



HWA CHONG INSTITUTION (HIGH SCHOOL SECTION)

Project Work Written Report 2021

Topic: Analysis of Humanity vs System in the John Wick film series and how viewer interest is sustained throughout

Slant: Literature

Total Word Count (excluding appendices, footnotes & references): 5494

Student's (official) Name: Rexton Teoh

Class: 3i4 (29)

Name of Teacher-Mentor: Mdm Hemalatha d/o Seenivasan

Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion. The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

Student's Signature: Rexton Teoh

Date of Submission: 16/8/21

Section 1: Introductory Chapter

1.1 General Background:

John Wick is an American neo-noir action-thriller media franchise that has bloomed with immense popularity since the release of the first film *John Wick* (2014), paving the way for the production of two sequels, *John Wick: Chapter 2* (2017) and *John Wick: Chapter 3* (2019). All three films were considered critical and commercial successes, accumulating a collective gross of more than \$587 million worldwide. The directors have decided to ride on this wave of popularity, with plans for the fourth and fifth installments underway.

The film franchise follows the eponymous protagonist, John Wick, played by Keanu Reeves in an action thriller, sparked by justice for the death of an innocent being, his dog. He is drawn back into his previous life as an underground contract killer for crime syndicates, under an autonomous organisation called the Continental, which will find him thrust into a tumultuous journey riddled with betrayal and attacks on various fronts. Keanu Reeves is no stranger to the average action film consumer, having starred in another memorable and popular film series *The Matrix* (1999). His expertise in the craft of minimalistic acting is beautifully intertwined into *John Wick*, providing a respite from the jarring stereotypical action film structure in recent times.

1.2 Rationale:

Despite the low budget for the first instalment *John Wick* (2014), which is around US\$20 million, the film was able to rake in almost US\$90 million in the Worldwide Box office.

Films in the action genre generally require large budgets to account for the high costs of the logistics and manpower required, with many props and a wide range of crew needed to create non-stop action sequences. Complex CGI (Computer-Generated Imagery) utilised in most action films also demand high-quality and expensive cinematography to create realistic and large-scale effects for the film. Therefore, with such a tight budget to work with, it came as a surprise when I caught wind of the film's immense success and viewers' positive reviews.

Before 2014, the action film genre was on a downward trend in terms of viewer interest. This is reflected in the Box Office trends over the years, whereby the action genre's market share gradually dropped from 22.96% in 1997 to 19.75% in 2013, highlighting a decrease in interest in the genre. This can be attributed to the recurring filming style and structures, which are synonymous with purely high-octane explosions, brutality and bloodshed, that are often presented without any particularly memorable degree of cinematic skill. However, after almost a decade long dry spell of popular action films, *John Wick* (2014) managed to inject its own unique and stylish cinematography into the action film landscape and revive the genre. According to the movie critic site '*Rotten Tomatoes*', *John Wick* (2014) is "Fast, fun, and with care taken on elements outside of the requisite action sequences, it's a film that succeeds in generally conquering the fatigue of its own familiarity."

Superhero films lack the element of relatability among audience due to the possession of impossible qualities in the protagonist, trading this for thrilling and grand fight scenes

permeated with heavy CGI, which will inevitably decline in reception. Such sentiments are echoed by Star Wars actor Mark Hamill, who told *USA Today*, “They're fantastic, but I think we're reaching a point of over-saturation. So that's why the story is so important, is that the gimmicks and all that, they can only take you so far. That's what I want, better stories.” This is in complete contrast with John Wick films, which is a fresh take on the action genre. With the action genre having taken a backseat to superhero films of late, it is intriguing to see such a valiant attempt to deviate from the typical action film stereotype to produce such a masterpiece as *John Wick* (2014). The film, that emerged almost out of nowhere was able to elicit such a positive response from consumers, achieving surprising financial success despite the low budget. Therefore, as a fan of action movies, this probes me to delve deeper into the narration of the John Wick film franchise that has exponentially gained popularity, with *John Wick: Chapter 3* (2019) bringing in US\$325 million. This can be possibly attributed to evolving audience appetite for films that can offer an avenue for them to vent their emotions through the protagonist, which the John Wick series evidently achieved. Much can be therefore discovered about the manner in which the John Wick films are produced and narrated that induced such success, which could potentially engender a new trend in the action film genre where films of similar style can be explored and produced, hence the necessity of this research.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. How does the concept of Humanity vs System develop throughout the film series to juxtapose John Wick's seemingly formidable image and intensify his sympathetic plight?
2. How does the director sagaciously employ elements of mise-en-scene to accentuate vulnerable emotions like the death drive (Freud, 1920) that resonate with the viewers?
3. How is the final recognition of John Wick's breaking point (Todorov, 1969) communicated to the audience to evoke anticipation from the viewers?

