's Grim Vision ... 76
3.1.3 Philip K. Dick vs Ridley Scott: Issues with Blade Runner ... 79

3.2 Nexus-6: Androids and Men ... **82**
3.2.1 What is Human? Androids, Empathy, and Humanity ... 82
3.2.2 Do Androids Dream? Philip K. Dick on Androids ... 86
3.2.3 Replicants: Scott's Nexus-6 ... 89

3.3 Roy: Rough, Cold Android or Wonderful Spiritual Man? ... **92**
3.3.1 "Something Worse": Roy Baty in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* ... 92
3.3.2 "More Human than Human": Roy Batty in *Blade Runner* ... 94
3.3.3 Tears in Rain: Roy's Humanity ... 96

Conclusion ... *101*

Appendix A. Nadsat glossary ... *103*

Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation ... *107*

Bibliography ... *121*

Introduction

"No man is an island, entire of itself."
(John Donne)

That man is a social animal is a truism. This idea can be dated back centuries and has been stated by so many great thinkers (from Aristotle's *politikon zōon*[1] in *Politics* to Seneca's social animal in *Epistles*, and Spinoza's in *Ethics*) that it is now treated as self-evident. As it has been pointed out, "[w]hat does make humans special," when it comes to their sociability, "is the wide range of behaviour and even entire behavioural patterns that they imitate" (Dijksterhuis 208). We do not limit our mimicry to other's observable behaviours, but "we adopt multiple, sometimes rather complex aspects of others' psychological functioning" (Ibid.).

In recent years, studies on the brain have developed theories that seem to suggest that humans are indeed not isolated entities. Zaki and Ochsner point out that "although people are physical islands, at a psychological level we are deeply intertwined" (871), proving Donne's famous quote to be right. We are designed to interact socially, live in communities, and experience phenomena of emotion sharing, such as that of *empathy*. Broadly defined by Derek Matravers as "an unholy amalgam of a raft of different claims involving imagining another's perspective, mirroring the properties of others (whether things or people), projecting our mental states into others (whether things or people) and taking on the emotions of others" (12), it has been described as enabling "us to understand others but also to understand ourselves as others experience us" (Coplan and Goldie xiii). However, the concept of empathy is so complex and spreads through so many different fields of study that it is impossible to find one definite explanation of what it really is.

In literary criticism, this idea has been applied to book-reading by Suzanne Keen who theorized the concept of narrative empathy: empathy invoked by reading that must involve cognition ("A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 213). In exploring the mechanisms that lay behind such a notion, she writes that "genre, setting, and time period may help or hinder readers' empathy" (*Empathy and the Novel* xi), while "[c]haracter identification often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from each other in all sorts of practical and obvious ways" (Ibid. xii) and "appears to require only minimal elements of

[1] The term "political animal" (in Greek *politikon zōon*) is described by Aristotle "as an animal that [naturally] lives in a state, *polis*" (Saunders 21).

identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization" (Ibid.). Building on this approach and on Theodor Lipps' concept of negative empathy, in *Empatia Negativa: Il Punto di Vista del Male,* Ercolino and Fusillo argue that

> Negative empathy is an *aesthetic experience* consisting of a *cathartic empathisation* with characters, figures, performances, objects, music compositions, buildings and spaces with a *negative* and *seductive* connotation in a *disturbing* way, or evoking a *primary destibilising violence*, able to trigger a deep *empathic anguish* in the beneficiary of the work of art, to insistently ask them to undertake a *moral reflection*, and to push them into *assuming an ethic position* (which cannot always be determined a priori, since largely dependent on the different and subjective reactions of the beneficiaries). Negative empathy can also be characterised as an aesthetic experience, either *open* or *neutral* in terms of *agency*; in other words, an aesthetic experience indifferently leading to pro- or antisocial behaviours or limited to the inner life of the empathising subject. (70-71; my translation, emphasis in the original)

Starting from this definition of negative empathy, this thesis aims at adding to our knowledge on such a theory applied to villains[2] in dystopias, and will attempt to define whether it is possible to outline a type of character that is capable of triggering negative empathy in the reader/audience. Such analysis will be based on three different dystopian novels and their cinematic or television adaptations. From Alex the droog in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* and Kubrick's masterpiece, to the Commander in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Commander Joseph Lawrence in Hulu's television series, ending with the android Roy in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Ridley Scott's celebrated *Blade Runner*, the possibility of provoking different degrees of negative empathic reactions in the reader/audience will be analysed through the lens of literary and cinematic empathy criticism.

As previously mentioned, empathy is a phenomenon based on complex social interactions that depend on our ability to understand what other people are feeling. In 1978, David Permack came up with the idea that humans possess

> the innate ability to understand that others have minds with different desires, intentions, beliefs, and mental states, and the ability to form theories, with some

[2] Such term will be used throughout this work to define people that are not necessarily stereotypical villains but are negative characters who assume an ambiguous position within the stories analysed.

> degree of accuracy, about what those desires, intentions, beliefs, and mental states are. (Gazzaniga 159)

This ability is now referred to as Theory of Mind (ToM) and has been observed to fully develop automatically in children by the age of four or five (Ibid. 160). A few years later, in the mid-1990s, the most important discovery in neuroscience– connected to the concept of empathy– was made by Italian researcher Giacomo Rizzolatti and his colleagues. While studying how the grasping neurons worked in macaque monkeys, they noticed that the very same neurons fire when a monkey grasps something as well as when it observes another individual grasping something. They called this system "mirror neurons", and it has been observed that in humans,

> there are mirror neurons that correspond to movements all over the body, and they fire even when there is no goal; in fact, the same neurons are active even when we only imagine an action. The mirror neurons are implicated not only in the imitating of actions, but also in understanding the intentions of actions. (Ibid. 161)

When it comes to understanding the mental states of others, ToM and mirror neurons are not the only processes we rely on. We also simulate these states in what is known as simulation theory, a process that "gives us an implicit grasp of how and what other people feel or do" (Ibid.). It is important to note that while we simulate the mental state of others, we do not always fire with the exact same neurons as they do. For instance, it has been shown in fMRI scans that activity in the area of the brain involved with the sensory experience is present in both observer and recipient of pain. In contrast, when seeing another person in pain, the observer only feels the anxiety of it, but not the pain itself (Ibid. 162).

As previously mentioned, a precise definition of empathy has proved elusive. When it comes to psychology, Zaki and Ochsner outline empathy as a "multifaceted construct comprising related but distinct components" (871). These components are experience sharing (the perceivers' tendency to take on various states they observe in targets), mentalizing (the use of lay theories to better understand how situations produce a specific internal state), and prosocial motivation (Ibid. 871-872). The phenomenon of empathy should not be considered a monolithic one, but rather a "constellation of psychological processes" (Ibid. 875) that include all the aforementioned components. It is often identified as an emotion sharing process and, as Zaki and Ochsner put it, such emotion is "the ability and tendency to share and understand others' internal states" (Ibid. 871). This aspect is also

underlined by neuroscientists Claus Lamm and Tania Singer who explain that "consistent evidence shows that sharing the emotions of others is associated with activation in neural structures that are also active during the first-hand experience of that emotion" (81). Empathy is also seen as an other-oriented emotional response "elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else" (Batson et al. 486); as an affective response "that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition, and that is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel" (Stayer and Eisenberg qtd. in Coplan and Goldie xxiii). According to humanistic psychology, to empathise means "temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements" (Rogers qtd. in Coplan and Goldie xix). This characterisation of empathy underlines the need to set aside any differing views or values and to "enter another world without prejudice" (Ibid.). Philosopher Edith Stein identified it as the way in which we experience foreign consciousness, delineating it as "the basis of intersubjective experience" and as "the condition of possible knowledge of the existing outer world" (qtd. in Coplan and Goldie xiii).

While little consensus has emerged from psychological literature on how to define empathy, in "Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects", Amy Coplan assesses that it "is a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation" (5). In the essay she also outlines a list of "loosely related processes or mental states" (Ibid. 4) that define empathy, the most popular being:

(A) Feeling what someone else feels

(B) Caring about someone else

(C) Being emotionally affected by someone else's emotions and experiences, though not necessarily experiencing the same emotions

(D) Imagining oneself in another's situation

(E) Imagining being another in that other's situation

(F) Making inferences about another's mental states

(G) Some combination of the processes described in (A)-(F). (Ibid.)

While the lack of a clear-cut definition raises challenges when studying the subject, empathy undeniably detains a central role in many different fields of study, both in the sciences and in the humanities.

When it comes to our engagement with works of art, empathy has always been seen as relevant. Often used interchangeably with the term sympathy, the concept of what today we call empathy appears in both David Hume's and Adam Smith's writings, albeit with different meanings. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), David Hume defines "sympathy" as a principle of communication fundamental to human nature. He states:

> [n]o quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathise with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (316)

Such account, however, does not remain consistent throughout Hume's works, and the concept of sympathy is invoked to explain "a variety of psychological phenomena, including the transmission of emotion from one person to another […], the formation of moral responses […], and desires […], and aesthetic responses" (Coplan and Goldie x). Much like Hume's account of sympathy, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) Adam Smith appeals to it in order to explain how humans are able to experience others' emotions, and much like Hume's account, the discussion of such emotion is varied, with the concept undertaking multiple definition duties.

Having briefly discussed the topic of empathy in psychological and philosophical terms, it is time to move on to look into one of the two main fields of interest of this thesis: literary criticism. Eileen John offers that literature as a form of art is "a rather extreme manifestation of a human urge to know how lives feel, how minds work, and what a full awareness of interacting agents with distinct subjectivities would amount to" (306). Traditionally, literary works "explore what can be undergone, done, sensed, felt, and thought by conscious beings" (Ibid. 308). When we read, we draw on psychological, imaginative, and interpretative abilities we use in relating with people in real life. In doing so, John notes, empathy "can help fictional characters 'come to life' and grip us as readers. But the literary context is also quite different since it eliminates (most of) the practical engagement and decision-making that empathy ordinarily helps us with. This difference is likely to explain, in part, why empathy can roam as freely and surprisingly as it does in the realm of fiction"

(Ibid. 315). Empathy inhabits an important role in literature as it "contributes to an informative and full experience of a work, particularly by helping us understand characters" (Ibid. 313); therefore, it is valuable in literary practice. However, it is important to keep in mind that "readers' empathic dispositions are not identical to one another" (Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* xii) and that "empathy is specific to individual reading experiences" (John 308). It is therefore impossible to imagine that every reader of one literary work will experience the same empathic reaction as everyone else.

In the *Handbook of Narratology,* Suzanne Keen defines narrative empathy as "the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and condition" ("Narrative Empathy" par. 1). In *Empathy and the Novel,* Keen's in-depth analysis of narrative empathy, she identifies *character identification* as a fundamental element responsible for triggering an empathic response in the reader, writing that

> [s]pecific aspects of characterization, such as naming, description, indirect implication of traits, reliance on types, relative flatness or roundness, depicted actions, roles in plot trajectories, quality of attributed speech, and mode of representation of consciousness, may be assumed to contribute to the potential for character identification and thus for empathy. (93)

Additionally, she states that *narrative situations,* including point of view and perspective, could assist in the arousal of a reader's empathic response. These situations could be, for instance,

> the nature of the mediation between author and reader, including the person of the narration, the implicit location of the narrator, the relation of the narrator to the characters, and the internal or external perspective on characters, including in some cases the style of representation of characters' consciousness. (Ibid.)

Moreover, Keen identifies a number of elements that are thought to contribute to readers' empathy, such as novel length, seriality, genre expectation, narrative pace, metanarrative commentary, and vivid descriptions of settings (Ibid.). First-person narration is also thought "to invite an especially close relationship between reader and narrative voice" (Ibid. 97), which can be eased by the deep understanding of the character's motives. The prolonged introspection into a character's thoughts and feelings can allow the audience to "account for

the effective engagement and self-projection of readers into characters" (Ibid. 95). As Wayne Booth writes, "*[i]f* an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, *then* the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him" (377-378; emphasis in the original).

Narrative empathy is also relevant when it comes to film criticism. As Keen points out in her essay "A Theory of Narrative Empathy," much like prose narratives, films "infamously manipulate our feelings and call upon our built-in capacity to feel with others" (209). Motion pictures and novels differ from real life in their being designed to elicit an emotional response in the audience by making prominent those features that satisfy our idea of an emotion. As Ercolino and Fusillo argue in the book *Empatia Negativa*, our experience of motion pictures is not a passive one. We do not only visually reconstruct a scene, but we simulate it in our neuromotor system (284-285). The main difference between real life experiences and what we experience when we watch a film is that in the latter, we are free from the restrains imposed on us by real life and our moral selves. At the cinema, or at home on our couch, when we watch a film we are free to love or hate or empathise with any character we like, safe in our protective distancing that the fictionality of a film provides us with.

A key concept in the context of eliciting audience emotional responses is that of cinematic empathy. Understood by Stadler as "an emotional process that occurs when audience members perceive, imagine, or hear about a film character's affective mental state and, in so doing, vicariously experience a shared or congruent state" (317), it differs from narrative empathy in one specific aspect: unlike literature, "film provides access to both cognitive-imaginative and affective-experiential forms of empathy because audiences are able to share in the sights and sounds of the story world and mirror characters' emotions and expressions" (Ibid. 319). Such mirroring is facilitated by devices that include "camera positioning, editing, lighting, and music, which can be employed to focus viewers' attention" (Gaut 155) on specific aspects of a scene.

As Coplan notes in regard to spectatorial response to films, "the stream of on-screen images creates an impression of reality that locates the ideal viewer (or spectatorial position) at the centre of vision as the creator of meaning, providing a sense of unity and control" ("Empathy and Character Engagement" 98). Empathy, Coplan argues, "allows spectators to connect to characters while remaining separate from them" (Ibid. 103). Murray Smith, one

of the key scholars to write about empathy in film, contends that when watching a film, we "imagine possessing certain predicates of the other" (*Engaging Characters* 97), without losing ourselves in them. He argues that cinema functions as a "cognitive prothesis" that amplifies our mind's capacity to grasp what affects other people and writes that

> [o]ur ability to empathise is extended across a wide range of types of person, and sustained and intensified by virtue of artificial, 'designed' environment of fictional experience […]. The possibility of understanding 'from the inside' – that is, empathically imagining – human agents in social situations more or less radically different from our own emerges. We may come not only to see, but to feel, how an agent in a given situation comes to feel. ("Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind" 111)

Our ability to empathise with the other does not only refer to persons (real or fictional), but also to objects. In the early 20th century, German philosopher and psychologist Theodor Lipps defined the term *Einfühlung* (literally "feeling into," German word from which the English "empathy" derives from) as

> [a] process of inner imitation or inner resonance that is based on a natural instinct and causes us to imitate the movements and expressions we perceive in physical and social objects. We experience the other's feelings as our own because we project our own feelings onto the other. (Coplan and Goldie xii)

Lipps classifies two different empathic experiences: positive or negative. "Positive empathy" takes place when there is no inner friction within oneself and a feeling of accord is experienced, while with "negative empathy" a conflict between the inner self and the perceived feelings of the other arises (qtd. in Ercolino 244). Recent psychological studies have underlined this distinction, noting that "positive and negative empathy differ in one regard: the empathiser shares differently valenced emotions (i.e., positive versus negative) with the target" (Morelli et al. 60). In support to such claim, studies have shown that "positive empathy and negative empathy selectively activate regions associated with positive affect (e.g., ventromedial prefrontal cortex) and negative affect (e.g., anterior insula, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex), respectively" (Ibid.).

As Ercolino points out, Lipps "affirms that we call '*beautiful*' [*schön*] the object of positive empathy; '*ugly*' [*häßlich*], the object of negative empathy" (245). While in normal,

everyday circumstances, Lipps sees "beauty and ugliness, as well as positive and negative empathy, respectively as an affirmation and a negation of the life of the empathising subject" (Ibid.), within the aesthetic experience it is possible to "repute pleasurable works of art representing suffering, evil or repulsive human beings, negative emotions such as existential angst, or tragic events" (Ibid.). Art allows us to feel the human, even when it depicts disturbing subjects. It allows us to perceive beauty in what is negative.

In an analysis of the limits of empathy, Adam Morton underlines the importance of distance when it comes to empathic experiences towards evil. Focusing on the impossibility to empathise with people who commit atrocious acts, he notes that, in real-life situations, in order to empathise with an evil person, we have to "overcome some barrier or inhibition, based on fear, sympathy, disgust or decency" (Morton 320) that prevents us from potentially suffering the empathic distress that comes from "choosing dangerous, disgusting, or immoral actions" (Ibid. 321). This barrier of decency (Ibid. 320) prevents us from feeling empathy towards people who commit real-life atrocities. Even when supplied with the motives of such actions, "we can often even imagine some of what it might be like to do the acts, but there are deep obstacles to the kind of sympathetic identification required for empathy" (Ibid. 321). However, the barrier of decency can be overcome when in the aesthetic realm. Morton argues that "at least in the way we imagine people in narration, we can find the process that can get a person past a barrier to empathy to carry them further" (Ibid. 322).

A work of art presents us with a "protective distance" (Ercolino 248) that allows us to overcome our barriers because empathising with evil characters in fiction will not have real-life consequences. Besides distancing, Morton also gives an interesting explanation as to why we can identify and feel something like empathy for characters such as Macbeth or Raskolnikov:

> a skilful author will direct the imagination to aspects of the fictional situation, including aspects of the fictional character's motivation, that are similar to those of the reader, so that one gets a partial imagination of the motivation of deeds that one would not consider doing oneself […] But a partial grasp of motivation is all one ever has: if there is any empathy at all it rests on partial imagination. (Ibid. 325)

He asserts that our ability to empathise with the motives of awful and repugnant characters is in part because "empathy can be selective in its choice of an imaginative basis" (Ibid.).

In his essay on negative empathy, Ercolino thoroughly explains the nuances of negative empathy and how the barrier of decency would make it extremely difficult, almost impossible, to empathise with particularly evil flesh-and-blood individuals, and he underlines the importance that understanding motives has when empathising with negative characters:

> [u]nlike life, works of fiction can provide the reader with *a lot* of information about characters, the motives of their actions, the different situations they live in, and which require them to act. In fictional worlds, complex historical and social contexts can be easily reconstructed with a very high level of precision, offering a rich background to the actions of negative characters with whom we can establish an empathic relationship; an empathic relationship that would be nearly impossible in a real situation because, among other things, the information we would have on flesh-and- blood monsters would probably be much more *limited.* (Ibid. 250; emphasis in the original)

In his definition of negative empathy, Ercolino emphasises two interesting aspects of such a phenomenon: its ability to trigger a "deep *empathic anguish*" (Ercolino and Fusillo 70) and its consisting of a "cathartic identification with negative characters" (Ercolino 252). One important aspect when it comes to negative empathy is that in order to empathise with a negative character, the reader/audience is not required to endorse the moral perspective embodied by them. For instance, when watching *Breaking Bad*, the audience does not have to approve of Walter White's profession in order to empathise with him.

Starting from Ercolino's delineation of negative empathy as involving a cathartic identification, and from Morton's analysis of the limits of empathy in regard to evil, I believe that negative empathy requires a more in-depth understanding of a character and their motives. While Keen's claim that character identification may require only minimal elements of characterisation is easily verifiable with most novels, the characters analysed in this thesis require a broader understanding of their psyche in order to be able to elicit a negative empathic reaction in the reader/audience.

In *Empatia Negativa*, Stefano Ercolino and Massimo Fusillo propose that in order to evoke negative empathy, a negative character is required to showcase three main traits: A) psychological complexity; B) being tormented by their actions or by the consequences of them; C) possessing impressive rhetoric abilities (72-99). This hypothesis will be applied to

every character analysed in the following chapters, in order to attempt to determine whether it encounters limitations. These characters will be first analysed in relation to the work of art they appear in (be it a novel, film, or television show), and then they will be compared with their counterparts in their adaptations or original texts, with then the focus of the analysis shifting on a relevant moment or scene that is thought to be particularly interesting for the topic in question.

In chapter 1, "Evil Personified: Alex in *A Clockwork Orange,*" readers will find a study of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* and of Stanley Kubrick's homonymous adaptation. The first section of the chapter will focus primarily on the dystopian setting and the issues that arose around both novel and film following the release of Kubrick's motion picture. Then, it will first analyse the role violence plays in the novel, and then in the film, followed by a brief analysis of "Nadsat," the language spoken by the protagonist. In the last part, the focus will be on the character of Alex with, like the previous sections, first an analysis of him in Burgess' novel, then in Kubrick's film, followed by a comparison between the two, with special attention given to the question of whether he can provoke an empathic reaction in the audience.

Chapter 2, "Humanity Peaking Back: Commander Lawrence in *The Handmaid's Tale*," will first be concerned with Margaret Atwood's novel and Hulu's TV adaptation, with a brief section that will touch on the development of the story going beyond the Canadian writer's novel. The second part will focus on the character of the Commander in the novel and its television counterpart, namely Commander Fred Waterford, followed by an analysis of the scene of Waterford's death in connection to the concept of empathising with evil actions. The last part will focus on the character of Commander Joseph Lawrence, who does not appear in the original novel. His role in the show and the likelihood of him and his actions triggering empathic reactions will be analysed.

Chapter 3, "'I have seen things': Roy in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*," begins with an analysis of Philip K. Dick's dystopian future and of Ridley Scott's version of Los Angeles in 2019, to then move on to briefly discuss the issues that surrounded the making of the celebrated movie. This section is followed by an analysis of the concepts of humanity, empathy and androids, and how these notions play crucial roles in both novel and film. Lastly, always focusing on the question of triggering empathic reactions in the audience, the chapter analyses the character of Roy Baty (or Batty, depending

on whether one is referring to Dick's or Scott's version), with special attention given to the final monologue brilliantly acted by Rutger Hauer.

Chapter 1.
Evil Personified: Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*

1.1 Horrorshow: Burgess's world of violence and Kubrick's adaptation

1.1.1 Stinking World: Alex's Utopia in Burgess's Novel

"Men on the moon and men spinning around the earth like it might be midges round a lamp, and there's not no attention paid to earthly law nor order no more," (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 13) an old man says while being beaten up by Alex and his "droogs"[3] in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). The quote perfectly describes the feeling of mayhem present in the first part of the novel which depicts the nightly activities of a group of young hooligans who enjoy passing their time practicing what they call the "ultra-violence." *A Clockwork Orange* is an example of dystopian novel, "a literary subgenre which first appeared in the late 19th century […] but gained prominence in the tumultuous first half of the 20th century" (Đedović 103). The events take place "in a time and in a world that proceeds not far from ours and of which they furnish an image […] that is skilfully deformed and monstrous" (Lourcelles 261). Burgess' interest for such genre is a well-documented fact, since he wrote a non-fiction book titled *The Novel Now* (1967) where "he devoted a chapter to fictional utiopias and dystopias" (Biswell xvii), analysing works such as Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Huxley's *Brave New World* (1958).

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess is concerned with the topic of violence (both that of street gangs and the systemic one of the State) and freedom of choice. The novel is narrated by anti-hero Alex – a fifteen-year-old with a passion for violence, the old "in-out-in-out," and classical music. The young protagonist speaks an invented idiom called Nadsat (from the Russian suffix -надцать [nadtsat'], the linguistic equivalent to the English -teen), a distinctively teenage language described as "[o]dd bits of old rhyming slang […], a bit of gipsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 86), the language young people speak in this not-so-distant future. From the very beginning of the novel, it is clear that Burgess' anti-hero appears to be different from the rest of the world. Through the character of Alex, Burgess presents the opposition between the dull masses and an individual that, while evil, is alive. As Bergonzi points out, "in the language of Baudelaire or Eliot this is the opposition between the masses of the spiritually dead and null, and those who, however evil they may be, are at least alive"

[3] Nadsat term for "friends". A short glossary of Nadsat words used in this thesis can be found in Appendix 1.

(98), and Alex is the “embodiment of a literary idea […] of the romantic antinomian cultivation of evil” (Ibid.).

Burgess’ novel is comprised of three parts: the first one focuses on Alex’s night life and his “ultra-violent” habits; the second one is centred around the young protagonist’s prison life and his “cure” through the use of a type of aversion therapy called the “Ludovico’s technique”; and the last part deals with Alex’s return to society and his newfound role as a pawn of both the government and the opposition.

Alex’s journey begins at the Korova Milkbar, a place popular among nadsats (teenagers), where milk laced with different kinds of drugs is sold. There, he and his droogs are getting ready for the night’s activities. Throughout the entire arch of the narrative, Alex does not try to justify himself, declaring since the very beginning:

> Our pockets were full of deng, so there was no real need from the point of view of crasting any more pretty polly to tolchock some old veck in an alley and viddy him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultra-violent on some shivering starry grey-haired ptitsa in a shop and go smecking off with the till’s guts. But, as they say, money isn’t everything. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 3)

They commit horrendous crimes of theft, rape, and murder without worrying about the consequences. In what is possibly the most brutal evil committed by Alex and his cronies, they decide to pay a “surprise visit” to someone, a “real kick and good for smecks and lashings of the ultra-violent” (Ibid. 17). They leave the city to go to a nearby village and stumble upon a place called “HOME” were a writer and his wife live. There, they proceed to destroy everything they can find before raping the woman while her husband is forced to watch.

The turning point in the novel happens the following night when, after a falling out between Alex and his friends on his role as leader of the group, they all go rob the house of a cat lady. Determined to show his droogs that he is still in power, Alex sneaks in and, instead of opening the door for them, decides to loot the place on his own. Things, however, don’t go as he planned. After an altercation with the woman, he makes his way to the door when he hears the sirens of a patrol car. Just outside the house he is betrayed by his friends who

hit him and leave him behind to get caught by the police. While he is in custody, he learns that the old woman has died, and he has been charged with murder.

The second part of the novel opens with Alex now being known as 6655321, a prisoner of the Staja (State jail) sentenced to fourteen years. In an overcrowded prison, he is accused of committing a second murder but gets away with it by being chosen by the Minister of Interior to be the subject of a new therapy that promises to cure criminals from their criminal behaviour. Alex is then released from prison and transferred to a medical ward where, under the supervision of Dr Brodsky, he is subjected to the "Ludovico's technique." He is forced to watch violent films while being conditioned to feel sick, therefore being

> impelled towards the good by, paradoxically, being impelled towards evil. The intention to act violently is accompanied by strong feelings of physical distress. To counter these the subject has to switch to a diametrically opposed attitude. (Ibid. 94)

Distressed by anything associated with violence, sex or classical music, Alex is deemed "cured" and released back into society. Turned away by his parents and then beaten up by Dim (one of his old friends) and Billyboy (his former street rival) who are now cops, he finds himself homeless. In search of a place to stay for the night, he stumbles upon the very same house where, years prior, he had raped a woman and forced her husband to watch. He finds out that the husband's name is F. Alexander, a writer who is also part of a group of people who are against the current government and want to avoid its re-election. They see Alex's story as their chance to prove the evil doings of the state in its path towards totalitarianism and plan on using him in any way they can while pretending to be the good guys and offering the young man a place to stay. However, Alex soon realises he is being used and is seen as a tool rather than a human being, and, in an attempt to commit suicide, he decides to jump off a window. His effort is not successful, and he wakes up in a hospital bed. Following the backlash for the treatment Alex was subjected to, the government reverses the effects of the Ludovico's technique and reaches an agreement with the young man to avoid further negative press. Upon being released from the hospital, the now eighteen-year-old narrator briefly goes back to his life of crime before not feeling in the mood anymore. Instead, he starts day-dreaming about having a family and a child and becoming a productive member of society.

1.1.2 Naughty, Naughty, Naughty: Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*

A Clockwork Orange has often been "dismissed as a minor dystopia" (Whissen 90). Its setting is a nightmarish version of Britain, where the society is a pre-dystopian one: the Government is on the verge of taking a totalitarian turn and needs to empty the prisons because soon they "may be needing all our prisons space for political offenders" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 69). However, its cinematic adaptation directed by Stanley Kubrick has undoubtably led Burgess' story to become part of cult culture. Released in 1971, Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* was heavily based on the events of the book. As John Baxter stated, "[Kubrick] threw [Burgess' screenplay] out. He decided he could do better himself. He said, 'I've got the book, all I've got to do is use the book'" (*Great Bolshy Yarblockos!* 4:00-4:03). The dystopian setting of the novel had interested and attracted the American director for a long time. Biswell writes that

> Kubrick said that he had been attracted to Burgess's novel because of the 'wonderful plot, strong characters and clear philosophy,' and Burgess repaid the compliment by describing the film as 'a radical reworking of my own novel'. (xxv)

Of all of Kubrick's films, *A Clockwork Orange* is the one where the central performance is absolutely key. Without a strong performance by Malcolm McDowell as Alex, the film wouldn't have worked since it follows the main character around for the entirety of the picture. According to the British actor, what was important to him was making Alex worthy of sympathy:

> It was really very concerning to me that I make it watchable for an audience. Watchable and find somewhere, which is rare in a Kubrick movie, someone that is sympathetic in any shape or form. You know, he doesn't do sympathetic characters that well. So, I was determined to make him, without cheating, to make him at least watchable. ("Malcolm McDowell talks about A Clockwork Orange..." 0:00-0:44)

His performance was praised from the very beginning, with a *New York Times* review stating that "McDowell is splendid as tomorrow's child" (Canby), and *Premiere Magazine* included it in the list of the "100 Greatest Performances of All Time," writing that "it's sickening that we could sympathise with a self-aggrandising, sadistic rapist, but that's because we're powerless under McDowell's spell as Alex" (Borgeson et al. 46). In one of the documentaries on the making of the film, J. David Slocum describes McDowell's performance as

"powerful," "engaging," that "draws in viewers" so that they end up "rooting for him" (*Great Bolshy Yarblockos!* 22:52-23:22). However, not everyone was happy with such a strong performance in this film. As Slocum points out, people who disliked the film disliked this aspect of it too (Ibid.).

Cultural historian Sir Christopher Frayling describes *A Clockwork Orange* as "possibly the most controversial movie ever made" (*Turning Like Clockwork* 3:26-3:30), adding that when it first came out, it created moral panic in the UK because of the way violence and sex were brought together. Upon its release it was met with much enthusiasm by Kubrick's fans, but also with a fair share of scepticism and disdain. A film designed to disturb the audience, it depicts violence with brutality, and it rapidly attracted controversy. As The International Anthony Burgess Foundation website reports, "tabloid journalists claimed that the film had been responsible for a number of 'copycat' crimes including home invasions, rapes, street beatings and murder" (par. 7). Speaking about the film, actor Malcolm McDowell admitted of being amazed by how crazy everyone went about the violence, "every day in the paper there was something. And […] *A Clockwork Orange* was blamed for everything" ("Malcolm McDowell talks about A Clockwork Orange..." 16:48-16:55). The British actor also noted that

> when it first came out, *A Clockwork Orange* was completely overwhelming to audiences. Nobody had seen anything like this before. Nobody had witnessed this kind of nightmarish future that we all had to look forward to. (*Turning Like Clockwork* 2:25-2:42)

Debunking the newspapers' accusations against the film, psychologist Neal King explains that

> there has been decades of different kinds of social science directed towards this question, and panel studies that follow youth from the early childhood into middle age, lab experiments, etc. etc. The punchline appears to me to be this: psychologists have demonstrated, I think to anyone's satisfaction, that watching a lot of media violence in a concentrated form in a laboratory setting will get you excited. And I personally can tell you that watching a great revenge movie will send me out of the theatre feeling like: 'Hey, try something with me. I'm tough,' for like ten minutes I'm really tough. Then what happens is that it fades away because this is an emotional high and doesn't last very long. Not many crimes get committed during those emotional highs because, for the most part, people are sitting on their butts

> on couches at home or in theatre seats. These are not high crime locations. As far as we can tell, there's been no effect on crime rates that is at all measurable. (Ibid. 8:52-10:18)

Anthony Burgess himself came out as a supporter of Kubrick's adaptation. In a piece titled "Clockwork Marmalade," published in the *Listener* in 1972, he defends the film from accusations, writing:

> It was possible for me to see the work as a radical remaking of my own novel, not as a mere interpretation, and this – the feeling that it was no impertinence to blazon it as *Stanley Kubrick's Clockwork Orange* – is the best tribute I can pay to the Kubrickian mastery. (245)

At first glance Kubrick's version seems to be fairly loyal to the book, keeping in most of the violence and using, even if in a reduced form, the Nadsat language of Burgess' original. However, Christopher Ricks notes that "the film of *A Clockwork Orange* does not want [Alex] to be seen in an ultra-violent light" (280). He continues his critique of the adaptation, stating that

> the real accusation against the film is certainly not that it is too violent, but that it is not violent enough; more specifically, that with a cunning selectivity it sets itself to minimise both Alex's violence and take delight in it. (Ibid. 281-282)

Despite Ricks' accusations of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* being too lenient on Alex and not being violent enough, some people were so offended by the film that they sent death threats to the American director and his family. These threats, together with the media controversy, prompted Kubrick to instruct "Warner Brothers to ban all screenings of the film in the United Kingdom" (The International Anthony Burgess Foundation par. 10).

It was not just the film and Kubrick that were accused of inciting violent behaviour. In an interview Anthony Burgess himself recalls: "there was a period when I was attacked daily over the telephone or in the press for fomenting violence" ("Anthony Burgess on A Clockwork Orange" 0:54-1:00). In the aforementioned article he wrote for the *Listener*, he defends his depiction of violence as "both an act of catharsis and an act of charity" ("Clockwork Marmalade" 249) explaining that his own wife had been the subject of a violent and vicious attack in London.

The violent society Anthony Burgess portrays in his dystopia seems to come from his fascination for the concept of evil and this interest of his is evident in the novel. He writes that

> [t]heologically, evil is not quantifiable. Yet, I posit the notion that one act of evil may be greater than another, and that perhaps the ultimate act of evil is dehumanisation, the killing of the soul – which is as much as to say the capacity to choose between good and evil acts. (Ibid. 248)

In "Extracts from an Unpublished Interview with Anthony Burgess," he states that he sees violence as "a way of saying, 'Look, I am here.'" (255), the easy way to leave trace of oneself in the world.

1.1.3 "I was cured alright": Issues with *A Clockwork Orange*

Before moving on to a more in-depth discussion and analysis of the concept of violence and its role in both Burgess' and Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, it is worth talking about the issue of the novel's ending and its publishing. In a memo circulated on 5 October 1961, Burgess' editor James Michie describes the book as "one of the oddest publishing problems imaginable" (Biswell xxi). He raises concerns about certain episodes of sexual violence that were at risk of being prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act of 1959. While the English author could potentially plead artistic justification, the risk of him being accused of indulging in sadistic fantasies was high. However, as Biswell notes, "it is unlikely that Burgess knew anything about these flutters of nervousness among his publishers" (Ibid.).

A second, and more relevant publishing difficulty was one (allegedly) created by Burgess himself:

> At the end of Part 3, Chapter 6, the typescript contains a note in Burgess's handwriting: 'Should we end here? An optional "epilogue" follows.' James Michie decided to include the epilogue (sometimes referred to as the twenty-first chapter) in the UK edition. When the novel was published in New York by W.W. Norton in 1963, the American editor, Eric Swenson, arrived at a different answer to Burgess's editorial question. (Ibid. xxii)

Because of this, the novel has been published in two different versions with two different endings. As Martin Amis writes in the "Foreword" of the Penguin's Restored Edition,

> [t]he American edition omits the final chapter (this is the version used by Kubrick), and closes with Alex recovering from what proves to be a cathartic suicide attempt. He is listening to Beethoven's Ninth:
>
> > When it came to the Scherzo I could viddy myself very clear running and running on very light and mysterious nogas, carving the whole litso of the creeching world with my cut-throat britva. And there was the slow movement and the lovely last singing movement still to come. I was cured all right. (xii)

The "official" version, however, affords Alex full redemption. He "simply – and bathetically – 'outgrows' the atavism of youth and starts itching to get married and settle down" (Ibid. xiii). According to what Stinson reports, Burgess himself came forward saying that he prefers his own ending with his own worldview and said that the truncated version was "'sensational,' but not a 'fair picture of human life'" (129). In the epilogue, the reader is asked to accept that at the age of eighteen, for no apparent real reason, as if having experienced some kind of epiphany, Alex has turned soft and has started yearning for a family:

> I kept viddying like visions, like these cartoons in the gazettas. There was Your Humble Narrator Alex coming home from work to a good hot plate of dinner, and there was this ptitsa all welcoming and greeting like loving. […] I had this sudden very strong idea that if I walked into the room next to this room where the fire was burning away and my hot dinner laid on the table, there I should find what I really wanted, and now it all tied up, that picture scissored out of the gazetta and meeting old Pete like that. For in that other room in a cot was laying gurgling goo goo goo my son. Yes yes yes, brothers, my son. And now I felt this bolshy big hollow inside my plott, feeling very surprised too at myself. I knew what was happening, O my brothers. I was like growing up. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 140)

It is hard to believe that Alex, who up until that point has had "no interest in women except as objects of violence and rape" (Hyman 299) and has never mentioned any female body part "except the size of the breasts" (Ibid.), has a change of heart and starts dreaming of becoming a family man. As Martin Amis pointed out, "it feels like a startling loss of nerve on Burgess's part, or a recrudescence […] of self-punitive religious guilt" (xiii).

In a recent interview actor Malcolm McDowell told a different version of how Burgess felt about the twenty first chapter. Going against every interpretation that has been reported in this chapter, the English actor revealed what Burgess told him:

> It was asked for by I think the English publisher, not the American. […] Either the English or the American publisher said, 'Oh my God, we can't finish here— you know, where he says, 'I was cured all right.' — We better make him a normal person.' […] So, Burgess just whipped it off. He didn't like it. It's not part of the book. […] Burgess said 'I did it for economic reasons. They wouldn't have published it, so of course I did it'. ("Malcolm McDowell looks back" 3:40-4:43)

Anthony Burgess defined *A Clockwork Orange* as "a novel about brainwashing" ("Clockwork Marmalade" 146) and he heavily criticised the Government of that clockwork society for conditioning its citizens. Regardless of what his stance on the epilogue was, it can't be denied that that final chapter feels like a brainwashed version of the Alex that up until that point has narrated the novel. What the author inadvertently ends up doing is brainwashing his own protagonist.

1.2 The Old Ultra-Violence: Violence in *A Clockwork Orange*

1.2.1 "Taking charge of the tolchocking": Alex and His Violence

As discussed above, violence lays at the core of *A Clockwork Orange*. The very premise of its dystopian society is that there apparently is little law and order in the future-England portrayed and, as Alex tells his readers, "[t]he night belonged to me and my droogs and all the rest of the nadsats, and the starry bourgeois lurked indoors drinking in the gloopy worldcasts" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 33). The night is a dangerous time where hooligans and their gangs freely roam around committing crimes of any kind. In his review of the novel, Kingsley Amis assesses that

> Mr Burgess has written a fine farrago of outrageousness, one which incidentally suggests a view of juvenile violence I can't remember having met before: that its greatest appeal is that it's a big laugh, in which what we ordinarily think of as sadism plays little part. (276)

It is in that appeal of violence as a big laugh that Burgess' point can be found, because this brutality is a choice youngsters make. There is never a doubt in the novel that Alex is doing

everything he does for anything other than pure enjoyment and entertainment. He "has chosen evil as a deliberate act of spiritual freedom" (Bergonzi 97) and not as a kind of rebellion against something.

In numerous instances Burgess has pointed out that society accepts violence when perpetrated by the system, "[w]hen the perpetrator of violence wears a uniform — that of the state police or of a revolutionary paramilitary force — the violence is wholly excused and takes on the lineaments of sanctity" ("A Last Word on Violence" 305). The novelist believes that "violence can only be countered by violence" (Ibid. 306), as one of the policemen says in the novel: "violence makes violence" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 53). The point that Burgess seems to be making in *A Clockwork Orange* is that Alex's actions are the result of a deliberate choice, that if he is free to choose, he chooses evil:

> Burgess insists that Alex's actions, atrocious assaults and all, proceed from deliberate choices of his own free will. The question, 'What's it going to be then, eh?,' which opens all three parts of the novel, and the last chapter as well, reinforces the idea that people are free to choose their own actions. (Stinson 121)

As previously discussed, when it comes to Kubrick's adaptation of the novel, violence takes centre stage in the debate around the film. Two views became predominant in the public controversy that concerned *A Clockwork Orange*. One is that Stanley Kubrick is condemning the violence present in society, while the other states the opposite, that he is glorifying it. *A Clockwork Orange* is a film about violence but, as Steven M. Cahn points out, it "is not a film of social commentary but instead one of philosophical speculation" (155). McDowell also came out stating that, very much like Burgess's novel, "the movie is really about the freedom of man to choose his path in life. Whether it be good or bad. And without any interference from the government" (*Turning Like Clockwork* 15:10-15:22). Additionally, Stanley Kubrick describes the story as

> a social satire dealing with the question of whether behavioural psychology and psychological conditioning are dangerous new weapons for a totalitarian government to use to impose vast controls on its citizens and turn them into little more than robots. ("Kubrick Country" 43)

The violence in *A Clockwork Orange* is a stylised one. Peter Greengrass describes it as "many coloured within the one film. It's balletic, but brutal at the same time" adding that

"part of the brilliance of *Clockwork Orange* is that it's the one film where the violence is on the one hand preposterous, and comic, and absurd, but in another way deeply disturbing" (*Turning Like Clockwork* 2:05-2:20). Interestingly, Kubrick's adaptation is made watchable by the stylisation of this violence and the removal of certain aspects of the novel (like the prominence of drugs) that may have been too much for an audience of that time.

It is impossible not to point out that the film underwent a transformation, a whitewashing. Not only because of artistic choices on Kubrick's part, or due to the sensibility of the time, but also for commercial reasons. As Krämer writes, the film was "initially rated 'X', which meant that no-one under 17 should be admitted. Young fans of Kubrick's previous work, who had been looking forward to his latest film, were disappointed" (419).

In a bid for the audience's sympathy, Alex is made younger, his jailors are made crasser and more brutal. The murders are reshaped so that they help Alex out. The writers' wife dies of pneumonia during the flu epidemic, and there is no prison killing in the film. The whitewashing continues with the two girls he picks up and takes back to his room. As Ricks notes,

> [i]n the book, what matters to Alex – and to our sense of Alex – is that they couldn't have been more than ten years old, that he got them viciously drunk, that he gave himself a 'hypo jab' so that he could better exercise 'the strange and weird desires of Alexander de Large,' and that they ended up bruised and screaming. The film, which wants to practise a saintlike charity of redemption towards Alex but also to make things assuredly easy for itself, can't have any of that. So the ten-year-olds become jolly dollies; no drink, no drugs, no bruises, just the three of them having a ball. (283-284)

Kubrick does not let Alex shed any blood and holds us off Alex's bloodlust. The beating of the old drunk is done by silhouette figures armed with canes and shown from a distance, the showdown between his gang and Billyboy's is choreographed, Alex teaching a lesson to his droogs is shown in slow motion. The violence in the film does not incriminate the young hooligan like the book did. His "horror shows" are allowed to flicker past. As McCracken states, "[v]iolence done by him to others we see only through a tasteful veil of technique: it is shadowed, choreographed, speeded up, slowed down. But violence done by others to Alex is handled quite clinically, even emphasized" (436). All these aesthetic representations make it easier to sympathise with him and see him as a victim of the state.

In the novel it is very hard to find anyone crueller than Alex, in the film very much less so. This artful representation of the brutality of the character while making it more watchable, doesn't make it less daunting. What is disturbing about *A Clockwork Orange*'s violence is that it touches men's deepest fears. As William Friedkin points out,

> all of the television shows have become way more graphically violent than *Clockwork Orange* was. Yet why are they not as disturbing is because *Clockwork Orange* goes to the deepest fears of human beings. That they are not safe in their own home, no matter what, that the law can't protect them. (*Great Bolshy Yarblockos!* 17:52-18:10)

The only instance in which Alex murders someone in the film is not shown on camera. We see the parodied fight with the woman yielding a Beethoven bust while Alex is fighting using a giant phallic-shaped sculpture, but when the young man is giving the fatal stroke, the camera cuts to one of the paintings in the woman's house.

1.2.2 "When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man": Free Will and Free Choice

Burgess believed in the primacy of free will and was interested in presenting a counter argument that went against the mechanistic determinism of psychologist B.F. Skinner. With the fight between good and evil being ever-present and never-ending, Burgess believed it is better to live in a society where people choose evil rather than in one where they are forced to do good. He was suspicious of new technologies that had the power to change others, try to correct them ("Extract from an Unpublished Interview" 258). Therefore, he believed that in being submitted to the Reclamation Treatment, Alex lost his freedom to choose.

The novelist's doubts and criticism on that kind of therapy are voiced in *A Clockwork Orange* by two different characters, namely the prison charlie (chaplain) and F. Alexander (the writer whose wife Alex raped). When talking to Alex about this new treatment, the chaplain asserts his doubts, telling the young man that "[t]he question is whether such a technique can really make a man good. Goodness comes from within, 6655321. Goodness is something chosen. When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 63). Later on in the novel, during the public demonstration organised by the Minister showcasing the miraculous "cure," the chaplain once again raises some concerns on the issue of freedom of choice:

> 'Choice,' rumbled a rich deep goloss. I viddied it belonged to the prison charlie. 'He has no real choice, has he? Self-interest, fear of physical pain, drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice'. (Ibid. 94)

F. Alexander also expresses his opposition against the "horrible new technique" (Ibid. 114) – and the Government in general – in the novel. Much like the chaplain, he believes that, because of the treatment, Alex has been stripped of the freedom to choose:

> 'You've sinned, I suppose, but your punishment has been out of all proportion. They have turned you into something other than a human being. You have no power of choice any longer. You are committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable only of good. And I see that clearly – that business about the marginal conditionings. Music and the sexual act, literature and art, all must be a source now not of pleasure but of pain'. (Ibid. 115)

While most criticism on the topic seems to agree with Burgess' interpretation of the novel, some have proposed a different analysis on the question of free will and freedom to choose. In an article titled "Novel into Film; Novelist into Critic: A Clockwork Orange…Again," Samuel McCracken writes that

> [t]he belief that Alex has indeed been brainwashed and deprived of free will is possible only with the help of a careless reading of the crucial passage, during which he is subjected to what the State is pleased to call Reclamation Treatment. (428)

He maintains that the brainwashing Burgess talks about in *A Clockwork Orange* isn't the kind of brainwashing that is usually meant when using that term. Usually, victims are "provided with a new set of opinions and values by a relentless program of indoctrination masquerading as political education" (Ibid. 429). During the Treatment, Alex is not given a new set of values and at no time after being "cured" does his reaction change from the pre-treatment one. As McCracken points out,

> [w]hat he *is* provided with, in supplement to his old drives, is a sort of internal injunction, the nausea which is always quicker than the knife. This resident injunctive power, far from depriving him of choice, merely offers him one: between

> eschewing violence and getting sick. And given the choice, he opts for the former. (Ibid. 430; emphasis in the original)

The critic also underlines that Alex is in no way an unwilling participant of the Reclamation Treatment, as Burgess seems to sometimes imply. On the contrary, he shows interest in the technique even before being selected by the Minister and sees it as an easy way out of prison that would allow him to avoid spending fourteen years in there:

> [t]his time I would be very careful not to get loveted. They were giving another like chance, me having done murder and all, and it would not be like fair to get loveted again, after going to all this trouble to show me films that were going to make me a real good malchick. I had a real horrorshow smeck at everybody's like innocence. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 74)

While disagreeing with Burgess on the way in which he presents the concept of free choice, McCracken agrees on considering "social control by such a process-server nearly as repugnant as does Burgess" (434). However, he states that he does it for different reasons. He finds the Treatment repellent because "it symbolises the bankruptcy of a society which having bred an Alex cannot, try as it may, come up with any better solution to his problem than chaining him thus" (Ibid.).

1.2.3 Nadsat: Alex's Language

Before moving on to attempt to answer the question this thesis is posing, it is important to discuss the language of both novel and film. Nadsat has a very important role when it comes to accepting the violence in the story. John J. Stinson points out that "the most important function of the language is the softening of the otherwise unbearably repulsive violence" (125). This is truer in Burgess' novel than in the film since due to the visual nature of cinema, Kubrick was forced to reduce the presence of Nadsat in it. Nevertheless, he masterfully supports the voice over with visual image, making it easier for the audience unfamiliar with that idiom to understand what is being said. In the very first scene where we see Alex, Dim, Pete, and Georgie in the Korova Milkbar. Through the voice over, the young protagonist introduces himself: "There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Kubrick] 0:01:38-0:01:44). Stuart McDougal in *Great Bolshy Yarblockos! Making A Clockwork Orange* calls attention to this:

> [Kubrick] always supports the language with visual image. So, in the first shot of the film, which is this extraordinary close up on Alex, the camera pulls away and then you hear the voice over of Alex and he explains who he is. If you don't know what a droog is, you see these three guys sitting with him so you can figure it out. (5:30-5:56)

In the novel, a good example of the language working as a barrier between reader and action that softens the brutality of violence can be noticed in the scene of the first beatings, when Alex and his cronies decide to lash out on an old man who is coming out of the public library:

> He looked a malenky bit poogly when he viddied the four of us like that, coming up so quiet and polite and smiling, but he said: 'Yes? What is it?' in a very loud teacher-type goloss, as if he was trying to show us he wasn't poogly. […]
> 'You naughty old veck, you,' I said, and then we began to filly about with him. Pete held his rookers and Georgie sort of hooked his rot wide open for him and Dim yanked out his false zoobies, upper and lower. He threw these down on the pavement and then I treated them to the old boot-crush, though they were hard bastards like, being made of some new horrorshow plastic stuff. The old veck began to make sort of chumbling shooms – 'wuf waf wof' – so Georgie let go of holding his goobers apart and just let him have one in the toothless rot with his ringy first, and that made the old veck start moaning a lot then, then out comes the blood, my brothers, real beautiful. So all we did then was to pull his outer platties off, stripping him down to his vest and long underpants (very starry; Dim smecked his head off near), and then Pete kicks him lovely in his rot, and we let him go. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 6-8)

As Stinson points out, "[w]hat forestalls reader revulsion at this basically realistic scene of violence is distancing through the use of invented language" (125). He expands on this adding that the language also has the function of awakening the reader's awareness of the teenager's impulses:

> [t]he distinct teenage language serves also to reawaken the reader's awareness of the anarchic impulse of the teenager and the instinct to be one with the herd, to regard other groups just as 'other,' utterly alien, in no way like the self. (Ibid.)

The distancing that this language barrier creates is essential when it comes to empathising with a work of fiction. Without it, the audience could respond negatively to the violence portrayed, leading to the possibility of feeling personal distress. Working like a cushion, Nadsat makes it so that the audience is not too repulsed by violence, therefore avoiding feeling distressed, that could potentially induce them to turn off the film or put down the book.

1.3 Choosing Evil: Your Little Droog Alex

So far, this chapter has focused on the violence of *A Clockwork Orange*. It is now time to move on and examine the question of whether it is possible to feel negative empathy for a character like Alex. Before turning to that, however, it is necessary to clarify that the last chapter of the novel (usually referred to as "epilogue" or twenty first chapter) will not be taken into consideration in this analysis. This is because, as already mentioned, McDowell recalled in an interview that Anthony Burgess did not like it, to him "[i]t's not part of the book" ("Malcolm McDowell looks back" 4:17-4:19) and Kubrick spoke negatively of the epilogue in an interview with Michel Ciment:

> I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the publisher had somehow prevailed upon Burgess to tack on the extra chapter against his better judgment, so the book would end on a more positive note. I certainly never gave any serious consideration to using it. (163)

As it is not part of Kubrick's adaptation, and since, as previously explained, the Alex in it feels alien and is not consistent with the character portrayed in the other twenty chapters, the epilogue is not taken into consideration in the more in-depth analysis that follows.

1.3.1 "I'll make me own way": Alex the Outsider

Alex is an outsider in the clockwork society, "[h]e is, to the state, a mere object, something 'out there' like the moon, though not so passive" ("Clockwork Marmalade" 248) and he himself identifies with a place of exclusion. As Slavoj Žižek points out, this is represented by his love for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: "the great genius of Beethoven is that he literally states this exclusion. All of a sudden, the tone changes into a kind of carnivalesque rhythm. It's no longer sublime beauty." (*The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* 0:23:45-0:24:05).

Both novel and film are narrated by the young man, and this makes it so that we see the world through his eyes. The way he narrates the book is aimed at creating some kind of camaraderie between him and his readers: he refers to them as "brothers" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 26), "my brothers" (Ibid. 3), and "only friends" (Ibid. 57) while describing himself as "Your Humble Narrator" (Ibid.), "Your Faithful Narrator" (Ibid. 33), and "Your Friend" (Ibid. 57). Despite all the atrocious crimes he commits, Alex comes out as a fairly likeable character. In an interview on the film, Kubrick said of him that,

> like Richard [III], [Alex] is a character whom you should dislike and fear, and yet you find yourself drawn very quickly into his world and find yourself seeing things through his eyes. It's not easy to say how this is achieved, but it certainly has something to do with his candour and wit and intelligence, and the fact that all the other characters are lesser people, and in some way worse people. ("Kubrick Country" 42)

That he is a very interesting and fascinating character goes without saying. While both novel and film seem to be asking us to sympathise with the teen, especially when he falls in the hands of the state, trying to determine whether he is able to trigger empathy in the audience seems a more complex task.