1.4 Thesis Statement:

Conflict through Humanity vs System in *John Wick* fleshed out through mise-en-scene unravel the innate human instincts within the protagonist, cruelly repressed by demands which are imposed upon him, suppressing genuine emotions. The accumulation of the death drive (Freud, 1920), the destruction of self and others, resonates with the viewer, engaging the viewer through the eventual catharsis that would occur through John Wick.

1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s):

This research will delve deeper into only the first and third film of the ongoing film series, *John Wick* (2014) and *John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum* (2019) respectively, due to more extreme disruptions in the plot that would showcase my research more

evidently. I will focus on the plot development and its effects on the protagonist, John Wick, as he navigates through the two films. Mise-en-scene will be a key component in my research endeavour to highlight the congruence with the key plot conflicts and how it enhances the concept of Humanity vs System.

Additionally, I will touch on the psychoanalytic aspect of the plot through the Death Drive Theory (Freud, 1920), elaborated in the literature review, to enhance the human element projected onto the viewer. This will serve as the principal source of audience engagement, an avenue for a person to resonate with John Wick on an emotional level, consequently rooting for him to unleash justice both for himself and the audience.

1.6 Significance of Research / Usefulness:

Although there have been several articles published, attributing the film series' success to Keanu Reeves' immaculate gun fu display, there has been minimal academic research done, regarding the intricately hidden emotional aspect in the films that play a pivotal role in viewer engagement. Existing research is only in the form of informal blog posts and video reviews. Such sites usually consist of brief, fragmented takes on what the author feels is the reason why they felt so deeply connected with John Wick, with some linking it to the 5 Stages of Grief. However, there is an absence of academic research done that delves deeper in this field, which is what I will be embarking on. I will be uncovering this aspect of the film and suggest how such resonance with the viewer is achieved, attaining success in both the technical (mise en scene) and psychological

aspects. Through this research, uncharted territories of literary research regarding action films, which are generally considered to be lacking in literary value, can be uncovered. The breakdown of such an artistic gem as the John Wick series could elicit a rejuvenation of the action genre, providing a refreshed structural model for production of action films that can be adopted.

1.7 Limitation(s):

This paper will exclude the second film of the series, *John Wick: Chapter 2* (2017), due to constraints in the length of the paper, which may result in the incomplete representation of the minor changes in the development of the protagonist within the second film. Additionally, since the John Wick film series is unfinished, I would be limited in my capacity to draw conclusions of the trajectory of the protagonist's character arc but I will produce supported predictions that have been hinted at thus far and instead utilise this limitation to explain its engagement with the viewer.

Due to the overarching lens of the paper not being completely psychoanalysis and its weaker significance, I will not prominently include the life instinct aspect of the Death Drive Theory in the analysis, which is the antithesis of the death drive (Freud, 1920).

Section 2: Literature Review

2.1 Psychoanalytic Criticism

2.1.1 Freudian Psychology

Sigmund Freud, widely known to be the father of psychoanalysis, theorised that the human psyche was split into three distinct entities - the id, ego, and superego. These three distinct entities are not physical, separate parts of the brain, but unique “psychical forces” and mental processes that guide our behaviours (Freud, 1923).

(For the purpose of this research paper, I will not be touching on the ego aspect.)

Id

The id is the impulsive part of our psyche which responds directly and immediately to basic urges, needs, and desires. It remains infantile in its function throughout a person's life and does not change with time or experience, as it operates within the unconscious part of the mind. The id operates on the pleasure principle (Freud, 1920) which is the idea that every wishful impulse should seek instant gratification, regardless of the consequences.

In the movie series, the id is manifested in John Wick himself, in his most primal self.

This is displayed when John Wick is allowing emotions to show through his demeanour and other indicators through mise-en-scene, which will be further explored.