First of all, it is important to make a distinction between sympathy and empathy. Suzanne Keen writes:

> In empathy, sometimes described as an emotion in its own right, we feel what we believe to be the emotions of others. Empathy is thus agreed to be both affective and cognitive by most psychologists. Empathy is distinguished in both psychology and philosophy […] from *sympathy*, in which feelings *for* another occur. ("A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 208)

She goes on explaining that a sentence like "I feel your pain" is empathy since you feel what the other feels, while "I feel pity for your pain" is sympathy since you feel an emotion not identical but supportive of their feelings (Ibid. 209). Berys Gaut explains that "[s]ympathy requires neither that we imagine feeling (affectively identify with) nor that we actually feel (empathize with) what our target is (fictionally) feeling" (140) and declares that since sympathy doesn't require imagining or feeling what the other is feeling, then "one can affectively identify and empathize with someone without sympathizing with him" (Ibid.).

Empathy and sympathy are two different notions that do not necessarily exclude each other but aren't indispensable for the other to exist either. Since emotional responses aren't monoliths, one can affectively identify with a character and sympathise with them without feeling empathy for that same character.

Since Burgess' and Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* deal with violence, another concept needs to be introduced when talking about empathy and emotional responses: personal distress. According to Keen,

> *Personal distress*, an aversive emotional response also characterized by apprehension of another's emotion, differs from empathy in that it focuses on the self and leads not to sympathy but to avoidance. The distinction between empathy and personal distress matters because empathy is associated with the moral emotion *sympathy.* ("A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 208; emphasis in the original)

This concept is dismissed in Keen's analysis of narrative empathy since "novel reading can be so easily stopped or interrupted by an unpleasant emotional reaction to a book" (Ibid.). However, it is relevant to the analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* because there has been at least one recorded instance of someone having a violently adverse reaction to the film. As McDowell recalls,

> I went to New York for the opening there, and that's what I remember particularly because I sort of crept into the back of the theatre […] and I'm sitting at the back and there was total and utter silence. Not one person laughed. When the film ended nobody moved from their seats. They sat there aghast, and I just thought 'Oh my God, they hate it. They hate it.' At one point a woman rushed out and I heard threw up in the lobby. ("Malcolm McDowell talks about A Clockwork Orange" 13:33-14:28)

As already mentioned in this chapter, *A Clockwork Orange* seems to have the tendency to split audiences. Because of its main theme and setting, *A Clockwork Orange* gave way to many contrasting opinions, that is why it has been defined as "possibly the most controversial movie ever made" (*Turning Like Clockwork* 3:26-3:30). If, on one hand, McDowell talks about witnessing someone leaving their seat because in obvious distress, on the other, Kubrick received letters from audience members who had seen the film, explicitly stating that the film, for better or for worse, "had made [cinemagoers] 'feel like' its protagonist" (Krämer 417). In his essay analysing audience response to *A Clockwork*

Orange, Peter Krämer reports that Kubrick received a letter from an audience member who demanded to be refunded because he had felt like Alex in the film. The man wrote:

> I have felt like the main character in the movie when I left the theatre. Stanley, do you think it's cool to go around and make movies that make people sick? I mean, people are sick enough without you adding to general misery. (Ibid. 416)

As explained in the introduction, negative empathy consists of a cathartic empathisation with characters who are both negative and seductive in a disturbing way (Ercolino and Fusillo 70). Many of the letters Krämer discusses seem to indicate that the film had a cathartic effect on many, noting that "strong sensual and emotional responses (not just to sexual violent scenes) play a role in a wider range of letters" (422). The audience sees the world of *A Clockwork Orange* from the eyes of a young and violent man who enjoys committing crimes. Such a thing plays into our "appetites for vicious imagery or [plays] with taboos" (*Empathy and the Novel* 131). However, the way in which we respond to seemingly the same character portrayed on screen and on a page could be very different.

Violence, as previously mentioned, is depicted in a cruder way in the novel than in the film. However, the film might trigger stronger reactions in the audience. This is because of the difference in medium: as Neil Postman points out in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, "on television discourse is conducted largely through visual imagery, which is to say that television gives us a conversation in images, not words" (7). While film is a visual form of art that requires little effort on the audience's part, a novel needs its reader to imagine the situation. This can be seen while comparing passages from Burgess' novel and Kubrick's adaptation. Taking into consideration the scene where Alex beats Dim because – in the protagonist's mind – he disrespects Beethoven, it takes Burgess more than three pages to describe the incident while Kubrick dedicates a little over three minutes to it. The text of the dialogue is nearly identical in both film and novel (and goes to attest how loyal Kubrick tried to be to Burgess' book and the language in it):

> And it was like for a moment, O my brothers, some great bird had flown into the milkbar, and I felt all the little malenky hairs on my plott standing endwise and the shivers crawling up like slow malenky lizards and then down again. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 22)

> And it was like, for a moment, O my brothers, some great bird had flown into the milkbar, and I felt all the little malenky little hairs on my plott standing endwise. And the shivers crawling up like slow, malenky lizards and then down again. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Kubrick] 0:14:38-0:14:55)

While Alex the narrator provides his readers with a description of what he is feeling, because of the medium used by Kubrick in the adaptation, the American director possesses the "luxury" of accompanying the words with a close-up of Alex's face, therefore reinforcing what is being said in the voice over.

1.3.2 "O my brothers": Identifying with Alex

In an essay titled "Alex e il nostro inconscio", Giovanni Bottiroli talks about identifying with the character of Alex in Kurbick's film and recognises the scene with the singing lady as the starting point from which we gradually identify with the protagonist. However, he points out that we do not recognise ourselves in Alex as a person, or in Alex's action, but in his subconscious (134-135). It is in his drive towards violence, what makes him *alive* in a world of mediocre and static people, that we see some part of ourselves. We are drawn by his being lawless (as the name A-lex seems to imply), placing Alex within "the myth of the gangster as hero" (Whissen 91). However, he is not a hero and there is nothing heroic in what he does, he is an outcast. As Richard Mathews points out, "Alex is a solitary hero, separate from and unlike the crowd he runs with, an individual in the midst of mass society" (55).

As Alex stands out more and more isolated from the rest of the characters, our sympathy for him should increase. While his love for classical music (Beethoven in particular) distances him from all the other droogs, his arrest only underlines the corruption of the state. The scene where he is humiliated by adults simply because they have power over him is no less brutal than his actions. In the novel, at the end of part one it is hard not to sympathise with the protagonist when he realises, he is a murderer:

> 'Well, what?' I said, smecking. 'Are you not satisfied with beating me near to death and having me spat upon and making me confess to crimes for hours on end and then shoving me among bezoomnies and vonny perverts in that grahzny cell? Have you some new torture for me, you bratchny?'
>
> 'It'll be your own torture,' he said, serious. 'I hope to God it'll torture you to madness.'

> And then, before he told me, I knew what it was. The old ptitsa who had all the kots and koshkas had passed on to a better world in one of the city hospitals. […] That was everything, I'd done the lot, now. And me still only fifteen. (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 56)

The film emphasises even more the violence against the young man. When Mr Deltoid visits him while he's in custody and informs the young man that he is now a murderer, Kubrick alternates a close-up shot of Alex's face to a close-up of Mr Deltoid. The adult's gleeful expression greatly contrasts with Alex's beaten-up face and scared look.

> MR DELTOID. [snickering] You are now a murderer, little Alex. A murderer.
> ALEX. Not true, sir. It was only a slight tolchock. She were breathing, I swear it.
> [all laughing]
> MR DELTOID. I've just come from the hospital. Your victim has died.
> ALEX. You try to frighten me. Admit so, sir. This is some new form of torture. Say it, brother sir.
> MR DELTOID. It'll be your own torture. I hope to God it'll torture you to madness.
> (*A Clockwork Orange* [Kubrick] 0:46:13-0:46:46)

Kubrick adds a scene that is not present in Burgess's novel (Ibid. 0:48:20-0:52:54). We see Alex being brought by a guard into prison. There he is forced to give up everything he has and divest to undergo a thorough search that is carried on by a shouting police chief. As already mentioned, Kubrick seems to be asking for our sympathy more insistently than Burgess. Ricks points out that "Alex is the only person in the film who isn't a caricature, the only person the film is interested in; whereas in the first-person narrative of the book, Alex was the only person Alex was interested in" (280).

As for the aversion therapy, while Alex seems positive about the technique, the audience is warned through the figure of the prison charlie who tries to dissuade the young man from enrolling in such programme. The scenes in which he is tied up and forced to watch horrible films are of course designed to evoke the audience's sympathy for Alex even more. We are told (or shown in the film's case) what he is being forced to go through and any decent person would at the very least feel pity for someone who is undergoing such kind of torture, no matter what they have done in life. In the novel, in the fifth chapter of the second part, Alex opens his narration stating that he does "not wish to describe, brothers, what other horrible veshches [he] was like forced to viddy" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess]

79) and then continues by describing the doctors' brutality and defining them as worse than criminals:

> The like minds of this Dr Brodsky and Dr Branom and the others in white coats, and remember there was this devotchka twiddling with the knobs and watching the meters, they must have been more cally and filthy than any prestoopnick in the Staja itself. Because I did not think it was possible for any veck to even think of making films of what I was forced to viddy, all tied to this chair and my glazzies made to be wide open. (Ibid.)

The part of Burgess's novel dedicated to the aversion therapy culminates with Alex begging the doctors to stop and saying that he has been cured:

> 'You needn't take it any further, sir.' I'd changed my tune a malenky bit in my cunning way. 'You've proved to me that all this dratsing and ultra-violence and killing is wrong wrong and terribly wrong. I've learned my lesson, sirs. I see now what I've never seen before. I'm cured, praise God.' And I raised my glazzies in a like holy way to the ceiling. (Ibid. 87)

While trying to convince the doctors to stop, he tells his readers –his brothers– that he is not entirely sincere. "In my cunning way" (Ibid.) and "in a like holy way" (Ibid.) underline the intention to deceive the scientists in the room. In Kubrick's version of this scene, masterfully acted by Malcolm McDowell who was notoriously in pain due to a scratched cornea ("Malcolm McDowell talks about A Clockwork Orange..." 6:05-6:12), there is no malice in Alex's actions. He is feeling sick, visibly retching, and simply begging to be let go.

Before being let free in society, Alex is subjected to one last test which also happens to be a demonstration in a small auditorium. There, the young man is forced to showcase his newly acquired inability to commit violence in front of an audience. The ordeal is extremely humiliating and hard to watch (or read), especially when considering that the people who are showing Alex off are the ones supposed to be helping him. Yet again, it seems hard for the audience not to sympathise with such a scene where the protagonist is pinned down, begging to be let go or else he will be sick. While Alex is retching and trying not to be sick, an older man asks him: "You want to get up? Now, you listen to me. If you want to get up you've got to do something for me. Here. Here. You see that? You see that shoe? Well, I want you to lick it. Go on! Lick it!" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Kubrick] 1:22:43-1:23:07).

When the moment for Alex to be released comes, it is plausible to assume that, given the numerous episodes of violence and humiliation towards the young protagonist, the audience is on his side, sympathising with. This feeling *for* the anti-hero can be triggered in various more instances throughout the story. Alex is left alone to learn how to navigate society while getting sick at the sight or even at the thought of violence. He is not welcomed back by his parents, beaten up by Dim and Billyboy (two droogs who became policemen) and left on the side of a road, homeless. He seemingly finds refuge in the home of Mr. Alexander (the author whose wife Alex raped and beat to death), but he is soon used by a group of reactionaries who are against the government (one of the members being the writer himself) and tortured (with music) to the point where he tries to commit suicide. All this works towards cementing his status, in the audience's eyes, as a victim of a cruel and brutal world.

1.3.3 "What's it going to be then, eh?": Alex and Empathy

The question of whether it is possible to feel empathy for a character like Alex is a tricky one. It is essential to keep in mind that people feel emotions differently. As Eileen John points out in regard to narrative empathy, it "is specific to individual reading experiences" (308). This also applies to cinema, as the numerous differing opinions on *A Clockwork Orange* demonstrate (Krämer).

As already mentioned, in "Empathy and the Devil," Adam Morton highlights the importance of distance in an empathic experience. He explains that when we empathise with a "devil," an evil person in a real-like situation, we must overcome several "barriers" which are "made of the same materials as the barriers against choosing dangerous, disgusting, or immoral actions" (321), they "affect our imagination of choice as well as our actual choices" (Ibid.). This "barrier of decency" that prevents us from empathising with evil actions in real life, placing us at a distance from them, does not work in the same way when it comes to the aesthetic domain.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, while the "barrier of decency" could be overcome by the fictionality of the text, Burgess introduces an additional barrier, that of Nadsat. The language spoken by teenagers in this nightmarish future Britain is something the reader needs to get used to. It results mechanic and alien at first, and even when they reach a level of relative mastery of the language, it still feels foreign. As previously discussed, its main role is to make all the violence portrayed in the novel (and film) more bearable for the reader.

However, it also represents an additional barrier the audience is asked to overcome when it comes to empathising with Alex.

The way the young anti-hero is portrayed makes it so that he stands out from the rest. He is an outcast, he is *other*, an outsider in a society that created him but cannot accept him because he represents a threat to public safety. Alex is "a character whom you should dislike and fear, and yet you find yourself drawn very quickly into his world and find yourself seeing things through his eyes" ("Kubrick Country" 42). He is very self-centred, the narrator –and his narrating "I"– is only concerned with himself and all we are led to care about is our "Friend and Humble Narrator" (*A Clockwork Orange* [Burgess] 57). In the film this aspect is emphasised even more by the stark contrast between Alex and the other characters who are nothing but caricatures. Stinson writes that "in a world of pale neutrals, [Alex] has energy and commitment" (126). This clear break between the protagonist and the people who inhabit the society of *A Clockwork Orange* helps the reader to feel for the young man.

The many pitiful situations and circumstances he falls victim to invite the audience to feel sympathy for him. This is something both film and novel seem to be asking of us, especially Kubrick who, in his adaptation, is more lenient towards Alex and doesn't let him shed any blood. As already established, it is reasonable to assume that Alex is able to trigger sympathy in the audience. We sympathise with him "because he is, in his own words, 'our faithful narrator' and 'brother'" (Ibid.). However, sympathy and empathy are two very different emotions. While he's a funny, engaging, and witty narrator, it is hard to forget the brutal beatings, murders, and rapes. Through the novel there is no trace of repentance, in no part does he ever really consider violence bad. It is only when brought to the limit by the aversion therapy that he declares he has learned his lesson, but even then, he admits of doing so in an attempt of getting the doctors to stop. There is no redemption in him, no maturing, but most important of all, there is no morally acceptable explanation as to why he did what he did.

The insight given to the audience about characters' perspective does not presume empathy since articulation from and focus on one specific character, John argues, "can be in place in a work and yet not prompt empathy" (311). Going back to the question this thesis posed of defining a type of villain, starting from the hypothesis of the type being a psychologically complex and tormented character who possesses impressive rhetoric abilities, it seems that Alex does not fit this description. While he is a complex character, he

is not tormented, at least not by the consequences of his actions and neither is he a rhetorically adept character, rather being a teenager. Moreover, he is not a villain. There is no ambiguous role-taking on his part. He is the narrator of the story, and we experience everything through his eyes. We are, in a way, over exposed to him, and this aspect leaves little to our imagination. Sides of his personality that prevent us from potentially empathising with him (such as his lack of remorse for any of the crimes he committed) are manifested to us through his narration.

In the end, *A Clockwork Orange* plays with taboos. It is for this very reason that it created so much backlash and ignited public opinion. Whether it is considered a violent film or a film about violence, it showcases some disturbing scenes and seems to be walking on the thin line between sympathy and personal distress. Depending on how a person interprets the story, either one or the other can be triggered resulting in two very different emotional responses regarding the same work of art. While reactions to both film and novel vary depending on the audience, what can be stated with certainty is that the medium with which the story is told influences these reactions. The innate immediate nature of cinema (and television for the matter) seems to have the tendency to evoke stronger reactions in an audience because it does not require much imaginative effort on their part. When we are in front of a screen, "contagion responses can be triggered by direct sensory stimulation alone" requiring "neither involvement in a narrative nor investment in a character" ("Empathy and Character Engagement" 105). This, Coplan explains, "is one of the reasons why film often elicits emotional responses more easily than literature" (Ibid.). When analysing *A Clockwork Orange*, taking into consideration both novel and cinematic adaptation, it is plausible to assume that, while it is hard to empathise with Alex, Kubrick's adaptation will generally trigger more negative reactions in the audience then Burgess' novel. This is because of the nature of the medium through which the story is told.

Chapter 2.
Humanity Peaking Back: Commander Lawrence in *The Handmaid’s Tale*

2.1 "It Can't Happen Here": Margaret Atwood's Gilead and Hulu's Adaptation

2.1.1 "A Study of Power": Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

"Maybe none of this is about control. Maybe it isn't really about who can own whom, who can do what to whom and get away with it, even as far as death" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 144) wonders Offred, the unnamed protagonist of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Written in 1985 and inspired by Orwell's *1984* ("*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context" 516), it has been described by its author as "a study of power" (Somacarrera 37). The novel offers a dystopian portrait of a near future where, following a military coup that wiped out the President and Congress, the United States of America have been replaced by the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian regime run according to patriarchal beliefs derived from the Old Testament, American Puritanism of the seventeenth century, and the America New Right ideology from the 1980s.

Prompted by an environmental crisis in conjunction with a birth-rate decrease, the coup was executed by the "revolutionary" power of "a large group united by a new creed – the Sons of Jacob, the ideological 'architects of Gilead'" (Ibid. 39). This new power "wins submission through fear, […] brainwashing and strict surveillance undertaken by security forces: the Angels (army), the Guardians (police), and the Eyes (secret police)" (Ibid.). Finding justification in the biblical story of Jacob, his two wives Rachel and Leah, and their two handmaids, Gilead classifies women into fertile and not fertile. Women who are able to bear children become Handmaids and are assigned to the governing class of the Commanders and to their Wives. They are considered breeding machines whose only job is to have children in order to repopulate the planet. Non-fertile women are relegated to domestic roles (Marthas), re-educational roles (Aunts), or labelled as Unwomen and sent to the colonies where they are forced to work in inhumane conditions.

The narration in *The Handmaid's Tale* diverges from the dystopias of Orwell, Huxley and Zamyatin. As Atwood herself explains,

> [t]he majority of dystopias –Orwell's included– have been written by men, and the point of view has been male. When women have appeared in them, they have been either sexless automatons or rebels who've defied the sex rules of the regime.

> They've acted as the temptresses of the male protagonists, however welcome this temptation may be to the men themselves. […] I wanted to try a dystopia from the female point of view. ("*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context" 516)

It is an "eye-witness account by [an] 'ignorant, peripherally involved woman' […] interpolated within the grand patriarchal narratives of the Bible and of history" (Howells 126). Offred's first-person narration claims a large autobiographical space within the novel, therefore relegating history to the margins as mere framework to her story. As Howells notes, "there's a shift from 'history' to 'herstory'" (126-127). It is her account, but she remains unnamed throughout it.

As Atwood explained to journalist Ezra Klein in the podcast *The Ezra Klein Show*, *The Handmaid's Tale* is her attempt to answer to two theoretical questions:

> I started writing it then in answer to the question, if America were to have a totalitarian government, what kind would it be? And under what flag, as it were, would it fly? And my answer to that was go back to the founders, namely the 17th century Puritan theocrats who never went away. They took different forms, but they didn't vanish. So, looking at what's happening in the '80s with the political organization of the religious right, that is who you see in league, trying to get rid of the voting rights and all the rest of it. Those are the folks. (Klein 0:30:09-0:30:57)

Atwood further clarifies this in a 2015 essay titled "Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*", where she outlines the two main questions behind her novel:

> (1) If the United States were to become a dictatorship or absolutist government, what sort of government would it call itself? (2) If women's place is in the home, and if women are now out of the home and running all over the place like squirrels, how do you stuff them back into the home and make them stay there? (252)

She came to the conclusion that the answer to question (1) would be a religious dictatorship, while the solution to question (2) would be to "take away women's jobs and their access to money" (Ibid.), and this could easily sum up the premise of Gilead's takeover. The novel also spurred from Atwood's belief that if "true believers say they'll do a thing, when they get the chance they'll do it" (Ibid. 251), that "anything can happen anywhere, given the right

conditions, as history has demonstrated time and time again" (Ibid.), and that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Ibid.).

The Canadian author has always underlined the importance of history repeating itself and the inaccuracy of the "it-can't-happen-here" philosophy. Much like Orwell's *1984*, "the geographical setting" of *The Handmaid's Tale* "undermines the it-can't-happen-here sentiment that makes liberal, secular bastions such as Harvard Square seem impervious to religious fundamentalism" (Horan 171). In the introduction Atwood penned for the rerelease of the novel in 2017, she states:

> One of my rules was that I would not put any events into the book that had not already happened in what James Joyce called the "nightmare" of history, nor any technology not already available. No imaginary gizmos, no imaginary laws, no imaginary atrocities. God is in the details, they say. So is the devil. (x)

When writing *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Canadian novelist drew on "a wide variety of historical sources, including Romania under the Ceaușescu dictatorship, Hitler and his Polish baby-stealing and multi-wife policies for SS men, [and] Argentina under the generals" ("Reflections on *The Handmaid's Tale*" 253). She also "used the denial of literacy to American slaves," "early Mormonism," "group hangings in medieval times," and "the Dionysian cult of ancient Greece" (Ibid.). However, the novel was not only shaped by real historical events, but also by literary influences. Among these, Atwood cites Chaucer, the Bible, and the world of utopias and dystopias with utopia explained as a "literary depiction of a society better than ours" (Ibid.255) and dystopia defined as a society "worse than ours" (Ibid.).

The Handmaid's Tale is an important literary work that has come to be recognised as a pillar in feminist studies and has often been defined as a feminist dystopia. Such definition has been resisted by the author herself who has explained that being narrated from a female point of view does not make the novel a feminist dystopia, unless by feminist "you mean a novel in which women are human beings –with all variety of character and behaviour that implies– and are also interesting and important, and what happens to them is crucial to the theme, structure, and plot of the book" (Introduction xii). Due to the very nature of this thesis' question, the present work will offset the traditional reading of the novel and focus on the figure of the Commander from Atwood's book, on Commander Fred Waterford, and

Commander Joseph Lawrence, respectively played by Joseph Fiennes and Bradley Whitford in Hulu's adaptation.

2.1.2 Adapting Gilead: Hulu's TV Show

In the thirty seven years following the publication of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale,* the novel has received enormous success and has been adapted to a variety of different media: from the 1990 cinematic adaptation based on a screenplay by Harold Pinter and directed by Volker Schlöndorff to the 2019 graphic novel edition by Renée Nault; from an opera production (that premiered in Copenhagen in 2000 and reached the London stage in 2003) to a ballet in 2013. It is only in 2017 that the already successful story found new life with the Hulu/MGM adaptation as a television series that sees Bruce Miller as the creator and Elisabeth Moss as the leading character.

Described as an "often creditable and impressive elaboration of Atwood's vision" (Lichtig par. 3), Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* tells the story of Offred (Elisabeth Moss), a Handmaid in Gilead assigned to the powerful Commander Fred Waterford (Joseph Fiennes) and his Wife Serena Joy Waterford (Yvonne Strahovski), following her life under Gilead's totalitarian regime, her heroic escape, and subsequent stay in Canada as a refugee. Unlike the novel, the show reveals Offred's name at the very end of the first episode with her sitting on the window seat while in voiceover she declares: "My name is June" ("Offred" 55:47-55:49).

The Handmaid's Tale's loyalty to its original source has been explained by creator Bruce Miller, who has oftentimes reiterated his love for the novel (see "The Handmaid's Tale: Margaret Atwood and showrunner Bruce Miller"). In an interview included in Andrea Robinson's book *The Art and Making of The Handmaid's Tale*, when discussing the first season Miller declares that "there's so much of the plot that's directly from the book, because [he] wanted to get as much directly from the book as possible" ("Inside the Writers' Room" 88), also admitting that he "felt strongly that the ending of the book was a great way to end a TV season because it had frustrated [him] for so many years" (Ibid.). This was also helped by Atwood's involvement in the making of the show where she did "some consulting" ("Interview with Margaret Atwood" 10). As she explains:

> There were various decisions that had to be made early on. Would the show be historic –that is, would it take as its starting point a period shortly after 1985? Or

> would it be contemporary, and give its characters cell phones? We decided the latter. Would it stick to the book and have all "non-whites" exiled to National Homelands, as in the South Africa of the time? Or would it postulate a multiracial society, thus allowing for roles for "non-white" actors? Bruce opted for the latter. He checked all such changes with me, as a matter of courtesy. He wanted to be as faithful to the book as possible. There were a couple of plot developments later that I had strong opinions about, and he saw the wisdom of those. We have never had a nose-to-nose fight about anything. (Ibid.)

The sense of continuity with the book is also the result of an understanding between Atwood and the creative team. As previously mentioned, the Canadian author made a rule for herself that she "would not put any events into the book that had not already happened" (Introduction x). In a conversation with actor Bradley Whitford (who plays Commander Joseph Lawrence in the show), Atwood revealed that the creative team of *The Handmaid's Tale* is "quite dedicated to [the show] and they do their research, so the writing room knows they can't just make stuff up. They have to follow the same rule that [she] did for the book. It has to have a precedent in real life. And everything that they put in has had" ("Writers Bloc Presents" 0:37:26-0:37:49).

When the show first premiered on Hulu in 2017, it immediately became an international phenomenon and received raving reviews with critics defining it a "masterful adaptation" (D'Addario par. 2), a "must-see TV in any context" (Stuever par. 3), "unflinching, vital and scary as hell" (Poniewozik par. 4), and "an astounding work of television, with a distinct visual palette that makes it seem as instantly authoritative as the book" (Gilbert par. 4). The show came at the hight of the "strange new landscape that emerged after November 9 [Trump's election as President], wherein women in the millions felt compelled to take to the streets to assert their attachment to reproductive freedom" (Gilbert par. 1). Highlighting this new scene was the surge in sales that Margaret Atwood's novel saw in 2016 (Alter par. 5), proof that, as Emily Nussbaum succinctly put it,

> [t]he sexual politics of 1985 survive today only in distorted form, reordered like Scrabble tiles. Our President is a *Playboy*-brash predator; his Vice-President is pure Gilead. The anti-porn movement is as dead as the Shakers; naked photos are practically second-date etiquette. In pop culture, the eighties are often portrayed as cartoonishly sexist: "Well, it was the eighties, after all," goes the excuse. It's like the fifties, if you lived in the eighties. Atwood's story may now be an artifact about

> an artifact, but it retains its great power as a reminder of the thin tissue between the past and the present. (par. 12)

Many commentators of the show felt –and still feel– that both novel and series alike portray a dystopian society that could threateningly become reality.

At the same time, Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* has been criticised in its depiction of female suffering "for emulating 'misogynist torture porn'" (Kröller 189). As Sommacarrera observes, "[s]cenes of torture and executions as well as constant images of the hanging bodies are prominent in the series, surpassing even the violence in the novel" (39). Many fans and commentators voiced their distress at the graphic rapes presented in the show, especially when it comes to "The Last Ceremony," the tenth episode of the second season, that was described by some as sickening and extremely graphic (Mitchell par. 3). The last two seasons (season four and five), however, saw a toning down in the representation of sexual violence, with season five having only a shot of June's arm and face during a ceremony and nothing else. This was an intentional choice by director Eva Vives who "doesn't believe rape should ever be explicitly shown in films or on television" (Hunter Lopez par. 1). She explains that "[v]iewers don't have to see the act happen to know that it did" (Ibid. par. 2). As research shows, viewing rape onscreen can have some ominous real-life repercussions: according to a study, prolonged male exposure to on-screen portrayals of violence against women as having positive consequences "increased males' acceptance of interpersonal violence against women. A similar tendency which did not reach statistical significance was found on acceptance of rape myths" (Malamuth and Check 442).

Besides the serious real-life consequences, prolonged exposure to sexual violence on television could trigger personal distress on the viewer. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, personal distress is defined by Suzanne Keen as an aversive emotional response that focuses on the self and leads to avoidance ("A Theory of Narrative Empathy" 208) This concept will be of use later in this chapter for the analysis of the character of Commander Fred Waterford in the show and the reactions that his actions cause in the viewer that could be so strong as to lead them to turn off their show.

2.1.3 Beyond Atwood's Novel: June's Story Continues

Returning briefly to the subject of adapting *The Handmaid's Tale* to the screen, it is worth mentioning that the first season of Hulu's television show is an almost chapter by

chapter adaptation of Atwood's novel, while season two onward take a life of their own. As the author herself notes, novels, films and tv shows "have different ways of proceeding and they have to because of the form that they are. So, you can do things in a novel that are impossible to do with a film or TV, but you can do things with film or TV that you cannot do with the novel" ("Writers Bloc Presents" 0:36:20-0:36:47). Despite having been ideated as an adaptation of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Hulu's show is a "new creation and a work of art in itself" ("Interview with Margaret Atwood" 11).

As actor Bradley Whitford brilliantly observed when discussing the adaptation of Atwood's novel with the author of this thesis, *The Handmaid's Tale*, "not perfectly, but in the most impressive way stepped off the dock of this beloved book onto the rowboat of an ongoing show" ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 147). Starting from the second season, the show began expanding its horizon towards worlds that were only mentioned in the novel. As creator Bruce Miller explains, "it goes to following the story to other worlds, whether we go to the colonies or whether we go into the criminal justice system. Those were really just areas that when I read the book just completely, as a reader, I was curious about" ("The Handmaid's Tale: Margaret Atwood and showrunner Bruce Miller" 27:03-27:16). While remaining loyal to the novel's focus on Offred's life and to Atwood's rule of not including events that have not already happened or could potentially happen in real life, the TV show was able to explore more of Gilead than the book's reader would be able to.

Beyond the first season, Hulu's adaptation portrays the Colonies and life in them ("Unwomen"), it also hints at the existence of underground resistance groups (the Marthas who help June escape in "The Word," the Marthas who help June in Jezebel's in "Liars," the network that makes Angel's Flight happen in "Mayday," the rebels in "Chicago," and the Mayday rebel outpost June and Moira join in "Border"). Refugees' life in Canada is also represented, especially, but not exclusively, throughout the later seasons with Moira first ("Baggage"), and Emily later ("Night"), trying to deal with the trauma once they're out of Gilead. Additionally, Moira's work as a field aid ("Chicago" and "Vows"), and the increasing intolerance towards American refugees in Canada ("Allegiance" and "Safe") are shown in the show. Turning back to Gilead, its newest settlement, New Bethlehem, a place "designed to be a safe haven for Gilead refugees and just a little looser in rules" (Turchiano par. 8) is introduced in "Motherland."

The logic behind the expansion of Atwood's world is clarified by Miller who states that

> [e]very story is a June story. Whether it's the story about Offred's experience in Gilead or whether it's the story of what happens to Luke or even Serena Joy. We try not to tell another story […] knowing that story doesn't impact on June's life as a handmaid and her chances of survival. ("The Handmaid's Tale: Margaret Atwood and showrunner Bruce Miller" 26:27-26:46)

What the show tries to achieve is to explore areas that are left open by the novel because Offred cannot know the answers to these questions. As Margaret Atwood points out, "[s]he can't read, she's not allowed to read. She's not allowed to question people, so when Ofglen disappears from her life she has no way of knowing what has happened" (Ibid. 27:25-27:38).

The broadening of the show's scope allows the introduction of new characters that are not present in Atwood's novel (that deals with Offred's life and is constricted to the family she is assigned to). This thesis will focus on one such character, namely Commander Joseph Lawrence. Portrayed by actor Bradley Whitford, he is an extremely peculiar character and could probably be regarded as one of the most complex and ambiguous characters in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The architect of Gilead's economy, he is an intellectual who, when we first meet him, is living in a state of semi-reclusion with his wife and two Marthas. First introduced in "Postpartum," this character remains very enigmatic for most of the show (with the exception of a couple of moments when he lets his human side be seen), making him nearly impossible to read. A deeper analysis of the character of Lawrence will be provided later on in this chapter.

The Handmaid's Tale's television series format gives it the opportunity to better explore characters psychology, something that would not be possible in a film. People and situations that are merely mentioned in Atwood's novel have the chance to be better analysed in the show and this gives both writers and audience the opportunity to better understand the motives that drive a character's action or choice. Through the use of numerous flashbacks, *The Handmaid's Tale* shows how life was before the coup that led to the United States of America becoming Gilead. Snippets of the past are constantly invading the dystopic present of the show the same way memories invaded Offred's narration in the novel. This prolonged exposure to characters' motives invites the possibility for the audience to identify with characters of the show.

Since *The Handmaid's* Tale is mostly told from June's point of view, it is very likely that the audience empathises with her rather than her oppressor. No matter how many morally questionable actions she must carry out in order to survive, her character will most of the time trigger empathy in the viewer. She is the main narrator, and her story is the main focus of the show. According to Keen, first-person narration "is thought to invite an especially close relationship between reader and narrative voice" (*Empathy and the Novel* 97). The same can be applied when it comes to viewing rather than reading, and this close relationship is eased by the deep understanding of the character's motives. The prolonged introspection into June's thoughts and feelings, which spans throughout the show's five seasons, allows the audience to "account for the effective engagement and self-projection of readers into characters" (Ibid. 95). Moreover, the close connection that the viewer formed with the character lessens the feeling of empathic distress when she commits actions that go against the audience's moral code and still allows the triggering of an empathic response.

Besides June Osborne, there are many other characters in the show with whom the viewer can empathise, both positively and negatively. Janine and the other Handmaids tend to trigger positive empathy, as well as Commander Lawrence's wife Eleanor. Yet, there are others who cause in the audience a negative empathic reaction. While the gallery of characters and events that could potentially trigger negative empathy is vast, this thesis will focus on the figures of Commander Fred Waterford first (specifically in connection with the Commander in Atwood's novel) and then on the character of Commander Joseph Lawrence.

2.2 On Gilead and Commanders

2.2.1 "I'm Just an Ordinary Kind of Guy": Atwood's Commander

When analysing the subject of utopias and dystopias, their relations and the push-and-pull that there is between them, Erika Gottlieb states that "each dystopian society contains within it seeds of a utopian dream" ("Dystopia West, Dystopia East" 8). These utopian dreams, she continues, "are articulated by the ruling elite's original promise when its new system was implemented" (Ibid.). While this is the case with a number of classic dystopias like Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell's *1984*, or Huxley's *Brave New World*, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* follows a different path. In Atwood's dystopia the "ruling class does not start out with a consistent utopian ideology" (Ibid. 9), and the novel is defined by Gottlieb as an "emergency dystopia" (Ibid.) because Gilead is the result of an emergency situation

(the USA birth-rate plummeting) where the solution became “a modified system of a quasi-utopian ideology expressed through a limited number of slogans of the state religion” (Ibid.).

The Republic of Gilead is a hierarchic society governed by a class of men who go by the title of Commander of the Faithful. These Commanders are heads of their households that include their Wife, a Handmaid, and one or more domestic servants (Marthas). They go around guarded by the Guardians and are assigned a driver who usually is also an Eye. Since *The Handmaid’s Tale* is an eye-witness testimony narrated in first person, the nature of the narrator makes it so that the audience is never enlightened “about the nature of the political change that was responsible for turning the United States of the eighties into the Gilead of the millennium” (“Dictatorship without a Mask” 103-104).

The partial information delivered by the narrator is inherent with a first-person singular point of view, especially in the case of Gilead where Offred is prohibited from accessing any kind of information. Handmaids are assigned to a household of a Commander of the Faithful and they are expected every month to take part in the ritual of the Ceremony where a strictly ritualised intercourse (that follows the Biblical story of Rachel, Jacob and Leah) between the Commander and the Handmaid takes place under the eyes of the Commander’s Wife. The novel, therefore, focuses on the family Offred is assigned to, about which we know very little. The Commander is described by the narrator as looking

> like a museum guard. A semi-retired man, genial but wary, killing time. But only at first glance. After that he looks like a midwestern bank president, with his straight neatly brushed silver hair, his sober posture, shoulders a little stooped. And after that there is his moustache, silver also. (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 97)

He is “like a boot, hard on the outside, giving shape to a pulp of tenderfoot,” having “given no evidence, of softness” (Ibid. 99).

Much life Offred, her Commander is never named throughout the novel; however, the name can be deduced analysing his Handmaid’s: Offred. As Atwood explains in the novel’s introduction, Handmaids names are “composed of a man’s first name [i.e., Fred] and a prefix denoting ‘belonging to’” (Introduction xi). More information on his identity is provided by the epilogue, “a partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies” held on “June 25, 2195” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 311). In it, Professor Pieixoto, the academic who transcribed the cassette tapes that contained Offred’s story, explains that there

are two possible candidates to being the Commander, "that is, two whose names incorporate the element 'Fred': Frederick R. Waterford and B. Frederick Judd" (Ibid. 319).

As previously mentioned, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an eye-witness testimony, therefore, there is no introspection in the Commander's psyche. Everything the reader knows is filtered by either Offred's memories or by the academics in the epilogue. Looking back at Keen's theory of character identification, she theorises that "merely naming a character may set readers' empathy in motion" (*Empathy and the Novel* 68-69), thus leading her to the hypothesis that only minimal elements are required to empathise with a character (Ibid. 69). While this could be sufficient in the case of positive empathy, it is certainly not the case for empathy triggered for a negative character. Negative empathy requires a character to be psychologically complex, tormented, and possessing marked rhetoric abilities.

Atwood's Commander feels like a threatening shadow that looms over Offred. He is a powerful man who believes that his "faith-based cause if just and that [Gilead's] regime has improved life for the majority" (Horan 175), making him "truly ignorant of the real conditions under which [everyone else] lived" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 167). While being a powerful man and holding enormous power over women, one he enjoys as the various illicit encounters with Offred in his office demonstrate, he is also "a letdown of sorts" (Ibid.163). During these unlawful encounters, the Handmaid has been expecting

> [s]omething unspeakable, down on all fours perhaps, perversions, whips, manipulations? At the very least some minor sexual manipulation, some bygone peccadillo now denied him, prohibited by law and punishable by amputation. To be asked to play Scrabble, instead, as if we were an old married couple, or two children, seemed kinky in the extreme, a violation too in its own way. As a request it was opaque. […] [N]ow I think that his motives and desires weren't obvious even to him. They had not yet reached the level of words. (Ibid.)

Between these illegal Scrabble games and the visits to Jezebel's (an exclusive brothel where high-ranking men and visiting official can enjoy the pleasures that are now outlawed in Gilead), Offred comes to value her relationship with her Commander because "his interest in her […] extends beyond the possibilities of her body" (Horan 177). As Horan explains, "he remains a monstrous sexist and delusional megalomaniac" (Ibid.), however, Offred tells her reader:

> Stupidly enough, I'm happier than I was before. It's something to do, for one thing. Something to fill the time, at night, instead of sitting alone in my room. It's something else to think about. I don't love the Commander or anything like it, but he's of interest to me, he occupies space, he is more than a shadow.
> And I for him. To him I'm no longer merely a usable body. To him I'm not just a boat with no cargo, a chalice with no wine in it, an oven –to be crude– minus the bun. To him I am not merely empty. (*The Handmaid's Tale* 172)

The trips to Jezebel's underline an aspect of the Commander's character that is probably what leads to his execution: the feeling of being superior to the law. This hubris "stems from his sense of security within the autocratic system he partially designed; it is a product of the special benefits he enjoys" (Horan 179). Offred explains it as his way to show his power off to her:

> He is demonstrating, to me, his mastery of the world. He's breaking the rules, under their noses, thumbing his nose at them, getting away with it. Perhaps he's reached that state of intoxication which power is said to inspire, the state in which you believe you are indispensable and can therefore do anything, absolutely anything you feel like, anything at all. (*The Handmaid's Tale* 248)

This affair between Offred and the high-ranking official known by the title of Commander leads to his execution as an enemy of the state. As the epilogue tells us,

> [w]e know, for instance, that he met his end, probably soon after the events our author describes, in one of the earliest purges; he was accused of liberal tendencies, of being in possession of a substantial and unauthorised collection of heretical pictorial and literary materials, and of harbouring a subversive. […] Like most early Gilead Commanders who were later purged, he considered his position to be above attack. (Ibid. 321-322)

There are two important aspects of Offred's narration of the Commander's character that could potentially invite an empathic reaction. At some point during one of their adventures in Jezebel's the narrator concedes the Commander is a faintly sympathetic individual: "I remind myself that he is not an unkind man; that under other circumstances, I even like him" (Ibid. 266). The second marks an important distinction with the television adaptation. When speaking about the Ceremony, Offred describes the ritual underlining that rape is not the right word to use for it:

> My red skirt is hitched up to my waist, though no higher. Below it the Commander is fucking. What he is fucking is the lower part of my body. I do not say making love, because this is not what he's doing. Copulating too would be inaccurate, because it would imply two people and only one is involved. Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose. (Ibid. 104-105)

And she continues, "[t]his is not recreation, even for the Commander. This is serious business. The Commander, too, is doing his duty" (Ibid. 105). While this does not justify the Commander's role in society and is in no way an exoneration from his role in Gilead, it sure is a very different attitude than the one June has in "Testimony." In that episode she accuses Commander Waterford in front of the ICC of having raped her.

When it comes to the possibility of triggering negative empathy in the reader, it can be said that with the character of the Commander there appears to be the opposite problem than the one raised in the previous chapter. If the issue with Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* is that the reader is overexposed to his thoughts and lack of remorse for his actions, with the Commander there is not enough introspection to be able to create a negative empathic connection between reader and character.

2.2.2 "We Chose God's Path": Commander Fred Waterford

Having discussed the figure of the Commander in Atwood's novel, this part of the thesis will focus on the character of Commander Fred Waterford, the Commander's counterpart in Hulu's television show. Appearing in the show from season one until season four, Waterford is one of the main antagonists in the story. Due to the large amount of screen time this character receives throughout the series, this thesis is not enough to analyse every moment he appears in. Therefore, only key scenes I believe are particularly relevant to the topic at hand will be analysed while keeping in mind the general context of the show. These moments are taken from four episodes, all from the second season of the show (arguably the season that focuses the most on his character), namely "Women's Work" (episode 8), "The Last Ceremony" (episode 10), "Holly" (episode 11), and "The Word" (episode 13).

As mentioned above, the adaptation into a television series allows for more introspection into different characters, in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*, especially after the first season. Commander Fred Waterford starts off as seemingly sympathetic towards

Offred, treating her kindlier than most. However, it soon becomes apparent that this is derived from a selfishness that ends up putting her in danger simply to satisfy his needs. He is a powerful man, well respected at first sight but also talked about behind his back. The Handmaids call him "fancy pants" ("Offred" 41:30-41:32) and later in the show, when June is reassigned to Commander Lawrence's house, her new Commander asks her if her flirting really worked with Fred, calling him "not exactly an intellectual giant" ("Useful" 24:47-24:50).Waterford is portrayed as possessing a shyness that is shared with the Commander in the novel. It is only with the second season that his character starts developing more. Actor Joseph Fiennes explains that "[s]eason two for Fred is him dealing with the fraying edges of his control and the extremes he goes to in maintaining it, … but sometimes in doing so his conscience is pricked and he fleetingly glimpses the monster he has become" ("Casting" 66).

Before moving on to the analysis of Commander Waterford's most significant moments, it is important to briefly describe an aspect of psychology that is relevant when being introduced to new people (or in our case to new characters). In the book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman talks about the "halo effect," that is the technical name used for "a common bias that plays a role in shaping our view of people and situations" (82). In real life, "[t]he sequence in which we observe characteristics of a person is often determined by chance. Sequence matters, however, because the halo effect increases the weight of first impressions, sometimes to the point that subsequent information is mostly wasted" (Ibid. 83). This is relevant to this thesis' topic because in season one Commander Waterford is presented as one of the two main villains that June has to fight with in order to survive in the dystopic society.

Having defined the scope within which this analysis takes place, it is time to turn to examine the figure of Fred Waterford in correlation to this thesis' question: when it comes to triggering negative empathy, can a type of negative character be defined? As indicated previously, the nature of a television show allows the creators to have more room for introspection into the characters' psyche and their motives, something that cannot happen within one novel. Commander Waterford is, therefore, a psychologically complex character whose traits are shown throughout the first four seasons of the show. Joseph Fiennes has underlined many times that in season two Waterford's conscience is "beginning to raise itself –but it's conditioned in one way, and he's battling to understand this sense of conscience that he feels" (par. 3). Through flashbacks, the audience is shown his metamorphosis from his pre-Gilead persona to his post-Gilead one. As Miller puts it, in season two the

Commander feels pressure from many different directions, "[t]he professional, the romantic, the moral, the religious … Even though he's a horrible person, makes horrible choices, and does horrible things, you can feel that like he's literally being ripped apart in his brain. Parts of his brain have to completely dissect in order to do the stuff that he does" ("Casting" 66). It is therefore reasonable to see him as a tormented character who is trying to come to terms with the monster he has become. The third point this thesis is set to analyse is that of rhetoric abilities. As previously mentioned, Commander Fred Waterford, while being a powerful man, is not always deemed as brilliant as he is convinced to be. He has been mocked numerous times by Handmaids and knows his fellow Commanders do not hold unconditional respect for him. Following his failed trip to Canada in season two he tells him wife "I'll never hear the end of it" ("Smart Power" 47:41-47:43). His rhetorical appeal is certainly not the best in the show.

The triggering of negative empathy on Commander Waterford's part is also held back by his actions in *The Handmaid's Tale*. I have pinpointed three instances of extremely cruel behaviour on his part that could very well lead to the audience feeling personal distress. The first takes place in the season two finale ("The Word"), where he does not attempt to use his power to dissuade his fellow committee members from punishing his wife for having read in front of the council in an attempt to convince them to allow girls to read scriptures. When his wife is begging him to stop, repeatedly shouting "Fred! No! Fred! Stop it! Fred, please! Fred, stop! Stop it, Fred!" ("The Word" 0:28:31-0:28:41), he turns his back to Serena and walks back into the council's chamber. He appears to be a ruthless monster who would do anything in the name of Gilead's law.

The second instance happens once again between husband and wife. In "Women's Work," Commander Waterford punishes his wife Serena for having forged his signature to allow a Martha who used to be a neonatologist to visit the Putnam's sick child, therefore breaking Gilead's law:

> SERENA. I did it for the child. What greater responsibility is there in Gilead?
> FRED. Obeying your husband.
> SERENA. I've broken the rules for months now. For your sake, with your consent.
> FRED. I never consented to this. Rewriting my memos to the committee? I asked you to be my conduit, not my voice.
> SERENA. Fred, you've asked me to read over your work before.

> FRED. That was then. [to June] Is this your handwriting?
> JUNE. Yes, Commander Waterford.
> FRED. You involved the Handmaid in your transgressions?
> SERENA. I did what I thought was necessary.
> FRED. Of course, you did. This isn't your fault. It's mine. It was unfair of me to burden you with so much responsibility. Now we must make amends. ("Women's Work" 35:56-37:37)

Accompanying the punishment with words from the Bible, he belts his wife while she begs him to stop, and he asks her for his forgiveness.

Even more disturbing is the portrayal of sexual violence in "The Last Ceremony." Following June's false labour, the Waterford's feel like she humiliated them in front of their fellow Commanders and Wives who had gathered in their home to celebrate the birth of their first child. Because of this, convinced that June has been spoiled by Fred, the Waterford's decide that they "need to help the baby come out naturally" ("The Last Ceremony" 26:39-36:42) and, in an extremely graphic scene, Commander Waterford rapes June while Serena holds her down. During the assault of the pregnant woman, Fred recitres Bible verses, possibly his way to justify such an act. As Mila Gauvin succinctly describes it,

> [d]irector Jeremy Podeswa does not shy away from showing the assault in all its horror, cutting between high shots of June's terrified and devastated face, closeups of Waterford and Serena whispering words from the Bible to each other, and overhead shots of the scene in its entirety. At key points, the shot/scene slows down, the camera zooming in on Serena's hand clenched tightly around June's wrist, for example. And at the end of it all, June lies prostrate, her face turned away from the camera, with all sound quieting down. (par. 3)

The scene –and the episode– received backlash from the audience for being extremely graphic in nature, with fans describing it as "[p]ossibly the most disturbing and hellish episode yet" (Mitchell par. 4), and for having "been the hardest [episode to watch] so far" (Ibid. par. 6). Yahlin Chang, the episode's writer, explains that she "wanted to depict how brutal and terrible rape really is," giving "the sense that for all the ceremonies in Gilead that are happening every month, like, what do you think is happening? […] It is rape, and it is always horrible and terrible" (Wigler par. 3).

As a result of such a graphic scene, it is plausible to assume that the audience may come to feel as strong a feeling as personal distress that makes them discontinue their watching the show. Moreover, going back to the concept of halo effect, scenes of graphic violence like this one (and like all the Ceremonies portrayed in season one and season two) work against the triggering of negative empathy for characters. Despite the sense of guilt that Fred has to live with and that leads him to allow June to see her daughter Hannah in the following episode ("Holly"), such graphic depictions of violence leave a lasting mark in the viewer.

Overall, when it comes to the question this thesis poses to find an answer to, the character of Commander Fred Waterford does not seem to be able to trigger negative empathy in the audience. He has humane moments throughout the show that could theoretically lead to negative empathic feelings towards him, however these moments are outnumbered by the horrific ones that cannot be overcome and forgotten. Despite having more introspection into his motives than Atwood's Commander, he still appears to be unable to invite any kind of identification with the audience, an essential feature in eliciting negative empathy.

2.2.3 Justifying Evil: Commander Waterford's Death

The dystopian genre includes in its nature the propensity to the creation of a "barrier of decency." The sense of alienation that characterises the genre suggests the creation of a protective distance which allows the audience to bend moral limits and play with them while being in a safe environment (Ercolino 250). It is not a rare occasion for the viewer of *The Handmaid's Tale* to discard any kind of moral limit and empathise –sometime to the point of rejoicing– with acts that in everyday life would be considered cruel and inhumane. A great example for this is Fred's final sequence in "The Wilderness," the last episode of season four. Having been for some time in Canadian custody, Commander Waterford is about to make a trip to Switzerland for his final trial hearing and it seems like he will be getting his freedom back. When everything seems settled, he is forced to face a sudden change of plans. Behind his back, June set up a meeting between Gilead authorities (represented by Commander Lawrence) and Americans, in which an agreement has been reached: a prisoner exchange that involves 22 women and Fred Waterford will take place and the disgraced Commander will be brought before justice under Gileadean law. In an unexpected turn of events, Waterford is taken away by the Eyes and soon finds himself in no man's land having

to run for his life while being chased by women who managed to escape Gilead and are now hungry for revenge.

What follows is without a doubt a gratuitous act of violence, however it is nearly impossible for the audience to feel much of anything for Fred. As previously mentioned, halo effect has a role in the way we judge characters, and the role Waterford's covers –paired with his beliefs– makes him a villain. All the rapes, the beatings, and the misogynistic behaviour that took place in the show cannot be forgotten. To quote actor Bradley Whitford, "as an audience member all of that is in you. It's all there" ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 148). After four seasons spent witnessing his abuses, the viewer is bound to empathise with June and the other victims and despise the cruel Commander. The moment when all those former Handmaids descend on Fred are more terrifying than the violence itself, and they are clearly a message, June's message to her former Commander. She wants him "to feel what she felt, to run in the woods, scared for his life, before beasts fall on him" (Kelly par. 12). His death seems taken out of a horror film, with the "actual attack [being] filmed in close-up to show June as bestial, a snarling wolf rather than a person. Cutting it together with the repeated Jezebel's flashback contrasted her gleeful lack of control in the woods with the meticulously controlled act she'd had to put on for Fred in Gilead" (Mellor par. 7).

The audience is aware that all the legal paths have been explored and Waterford is going to be exonerated by the ICC and will regain his freedom despite everything he did. June is made to choose between acceptance and justice, between trying to go on with her life and the visceral need for retribution that she feels. She picks the justice path because even outside Gilead, the justice system failed to deliver. As June notes in the episode, "[t]hey know what he was. What he did and how it felt. They made a deal with him anyway. So maybe what he's giving them is more valuable than what he took from me" ("The Wilderness" 10:40-10:54). Commander Waterford is well aware of this, and it is no coincidence that while he is being taken away by Agent Tuello he states: "I'm a man and I have rights!" (Ibid. 39:12-39:13).

Cynically, the whole ordeal is slightly unrealistic with Nick and Lawrence helping June out without having to report back to anyone. However, as Erik Kain writes in his review:

> I'm willing to trade realism for satisfaction in this case. I think a story like this probably ought to be messy—Season 5 dealing with Fred's trial in Gilead, no real justice, no real revenge, just … one ugly thing after another. But we need happy endings also. We need a little satisfaction even if it is the kind you'd find in a fairytale—albeit a very dark, very gruesome fairytale. (par. 20)

Creator Bruce Miller described the scene as ugly justice, noting: "I think it's incredible catharsis. It's a very ugly kind of justice, but it is justice and it feels good because of that. It's what Fred deserved. Because of the way he treated these people, he deserved to be killed in whatever way their anger led them" ("'The Handmaid's Tale' Boss on the Finale's 'Ugly Justice'" par. 16).

A question naturally arises: why does such a violent scene feel incredibly cathartic? This can be justified by two concepts: negative empathy and *Schadenfreude*. The first has already been explored in this thesis. The fictionality of the show provides the audience with information about characters, motives, and actions that they would not possess in a similar situation in real life. Moreover, it offers viewers the possibility to overcome the "barrier of decency" by providing a safe space where there will be no consequences in empathising with "evil." As previously mentioned, the very nature of *The Handmaid's Tale* makes it so that the audience empathises and identifies with June. In this scene, June embraces her brutality in a way that makes her a negative character, and she incites in the audience strong emotional responses. This reaction on the protagonist part is justified by a series of events that piled up on top of years of abuses received from the Commander and that would otherwise have resulted in his freedom. Rooting for June and other former Handmaids in this scene is, from a moral standpoint, wrong. Violence should never be the answer. Yet it feels good, it gives a sense of catharsis.