Superego

The superego incorporates the values and morals of society which are cultivated from one's upbringing, through mentors. The superego's function is to control the id's impulses, especially those which the society constructed for the individual forbids.

Behavior which falls short of the 'ideal self', that which the superego imposes upon one's self, may be punished through guilt.

In the movie series, the superego is represented by the stern moral expectations imposed upon John Wick as a professional assassin from training. This is showcased through his facial expressions during fights and it is further confirmed in a portion of the third movie which provides a glimpse into his training from young.

The id and superego are therefore polar opposites, with the superego exerting direct restraint over the id's interests if it does not meet the criteria of morality. This therefore forms the "repressed", which produces friction that could lead to disastrous consequences if the superego is too restrictive. These Freudian elements tie in with the concept of Humanity vs System in the John Wick series, with the superego manifesting as the System which exerts direct control over John Wick's id. The concept of Humanity is frequently used in films, with it being the core aspect of a good film, which is what allows audiences to relate to and grow together with the characters. John Wick also suffers from the emotional restraint from the System, which highlights how he is human too. This concept of Humanity vs System is not commonly used in research of films, but nevertheless it is applicable to the John Wick film series.

2.1.2 Freud's Death Drive Theory

Late in his career, Sigmund Freud demonstrated what might be described as a crisis of faith with regard to the central tenets of his psychoanalytic account of the human

psyche. In his paper “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, he momentarily shifts from a mode of discourse that embraces a scientific regard for the priority of evidence and experimentation, to a highly speculative discourse that, in a particular light, appears directly to challenge his scientific perspective. The Pleasure Principle is what the id operates on, when the id achieves its demands, we experience pleasure but when it is denied we experience 'unpleasure' or tension. In opposition to the pleasure principle, the 'death drive' — residual of a pre-organic, chaotic past — attempts to undo the organic whole (Faulkner, 2005). The death drive is derived from jarring incidents in one's psyche that disrupt homeostasis in the self, such as trauma-inducing events (Freud, 1920). This death drive is therefore instinctively channeled outwards through emotionally charged aggression for example or inwards through self-harm or suicide. However, if the death drive within one's id is not resolved such that the individual cannot return to its organic state, repression of the death drive will linearly lead to a greater magnitude of an eventual catharsis.

In the movie series, the death drive is the emotion that quantifies the anguish in John Wick that spikes after each traumatic incident. Since the superego prevents this death drive from being addressed, an explosive release in the form of violence is expected, which would be foreshadowed within John Wick at the end of the third film of the series. The anticipation engendered will be further explored.

2.2 Mise-En-Scene

Mise-en-scene is the arrangement of scenery and stage properties in any visual performance and is essential in any film. Its application to film critique gained traction in the 1950s, with film critics and the French film magazine Cahiers du Cinéma beginning to use the term mise-en-scene when reviewing movies. Its elements can be divided into six sections.

Components of Mise-En-Scene	Manner in which it is utilised in films
1. Composition	The framing of a camera shot and the camera angles used (e.g. wide shots, medium shots, close-up shots etc.)
2. Production Design	The creation and organisation of the physical world surrounding a film story to build a visual concept (e.g. the backdrop, arrangement of props)
3. Lighting	The intensity of lighting in certain scenes to the colour palette used (e.g. neo-noir films using stark lighting contrasts, dark backgrounds with jarring illumination of key details)
4. Costuming	The design of the characters' visual appearance, following certain themes. It can aid in communicating a character's personality to the viewer.
5. Hair and Makeup	The cosmetics of the character, to complement the character's personality (e.g. antagonist may have stronger makeup to create a sense of dominance)
6. Film Texture	The type of film stock or video camera selected and filters used before a final movie is screened (e.g. grainy texture)

The amalgamation of these elements throughout the film, designed by the director can have a powerful impact in influencing the viewer's response emotionally. If carried out thoughtfully, with active congruence with the plot, it can aid in amplifying or softening emotional responses (Poland, 2015).

Mise-en-scene is of exceptional relevance in *John Wick* due to its usage to forward many agenda in plot development. Since the film does not have any heavy CGI presence or exceptionally flashy scenes like in superhero films, the creative usage of mise-en-scene in many shots is used to create an immersive experience. An example is the film, altering shot angle and employing the Point-of-View technique allowing the audience to temporarily assume the position of John Wick, personally feeling the same emotions, strengthening the audiences' emotional response. Other elements such as lighting used throughout the series stimulate certain emotional responses that culminate into passionate viewer response in line with the plot, playing a crucial role in sustaining viewer interest.

2.3 Todorov's Equilibrium Theory

In 1969, Tzevetan Todorov proposed a narrative theory of the structure of narratives. He believes it is universally applicable to any film narrative structure and therefore ingrained in the human mind as an instinctive expectation when viewing any film. It follows a five step framework.

1. Initial Equilibrium- Balanced Status Quo

2. **Disequilibrium/Disruption-** Tipping of the Balance (Conflict)
3. **Recognition of Disruption-** Identification of the Conflict
4. **Resolution of the Damage-** Neutralising the Conflict
5. **Restoration of a Final Equilibrium-** Striking New Balance

This narrative structure can be applied to not only individual films but also film series whereby there is a larger magnification of such a structure developed throughout the series. In the case of the John Wick film series, I want to explore how it is in fact a larger allegory of this theory, with the three movies thus far having reached the third stage, Recognition of Disruption and therefore further support my research as to how the next movie will consist of Resolution of the Damage, equivalent to the catharsis suggested from my other theories.

Section 3: Methodology

My research would be mainly structured chronologically according to the unfolding of events in the movie series, employing a hybrid of psychoanalytic lens and narratology in the analysis. A 'shot-by-shot' analysis method will be applied for pivotal scenes, allowing for increased depth in analysis that take into account various aspects of the scene. Freud's concepts of the id and superego specifically will respectively represent the Humanity and System elements which are the basis of my research. Freud's Death Drive Theory will supplement the id aspect, with the death drive (Freud, 1920) being the entity which constitutes the id's desires. Therefore, I will then utilise elements of mise-en-scene, identifying motifs of symbolism within them as well as John Wick's

interactions and demeanour, to provide concrete analysis of the manner in which the directors flesh out the concept of Humanity vs System and whether the death drive is resolved within the id. Lastly, in order to extrapolate such trends engendered through the analysis, I will be drawing on Todorov's Equilibrium Theory on the narrative structures of films to explain viewer interest in the film series through audience's instinctive reactions to the events occurred.

Section 4: Discussion and Analysis

This section will be divided into four subsections, in a manner to uncover and lucidly break down the first and third John Wick films. I will trace the progression of John Wick's psyche under the overarching concept of Humanity vs System, exploring the two dynamics separately and how their contributions construct a sympathetic, therefore relatable, image. An emphasis on mise en scene, especially its symbolism will be employed to convey my interpretations of the films.

Section 4.1: Establishment of the Superego's Manifestation as the System in John Wick films

In order to understand where my direction of exploration in this research is headed towards, it is key that I first establish the context of my theory. I will discuss how

a major portion of my theory regarding John Wick's superego being stern moral expectations imposed upon him as a professional assassin from training is derived.



Fig 1.1: A ballerina performing as training under 'The Director'

This takes place in the third film, *John Wick: Chapter 3 - Parabellum*. When John Wick returns to the base of the Ruska Roma crime syndicate, which took John Wick under their wing when he was an orphan, he reconnects with 'The Director'. She was John Wick's motherly figure as he grew up and is in charge of the crime organisation. While John Wick is requesting for safe passage to Casablanca as it was owed to him for once being part of the organisation, there is a ballerina dancing in a sort of zero-tolerance assessment by the 'The Director'. This is the first glimpse into John Wick's background as he grew up into the legendary assassin that he was. However, it also

gradually reveals both the mental and physical torture that John Wick was conditioned with.