Additionally, the emotion of *Schadenfreude* plays a role in this. The German word that literally means "harm joy" refers to "the uncanny yet widely shared experience of pleasure or delight in the misfortune of others" (Wang et al. 1). Wang et al. have theorised that three different subforms of *Schadenfreude*, "each underpinned by a distinct concern" (Ibid. 4), exist: aggression, rivalry, and justice. For the purposes of this analysis, only the other-oriented *justice Schadenfreude* defined as deriving "from a concern for social justice defined by norms of fairness" (Ibid.) will be considered. The pleasure of seeing Commander Waterford suffer at the hands of those who used to be his victims comes from a sense of justice being served. Albeit not in a legal or lawful way, which has been proven impossible

in the episode since everything June tried to do was overshadowed by Waterford giving information to the American government, it is justice, nonetheless.

This section has analysed Atwood's Commander and Hulu's Commander Waterford and has argued that in both cases, the two do not invite character identification in any way, therefore not triggering negative empathy in the audience. The next part of this chapter will move on to the analysis of a character that does not appear in Atwood's universe, but, as Whitford describes him, is "an alien and visitor in [her] incredible imagination" ("Writers Bloc Presents" 1:13:40-1:13:50), and the question of whether such a complicated figure can invite some kind of negative empathic reaction in the audience.

2.3 The Not-So-Faithful Commander: The Character of Joseph Lawrence

2.3.1 "He Figured It All Out": The Architect of Gilead's Economy

Commander Joseph Lawrence was introduced in the show during the twelfth episode of the second season. Unlike other characters, he is not presented directly to the audience, instead his appearance is preceded by Aunt Lydia describing him to Emily, a Handmaid who's been through hell and back and is being assigned to a new household. By the time she is sent to the Lawrence's house she has killed a Guardian, had her Commander die on her during the Ceremony, has been arrested for having an illegal relationship with a Martha, has had her clitoris cut off and has been sent to the Colonies before being called back due to the scarcity of Handmaids in her district. As Eric Tuchman, the writer behind *The Handmaid's Tale* episode "Postpartum," explains, "Emily at that point is really at the end of her rope. She's been through hell, she's been damaged emotionally and physically, she's walking into yet another place where she expects to be raped" ("Season Two: Moving Beyond the Novel" 150). As Aunt Lydia and Emily (who will soon become Ofjoseph) are approaching the house, the older woman reveals to the Handmaid (and consequently the audience) where exactly she is going: "Commander Lawrence is a very brilliant, very important man. He is considered the architect of Gilead's economy" ("Postpartum" 12:27-12:36). This creates in the audience an expectation: he is a very important man in Gilead, possibly someone who is prim and proper and rigorously follows the norms, since he is one of its architects. However, from the very moment they enter the house it is clear that he is unlike all the other Commanders that have populated the show until that moment. Tuchman notes:

> They walk into a house that has immediately a very different vibe than the Waterford's. It's messy and there are books everywhere and there's risqué art on the walls. Commander Lawrence comes traipsing down the stairs, played by Bradley Whitford, who is absolutely perfect for the role, and we see right away that he's a very different style of Commander. He dispenses with formalities, the Martha talks back to him, he is kind of brusque with Aunt Lydia, and he doesn't include his wife. And what's great about that is it throws Emily even more off-balance. ("Season Two: Moving Beyond the Novel" 150)

When he first appears on screen, he is sprinting down the stairs to meet the new Handmaid, disregarding formal dressing attire (he is wearing a scarf instead of the more appropriate tie) and formal greetings, and he not so gently invites Aunt Lydia to leave the house. Lawrence seems to spend a lot of time studying Emily and her face –much like the audience is studying and trying to understand him– and this makes him untrustworthy in the eyes of the viewer who is sympathising for poor terrified Emily. This gap between the viewer's expectations and his behaviour makes it hard to identify with Commander Lawrence and thus prevents any kind of empathic connection.

Later, in that same episode, the audience is introduced to his wife Eleanor, a minute, fragile looking woman so unlike the other Wives. She sneaks into Emily's room to meet her and warn her about her husband:

> ELEANOR. Don't tell Joseph that I came in. He doesn't like when I talk to the girls.
> EMILY. Yes, ma'am.
> ELEANOR. He did something terrible. Terrible! He came up with the whole thing.
> EMILY. With what?
> ELEANOR. The colonies. He- he planned everything. He figured it all out. And- and I said, real people are digging up that dirt, [crying] and it's poison. It's poison. It's poison.
> COMMANDER LAWRENCE. [rushing in] Eleanor, please, please.
> ELEANOR. Oh, you're a monster!
> COMMANDER LAWRENCE. [raising his voice] Okay! [more calmly] Okay! Come on! Come on!
> ELEANOR. [shouting] You're disgusting! I hate you!

> COMMANDER LAWRENCE. [defiantly, while holding a sobbing Eleanor]
> Okay! Okay, sweetheart. ("Postpartum" 33:50-34:34)

From the very beginning it is hard to pinpoint Lawrence. He is described as a monster; he appears hard to read and yet seems to genuinely care for his wife. Any possible judgement about this character is thrown off by what happens in the next episode. In "The Word," following Emily's stabbing of Aunt Lydia in their house and the high probability of her ending up on the wall, Commander Lawrence turns out to be an unanticipated ally. In a nerve-wracking scene, he drags Emily to his car and drives her away. While she is crying in the backseat, he is enjoying some up-beat music and dancing following the rhythm of the windshield wiper. Whereas this kind of scene might invite in the audience a negative empathic response, at this point of the story the viewer still knows very little about him and it is more likely that once again they find themselves empathising with the more familiar character of Emily. Yet, when the car stops at a bridge, the Handmaid learns that she is getting out of Gilead and that the Commander is "getting [him]self in deep shit" ("The Word" 0:59:30-0:59:33); something changes in the relationship between Lawrence and the audience. The viewer is bound to feel something which might not yet be empathy but could be recognised as that unqualified sensation Brian Massumi calls *affect*.

Drawing from Spinoza's philosophy, Massumi defines affect as "an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" ("Note on the Translation" xvi). Often used as a synonym for emotion, "affect is intensity" ("The Autonomy of Affect" 27). As the Canadian philosopher explains,

> an emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is *qualified intensity*, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativisable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is *intensity owned and recognised.* (Ibid. 28; emphasis added)

This back-and-forth between seemingly being good and evil is an innate peculiarity of the character of Commander Lawrence. He has been created so that the show could have "a different kind of Commander than Fred" ("'Handmaid's Tale' Creator on Surprising Finale

Twist" par. 30). While Fred is very powerful yet possesses numerous weaknesses and strengths,

> Commander Lawrence has such a different set of rules. He's a much more venerable figure in Gilead. He was one of the founders of Gilead, like Fred was, but more of an intellectual founder of Gilead. He designed the economy of Gilead. So, what happens when an academic who's doing think pieces on the computer screen and simulations, and someone says, 'Hey, that's a good idea. Let's put it in practice.' What happens then? (Ibid.)

Modelled after "some of the academics in Germany [during World War II], who had come up with a lot of the plans and did calculations and came up with the theories that ended up informing both the war and the Holocaust and the kind of Nazi racial policy" (Ibid.), Commander Lawrence is "an odd guy, hard to get a read on. He certainly has his own quirks, and there's a certain level of the world as entertainment for him. He seems to be looking at it from the outside looking in" (Ibid.). Unlike all the other Commanders, he is not in it for power and looks at the world from a perspective of problem-solving, "he's all of a sudden gone from academia to real life, and seeing your research go from academic to reality is a real blow to the chest for him" (Ibid.). According to Bradley Whitford,

> Lawrence was a brilliant economic theoretician and he saw a way to put his ideas into action in the service of saving the next generation, but he underestimated the depravity of the [religious] wackos. And I think he has, you know, complete contempt for them, and I think he understands that it has gone from maybe a manageable totalitarian society like China to North Korea. I also think Lawrence enjoys the stature that this gave him. It fluffed his ego. ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 139)

Following his brief appearance in the last two episodes of season two, Commander Lawrence starts becoming a more relevant figure in the show. After having helped Emily escape, he decides to take in June as his new Handmaid. As well as with his previous one, he refuses to take part in the Ceremony and is eventually forced to do it by the Waterford's and Commander Winslow who decide that he should be kept to the same standard as anyone else and does not deserve special status. This leads to a dramatic decline in Eleanor Lawrence's health and to her death by suicide. Throughout the third season, he also aids June in organising the Angel's Flight that takes place in the finale. He is, because of that,

arrested and sent to prison. However, in season four he quickly finds a way to be released and gets himself back in a position of power where, with the help of Nick, he is able to keep on helping June as one of her contacts inside of the Gilead. As previously mentioned, he plays a very relevant role in the negotiations that end with the prisoner exchange that leads to the death of Commander Fred Waterford. The fifth season of the show sees him once again in a position of power and with a new project: New Bethlehem, a Gilead settlement with less strict law that would hopefully appeal some of those who fled to Canada to come back.

Having introduced the character of Joseph Lawrence, it is yet again necessary to restrict the scope of this research with the same reasoning as for the analysis of Commander Waterford. Books could be written on such a character and this thesis does not provide enough space to analyse every single episode in which he appears. Therefore, key scenes from six episodes that are particularly relevant to the topic of this thesis will be analysed in the following pages, always keeping in mind the context within which each takes place in the show.

2.3.2 "I'm Not Gonna Do That with You": A Commander Against the Ceremony

Keen, while quoting Richard J. Gerrig, suggests that the reader (or in our case the audience) is "likely to make category-based judgements about fictional characters and to empathise attributed dispositions of characters over their actual behaviour in situations" (*Empathy and the Novel* 95). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that it is easier for a flat character to trigger an empathic response in the viewer since they can be judged according to well-known categories (good, evil, etc.). Commander Lawrence is an extremely complex character, very hard to understand and pinpoint. He is a Commander of the Faithful, a member of the ruling class of Gilead, yet he does not blend in with the rest of them. The following section will try to underline the aspects of Commander Lawrence's character that make him different from all the other Commanders.

Whitford told me that, dramatically, the character is very interesting: "He clearly, unlike any other Commander, wants no part of this. You know, when June first gets there, he's like 'No, no, no. We don't do that,' which was so interesting to me" ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 140). It is made clear from his very first scene that he is unlike all the others. His house is decorated with artworks (likely stolen from museums

following the coup), with books everywhere from tables to chairs. He obviously does not agree with the religious aspects of Gilead, as the American actor argues, "he did not want to create a system where women were raped, he did not want to create a system where people were hanged on a wall, but he enjoyed the status. The status that it gave him was seductive" (Ibid. 139). At the same time, he does not respect his fellow Commanders, as we have seen with his remarks on Waterford, and has a generally condescending attitude towards them. This dislike however is mutual. As the show goes on, numerous Commanders voice their objections to his failure to comply with Gilead rules. One such instance takes place in season five, where Commander Putnam remarks: "Why should we listen to you? You don't even adhere to our way of life. You have no wife, no child, no family" ("Ballet" 30:58-31:06). A similar thought is expressed by Commander Waterford in "Witness." When talking with High Commander Winslow (a higher-ranking Commander from Washington, D.C. who also happens to be friends with Commander Lawrence from pre-Gilead times), he voices his belief that Lawrence should prove his loyalty to Gilead:

> FRED. Once Gilead is finally recognised as a sovereign state, we won't have time to indulge with those clinging to old habits.
> SERENA. Is there someone in particular that you're concerned with, Fred?
> FRED. I… I hesitate to say.
> WINSLOW. I'd like to hear.
> FRED. Commander Lawrence.
> WINSLOW Lawrence's contributions to Gilead have been substantial.
> FRED. At first. Now, I fear his influence does more harm than good.
> WINSLOW. Oh.
> FRED. He's made some cosmetic changes to his household, yes, but… (*scoff*) He's had four Handmaids. Not one has produced. And from what I've seen from his current Ofjoseph, that lack of discipline persists. We may need to set an example.
> WINSLOW. Challenging someone like Lawrence is a delicate business, Fred.
> FRED. I'm only suggesting that we make certain that he and his household are abiding by Gilead's most sacred tenants. There are mechanisms in place to ensure virility.
> SERENA. Isn't that a little extreme?
> WINSLOW. If he's unfit to lead his household, he's unfit to lead Gilead.
> ("Witness" 20:11-22:01)

This scene is instrumental in the story of Lawrence's character. Following this discussion, it is decided that the Waterford's, Commander Winslow, and Aunt Lydia will bear witness to the monthly Ceremony that is supposed to take place in the Lawrence's household.

The practice of the Ceremony is one that is despised by Lawrence. In "The Word" he finds Emily kneeling in front of the fireplace, ready for the ritual to take place and he appears confused as to what she is doing. When he realises, she expects to be raped by him, he seems disgusted by the suggestion and sends her back to her room:

> LAWRENCE. What are you doing?
> EMILY. We have The Ceremony tonight.
> LAWRENCE. No. Get up. I'm not gonna do that with *you*. Come on. Get up. Go to your room! (22:03-22:24)

Later, in season three, when he is forced to take part in such practice, it appears obvious to the viewer that he has no idea of what he is supposed to be doing. The cold demeanour that has characterised him up to this point cracks and he ultimately breaks down. During the whole proceedings he is visibly shaken, and his wife's distress doesn't help calm him down. When they realise there is no way out of the Ceremony, his main focus is to soothe and try to calm down the woman he loves. In doing so, he shows the humane side that has been hidden until this point. Moreover, what additionally discerns him from the other Commanders is his continuously asking June if what he is going to do is fine, a desperate attempt to get some kind of consent on her part. This undoubtably represents a turning point for the character, not only plot-wise but also when it comes to his relationship with the audience. His disgust towards this barbaric practice aligns with the audiences' feelings and can be considered what ultimately invites an empathic response.

Like all the other Commanders, he believes to be above the law. His powerful position has allowed him to get away with avoiding the Ceremony, however life is catching up with him too. While he is trying to calm his wife down, June asks him: "You helped to create this world. How long did you think it would be before it came for you?", to which he replies that "[e]very government makes room for exceptions" ("Witness" 30:15-30:28). He is visibly distressed and, probably for the first time since the institution of Gilead, has to come to terms with the consequences of his ideas. His reticence towards this practice is later underlined by June during her testimony in front of the ICC. She tells the judges:

> I was sent to a new household, where Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Lawrence did not subject me to any rapes...at great risk to their own lives. But Mr. Waterford later arranged for me to be raped by Mr. Lawrence as a test of loyalty. The Waterford's drank coffee while upstairs *I had sex with Mr. Lawrence against both of our wishes* in front of his wife. Mrs. Lawrence… Eleanor… was a kind and fragile woman, and this experience devastated her. ("Testimony" 21:36-22:23; emphasis added)

After the forced Ceremony, Lawrence is confronted with the consequences it has on his wife's already precarious and delicate mental health. When Eleanor reaches a breaking point and realises her husband is not the man she married, she decides to take matters in her own hands: she holds him at gunpoint and threatens to kill him while June is forced to calm her down explaining how she needs the Commander to help with her plans ("Liars"). His being an asset for June's plans is bound to place him closer to the audience than he was before. The viewer knows that for June to be able to get out as many children as she can, she needs the help of a Commander, and Lawrence is the one she has direct access to. His help, however, does not come without a price. Everything he does, is not done out of moral goodness, but because he will get something in exchange (in this case he agrees to help if June gets his wife out of Gilead).

Another significant aspect of Commander Lawrence's character is his unwillingness (rather than his inability) to care about the world he has helped creating until it has direct consequences on his life, or rather on his wife's life. As Whitford succinctly explains:

> The redeeming and horrible thing about this guy is his, and I think it comes across in the way it was written and in the way we played it, that love for Eleanor was absolutely real. And I think he reflects a kind of horrible thing about human nature. It's not until the rape and the horrible world he has created really doesn't hit home for him in a way that he might deal with, until it destroys the woman he loved that he reacts. Which is an interesting thing with this guy because it both makes him redeemable, but it's a pretty sad statement on our ability to relate to the suffering of people other than those on our immediate circle. ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 138)

And while his genuine love for his wife makes him somewhat predictable at times (in more than one occasion his choices are motivated by his need to keep Eleanor safe or attempt to get her out of Gilead), following her tragic death he becomes unpredictable. The uncertainty of what Commander Lawrence will do next characterises the final episodes of season three

and the entirety of season four, culminating with his involvement in the plot that leads to Waterford's death. The character's volatility is also a mystery for actor Bradley Whitford, who told me:

> I think with the shattering death of Eleanor, that there is something that I have not articulated, that I don't understand. […] And I think that there's a recklessness to Lawrence after Eleanor's death. I don't think he gives a … you know. He hates Fred. He's risking his life out there to facilitate the killing. There's a kind of abandonment to this guy. A combination of a sort of abandonment and some sort of magnetic need that I don't think the audience knows, I don't think he knows if he's capable of sort of inching towards some sort of redemption. (Ibid. 141)

However, with season five Commander Lawrence seems to be back to his old ways, scheming and manipulating people in order to get what he wants, as we will see in the last section of this chapter.

2.3.3 Commander Lawrence: Friend or Foe?

The relationship between Commander Lawrence and the audience is a complex one. On one hand, he's one of the creators of Gilead and has had an important role in making the dystopian nightmare happen. On the other, he seems to be an ally for June when she needs it and appears to have a "kind of a paternal" ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 144) relationship with her. She not only defends him from the accuse of having raped her, as we have previously seen, but also takes his side when arguing with Luke:

> LUKE. So you trust Lawrence, yeah? The Nazi?
> JUNE. Lawrence…
> LUKE. Yeah?
> JUNE. … has come through for me, okay? He got Nichole out, he got Emily out. He let Mayday into his home. He helped me with Angel's Flight. He even helped deliver Fred. He has put his neck on the line over and over and over. And it has not benefited him at all. He has been my friend. ("Motherland" 15:30-15:52)

Yet his actions are not always so clear and easy to read. Seeing Commander Lawrence simply as a flesh-and-blood monster would mean to disregard all the layers his character possesses. At the same time, as Whitford put it, "in a lesser version of the writing Lawrence

has an epiphany and becomes a good person" ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 142). There is margin for redemption for such a character, but the question that will probably never be settled is if he deserves it.

Returning to the matter of whether negative empathy can be triggered by the character of Commander Lawrence, this section will analyse scenes that go in favour and against this theory, focusing on the following episodes: "Useful," "Chicago," "Motherland," "Witness" and the season finales of seasons two ("The Word"), three ("Mayday") and four ("The Wilderness"). As previously mentioned, these are only a few significant examples, but many more can be found throughout the numerous episodes in which the character of Lawrence appears.

One of the aspects that characterises Commander Lawrence in the beginning is his need to hide behind a barrier that can be physical (represented by his effectively locking the world out of his home while he and his wife seemingly lead a normal life untouched by Gilead laws), or emotional (mainly consisting of his resisting the idea that he possesses a humanity). He built those walls around himself to be able to live with the consequences of his actions by ignoring them and pretending they do not exist. However, when June enters his life, as Whitford observes, he starts being challenged once again, something he is not accustomed to anymore:

> There was something very surprising to me in the early scenes—this overwhelming, painful, exhilarating feeling that June sees him and challenges him […] This guy hasn't been seen or challenged in a long time. In his patriarchal condescension, he's not expecting that. It's an overwhelming flick of a gyroscope. There are moments when he gets defensive, but he's open to it. ("Bradley Whitford Is More Confused By His Handmaid's Tale Character Than You" par. 3)

One such instance of defensiveness takes place in "Useful," where he has a confrontation with June on the reasons behind what he did. He accuses her of being a bad mother and preferring to edit esoteric books rather than taking care of her daughter, to which she rebuts:

> You wrote esoteric books. You did that. God, it must be scary? Uh? Seeing the numbers on those spreadsheets turn into real people? Real people being executed? Knowing that if no one had read your books, we would all be better off. It must be hell being a man like that. Far worse than useless. You know what? I get it. I get why you would do this. I supposed you would hole yourself up in a house like this,

playing games with people's heads, doing a good deed or two every once in a while, so that you can fucking sleep at night. ("Useful" 26:44-27:30)

She is clearly challenging him and his power, and she has read him like an open book. Commander Lawrence knows this and, in an attempt to distance himself from her, he tells her: "How tempting it is to… invent a humanity… for anyone at all"[4] (Ibid. 27:42-27:57). This implies his lack of humanity, something that would not invite character identification from the audience.

As previously mentioned, what he does is dictated by his interests. Despite his good actions, he is still a statesman and is interested in keeping his position of power. This means that while he sometimes helps June, there are also instances where he puts her at risk, as it happens in "Chicago." He convinces the council to bomb the city right before the end of the ceasefire, putting June –who's there– in danger. In that same episode he forms a sort of allegiance with Aunt Lydia (who has blackmailed him) and he tells her: "Let's fix this country" ("Chicago" 22:33-22:35); it remains unclear how they will "fix" it. Throughout season four, he appears to be pursuing his interests; however, what these interests are is still hard to define. His uncertain position and unpredictability make it hard to empathise with him. Additionally, his numerous attempts, in season five, to convince June to move to New Bethlehem and effectively be back under Gilead's control, together with his involvement in the arrest of Janine, widen the wedge between him and the audience. This division usually happens when his motives are hidden and unclear, as is the case with the final episode of the fifth season.

In contrast to the negative impact these scenes have on the possibility to empathise with the character of Commander Lawrence, the show also presents scenes that could invite such connection. These instances are usually related to the "good" actions he does. However, given the nature of the character, it is reasonable to assume that it is negative empathy that is being triggered. It seems difficult to presume that people empathise in a positive way with a character like Commander Lawrence.

As discussed above, a turning point is represented by the Ceremony he, June, and Mrs. Lawrence are forced to partake in. That scene displays, for the first time, Commander Lawrence as a human being with fears and feelings, stripped of all the barriers he put in place

[4] Interestingly, this quote is taken nearly verbatim from Atwood's novel: "How easy it is to invent a humanity, for anyone at all" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 155).

to protect himself. Interestingly, unlike all the other numerous Ceremonies that take place in the show, this one is not shown to the audience. Commenting on this detail, Whitford told me:

> I think the audience filling in with their imagination, the horror of that scene, is even more troubling than it would be if you saw a conventional Ceremony scene. Sometimes when you don't show it, it's almost worse. And it is a fundamental difference between him and all of the other Commanders who are willing to do it. I think Lawrence understands, not only are they willing to do it, they kind of get off on it, you know, abusing these young women. ("Appendix B. Bradley Whitford in Conversation" 140)

The fundamental difference that sets him apart from all the other Commanders is what facilitates an empathic connection with the audience. Just for that scene, from victimiser he becomes victim. This, however, does not in any way exonerate him from his past faults. Both the audience and the characters know very well that Gilead is –in large part– his doing.

An empathic reaction is also facilitated by the finales for season two, three and four. In each of these episodes Commander Lawrence is involved in a more or less direct way in activities that go against Gilead. In "The Word," as already explained, he helps Emily flee to Canada in a plot that would also have allowed June to escape. She does not, and instead gives her daughter Nichole to the fugitive Handmaid to take safely to the other country. In season three, he takes June as his Handmaid and harbours her in her plan to get out of Gilead as many children as she possibly can. Despite his reticence at first and his attempt to pull the plug on the operation in "Mayday," he is led by June and, as Whitford observes, "suddenly I'm reading stories to kids, and Angel's Flight is happening" (Ibid.). The following season, the audience meets him in prison, awaiting what is an unjust trial that will likely put him to death. However, through Nick, he manages to convince the other Commanders of his being invaluable to the cause and soon is back in a position of power that allows him to take his revenge on Fred and hand him over –with Nick's involvement too– to June ("The Wilderness").

One last aspect of Commander Lawrence's character is worth mentioning when it comes to the topic of negative empathy. Unlike all the other Commanders (with the exception of Nick), he is the only one who comes to acknowledge his role in the creation of that dystopic hell. In "Useful," when confronted on his position in the creation of Gilead, he

resists the idea of possessing a humanity. However, two seasons later, in "Motherland," he recognises his role in creating the Republic. In a monologue majestically delivered by actor Bradley Whitford, Joseph Lawrence shows himself as a man aware of all the pain he has caused:

> You think I don't know? You think I don't know the misery that I've caused? You think… You think I'm unaware? I was trying to save humanity. And, you know, I did. I fucking did it. Then it got away, got away from me. It went septic. You think I wouldn't take it back? I would take it all back. I'd let the whole fucking human race just die out, just so I wouldn't have… have Gilead on my conscience. ("Motherland" 32:15-33:00)

This scene perfectly represents him as a character. Despite this admission, he never once takes into consideration the effect Gilead has had, is having and will have on other people. He is an academic at heart, and all he cares about is showing that his idea is valid, his idea would work without all the religious aspects that were added by the Sons of Jacob. New Bethlehem is his plan to modernise Gilead, and what he might see as his only path to redemption. When June asks him if he really believes he can fix what he did, he replies: "I have to. I have to believe it. I have no choice. It's either that or, or yeah… kill myself, like Eleanor, y'know. One or the other" (Ibid. 34:22-34:42). Ultimately, it is the fictionality of Gilead allows viewers to empathise with characters that are the equivalent of Nazi generals. It would be a lot harder to empathise with someone like Lawrence if you put him in a SS uniform within an historically accurate depiction of the Second World War.

Circling back to this thesis' initial hypothesis and taking into consideration everything that has been said in this chapter about Commander Lawrence, rhetoric abilities, psychological complexity, and a tormented character are all traits that can be observed in the character. Commander Joseph Lawrence deeply diverges from other figures in the show, and this makes him peculiar. The constant shapeshifting required of him to survive ultimately makes it hard to identify with him. Yet, when it happens, when an empathic response is triggered in the audience, it is a negative one most of the time. His endless contradictions may hinder rather than help a viewer's empathic response, but it doesn't preclude it completely. Audiences can identify with his use of music to convey his love for his wife ("Unknown Caller"), they can be moved by him constantly referring to his wife as "my love" and might go as far as pitying him when he finds himself with a gun pointed at his head ("Liars"). Despite the viewer's knowledge of all the horrible things he has done, it is hard

not to form some kind of connection with this character, along the lines of a love-hate relationship. Interestingly, despite his numerous positive actions aimed at helping the main character in the story, Commander Lawrence nonetheless appears as a negative character (often defined as evil and a monster). This leads to the assumption that when an empathic response is triggered, it probably is a negative one. In the end, whether an empathic response (either negative or positive) is provoked in the audience varies from person to person.

Chapter 3.
“I have seen things”: Roy in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*

3.1 World War Terminus: Dick's Dystopian Future and Scott's Vision

3.1.1 Dick's Future: A World Revolving Around Empathy

"Isn't it a way of proving that humans can do something we can't do?" (*Do Androids Dream* 165) asks Irmgard Baty about empathy at some point in the novel. Unlike the dystopias previously analysed, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* places this concept at the centre of its narration. In this futuristic world, an empathy test is used by a specialised police force (that Scott's film will name "blade runners") in order to determine whether someone is human or android, therefore allowing them to establish which beings are to be "retired" (a glorified way to refer to the execution of androids that fled their slave-like lives in off-world colonies and made their way to a nearly abandoned and heavily polluted Earth in search for freedom).