Despite a lack of dialogue that directly communicates this message, apart from frustrated shouts at the ballerina from 'The Director', two elements of mise en scene utilised in this scene cleverly convey this point, which is the shot composition and lighting. The camera angle selected facing the back of the ballerina in the foreground immediately casts her in the limelight, which produces the effect whereby she has become an object under scrutiny not only from 'The Director' but also by the audience, from behind her. This is representative of her emotional situation during her training, constantly subject to immense judgement and therefore compelled to suppress her pain to achieve flawless performance. Additionally, the key lighting in the scene, a type of lighting to draw the audience's focus towards the object it shines on, is directed towards the ballerina, which accentuates her jarring and imposing muscular physique. Ballet is typically associated with grace and gentle movements but the surprisingly muscular appearance, coupled with the tattoos cause her to appear almost masculine, which is the opposite. Such a juxtaposition results in the audience only imagining the physical turmoil she had been subjected to, and therefore the moral fortitude that was demanded of her to obtain such a defined figure. The training she was going through is also what John Wick endured and the fact that he is a male suggests he had it worse.



Fig 1.2: Orphan boys practising martial arts as training

Another scene of the orphan children training under the Ruska Roma syndicate depicts this time, boys engaging in martial arts. In this instance, the audience is able to draw connections between the distinct colour scheme in John Wick and its significance to the plot. In this scene, the two main colours are blue and red. Due to its association with the sea and sky, blue is commonly known to evoke feelings of stability, tranquility, expertise and at times seriousness. This is brilliantly used for the colour scheme of the background through the windows, which is vivid when contrasted with the surroundings. The atmosphere in the room is also one that is serious, with the duel in the middle of the room soundless except for the thudding of bodies on the ground and the rest observing intently. Therefore, the blue here signifies the isolation of any additional feelings, where the task before them, practising martial arts, is the sole focus. Another element of mise en scene utilised is costuming. During the practice duel, it is observed that the boy dressed in blue is overpowering the one in red, putting him in a lock which carries a

secondary meaning. Although potentially dismissed as just the costuming, the colours used perfectly symbolise the moral expectations that all the students must abide by. By the colour blue overpowering red, where red represents passion and agitation, it suggests how internally, when they fight, they must never allow their emotions to dictate their actions but rather remain stoic. With the blue light enveloping the building, as seen through the windows, it suggests how this rule of thumb when fighting is constantly ingrained in the students, to become professional pawns in the network of assassins under the High Table.

Through these pieces of evidence, I have therefore theorised that this fighting devoid of emotion forms John Wick's superego through years of training and it is this that manifests as the System's restraint on him.

Section 4.2: Trigger of the Death Drive within John Wick

The various scenes I have selected for analysis in this section are in my opinion the crucial events in the first and third film that induced a spike of the death drive within John Wick's psyche



Fig 2.1: John Wick looking at his new puppy 'Daisy' fondly

The John Wick franchise is known to indulge in its usage of low-key lighting since it is a neo-noir film, with an emphasis on high lighting ratios for scenes. Therefore, to the audience, this scene, which is using high-key lighting, is certainly a stark contrast. The puppy was gifted to John Wick by his beloved wife who had passed on and the type of lighting not only serves to depict an upbeat mood, which is the intended effect of high-key lighting, but also draw attention to this scene, suggesting that this is a special moment for John Wick as well. Additionally, the colour scheme of the scene consists of light colours with a predominant gold tint. Gold is commonly associated with love and

wealth. It carries a metaphorical meaning here, where the puppy symbolises an abundant source of genuine love and the choice of a puppy also signifies pure innocence, boosting John Wick's affection towards the puppy, especially after experiencing grief from his dead wife. Therefore, it conveys how the puppy is the thread sustaining John Wick emotionally, the sole living substitute for his wife at that point.



Fig 2.2: John Wick mourning his dog's death

After several gangsters break into his house, John Wick's dog is killed ruthlessly and he is knocked unconscious. The scene after is heart-wrenching as the camera follows a trail of the puppy's blood to John Wick laying beside his dog. The positioning of the dog in front of John Wick suggests how the puppy was John Wick's emotional shield from the real world, protecting him from crumbling. After suffering such a painful loss, of both his wife and the puppy, her emotional substitute, the trauma which John Wick is subjected to is unbearable as he is left utterly exposed without emotional support. As he lies beside the dog on the ground, it is also representative of his internal wellbeing having hit rock bottom and this pathetic sight is a sharp transition from his

usual formidable figure, expressing his immense trauma that disrupted the homeostasis in himself, pandering to John Wick's id, generating the death drive. This is the initiation of the disequilibrium stage in Todorov's equilibrium theory.



Fig 2.3: Winston betraying John Wick by shooting him to eliminate him

This scene occurs in the third film, when the Adjudicator (The High Table's middlewoman) agrees to a parley with Winston (owner of the New York Continental Hotel - an establishment that functions as a neutral territory for hired killers). John Wick, however, in an unprecedented turn of events, is betrayed by Winston, his close friend that he had a bond with for many years. In fact, when John Wick was declared excommunicado (stripped of the right to services for professional assassins), Winston was the one that gave John Wick a 1-hour head start to ensure he had higher chances of survival. Another motif is the colour gold being used signifies, just like his puppy, Winston was a pillar of support for John Wick. To have such ties severed, especially

after becoming excommunicado is certainly a huge blow. This is compounded by Winston's sheer nonchalance when shooting John Wick, uttering, "Oh, he has to die." He seemingly treats John Wick like a dispensable asset that he has no further need of, suggesting to John that their relationship was artificial and he has no external help. Trauma through the internalisation of one's defencelessness shakes up his psyche, causing his death drive to once again increase tremendously.



Fig 2.4: John Wick falling after getting shot

Another notable point is the clever use of the surroundings as he falls. John Wick slams into three structures as he falls down and this carries a symbolic meaning. At the top of the building, he is viewed as a respectable figure among the underworld, having a name for himself, even among the High Table. As he falls, it is as though his social standing is plummeting as well, with each of the structures like rungs of the social

hierarchy. To be reduced to an outcast in the system is also another depressing fact that contributes to the death drive within his psyche.

Section 4.3: Inability to resolve the Death Drive within John Wick



Fig 3.1: A thug killed by John Wick

For the average audience watching for leisure, it is apparent that *John Wick* is riddled with an assortment of expertly choreographed fight scenes that display John Wick seamlessly dispatching his enemies. An assumption that he is expressing his fury when he fights, is the default interpretation. However, my theory is that instead John Wick's superego, as explained in the first section, overrides his id such that he is forced to operate without external emotions, inhibiting the death drive in his psyche from being resolved.

This scene selected portrays this idea vividly. The usage of backlighting here to produce the silhouette of the thug has the effect of separating him from the surroundings. The mapping out of his figure seems to suggest how he is almost like a prop, without any room for expression, just a splash of darkness. This perhaps allows the audience to view the world like how John Wick views it in a fight, in the sense that he treats his enemies as binary. He has no regard for the enemies' expressions apart from the sole criteria of whether they pose a threat to him. The overwhelming blue light also employs the motif of colour that represents the moral expectations ingrained in John Wick governs him completely. The superego restricts the id's impulses for John Wick to release his wrath. This theory can also be confirmed by John Wick's unique style of fighting, in which he frequently shoots the enemy once in the body and in the head. The mechanical and calculated nature of eliminating his enemies with a stoic expression contributes to my theory.



Fig 3.2: A second example of a fight sequence



Fig 3.3: A third example of a fight sequence

As demonstrated by these two other examples of prominent fight sequences taken from the two films, there is a common motif of the colour blue being utilised, which serves to display how across the two films, the death drive in his psyche remains to be repressed. Under all the impressive stunts as he subdues the enemy, his internal turmoil remains unaddressed. The pent up death drive from all the trauma faced, continues to torture John Wick subconsciously. This reveals the more human nature of John Wick, evoking sympathy among the audience as this holding onto a facade of strength is relatable, promoting viewer engagement.

Section 4.4: Projected Resolution of the Death Drive and the Effect on Audience



Fig 4.2: John Wick on the ground after his fall

After the fall, it depicts John Wick lying in a desolate and unsanitary alleyway, with rubbish strewn around. The gap of brightness in the distance juxtaposed to John Wick in the darkness signifies his internal isolation from the world, magnifying his absence of subsistence. The claustrophobic nature of the surroundings also suggest how he is constrained, unable to claw his way up. The singular light present is a blue light casted on John Wick, utilising the same motif as before, highlighting that he will forever be a pawn of the system. This is the moment where John Wick recognises the disruption, and redirects his focus from survival to the High Table, the agent of disruption.