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? was first completed by Philip K. Dick in 1966 and published two years later, in 1968 (Rossi 145). Its narrative follows the lives of two characters: "henpecked, petty bureaucrat" (*Future Noir* 22) bounty hunter Rick Deckard, and "chickenhead" J.R. Isidore. As Rossi points out, the two narrative foci of the novel are not reliable individuals:

> John Isidore is a chickenhead or special […]; he may be a warm person from the emotional point of view, and there is no doubt that he is one of the most humane characters in Dick's gallery, but has troubles when it comes to analysing others' behaviour with some detachment. On the other hand, Rick is not a very competent bounty hunter at the beginning of *Androids*; he is almost cheated (and killed) by Polokov, is shrewdly manipulated by Rachael Rosen […], and at least confused by Luba's allegation that his colleague is an android – even though she had already accused him to be one just hours before. (163)

These two lives cross paths thanks to the group of six fugitive androids who are being hunted by Deckard and are hiding in Isidore's apartment.

The novel takes place in a planet Earth that has been devastated by an atomic war (known as World War Terminus), more specifically in the city of San Francisco. It portrays a nearly deserted planet plagued by an ever-present dust where only "chickenheads" (people who "failed to pass the minimum mental faculties test" [*Do Androids Dream* 14]) or people not rich enough to emigrate populate it. There, bounty hunter Rick Deckard is given the job

of finding and retiring six androids who have escaped from a colony on Mars in search for freedom from their condition of slavery. These Nexus-6 (the latest and most advanced model) androids are so humanlike in appearance that Deckard needs to subject them to an empathy test to determine whether they are human or not. This test, once deemed flawless, is turning out to be inappropriate to accurately examine these new models. At the beginning of the novel, after a fellow bounty hunter has been severely injured by one of the fugitive Nexus-6 who got caught, Deckard is ordered to travel to the Rosen Association's (the industry that manufactures the androids) headquarters in Seattle and verify the validity of the test. Once there, he comes face to face with Rachael Rosen, a Nexus-6 android that was raised as Eldon Rosen's niece and doesn't know about her true nature. Rachael is such a sophisticated piece of engineering that she nearly defies the test. This causes some serious trouble for Deckard throughout his hunting of the other androids because he starts developing feelings for her and comes to the point where he feels empathy for that type of android, something very dangerous for a man with his job.

Probably one of "the most accomplished and subtly complicated of Dick's fictions" ("Do Androids Dream" 997), the novel has been defined by its author as "essentially a dramatic work" possessing very profound "moral and philosophical ambiguities" ("The Making of Blade Runner" 22). In an interview with Paul M. Sammon, Dick declares that the book's idea

> stemmed from my basic interest in the problem of differentiating the authentic human being from the reflexive machine, which I called an android. In my mind, 'android' is a metaphor for people who are physiologically human, but who behave in a non-human way. (Ibid. 22-23)

Developing from this initial idea, *Do Androids Dream* maintains at its heart dilemmas that have to do with humanity and authenticity: what is human, and what are the boundaries that separate it from what is not? what is fake, and does it matter if it is fake? (Sleight). Through empathy tests and Mercer's empathy box, Dick tries to demarcate said confines, but they turn out to be more complex than one might think. The lines between men and machine become less defined throughout the novel, with androids appearing to display human behaviours and men acting like cold machines. In this blurring process an important role is played by

> Dick's refusal to maintain stable boundaries between the various "types" he depicts — from radioactively damaged *sub*humans (caustically labeled "chickenheads") and animals (real and/or electric) to humans *proper* and Nexus 6 androids — repeatedly highlights the need for *and* the impossibility of sustaining fixed categories of being. (Toth 69; emphasis in the original)

The lack of stable boundaries complicates the reader's understanding of what is authentic and what is not. As John Huntington points out in an essay titled "Philip K. Dick: Authenticity and Insincerity," Dick's work stands out because "it has thoroughly embraced insincerity, especially by its thorough dependence on the mechanical creative formulas of pulp fiction, and thus become 'authentic' at a new level" (152). Saturated with the typically Phildickian philosophical, ecological, and sociological concerns, the novel is also characterised by "themes of paranoia […] and alienation […], it also [condemns] mankind's emotional sterility […] while indicting humanity's misuse of the earth's natural resources" (*Future Noir* 22).

The novel's central questions and concerns have been faithfully kept in the 1982 *Do Androids Dream*-inspired *Blade Runner*. However, there are two important contrasts between film and novel that have been pointed out by Neil Easterbrook:

> *Blade Runner* concerns whether or not the replicants are human; the novel asks if Deckard is human. *Blade Runner* foregrounds the replicants' ontology; the novel addresses Deckard's ethical behaviour and the philosophical status of readers' perception. ("Do Androids Dream" 999)

As Sammon points out in his book *Future Noir: The Making of Blade Runner*, while at some point it was fashionable to say that Ridley Scott had taken out the core of Dick's book and thrown away the rest, "*Blade Runner* was most faithful to *Sheep?* where it really counted" (22).

3.1.2 Los Angeles. November, 2019: Scott's Grim Vision

The opening crawl from the 2007 version of *Blade Runner* informs the audience about the world they are entering:

> Early in the 21st Century, THE TYRELL CORPORATION advanced Robot evolution into the NEXUS phase – a being virtually identical to a human – known as a *Replicant*.
> The NEXUS 6 *Replicants* were superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them.
> *Replicants* were used Off-world as slave labour, in the hazardous exploration and colonisation of other planets.
> After a bloody mutiny by a NEXUS 6 combat team in an Off-world colony, *Replicants* were declared illegal on earth – under penalty of death.
> Special police squads – BLADE RUNNER UNITS – had orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing *Replicants*.
> This was not called an execution.
> It was called retirement. (*Blade Runner*[5] 0:02:05-0:02:57)

White letters on a black background read "Los Angeles. November, 2019" (Ibid. 0:02:59-0:03:04), followed by the image of a dark, vast industrial wasteland lit by thousands of oil refineries. Paul M. Sammon describes the scene as "a man-made, overwhelmingly polluted monstrosity dotted by fireball-belching cracking towers cocooned in thick petrochemical haze" (*Future Noir* 1). The film is "a dark dystopia, a cyberpunk world when the term had barely been conceived, and the most visually impressive science fiction epic since *Metropolis*" (Butler 937). Scott's Los Angeles is a decayed city, cheerless and overpopulated by ethnically diverse, oddly dressed people who are constantly drenched by a near-perpetual rain (*Future Noir* 3). Due to its grim setting, *Blade Runner* received plenty of criticism when it first came out, often being described as "all form and no content" (Ibid. 7-8). However, saying that Scott's film is devoid of meaning would not only be incorrect, but would also imply not having understood the picture. As previously pointed out, while plot-wise moving away from Dick's novel, *Blade Runner* maintains the main concerns that are at the heart of *Do Androids Dream*.

Preserving the detective plot aspects of the novel, screenwriters Hampton Fancher and David Peoples turned Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) into a burnt-out detective typical of the film noir genre. A cynical former policeman who wears a trench coat and drinks too much, Deckard is called back from retirement by his former superior Capitan Bryant (E. Emmet

[5] Due to its troubled history (as discussed later in this chapter), Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* has been shown in six different versions since its first release in 1982. To avoid confusion, when speaking of "*Blade Runner"* I will be referring to the 2007 version titled *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*. All references to any of the other versions will be indicated by full title and release date.

Walsh) and is ordered to find and retire four replicants, led by an android named Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), who escaped the Off-world colonies, "slaughtered 23 people and jumped a shuttle" (*Blade Runner* 0:13:24-0:13:26). These murderous androids that are now on Earth are all Nexus-6, the best technology available, "endowed with physical and mental capacities far superior to ordinary humans" (*Future Noir* 4). As Bryant explains to Deckard, these replicants are "designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions. The designers reckoned after a few years they might develop their own emotional responses. Hate, love, fear, anger, envy. So they built in a fail-safe device. […] Four-year lifespan" (*Blade Runner* 0:15:02-0:15:20).

Before going out on his quest, Deckard is sent to visit the Tyrell Corporation and seek additional information on these androids from the manufacturer himself: Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel). Once there, Tyrell requests that Deckard runs a Voigt-Kampff test on a real human: his assistant Rachael (Sean Young). Soon the blade runner discovers that the old man has tried to deceive him and had been deceiving the young woman, since Rachael is in fact a replicant herself but does not know it. From here on, the film follows the traditional dark-mystery structure with Deckard searching Los Angeles to find the four missing replicants while crossing paths with a gallery of grotesque characters (*Future Noir* 5).

Despite its generic conformity, *Blade Runner* "strives to criticise and subvert its formulaic underpinnings" (Ibid.). Its hero, initially presented as a macho type of man, is not fit for the job. Deckard is constantly being beaten (both physically and intellectually) by the replicants he is hunting. He ends up killing only two of the four escapees, technically never completing the assignment. Furthermore, the two androids he manages to kill are both women and are shot by Deckard in the back, an unsportsmanlike behaviour on his part.

In his analysis of the film, "three primary metaphysical queries" (Ibid. 6) are identified by Paul M. Sammon: "Who am I? Why am I here? What does it mean to be human?" (Ibid.). These remarkably Phildickian questions, as previously seen, are also at the centre of Dick's novel. While there is no denying that *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream* are two different works of art (for example, Dick's novel is set in San Francisco 1992, while Scott's film takes place in 2019 Los Angeles; Dick's world is deserted, Scott's one is overpopulated; the city in the novel is plagued by dust, while the city in the film is victim of a perpetual rain), they share common ground when it comes to their core.

Before moving on to discuss the many issues that came along with the making of *Blade Runner* and the troubled relationship between Ridley Scott and Philip K. Dick, it is worth spending a couple of words on *Blade Runner*'s success. What is now considered one of the best –if not *the* best– sci-fi motion picture ever made was not a hit when it first came out. Released in US theatres on 25 June 1982, it was welcomed by a pretty indifferent public grossing only around $6 million dollars (Ibid. 356-364). This was not only due to a lack of enthusiasm towards the film, but because of the release in that same summer of Steven Spielberg's *E.T.*, and of sci-fi movies like *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn* and John Carpenter's *The Thing* (Ibid. 364). Producer Michael Deeley, when discussing *Blade Runner*'s unsatisfactory first release, has stated that "[t]he truth was, *E.T.* so dominated the atmosphere of what you might call 'space fiction' for that summer that nothing else was going to be considered. It took over the sensibility of the audiences, which left no room for a different view" (Ibid. 365). Another possible explanation as to why the film did so poorly was advanced by Paul M. Sammon's *Future Noir*: many audiences found the complex, thought-provoking, extremely detailed film to be boring (Ibid. 366).

In addition to the lack of box office success, *Blade Runner* also faced a polarised reaction from the critic. Unfortunately, negative reactions were the ones to draw most attention because, Sammon explains, "for some reason, unfavourable *Blade Runner* reviews were particularly vitriolic, as if many of the nation's critics had somehow been personally offended by the subtlety and care that had gone into the picture" (Ibid. 361). However, the unfavourable criticism did not condemn the film to oblivion and in the following decades it became, thanks to the birth of cyberpunk and the growing popularity of Philip K. Dick's works, a cult film. In the article "The Best Sci-Fi Movies of All Time" published on *Empire Magazine*, *Blade Runner* is described as "an initially misunderstood masterpiece that, over multiple decades and several recuts, stands as the pinnacle of cinematic science fiction" (Travis and White).

3.1.3 Philip K. Dick vs Ridley Scott: Issues with Blade Runner

It is a well-known fact that *Blade Runner* has had a troubled history with most accounts depicting its making of as a miserable, exhausting and generally unhappy experience. In his book on the film, Sammon quotes producer Katy Haber recounting:

> On one level, *Blade Runner* was an incredibly contentious production, even when measured against the typical horror that's called making a motion picture. […]

> Tandem [Productions] was furious with Michael [Deeley, *Blade Runner* producer] and Ridley [Scott], Ridley and Michael were battling Tandem, and our leading man and director got to the point where they were barely speaking to one another. Ridley was also exasperated by the crew, and many of the crew hated Ridley. It was just wretched awfulness, really; *Blade Runner* was a monument to stress. (*Future Noir* 237)

This internal clash among production companies and director, director and crew, and so on is relevant for the question of the different versions of the film. Six different cuts of *Blade Runner* have been shown at different times throughout the 40 years since its release. While maintaining for the most part the same plot and structure, the most relevant differences boil down to the presence of the "Ride in the Sunset" happy handing and Deckard's narration or lack thereof. This topic can therefore be treated under two headings:

- happy ending and narration versions consisting of the San Diego Sneak (May 1982), the Theatrical Version (June 1982), and the International Version (1982).
- no happy ending and narration cuts comprising the Dallas/Denver Sneaks (March 1982), the Director's Cut (1992), and the Final Cut (2007).

In this dissertation, *Blade Runner*, when not referring to the story in general, will be used to refer to the last released version of the film: *Blade Runner: The Final Cut* (2007). Having taken into consideration the history of the different cuts, conscious of the fact that "the hidden joke behind 1992's *Director's Cut* has always been that it isn't one" (Ibid. 457), the author of this thesis chose 2007's *Final Cut* as the main version of the film to focus on. Any future mention to any other variant of the film will be done using the name with which they have been referred to above.

Another important aspect of the troubled making of this motion picture is the conflict between the film production (director Ridley Scott in particular) and Philip K. Dick. The dispute stemmed from a faux pas on the production's part, as Dick recalls:

> One day I got a call from Robert Jaffe, around late April 1980. […] And the first think he told me was 'Congratulations!' I said, 'On what?' Jaffe then said he'd called to congratulate me on *Sheep?* being made into a film. I told him I didn't know a thing about it, because I didn't. It turned out that Jaffe had read about it in the trades, but no one from the production company had taken the trouble to inform me of the fact. At first I was bemused by this incident. […] In fact, a bit later I was

> having dinner with Ray Bradbury […] and I mentioned that I'd heard someone was making a movie out of my book by reading about it in the trades. Well, Ray just started shouting and waving his arms! He was totally scandalized. He thought that that was absolutely unacceptable behaviour. I just smiled and finished my drink. But as time went on, that snub began to gnaw on me. That and other things. (Ibid. 70)

Following this incident, the American author made sure to make his displeasure known by being openly hostile to the project that at the time was in production (Rickman 103). A second, and more relevant, point of contention was Scott's alleged criticism towards the novel. In an interview with Gregg Rickman, Philip K. Dick states that

> the whole thing with Ridley Scott, he's alleged to have said 'I could not read the novel' – once I heard *that,* I was programmed for a head-on collision with Hollywood after that. That probably is the worst thing I could have heard. If anything is guaranteed to create a schism between me and Hollywood, it would be that the director of the film had not and would not and could not read the novel. (105)

Dick was also unhappy with one of the first *Blade Runner* screenplays he was able to get his hands on and read. It has been described by the author as "a destruction of the novel," with Dick stating that that he "was just destroyed at one point at the prospect of this awful thing that had happened to [his] work" ("Philip K. Dick: 1928-1982" 52). However, he eventually admitted that David Peoples' screenplay changed his attitude towards the film (Ibid.). What definitely mutated Philip K. Dick's stance of the adaptaiton was a segment on *Blade Runner*'s special effects on KNBC-TV news. He has stated that he felt the film perfectly captured the world he imagined (Ibid.). That got the author interested in the film again and, shortly before Christmas of 1981, Dick was invited to the EEG facility and there he met Scott and viewed footage from the motion picture (*Future Noir* 326-327). The author himself describes the meeting with the director as

> very frank, […] certainly not the cliched formality of mutual compliments. I expressed certain ideas that I hoped would be in the film, and then Ridley said they would not be in the film. […] Yet he was very friendly, very honest, very open in what he said. Even though we openly disagreed on a number of points, the air of cordiality was always maintained. (Ibid. 329)

Blade Runner's coeffects supervisor David Dryer recounts Dick's reaction to the footage he was shown as one of the most successful moments of his career. He recalls: "Dick looks me straight in the eye and says, 'How is this possible? How can this be? Those are not the exact images, but the texture and tone of the images I saw in my head when I was writing the original book! The environment is exactly what I was feeling and thinking" (Ibid.). With a newfound excitement about the project, Dick wrote in a letter to producer Jeff Walker:

> The impact of *Blade Runner* is simply going to be overwhelming, both on the public and creative people – and, I believe, on science fiction as a field. […] Nothing that we have done, individually or collectively, matches *Blade Runner*. This is not escapism; it is super realism, so gritty and detailed and authentic and goddam convincing. […] And, I think, *Blade Runner* is going to revolutionise our conceptions of what science fiction is and, more, can do. […] My life and creative work are justified and completed by *Blade Runner.* (Ibid. 494)

The American author's elation over the film was unfortunately short lived. In what later turned out to be his last interview, he told John Boonstra: "I've been so amped-up over *Blade Runner*" ("Philip K. Dick: 1928-1982" 52). Reportedly, he was also anticipating the release of Scott's film "like a kid on Christmas Eve" (Turan par. 8). Unfortunately, he died four months before the film landed in cinemas all around the world.

3.2 Nexus-6: Androids and Men

3.2.1 What is Human? Androids, Empathy, and Humanity

The question of what is human is a universal one, all fiction engage in it. As a genre, science fiction "deals with the human condition challenged by change," focusing on "the entire human species, revealing humanity responding to technological and environmental change" (Gunn 399). Literature has been fascinated by the idea of creating creatures with human likeness ever since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and this has led authors to focus on what aspects of humanity can be replicated. In science fiction, three different concepts have been created as a result of this: the robot, the clone, and the android. Robots are "mechanical imitation of humanity […] offering the hubris of creation without the complexities of biology" (Langford 675). They are therefore machines artificially created with the intent of reproducing human life in a computer. On the other hand, clones are defined as "genetic copies of human, or other, beings" (Blackford 137). Cloning has been portrayed with highly

negative images throughout literary history, with the majority of representation being particularly filled with repugnance towards this technique (Ibid.139).

In science fiction, androids are what could be considered the middle ground between clones and robots. They are "artificial humanoid being[s], either of metallic or organic manufacture, specifically designed to resemble a human, albeit often with limited functionality in terms of sentience, programming, emotions, or lifespans" (Hall 30). Unlike robots, they may pass undetected through human society and can be programmed to be unaware of their own manufacture, therefore making themselves regard as humans (much like Rachael in both *Do Androids Dream* and *Blade Runner*, or Deckard himself in some versions of the film).

The juxtaposition between the human and the android permeates Dick's work. This motif is present in many of his novels and short stories, the most important of which is, of course, *Do Androids Dream*. In one of his last letters (dated July 1, 1981), the American author writes:

> I guess the essence of my artistic vision is to try to formulate what constitutes the authentic human being, as contrasted to what I call the "android" (a metaphor) or reflex machine; that is, the creature which resembled a human, is human biologically yet lacks, really, a soul. (Rossi 162)

As previously indicated, both Dick's *Do Androids Dream* and Scott's *Blade Runner* revolve around the question of what is human. The presence of androids in these futuristic societies represents a threat that needs to be extirpated. The need to formulate new criteria to define human beings has been brought on by the problematisation of fundamental categories that define humanity as a consequence of the possibility that these androids can masquerade as human beings. In both novel and film, the new principle is found in the concept of empathy. It is only through an empathy-based test (the Voight-Kampff test) that bounty hunters are able to determine whether someone is an android or a human being.

With regard to the concept of empathy in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream*, it should be kept in mind that there is no clear-cut definition of what the author means with the term empathy. When the novel was first published in 1968, vital aspects that have revolutionised the study of empathy (like mirror neurons) had not been discovered yet. In Dick's future world, men and androids coexist and intelligence is not a differentiating factor

in determining what is human and what is not. Nexus-6 androids have already "surpassed several classes of human specials in terms of intelligence" (*Do Androids Dream* 23). With the burgeoning "humanisation" of androids, it had become necessary for the governing human class to find a new way to define humanity and they found what they were looking for in empathic responses. As Deckard at some point muses in the novel:

> Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order including the arachnida. For one thing, the empathic faculty probably required an unimpaired group instinct; a solitary organism, such as a spider, would have no use for it; in fact it would tend to abort a spider's ability to survive. It would make him conscious of the desire to live on the part of his prey. [...] Because, ultimately, the empathic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated. (Ibid. 24)

Hence, empathy becomes a distinctive sign of humanity, something that needs to be cultivated and cherished. However, this new criterion to define humanness creates ethical issues, and because of that the novel showcases different degrees of empathic abilities amongst men and machines alike.

In the novel, however, the very nature of the test is questioned. Testing someone's empathic abilities to determine one's humanness ostracises an entire category of humans that show deficiencies in such ability. The test does not seem to take into consideration that "authentic humans with underdeveloped empathic ability" (Ibid.43) exist. A great example for this is the character of Phil Resch, a bounty hunter who Deckard suspects being an android due to the lack of empathy showcased in retiring a Nexus-6. When finding out he is stationed at an android-controlled police station, Resch himself starts doubting his belonging to the human race. He tells Deckard: "'After we retire Luba Luft – I want you to–' His voice, husky and tormented, broke off. 'You know. Give me the Boneli test or that empathy scale you have. To see about me'" (Ibid. 101). He is also accused by other androids of being one: "You're sure I'm an android? Is that really what Garland said?" (Ibid. 108) he asks Deckard, and he is told by Luba Luft that he is "not human. No more than I am" (Ibid. 105). However, when Deckard finally tests him, the test highlights in Resch a deficit in empathy towards androids:

> ‘Do you have an ideology framed?’ Phil Resch asked. ‘That would explain me as part of the human race?’
> Rick said, ‘There is a defect in your empathic, role-taking ability. One which we don’t test for. Your feelings toward androids.’ (Ibid. 112)

The lack of empathy towards androids is not tested in this world because they are considered worthless. They are machines created with the sole objective of working as slaves in the off-world colonies and to be used in dangerous situations. In the universe of *Do Androids Dream* animals are clearly more valuable than them: “‘As you say, even animals are protected by law. All life. Everything organic that wriggles or squirms or burrows or flies or swarms or lays eggs or–’ […] ‘Insects […] are especially sacrosanct’” (Ibid. 128). Androids are valuable only as labour or sexual slaves.

In his essay “Philip K. Dick’s Androids: Victimized Victimizers,” Aaron Barlow points out that in *Do Androids Dream* men hold their humanness thanks to animals and Mercerism (84). Mercerism is a hegemonic theology that sustains the society depicted in the novel. This religion’s origin is unknown, however at some point in the past “empathy boxes […] appeared on Earth” (24). As explained by Toth:

> When held, these empathy boxes transport a human’s consciousness into a type of virtual reality. In this virtual reality, the subject “fuses” with all others who are also, at any given time, fused. This human collective then *becomes* the messianic Wilbur Mercer as he struggles to climb a seemingly insurmountable hill. This climb satisfies his (or humanity’s) overwhelming “need to ascend” [(17)]. During the climb, unidentifiable assailants bombard the fused humans with rocks. The “cycle” ends (and begins again) when the collective “[falls] into the trough of the tomb world.” (67; emphasis in the original)

In a world where individuals are often alone and those that are still on Earth feel left behind, Mercer and his fusion gives them a sense of community. The empathy box represents their opportunity to be a part of something bigger, it is “the most personal possession you have! It’s an extension of your body; it’s the way you touch other humans, it’s the way you stop being alone” (*Do Androids Dream* 53).

It is from this feeling of belonging that androids are precluded. Mercerism and its empathy box is seen by these machines as “a way of proving that humans can do something [androids] can’t do” (Ibid.165). What the fugitive Nexus-6 are going after is freedom and “a

group experience similar to that of Mercerism" (Ibid. 145), something that, as Baty points out, "remains unavailable to androids" (Ibid.). Mercer's experience through the empathy box (and the theology of Mercerism) imitates "the tension between a need to experience empathy (and/as entropy) and the paradoxical desire to assert and maintain a sense of selfhood" (Toth 67). This tension culminates in the scene where Buster Friendly exposes Mercerism as a fraud and the androids mutilate a spider. That moment during which the androids chop off the spider's legs with scientific precision and with a cold objectivity, along with Buster Friendly's explosive revelations on Mercer leads to "the absolute dissolution of Isidore's sense of distinction and/or difference" (Ibid. 70). Isidore's uncontrolled empathy towards a spider (arguably the least human of all creatures) marks his total dissociation from humanity, as much as the androids' cold and brutal mutilation of that animal underlines their lack of humanity. As noted by Toth: "by the end of the scene, then, neither the androids nor Isidore are identifiable as (human) subjects. No one is *alive*" (Ibid. 71; emphasis in the original).

In Scott's version of the story, this particular religious aspect is removed from the plot and animals are less present (there is only a fake snake in Zhora's dressing room). The Voight-Kampff test is kept, but the plot revolves more around the humanity of the replicants, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.2.2 Do Androids Dream? Philip K. Dick on Androids

In December 1972, Philip K. Dick gave speech at the Vancouver Science Fiction Convention that was later published in the fanzine SF Commentary. In the speech, now known with the title "The Android and the Human," the American author touches the topic of what is human. In his analysis on the differences between man and machine, Dick admits that the chances of deception are major, but points out that similarities can be more easily made, explaining that:

> Some meaningful comparison exists between human and mechanical behaviour […]. [As] the external world becomes more animate, we may find that we – the so-called humans – are becoming […] inanimate in the sense that we are led, directed by built-in tropisms, rather than leading. So we and our elaborately evolving computers may meet each other half way. (11)

Dick believes that machines, and all things created, have the tendency to take lives of their own and can therefore teach us humans about ourselves (Barlow 77). A few years later, the American author wrote an essay titled "Man, Android and Machine," where he states that:

> Within the universe there exists fierce cold things, which I have given the name 'machines' to. Their behaviour frightens me, especially when it imitates human behaviour so well that I get the uncomfortable sense that these things are trying to pass themselves off as humans but are not. I call them 'androids,' which is my own way of using that word. By 'android' I do not mean a sincere attempt to create in the laboratory a human being […]. I mean a thing somehow generated to deceive us in a cruel way, to cause us to think it to be one of ourselves. (202)

Dick constantly writes about them in his fiction, positing a difference of behaviour, rather than one of essence (Ibid.). To him a human being without empathy equates to an android that is built without it. Quoting John Donne's famous theorem that "No man is an island," he describes androids and men lacking the ability to empathise as

> someone who does not care about the fate which his fellow living creatures fall victim to; he stands detached, a spectator, acting out by his indifference John Donne's theorem that 'No man is an island,' bit giving that theorem a twist: that which is a mental and moral island is *not a man*. (Ibid. 202-203; emphasis in the original)

While portraying androids in a negative way, Dick always puts them up against the concept of man. Understanding the term "human being" as something applying "not to origin or to any ontology but to a way of being in the world" (Ibid. 203), he raises the issue of the soul by ideating this equation between man and machine:

$$soul : man = man : machine$$

He explains that, as it happened with men when scientists weren't able to locate a specific organ that proved the existence of the soul and declined to admit we have one altogether, the same thing would happen if scientists tried to locate the "humanness" of a machine (Ibid.).

In his novels and stories, Dick rejected the simplistic idea that humanity was something that could be established beyond a reasonable doubt. He defined humans as "those beings able to empathise, to care what happens to others" (Barlow 79). His work that best explores

this idea is indubitably *Do Androids Dream*, where empathy defines humanity. As previously mentioned, in this dystopic future great importance is given to the empathy test. Throughout the novel different versions of the test are mentioned, from the Voigt Empathy Test, the very first test developed by the Pavlov institute to detect the presence of androids among humans, to its newest revised version, the Voigt-Kampff Test using the Voigt-Kampff Altered Scale. At the basis of this test there is "[e]mpathic response. In a variety of social situations. Mostly having to do with animals" (*Do Androids Dream* 95) and it takes on average six or seven questions before a determination can be made (Ibid. 111). The sacredness of real animals is essential in *Do Androids Dream* and the relationships with them is the main point of contrast between androids and humans. Rick Deckard is constantly obsessing over how much it would cost to get a real animal instead of the electric sheep he kept on the roof of his apartment building. His perpetual dreaming of owning a real pet, and in general the human tendency to care for other animals, is put in stark contrast with the androids' coldness towards them. It is made evident in the scene where the androids are mercilessly mutilating a spider while J.R. Isidore is begging them to stop:

> 'Eight?' Irmgard Baty said. 'Why couldn't it get by on four? Cut four off and see.' Impulsively opening her purse she produced a pair of clean, sharp cuticle scissors, which she passed to Pris.
> A weird terror struck at J.R. Isidore. […]
> 'Please,' Isidore said.
> Pris glanced up inquiringly. 'Is it worth something?'
> 'Don't mutilate it,' he said wheezingly. Imploringly.
> With the scissors Pris snipped off one of the spider's legs. […]
> Pris clipped off another leg, restraining the spider with the edge of her hand. She was smiling. (*Do Androids Dream* 162-163)

This coldness is what differentiates androids and men.

The most obvious difference in approach and interpretation of the story's topics is that of the representation of androids in the novel and in the film. In *Do Androids Dream* their portrayal is overall negative. What the novel focuses on is the dehumanisation of Deckard who is forced to act as a machine and suppress any kinds of empathic relationship he creates with the androids. On the other hand, *Blade Runner* is concerned with the replicants' humanity. When discussing the differing views he and Scott had on various aspects of the film, Philip K. Dick stated:

> To me, the replicants are deplorable. They are cruel, they are cold, they are heartless. They have no empathy, which is how the Voight-Kampff test catches them out, and don't care about what happens to other creatures. They are essentially less-than-human entities. Ridley, on the other hand, said he regarded them as supermen who couldn't fly. He said they were smarter, stronger, and had faster reflexes than humans. 'Golly!' That's all I could think of to reply to that one. I mean, Ridley's attitude was quite a divergence from my original point of view, since the theme of my book is that Deckard is dehumanized through tracking down the androids. When I mentioned this, Ridley said that he considered it an intellectual idea, and that he was not interested in making an esoteric film. (*Future Noir* 329-330)

3.2.3 Replicants: Scott's Nexus-6

One of the most noticeable differences in the approach of androids between *Blade Runner* and *Do Androids Dream* is the use of two different terms to define these machines. Dick uses the more traditional "android" (sometimes in its shortened version "andy"), while Scott uses the term "replicant." This is due to the director's dislike for the traditional term, that was explained in an interview with Paul M. Sammon:

> The term *android* is a dangerous one, undermined by certain generic assumptions. I don't like using it. […] You see, *android* is a very familiar word. Not just to science fiction readers, but to the general public. A lot of material – some good, some crap – has been touched by the term. Therefore, I didn't want *Blade Runner* to be premonitory of *android* at all. Because then people would think that this film was about robots, when in fact it isn't. I thought it was better that we come up with a new word altogether. (*Future Noir* 66)

As the story goes, it was screenwriter David Peoples, with the help of his daughter Risa, who came up with this term. Risa told her father about "replicating," "the name of the process used to duplicate cells for cloning" (Ibid. 67), and from there the name "replicant" was born.

At the height of the Dick-*Blade Runner* quarrel, following the publication of an inflammatory article published on *Select TV* penned by the author himself against the film, during a conversation with someone from the production Dick recalls being warned about using that word: "I shouldn't be using the word 'android.' That this was dangerous talk. […] So I told them, 'Shucks, fellas, I am *so* sorry I titled my book *Do Androids Dream of Electric*

Sheep? But you know, gosh… now I'm sort of committed to it" (Ibid. 75). Despite this first acrimonious comment, the American author later went back to the topic of the term "replicant" and stated: "I do accept the word 'replicant' now, since 'android' genuinely has been overused" (Ibid.).

The *Workprint* (1982)*,* the oldest existing version of *Blade Runner*, presents a dictionary definition of the term "replicant" that was later replaced by the opening crawl previously cited at the beginning of this chapter. The entry reads:

> REPLICANT \rep'-li-cant\ *n*. See also ROBOT (*antique*): ANDROID (*obsolete*): NEXUS (*generic*): Synthetic human with paraphysical capabilities, having skin/flesh culture. Also: Rep, skin job (*slang*): Off-world uses: Combat, high risk industrial, deep-space probe. On-world use prohibited. Specifications and quantities – information classified. NEW AMERICAN DICTIONARY. Copyright © 2016. (0:00:39-0:01:05)

This explanation of the term gave a better idea of what a replicant is, rather than the more general opening crawl that implies that these androids are simply high-tech robots.

What makes *Blade Runner* exemplary is "its ambiguous attitude towards replicants" (Bukatman 76). In cyberpunk, technology "is pervasive, utterly intimate. Not outside us, but next to us. Under our skin; often, inside our minds" (Sterling xi). Replicants fuse together technology and humanity, surpassing men with their physical and mental superiority. This is an important concept in *Blade Runner* where "the only important difference between humans and replicants was programmed: a four-year lifespan [operating] as a fail-safe mechanism, protecting the human from its own obsolescence" (Bukatman 77). What makes them indistinguishable from humans are their implanted memories. They are given photographs that serve as visual representations of these artificial memories they have. As Ridley Scott explains, "photographs are essentially history. Which is what these replicants don't have" (*Future Noir* 498).

In the film, each of the androids showcases human traits. As Francavilla points out in his essay "The Android as *Doppelgänger*":

> Leon, for example, is nervous, afraid, and hesitant when being interrogated, triumphant and self-confident when he is about to kill Deckard. Zhora is at first worldly and cunning. But she panics and runs when others discover her attempt to

> strangle Deckard. Pris exhibits that gracefulness and beauty of movement one would expect in a trained dancer. Both Zhora's death and Pris' are bloody, violent, and shocking. Each death demonstrates the tenacity and will with which these replicants cling to life – another human trait. (13)

The most human of all androids is Roy Batty, as it will be later analysed in this chapter. He is the one who displays those emotions we think the most human, such as rage, love, revenge, suffering, and sorrow. However, despite these displays of emotions, they are not persons. In the essay "Androids as a Device for Reflection on Personhood," Marilyn Gwaltney observes that, unlike in the book where androids "are portrayed as acting in much the way any group of hunted persons forced to go underground might act" (35), Scott's film depicts them as if they were "'unfinished' persons" (Ibid.). This unfinishedness, Gwaltney argues, is suggested by "striking moments of childlike or animalistic behaviours" (Ibid.), such as when Leon plunges his hand into the tank full slimy liquid in Chew's laboratory and proceeds to smell the gooey substance, or Roy's hide-and-seek hunt of Deckard at the end of the film. This defect –their being unfinished persons– in the book is located in the androids' lack of empathy, while the motion picture attributes it to the "lack of maturity or developmental experiences which remain with us through memory" (Ibid.). It is because of that failsafe device that was implanted in them, that –as Pris describes it– "accelerated decrepitude" (*Blade Runner* 1:18:23-1:18:25) that they are unable to fully form as persons.

Blade Runner challenges the definition of humanity that had been present in sci-fi motion pictures in the 1950s and inverts it from humans have feelings and non-humans do not, to "*what has feelings is human"* (Bukatman 81; empahasis in the original). It is in this inversion that lays the core difference in the interpretation of androids/replicants of *Do Androids Dream* and *Blade Runner*. As science fiction writer Norman Spinrad asserts:

> What ultimately makes the androids in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* less than human is not their synthetic origin, but […] their inability to empathise with the existential plight of other life forms caught in the same multiverse. What raises the android Roy Batty to human status in *Blade Runner* is that, on the blink of his own death, he is able to empathise with Deckard. (210)

Roy appears to be the most human character in the film, as this chapter's next section will analyse, perfectly embodying the Tyrell Corporation's motto: "more human than human" (*Blade Runner* 0:22:00-0:22:05).

3.3 Roy: Rough, Cold Android or Wonderful Spiritual Man?

Before proceeding to examine the character of Roy in both *Do Androids Dream* and in *Blade Runner*, it is important to reintroduce the main question this thesis is trying to answer: can we feel empathy for "villains" in dystopias? And if yes, can a type of negative character be defined? As noted in the introduction, in order for negative empathy to be triggered by a villain, this character needs to possess three main characteristics: 1) psychological complexity; 2) be a tormented character; 3) exhibit notable rhetoric abilities. This section of the chapter will, in connection to the aforementioned question, analyse Philip K. Dick's version of Roy first, then Ridley Scott's.

3.3.1 "Something Worse": Roy Baty in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

Dick's *Do Androids Dream* focuses on people (on the character of Deckard specifically) and not on the suffering of the machine. The author's stance towards the androids is unsympathetic. He sees them as "deplorable, [...] cruel, cold, and heartless. They have no empathy [...] and don't care about what happens to other creatures" (*Future Noir* 329). In the novel, Roy is described as a heavy man (*Do Androids Dream* 128), with a "face wise with profundity" (Ibid. 125), smart (Ibid. 31) and "cleverer than humans" (Ibid. 144), possessing "an aggressive, assertive air of ersatz authority" (Ibid. 145). As the poop sheet informs Deckard, "given to mystical preoccupations, this android proposed the group escape attempt, underwriting it ideologically with a pretentious fiction as to the sacredness of so-called android 'life'" (Ibid.).

Besides his superior intellect and his dreams of freedom, Roy Baty is also described as a dangerous threat. He derives pleasure from other people's shock, so much so that "the worse the situation the more he seemed to enjoy it" (Ibid. 123) and is at some point characterised by the narrator as "something different. Something worse" (Ibid. 145). In his pursuit of the sacredness of the android life he "stole, and experimented with, various mind-fusing drugs, claiming when caught that it hoped to promote in androids a group experience similar to that of Mercerism, which it pointed out remains unavailable to androids" (Ibid.), making him a "rough, cold android, hoping to undergo an experience from which, due to a deliberately built-in defect, it remained excluded" (Ibid. 146).

The novel is narrated from two different "human" foci: Rick Deckard's and J.R. Isidore's. There is no android point of view in the story, everything we know, we know from

the human side. There are, however, two instances where Roy seems to showcase human characteristics in the novel. Both happen at the end of the story, in chapter 19, when the androids are meeting their end. In it, Roy, a machine built to go to war and undertake tasks that would be too dangerous for humans, feels fear. When the circle is starting to close around the remaining androids and Deckard has finally found their hiding place, while trying to hear any noises coming from the hallway, "Isiodre smelled the rank, cringing body; he inhaled *fear from it*, *fear pouring out*, forming a mist" (Ibid. 171-172; emphasis added). Fear is a distinctly human emotion, yet it is a machine that is feeling it. The second instance of humanity showcased by Roy happens when Deckard manages to kill his wife Irmgrad. Roy, "in the other room, let out a cry of *anguish*" (Ibid. 177; emphasis added). Anguish for the loss of his wife implies that Roy loved Irmgrad (as Deckard acknowledges with his "Okay, you loved her" [Ibid.]), therefore making him feel yet another typically human emotion.

From the text it emerges that the character of Roy Baty is what many would define a villain. Despite his human traits showcased in the end, he is portrayed as a violent being ready to do anything in order to get what he wants. Following this pretty damning description, the question of whether a reader or an audience can relate to such a brutal being naturally arises. As previously explained, Keen describes character identification as a fundamental element responsible for triggering an empathic response in the reader. However, I believe that the reader is not exposed enough to Roy's motives to be able to empathise with the android. They are only briefly told of his ideology of the "sacredness of so-called android 'life'" (Ibid. 145) that is dismissed by the novel as "pretentious fiction" (Ibid.).

Unlike in the film, Dick's Roy is more like a shadow that lurks in the background and when he is in the spotlight, he displays cruel and ruthless behaviours. There is no empathy in Roy and, most importantly, his desire to live is not so strong after the death of its wife. There is less struggle in Dick's android, no redemption in his death:

> [Deckard] shot Roy Batty; the big man's corpse lashed about, toppled like an over-stacked collection of separate, brittle entities; it smashed into the kitchen table and carried dishes and flatware down with it. Reflex circuits in the corpse made it twitch and flutter, but it had died. (Ibid. 177)

3.3.2 “More Human than Human”: Roy Batty in *Blade Runner*

Due to the director’s idea of replicants, Roy’s portrayal in Scott’s film is diametrically different from Dick’s. In *Blade Runner* the androids are portrayed as superhuman beings that are not able to fly. As actor Rutger Hauer recalls: “I had a long talk about Batty’s superhuman powers with Ridley, because I felt we had to be really delicate in showing how strong this guy really was. Because if he was superhuman, there’d be no comparison to a human’s weakness” (*Future Noir* 221-222).

Blade Runner focuses a lot more on the replicants’ desperate search for a cure to their “accelerated decrepitude.” The audience is shown the androids’ motives, as Gwaltney points out:

> in the movie, Roy Batty develops into a sympathetic character. Our understanding of his cruelty changes as we come to understand it as a very human reaction to his existential situation: the imminence of his death and that of those he loves; the feelings of betrayal by the beings that brought him into existence. (33)

The dramatic core of the film derives from Batty’s attempts to assert his freedom through the assertion of his right to a lengthier life. It is Roy’s love of life that drastically contrasts with Deckard’s lack thereof. Thanks to a “campy” (Bukatman 96) performance by Dutch actor Rutger Hauer, Roy “is romping through the film, the ‘thing’ that thinks and fights and pouts and plays and poses” (Ibid. 95).

The role of this replicant in the film is a complex one. He is not a villain, yet he is not the hero of *Blade Runner*, as some have implied. On this matter, Rutger Hauer states:

> It’s not so much that Batty is the hero. Let’s say he’s almost like Deckard’s instrument for redemption. Deckard’s character is sort of lost. A burnt out, lost human. And here’s this toy called Batty that enters Deckard’s life. Batty says, hey, I have a few human ideas here. Let me check them out. So he keeps testing Deckard on those. And Deckard never gets it. That’s the biggest thing, Deckard doesn’t get shit. He learns nothing. (*Future Noir* 582)

The Dutch actor also adds in another interview, “I don’t think this is a villain. From the point where they start chasing him, he just wants to live longer. He hasn’t done much harm; you

don’t see him do any harm. […] He has to fight every once in a while, because… that’s survival” (“Rutger Hauer- Interview” 2:06-2:40).

Roy functions as a sort of double to Deckard. In the film, the distinction between android and man is so blurred that in the end there is a sort of reversal with the hunter that ends up being hunted by his pray. Roy is not a hero, nor a saint in the film. In his essay “The Android as *Doppelgänger*,” Joseph Francavilla notes:

> Batty is indeed a demonically menacing figure throughout the film, often appearing from shadows suddenly. At the same time, he is no villain, but actually a Promethean hero with a noble, tragic fate. He is a nobler and better “man,” in many ways, than most of the humans in the film. His hamarthia, the tragic character flaw causing his inevitable downfall, is the imposed four-year life span. (11)

In the world of *Blade Runner*, it is empathy that defines one’s humanity, and in the film, Roy seems to develop a love for life more quickly than Deckard (who cannot fully empathise with his victims until he cannot kill Batty and will not kill Rachael).

Roy seems to reject the idea of being a machine. While together with Pris in Sebastian’s apartment, when he is faced with a fascinated man who wants to see what a Nexus-6 can do, Roy remarks: “We’re not computers, Sebastian. We are physical” (*Blade Runner* 1:17:35-1:17-40). His desperate search for a solution to the aging problem leads Roy to face the creator of the Nexus-6 android: Eldon Tyrell. When the replicant comes face to face with his creator, he demands: “I want more life, father”[6] (Ibid. 1:23:43-1:23:47). But that plea falls on deaf ears:

> TYRELL: You were made as well as we could make you.
> ROY: But not to last.
> TYRELL: The light that burns twice as bring burns half as long. And you have burned so very, very brightly, Roy. Look at you. You’re the prodigal son, you are quite a prize. (Ibid. 1:25:00-1:25:20)

[6] In the US Theatrical Cut, the International Cut and the Director’s Cut the line goes “I want more life, fucker” giving the whole scene a more aggressive taste. The “father” version was ultimately chosen for the Final Cut, giving deeper complexity to the meeting between Roy and Tyrell.

Conscious of not having any more chances at prolonging his life, Roy ends up brutally killing Tyrell in front of Sebastian in what is possibly the most graphic depiction of violence in *Blade Runner*.

The most fascinating aspect of the film is that "it makes us feel the pain Roy Batty feels when faced with the knowledge of his approaching death," Gwaltney writes, "we are aware with him of all the valuable things he will never know or do" (36). The understanding of the limited time possessed by Roy permeates the film. Early on a shot of a closing hand is shown while Roy's voice can be heard saying "Time… enough" (*Blade Runner* 0:25:15-0:25-18), and that same hand is later pierced with a nail by Roy in an attempt to revitalise it as it slowly starts closing: his batteries are running out. His inability to live longer, the pain and awareness that come with it are all comprised in his final speech. Arguably one of the most famous monologues in cinema history, "Tears in Rain," despite its limited length, encompasses Roy's humanity.

3.3.3 Tears in Rain: Roy's Humanity

The famous "Tears in Rain" monologue comes as the climax of a 20-minute-long sequence that shows Roy hunting Deckard in an attempt to kill him as revenge for the blade runner having killed Pris and all the other fugitive androids. The replicant's batteries are running out –as represented by his hand slowly closing– and he has nothing left to live for. During the hide-and-seek-like hunt (Rutger Hauer suggested they base the chase on the Game of Life [*Future Noir* 220]), the audience witnesses Roy grabbing Deckard who is dangling from a building, therefore saving his life. In a 1982 interview to science fiction film magazine *Stabrust*, Ridley Scott suggests that Batty act of saving Deckard's life

> was an endorsement in a way; that the character is almost more human than human, in that he can demonstrate a very human quality at a time when the roles are reversed and Deckard may have been delighted to blow his head off. But Roy Batty takes the humane route. But also in a way, because [Batty] wants a kind of death watch, where he knows he is going, dying. So in a sense he is saving Deckard for something, to pass on the information that what the makers are doing is wrong – either the answer is not to make them at all, or deal with them as human beings. (Ibid. 227-228)

However, Rutger Hauer gives a different story from Scott's one:

> The reason I saved Harrison's life? In talking with Ridley, I'd asked him, 'Can I put stuff into this computer called Batty, things that don't really belong?' […] But Ridley insisted that one thing Batty had to have was absolutely no sense of hesitation. He doesn't reflect, he reacts. He's faster than anybody. A characteristic of the Nexus-6. […] This reply might bother some people, because so many folks have read a lot of meaning into Batty saving Deckard's life. But actions always come first. *Then* we think about them, later. Roy doesn't know why he saves Deckard or grabs the dove. He just does it. (Ibid. 228; emphasis in the original)

Whatever the reason, that action is bound to resonate in the audience as possibly the most humane action in the entire film, no matter if Roy did it intentionally or not. Screenwriter Hampton Fancher recalls him and Scott discussing about Batty's fascination with life. He recalls:

> Ridley and I had also talked about Batty as a character who was fascinated with life, even though he deals in death. And here, at the last moments of Batty's life, is this little man, Deckard, who literally spits in the face of death. Roy appreciated that, this last, defiant, life-affirming gesture. That's why he saved Deckard – he repaid Deckard's defiance with a moment of largesse. (Ibid. 229)

Roy's love of and fascination with life is enclosed in his final lines. The speech was famously changed by actor Rutger Hauer the night before the shooting because he felt the original scene was too long. In the documentary on the making of the film, the Dutch man recounts:

> There was a real page of opera talk that, you know, is bad in any script, I don't care how you look at it. And this was high-tech speak that had very little bearing on anything, you know, that the movie had shown you before. So I just put a knife in it. And I — And I did this at night, and I didn't know if Ridley was okay with it. (*Dangerous Days* 2:36:08- 2.36:28)

An undated Fancher/Peoples draft displayed in *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner* shows a version of Batty's monologue before the actor edited it:

> BATTY. I've known adventures, seen places you people will never see, I've been Offworld and back… frontiers! I've stood on the back deck of a blinker bound for the Plutition Camps with sweat in my eyes watching stars fight on the shoulder of Orion…
> DECKARD. Ah…

> BATTY. I've felt wind in my hair, riding test boats off the black galaxies and seen an attack fleet burn like a match and disappear. I've seen it, felt it…! (2:36:08-2:36:20)

In the replicant's final scene, Roy sits down in front of a panting Deckard that has just been saved from falling down a building. Holding a dove in one hand and with a nail perforating his other, he sits down and tells the blade runner:

> I've… *seen* things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those… moments will be lost … in time … like… tears… in rain. Time to die. (*Blade Runner* 1:46:22-1:47:05; emphasis added)

Roy shares with Deckard his memories, his *real* memories, and not the false ones given to him upon his manufacture. In the scene he is presented shirtless, vulnerable, and bleeding. The replicant has nothing to lose. In this fragile moment, the machine becomes an individual and the person (Deckard) realises he has become a machine. As Hauer writes in his biography: "Roy is never a hero, but for one moment he acts like one" (Hauer 127). Batty's final speech captures the essence of life. In it, the replicant includes the life he has lived, the memories he has created in his four years, while underlining its delicacy. Life, and memories, perish with time and get lost, like tears in rain.

Circling back to the initial hypothesis, the character of Roy is a psychologically complex one, a four-year-old in an adult body that is developing his own personality; however, while experiencing life as a kid, he also possesses extraordinary rhetoric abilities and a mind more brilliant that most humans (as Tyrell remarks, Roy has "burned so very, very brightly" [*Blade Runner* 1:25:15-1:25:20]). The android is also a tormented character, hunted with the knowledge that it is running out of time.

Ultimately, Roy is a machine programmed to kill, to react and not think about it. Yet his negative connotations are neutralised at the end of the film where the audience is shown the remote "human" essence that is developing in the android. Unlike Dick's novel, *Blade Runner* provides the audience with a back story that explains Roy's actions, his motives, the different situations he lived in that required him to act. This rich background allows them to establish an empathic relationship with this negative character by taking them along with him in his quest for more life. This desire to live longer is one of the most human aspects of

the film, and Roy's desperation in the end could trigger an empathic reaction in the audience thus allowing them to dismiss their knowledge of all the murders and violence he committed and create an empathic connection to the character.

Conclusion

Empathy is an essential aspect of our life and the way we engage with people or works of art. Deriving from the German term *Einfühlung*, the concept of empathy has been defined in many ways, essentially representing the "ability and tendency to share and understand others' internal states" (Zaki and Ochsner 871) that allows us to better engage and understand the world around us. Recent studies have demonstrated that the concept of empathy can be divided into two different empathic experiences (positive and negative) which activate different regions of the brain. This classification had also been theorised by Theodor Lipps, who affirmed that positive and negative empathy are "affirmation and negation of life of the empathising subject" (Ercolino 245). However, it is within the aesthetic realm that it is possible to repute repulsive works of art as pleasurable. Art allows us to feel human and perceive the beauty in what is negative, even when it represents "suffering, evil or repulsive human beings" (Ibid.). Drawing from the ideas of academics like Suzanne Keen, Adam Morton, Berys Gaut, Jane Stadler, and Stefano Ercolino, the main goal of the current study was to determine whether, in order to evoke a negative empathic reaction in the reader/audience, a negative character ought to be psychologically complex, tormented, and possessing impressive rhetoric abilities. This exploration has been limited to the domain of the dystopia since this genre provides the audience with a greater distancing from reality than any other fiction.

Analysing Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and their adaptations, namely Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, this thesis has explored whether a specific type of negative character can trigger a negative empathic reaction in the readers/audience. This study has shown that in order to evoke an empathic reaction in the reader/audience, villains in dystopias need to be psychologically complex, tormented, and showcasing notable rhetoric abilities. These three conditions are *necessary but not sufficient*.

The analysis of the character of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* shows that, while coming out as a relatively likeable character, he possesses only some of the aforementioned traits, and this makes it hard to empathise with a character like him. Even after having successfully overcome the barriers of decency that normally prevent us from feeling empathy with people who commit atrocities, and the additional barrier constituted by the use of Nadsat, the

invented language that distances us from the graphic violence depicted in the novel and in the film, Alex's unremorseful attitude towards violence represents a hindrance towards achieving a negative empathic connection.

As for the character of Commander Lawrence in *The Handmaid's Tale*, this thesis has pointed out that while there are sides of his character with which the audience can empathise, the constant shapeshifting he carries out throughout the series in order to survive makes it hard to maintain an empathic connection with the character. However, the introspection provided into his motives, together with the lack of active participation in the more violent situations of the story and his occasional role as an ally of the protagonist make it easier to form an empathic connection with him.

Lastly, the character of Roy in *Do Androids Dream* and *Blade Runner* leads to very different conclusions, depending on the work analysed. If Dick's android is portrayed in a negative light and not explored enough to allow the reader to be able to empathise with him, Scott's replicant develops as a sympathetic character, sometimes a nobler and better man than the humans in the film. The film depiction of the replicant's desperate fight for survival leads the audience to understand his cruelty as a very human reaction to the imminence of death, therefore making him a character with which it is relatively easy to understand and whose moral compass is possible to accept, therefore making an empathic reaction achievable.

As it has been stated many times, there is no guarantee that a character will trigger an empathic connection in the audience, since different people experience the same work of art in different ways. Several questions still remain to be answered when it comes to the concept of negative empathy, and further research should be undertaken to explore what narrative or cinematic techniques play an important role in provoking negative empathic reactions towards negative characters.

Appendix A.
Nadsat glossary

A short glossary of Nadsat words present in this thesis. Definitions and translations have been drawn from the notes and glossary present in Penguin's *A Clockwork Orange. The Restored Edition* published in 2013 and edited by Andrew Biswell.

bezoomny	crazy
bolshy	big
bratchny	bastard
britva	razor
cal	shit
(to) crast	to steal
(to) creech	to scream
deng	money
devotchka	girl
(to) drats	to fight
droog	friend
(to) filly	to play
gazetta	newspaper
glazzy	eye
gloopy	stupid
goloss	voice
goober	lip
grahzny	dirty
horrorshow	good, well. From the Russian word хорошо ("good"); Burgess plays with the sound of it and its similarities with the English "horror show"
in-out-in-out	sex. At times also spelled in-out in-out
koshka	cat
kot	tomcat
litso	face
(to) lovet	to catch

malchick	boy
malenky	little
nadsat	teen
noga	foot, leg
platties	clothes
plott	body
poogly	frightened
prestoopnick	criminal
pretty polly	money
prison charlie	prison chaplain. “Charlie” is also a slang expression for idiot or charlatan
ptitsa	woman
rooker	hand or arm
rot	mouth
shoom	noise
(to) smeck	to laugh
starry	old
(to) tolchock	to hit
veck	man, guy
veshch	thing
(to) viddy	to see
vonny	smelly
zooby	tooth

Appendix B.
Bradley Whitford in Conversation

Bradley Whitford was born on October 10, 1959, in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. A classically trained stage actor, he studied theatre and English literature at Wesleyan University before completing his studies at the Juilliard Theatre Centre. Whitford made his screen debut in 1985 in a low-budget thriller titled *Dead as a Doorman*. In 1987, he appeared in both the New York and Los Angeles productions of Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*. In the following years, Whitford continued to alternate stage roles with film assignments, and by the early '90s was appearing in a steady stream of supporting roles in such films as *Presumed Innocent* (1990), *A Perfect World* (1994), and *Philadelphia* (1993). In 1999, he was cast as Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Lyman on the American TV series *The West Wing* (1999-2006). This role earned him an immense success, and, in 2001, the first of his three Emmy awards.

A seemingly inexhaustible actor, he's been starring on films and television shows ever since, with credits that include *Young Guns II* (1990), *Scent of a Woman* (1992), *The X-Files* (1994), *Billy Madison* (1995), *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005), *Little Manhattan* (2005), *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (2006-2007), *The Mentalist* (2011), *Cabin in the Woods* (2011), *Parks and Recreation* (2012), *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013), *Get Out* (2017), *The Post* (2017), *Transparent* (2014-2019) — which earned him his second Emmy win — *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019), *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2015-2020), and *tick, tick… BOOM!* (2021).

Of course, for the purposes of this thesis, Bradley Whitford is best known for portraying Commander Joseph Lawrence in *The Handmaid's Tale* (a role that brought him to his third Emmy win).

The following interview is an edited composite of a conversation that took place between Bradley Whitford and the author of this dissertation over Zoom on September 3, 2022, before the release of season 5 of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

PADOVAN: I have some ideas on Commander Lawrence's background, but I have nowhere to confirm them because there's not much in the show, it's pretty secretive. I think that's the appeal, but also, I need to know more about the character.

WHITFORD: What's interesting is, you know, there's no document of Lawrence's past. There's some agreed upon things, but I've had arguments with writers this year, like,

“Look, this is my understanding of- from the inside, where I’m coming from and it has to do with this history that I’m thinking of, that they may not have even sort of thought about. So, it’s an interesting thing about ongoing television as an actor because- I remember- the stupid example is like doing *West Wing* and at some point in the first year I realise that my sister died in a fire. Well, I didn’t know that [*laughs*]. You kind of find it out as you go along. And my relationship with the Donna character gets shown to you at certain times. This year they almost did, on *Handmaid’s Tale*, a sort of origin story before Gilead thing. They thought about doing it with Eleanor, but they ended up, rightfully so, just doing the plot.

PADOVAN: Oh, it’s a pity. I was looking forward to that because I think it’s very important for the character.

WHITFORD: Yeah, I do too.

PADOVAN: I think his relationship with his wife- it’s as personal as he gets in the show.

WHITFORD: Yes.

PADOVAN: That’s all you see from his past. And it’s what she remembers of him.

WHITFORD: Yes, that- I mean, the redeeming and horrible thing about this guy is his, and I think it comes across in the way it was written and in the way we played it, that love for Eleanor was absolutely real. And I think he reflects a kind of horrible thing about human nature. It’s not until the rape and the horrible world he has created really doesn’t hit home for him in a way that he might deal with, until it destroys the woman he loved that he reacts. Which is an interesting thing with this guy because it both makes him redeemable, but it’s a pretty sad statement on our ability to relate to the suffering of people other than those on our immediate circle.

PADOVAN: Yeah, I think it’s clear. That’s central to the character. He’s redeemable up to a certain point because only then he understands what he’s had a pretty important part in creating. And that brings me to my next question. I often see Lawrence described as Gilead’s architect, and I would argue it’s incorrect and he is the architect of Gilead’s economy, which is a big distinction. My question is: does he believe in Gilead and its ideology? To me it doesn’t really seem like it. Or is he more like “I’m gonna accept the religious part because I want to see my economic theory succeed?”

WHITFORD: Mostly the latter, we get into this, and I was really adamant that we get this right. I believe that the situation was… and it's unfortunately relatable. There's a horrible environmental crisis which is the end of, potentially the last generation. I think he rationalised using- It's very much what the right wing in this country does. They rationalise the use of right-wing lunatics as a delivery system for their economic ideas. I mean, basically in the US you have a business agenda that is fuelled by culture wars, and they use the religious right wackos as a delivery system. First of all, I think Lawrence was a brilliant economic theoretician and he saw a way to put his ideas into action in the service of saving the next generation, but he underestimated the depravity of the wackos. And I think he has, you know, complete contempt for them, and I think he understands that it has gone from maybe a manageable totalitarian society like China to North Korea. I also think Lawrence enjoys the stature that this gave him. It fluffed his ego. There is a renowned, beloved television writer, Larry Gelbart, right before he died, he wrote *M*A*S*H*, he's just this beloved, sort of brilliant guy. And I did a reading of- this was way before they did limited series, except, you know, in England - and it was a limited series about a Jewish filmmaker in Berlin who gets asked to make a Nazi propaganda film for Goebbels, and the point of it was: yes, yes, he would do that.

He wasn't really judging him. I would hope that if you came to me and said : "I'm gonna make your career options blow wide open and you're gonna be able to support your family for generations if you make a pro-Trump film", I'd hope I'd say no, but, you know, it's very tempting for a lot of people. And, I've always understood, you know, I've been in proximity to, just as an actor in my sort of peculiar position, a lot of people getting famous and powerful and it's very seductive, and it's very seductive for academic types. So, to answer your question: no, he did not want to create a system where women were raped, he did not want to create a system where people were hanged on a wall, but he enjoyed the status. The status that it gave him was seductive.

PADOVAN: Going back to something you said. You said he feels contempt for those people. I think Commander Lawrence is not like other Commanders, you can't put him in the same category as Putnam or Waterford. The thing is that he is, I think, portrayed differently. We see all the other Commanders commit the rape in the Ceremony. He is forced to do the Ceremony, yet the scene cuts right before. Which I'm glad, honestly because it's a hard scene to watch. But I think it's very important what the audience sees because it

influences the way they feel about the character. Not seeing it done, I think, makes a difference.

WHITFORD: Yeah, I mean, it's an interesting thing, dramatically. He clearly, unlike any other Commander, wants no part of this. You know, when June first gets there he's like "no, no, no. We don't do that," which was so interesting to me. Let me finish my first point. On the one hand, I think the audience filling in with their imagination, the horror of that scene, is even more troubling than it would be if you saw a conventional Ceremony scene. Sometimes when you don't show it, it's almost worse. And it is a fundamental difference between him and all of the other Commanders who are willing to do it. I think Lawrence understands, not only are they willing to do it, they kind of get off on it, you know, abusing these young women. The most interesting thing to me about, and I'm always sort of reminding the writers of this, is like why? June is the most notorious handmaid in Gilead. Apparently, I get information about all this stuff, I know of all the problems that she has caused, and I don't want to rape anybody but I'm like "who is this girl?" I'm interested in her. And I know she's a rebel, and I know she's a problem. I think in that first scene with her I'm like "you're not gonna be any trouble," but, why would I seek her out? And I think one of the most interesting things in this, what is a testament to June's character and to the way Lizzy plays it is that- I think regardless… even if I'm not into abusing women, raping them, there's clearly misogyny, sexism in me that would allow me to be a part of this at all. There's a condescension about women and I'm in a power position with her, and what's great about her character is I don't even realise it and suddenly she's leading me. She's leading *me*, you know. It begins in this condescending place and suddenly I'm reading stories to kids, and Angel's Flight is happening. Another fundamental thing about, part of my character's smartassery, and I don't know if he's capable of, I really don't, I think with the shattering death of Eleanor, that there is something that I have not articulated, that I don't understand. Intuitively I can see that June is a path to redemption of some kind. And I think that there's a recklessness to Lawrence after Eleanor's death. I don't think he gives a … you know. He hates Fred. He's risking his life out there to facilitate the killing. There's a kind of abandonment to this guy. A combination of a sort of abandonment and some sort of magnetic need that I don't think the audience knows, I don't think he knows if he's capable of sort of inching towards some sort of redemption.

PADOVAN: I think there's the thing with Fred- There's the exchange on the bridge at the end of season 4 and I noticed when Nick takes Fred away, Lawrence steps aside and

takes off his hat while he [Fred] walks in front of him and it's obviously, I think- I interpreted it as his revenge. Because he knows what's gonna happen-

WHITFORD: Yeah.

PADOVAN: And you take off your hat when a dead person passes in front of you. Usually, it's at a funeral, at least here. I think- after season 3 he's a loose cannon and it's hard to pinpoint him.

WHITFORD: Yes.

PADOVAN: He helps June. He meets with her in Canada, actually, in Gilead but close to the border, but at the same time he's helping Aunt Lydia, he's giving her Janine. So, it's really hard to pinpoint him as a character.

WHITFORD: Well, that scene, you know. When I read that scene where I go "yeah, take her. Do whatever you want," I was upset. I didn't understand why Lawrence would do that. I ended up- and you'll see, it gets interesting with Lydia. The way I was trying to play that scene, I thought Lawrence was doing a very manipulative mind game on her. You know, when I first read it, I was like "Jesus, what a-", you know, "God! What a horrible, brutal asshole." I think he was going, like basically saying: "You're just twisted. You're really fucked up." I think he despises her brutality. And in his sarcastic way he's like, "Yeah, you get off on it! It's a little out of control but, you know, everybody's got to have a hobby, you sick monster. You pious monster." I like to think that he's playing this mind game of saying: "You're nothing but a twisted hypocritical sadist. So, here. Take this vulnerable girl whose eye you were part of having removed and do whatever you want." Knowing that, basically saying "you're so fucking sick, just go do it", manipulating her to not do it. I don't know if that's-

PADOVAN: No, it does come across.

WHITFORD: Yeah, you know. But also, I think Lawrence is- I've said this before, in a lesser version of the writing Lawrence has an epiphany and becomes a good person. The reason North Korea has existed for so long is it's very hard to end these things, and I think Lawrence can't be obvious about whatever it is he's trying to do. And again, I'm not lying to you, I don't know where this goes. I don't know, and I have very mixed feelings about it because I do think he has this capacity for redemption, but I also think of him like the

republicans, you know. I don't know if you know who Lindsey Graham is, these monstruous people who know better, who have enabled horrible things to happen. I don't know if he should be capable of redemption. The other interesting thing that we kind of get into this year is… I think Lawrence will rationalise certain things that are completely antithetical to what I believe with the arguments, in whatever that parallel universe we live in in that show. "Hey, free society doesn't work. It broke the planet." and all this, I think Lawrence is like: "It all is just gonna collapse into late stage capitalism and destroy us all, so…" And I know this is an idea that Margaret [Atwood]- She's doing publicity for her new book of essays and she said the most heroine thing. First of all, she was talking about how, like I have grown up, you know, I had older parents who would be 108. They went through the depression, my dad fought World War II, but my dad came home from the war and my older siblings, some of them are in their eighties, we've all lived in this world where democracy is kind of inevitable, and free society is always gonna expand. When we were doing *West Wing,* I was- this is a name drop- we were visiting the White House and Bill Clinton had a laptop on the desk in the Oval Office and he's like, "That's gonna open up Cuba, that's gonna open up China, it's inevitable." So, Margaret is saying that this idea that democracy and open society is inevitable, is completely insane and it's an historical anomaly.She said: "part of the problem when you're dealing with fascists", and she said, "I know this will be offensive to some people, but I think we have to acknowledge the disadvantage on top of all the other disadvantages that progressives have in the face of fascism is you have to acknowledge the fact about human nature that it was fun to be a Nazi." It is fun to say, "Fuck your pronouns. No, I don't want these people coming in." You see it in the Trump world, they're like at a professional wrestling rally. Meanwhile, on a superficial level, we are going: "Hey, you know, we really need-" like, "You're not being kind, we need to take care of the planet." There's a tsk-tsk to us. But to get back to Lawrence, in my mind, at this point he is like: "Yeah, cute idea. All men are created equal, who came up with that? Weren't they a bunch of slave owners? And weren't they just men?" So, I think he has a very cynical view about that and may think that returning to the pre-Gilead time is just, you know, is just naïve. He's like, "It doesn't work. It almost wiped us out." It's a great, sweet idea. I think that's how sort of cynical he may be. And again, on a lesser show he would become a more sort of unabashed freedom fighter.

PADOVAN: Yeah. I'm going to use this thought to connect to another question I have because it's about humanity. You've said many times, back when you were doing press for the show, that his humanity was starting to fight back. Is he gaining it back? Because I think

it's very interesting that from the book, one of the few quotes he gets that are taken directly from the book, is "How tempting it is to invent a humanity for anyone at all." And I think he is human but has repressed everything to gain success, to see his theory succeed to the point where it destroyed his wife.

WHITFORD: Right. That is the question. If you've read interviews, you know how I talk about McNamara who was just- it's a very tricky thing because the character brings up- you know, should I forgive Lindsey Graham? If Lindsey Graham came out tomorrow, is that- he may want to, he may not do it perfectly, will that be enough? The amazing thing about doing these sort of long form series is it is unfolding in the writers' room. They don't know- we don't know, and I don't want it to be sentimental. I don't want this character to be some shallow, fully redeemed male saviour. But I- I'm trying to put this diplomatically, I am always fighting, I'm always reminding everyone that I took her in, I was attracted to her rebelliousness, that she- in the same way, in a romantic context with Nick, part of the power of this character is that she's able to blow on a spark of decency and elicit a redemptive path. With me, you know, it's kind of a paternal. It's a wonderful reflection of my actual relationship with Elisabeth [Moss]. I feel about her the way I feel about my kids. I'm like, "Oh my God, I can't believe what you became!" I think she's had an effect on me and it's very important to me. We also have the shared trauma of what we didn't show in that room, which is a palpable horror. I don't even like- I don't like thinking about it. There is a shared trauma there and I don't ever want to- I'm always feeling protective cause I don't want anything to cheapen the effect that she's had on me. You know, this is a guy who rationalised a lot of horror so, I don't- Is he capable of redemption? I don't know. I hope so, even though it's just a TV show.

PADOVAN: I think a lot of people are rooting for him. And I think he gets a chance at that because- when June does her testimony, she puts in a good word for Lawrence. I think it's interesting that she uses the term rape when she's talking about Fred forcing them to do it, but when she talks about the act, she says sex. Which is something both didn't want to do. And I think this has a big influence in, and that's what I'm kind of interested about, how the audience perceives it. Of course, it's traumatic and it's a scene filled with emotions. It's not like the other Ceremonies. The others were pretty like- Fred used to think about other things while doing it. While with theirs Eleanor is breaking down, Lawrence is trying to calm her down-

WHITFORD: No, yeah. She talks me through her own rape. I mean, that's horrific.

PADOVAN: I think that's his redeemable act. That's where he is redeemable because he's decent and I think in that show the bar for men is very low so being decent is enough. I mean, I don't know how it's gonna go but, there's a chance. But then again, he refused the first time, he refused to get on the plane.

WHITFORD: Yeah, well. I think he feels- I mean, what's interesting is, he feels an obligation. Just leaving is not redemption. I think about it all the time with people of your generation who are justifiably, totally, certainly in the United States, completely cynical. I grew up in a very progressive household. One of my earliest memories is my mom screaming "JFK got shot" when I was three or four. Then my brother was a conscience objector against the war in Vietnam, then Martin Luther King gets his head blown off and Bobby Kennedy gets his head blown off, and in Madison, Wisconsin, where we had lived the left was bombing- they bombed the ROTC building, Maths Science Research Centre, and killed people in our own town. It was crazy, but we absorbed this, we internalised this unmistakeable message from my parents. It looked like Hitler was going to win, they got through that, they got through the depression, they got through McCarthyism, and there was this unmistakeable internalised optimism that whatever was going on, however it felt the centre wasn't gonna hold, the world was gonna get better. It would get better. And in my consciousness the impeachment of Nixon sort of proved that. My kids- and I think your generation unfortunately don't have that. I was saying to my kids it's not gonna happen, but if Donald Trump gets elected it's the end of the world. And then I had to explain to them: oh, it's not the end of the world, we have to keep fighting. But the planet is, you know, is in real danger. The fascists want you to think that the normal tools of governments don't work. And, here in the US I worry that, you know, we could come out and really defeat Trumpism, but do young people believe in the system anymore? Does it work? Do you make change from within the system or from outside the system? And so… it's interesting to me, and without being too specific, I think that in a world where fascism is on the rise, where it seems like democracies don't work, that Lawrence may think that maybe, you know, June's done a lot of stuff but to make real fundamental change you may have to make it from the inside… I think an argument that Lawrence might make to June is "Look at all the trail of fucking misery you have left. Stop. Stop. Being a guerrilla fighter is not gonna fix this, we're not going back to- You're not going back to Boston and birth control. You're right, you should be able to, but I'm- that's the world you want, I'm in the world as it is." That's an interesting

argument to me. I don't agree with him, but I think it's a position… It is amazing to me how unfortunately, you know, I first read this book, when did it come out, '86? Ehm… Do you know Ezra Klein? Do you know who that is?

PADOVAN: No.

WHITFORD: He does an interview with Margaret Atwood that is an incredible interview that you would love. She is- like, it's so funny cause she's talking about fascism but there's this weird kind of joy that she finds and it's all about storytelling. It's an incredible interview.

PADOVAN: I'll check it out for sure.

WHITFORD: Yeah, I hope there's something redeemable in this guy.

PADOVAN: I have one last question, which is more of an idea I got. Going back to the Ceremony, it's the idea that Lawrence is a tragic character. When I watched the ceremony again, he reminded me of Macbeth. Because you don't see him kill King Duncan, you see him come back with two bloody daggers, which is Lawrence coming back running down the stairs without talking to anybody, going straight into the kitchen, and starting to drink. And he's shook by it, which is very much- it really reminded me of the "I've done the deed" part of Macbeth, which I think is- he's tragic as a character, and maybe there's a part that's redeemable, and I hope so. But I see it very hard.

WHITFORD: Yeah. I'll tell you, it's a very fine line that is debated and fought over and discussed. I have real sympathy for- I mean, I've been very lucky to have a couple of runs in these sorts of culturally relevant shows that happened to have these astonishing actors in it. And you get into year five with great actors, and the writers are kind of in- you're obviously very deep into the show and very bright about it, as bright as you can be. Like one thing I think is really underappreciated about the show is- it was a very, almost chapter by chapter- the first year adaptation of the book, a lot of the dialogue and everything. I think one of the greatest achievements I have ever seen in my very lucky creative life is the way this show, not perfectly, but in the most impressive way stepped off the dock of this beloved book onto the rowboat of an ongoing show. That is an extraordinary achievement because it's really difficult to do. I ache for the writers as these shows go on because you have a bunch of actors who have internalised these characters and you don't wanna play the same

thing over and over again, that will drive you crazy. And when you get- if a story is going in a certain way, I've seen this happen on every show as these great actors sort of take ownership of these characters, they're like, "What? Do you not understand me at all?" And what you end up with on this show is a very interesting kind of- it almost feels like Talmudic, like the way we're able to, in a good way, talk with the writers. You know- Ann Dowd knows what she's doing. We- Lizzie [Moss] and I- I was directing this very emotional…I'm directing- I've done my side of a phone call a month earlier so I'm directing, I have a prop, a phone that is calling Lizzie that is standing over there. I have a sound thing on here- and there is a discussion of Eleanor's death. I'm watching Lizzie and I see this sort of incredible thing happen with her, is like an approach to a line that was the opposite of what you thought it would be and it had to do with Eleanor's death. And I'm not on camera but I'm on the phone with her, she's twenty feet away, and I immediately knew what was hitting her and I said, "No, I remember in the kitchen." like, I just improvised that, and she did- honestly it was one of the most incredible takes of this phone call which you will eventually see. And what's interesting about it is, we have, I think, a pretty healthy scepticism about "method acting" but when you've been on a series for all these years it's very non performative. One of the joys of doing a show like this is, we are getting- it's a form of method acting, like we have lived it. And it's another reason why I think television- you know, when- have you seen *The Sopranos*?

PADOVAN: Some episodes.

WHITFORD: Well, when… it's very interesting to me because when Tony Soprano comes in and he yells at his wife in season 5, you know the affairs he's had, the people he's killed, you know her frustrations, you know what she's been through with the kids, so when he snaps at her, as an audience member all of that is in you. It's all there. You cannot do that in a movie, it just can't happen. And it's interesting to me because I grew up in a world where television- there was a kind of condescension about television. And now we're in this moment where it's almost like there are specific stories that work in a movie, contained stories. Just like there's some great ideas that are short stories, but most people want a novel. You know, the people who do read, the few people who do, generally want a novel. What's interesting too is, you know, [*The Handmaid's Tale*] is, you know, a thousand times longer… and it is- I mean, I think you would be- I wish I could pull you into a writers' room discussion because it's all undecided, you know, where it's gonna end. I think sometimes, you know, the- you get- I don't quite know how to articulate this. It was funny… Bruce [Miller] said to

me I got to direct this year and somebody else had said a very interesting thing which is that scripts are lying, the director has to tell the truth. There is, and part of the paranoia of the show, when you're in Gilead, is- there's this very East German, you know, camouflage on everything you're seeing. There's all this subterfuge and sort of counterplay. I sometimes wonder… this is how old I am; I remember doing *West Wing* and *The Sopranos* was on. I mean, this is how kind of recent- it had happened in movies, but it had not happened in television. I remember Tommy Schlamme, which is his name, came in, we were all huge fans of *The Sopranos*, and he was like, "I can't believe what they are doing." Nobody had done it. Now it's all anybody has done, you know, *Breaking Bad*, these anti-heroes, *Mad Man* to a certain extent. And it makes sense that television will allow you to understand and give you the opportunity to be ambivalent about it or forgive people. There are a lot of people who, I understand, find it deeply offensive to rationalise evil like Hitler, you know. How can you…you know, people are like, "No, no, no, no. This is evil, you can't rationalise it." I just went back and like rewatched *Handmaid's*, which I had never done with any show- I still haven't seen all of *The West Wing*- but there's a lot of understanding of incredibly, incredibly evil people.

PADOVAN: It's a tough show to watch.

WHITFORD: You know, when I was watching it again, I mean, I am blown away by the- and I don't stand behind any of my work, and I usually find it excruciating to watch, but me excluded like, the show is- it's beautiful and what Lizzie is doing is like impossible and the actors like Max, Yvonne, Ann and OT, especially when you direct you realise what these- you know, it's a beautiful thing.

PADOVAN: I think it's interesting because, going back to what we said, we as humans do rationalise evil, especially if it happens close to us because we need to give it an explanation, otherwise it could be us and we don't like to think we could do the same, so we need to give it a reason.

WHITFORD: I'm not comparing anything that's happened in the United States, but I never really understood, it never really made sense to me how a developed so- you know- relatively open society like Germany- like how a civic virus could take it over. I'm not comparing it, but I understand now. Like how much people wanna be led. I think it's astonishing to me.

PADOVAN: I think it's happening in the US; it's happening here in Europe too. There's a lot of elements you see in *The Handmaid's Tale* and maybe you read the book and you were like, "Yeah, okay, that's over-"

WHITFORD: Yeah, I don't know if you saw this. Margaret wrote, I think it was in The Atlantic, she almost stopped, she was like, "Oh this is stupid," and now, you know, they are making ten-year-olds carry their children. And something is very disorienting because extremism is incentivised, they're rewarded for.

PADOVAN: Going back to Commander Lawrence and rationalising evil, I think what's interesting is that he's probably a bad guy, most of the time, but people care about him-

WHITFORD: Right.

PADOVAN: That's what I discovered. Because I started talking to people and they were like yeah, maybe he's good.

WHITFORD: [*laughing*] Yeah, I know. No, my wife talks about this all the time and people will be like mad at themselves because they kind of, you know, he can be funny.

PADOVAN: Oh, yeah, I think he's the comic relief of the show. He has so many one-liners that are so funny.

WHITFORD: Yeah. It's funny because there are- the writers were laughing because, you know, it's not a big improv show, but I was very happy because there are two really kind of funny lines that the writers who were not totally aware of the script at first thought I had improvised [*laughs*] and I was like, "No, no, you wrote it. But I'm glad you thought I made it up." Because occasionally I'll, you know, chuck up things that are like inappropriate. But, no, I know how- it's a weird, you know, lucky thing- it's another thing about television, you have this very intimate relationship with this character that goes on and on and on, and you have this really intimate relationship with the audience which goes on and on and on. I always- People use a possessive. "Oh yeah, that's one of my shows." And they're watching it, you know, in bed. With their mom, you know, it's like… It's a very intense relationship between- it's weird because I've never been like a fan of a show that I was in. I usually found it better not to even look until it was long gone. But yeah, I'm like- and it was really interesting directing because like we're actors and, you know, we talk and there's some

episodes and you're like how did episode three turn out. Like in the second year you're like, "How did it turn out?" And people are like, "Yeah, you know, it was okay." You don't wanna do that episode and you wanna do justice to it. I mean, I can't even tell I'm in love with these- you know- with- you know- OT and Nick… Jesus, Yvonne… Oh my god, Ann… like, it's- and part of it are these horrible characters- I don't know- I don't know- Obviously there are these unfortunate trend in the world which continue to make the show relevant, but there's some very interesting storytelling dynamics about it that connect.

PADOVAN: I think Lawrence kind of mixed things up. When we meet him there's a lot of paintings in his house, he doesn't use the right greetings, he's always saying super, ace or something like that. He's kind of disregarding this society, which puts you on alert because you don't know who this guy is.

WHITFORD: I mean, that's the fundamental fun of playing him. He is in play. It's not static. One of the fun things of playing this is, it changed the way I think about acting, which is usually narrowing down what a character is. With this guy it's about opening up the aperture. Just because he's not a static place, he's not trying to be static. But… I can't wait for you to see the- let me know what you think.

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