Fig 4.2: An indignant John Wick talking to the 'Bowery King' (not in picture)

This is the ending scene of the movie and it takes place when John Wick is brought to the 'Bowery King', another victim of the System. In this scene, the crimson red blood which is illuminated on John Wick's face, juxtaposed to the faint and diffused blue light in the background, is a distinct indicator of the triumph of his id over the superego, where he no longer is subservient to his superego, but rather is at his limit. The death drive in his psyche has hit a point where catharsis is imminent and this is confirmed by his demeanour. Throughout the film, there is a lack of facial expression, always putting on a stoic facade. In this scene, his face is tensed up, physically expressing his id's primal desires. According to Todorov's Equilibrium Theory, this is finally the stage of Recognition of Disruption, at the end of the third movie. The next stage, Resolution of Disruption, addressing his death drive, represents the catharsis of his repressed id. From the audience's perspective, this potential redemption arc fills them with adrenaline since they have related with John Wick's sympathetic plight on a

personal level and equally seek retribution. Revenge is a powerful emotional trigger that mobilises people into action. It is this very pervasive experience in human lives, people from every society understand the idea of getting angry and wanting to hurt someone who has harmed you as it is hedonically rewarding (McCullough, 2017).

Section 4.5: Conclusion

It is without a doubt that *John Wick*, upon analysis of the scenes is an artistic masterpiece, intelligently utilising mise en scene, especially lighting, colour scheme, spatial arrangement of objects in the scene and costuming to convey to the audience the desired mood and connotations of the scenes. The directors are able to flesh out John Wick's pathetic internal situation, where he is restrained under the System through his superego across the two movies, the death drive painfully building up in his psyche. A catharsis is therefore imminent as indicated in the last film through Todorov's Equilibrium Theory, with passion radiating from John Wick in the last scene, which keeps the audience rooting fervently for him. The continued audience engagement is therefore intrinsically linked to the film's impressive ability to connect John Wick's internal predicament with the audience's personal struggles.

(x) Resources/ References:

Argyrou, S. (2014, January 16). Todorov theory. Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <https://selinaargyrou.wordpress.com/todorov-theory/>

Bourne, J. (2016, June 04). Meaning of the color red. Retrieved August 12, 2021, from <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-red/>

Bourn, J. (2016, June 04). Meaning of the color blue |. Retrieved August 11, 2021, from <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-blue/>

Bourn, J. (2016, June 04). Meaning of the color gold |. Retrieved August 11, 2021, from <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-gold/>

Derisz, R. (2020, November 02). How John Wick CHANGED action movies and no one noticed. Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <https://www.looper.com/120821/john-wick-changed-action-movies-one-noticed/>

Dise, J. (1969, December 27). Filmmaking 101: Camera shot types. Retrieved August 13, 2021, from <https://www.bhphotovideo.com/explora/video/tips-and-solutions/filmmaking-101-camera-shot-types>

Faulkner, J. (n.d.). Freud's concept of the death drive and its relation to the superego. Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol9/Freud.html>

Hogenboom, M. (2017, April 3). The hidden upsides of revenge. Retrieved August 12, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170403-the-hidden-upsides-of-revenge>

Horton, H. (2017, July 27). The clothes make the character: The impact of costume design. Retrieved August 13, 2021, from <https://filmschoolrejects.com/clothes-make-character-impact-costume-design/>

John Wick (film). (2021, March 08). Retrieved March 09, 2021, from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wick_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wick_(film))

John wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum. (2021, March 01). Retrieved March 09, 2021, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wick:_Chapter_3_%E2%80%93_Parabellum

Lannom, S. C. (2021, March 24). Watch: Every camera ANGLE explained [Video Essay]. Retrieved August 4, 2021, from <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/types-of-camera-shot-angles-in-film/>

Lawrence, N. B. (2014, January 19). Why do hollywood movies cost so much to make? Retrieved March 09, 2021, from <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/54440/why-do-hollywood-movies-cost-so-much-make>

Maio, A. (2021, January 26). Empathizing an anti-hero with shot composition.

Retrieved August 8, 2021, from <https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/rules-of-shot-composition-in-film/>

Poland, Jennifer Lee, "Lights, Camera, Emotion!: an Examination on Film Lighting and Its Impact on Audiences' Emotional Response" (2015). ETD Archive.

379. <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/379>

Preda, C. (2020, September 12). What is mise en SCÈNE in a film? Retrieved

March 09, 2021, from <https://www.careersinfilm.com/mise-en-scene/>

