Princesses in the Suburbs: Reading The Virgin Suicides as a Fairytale

Moureta Lingkar Maharani[1*], Mugijatna[2]

[1]*Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia*

[2]*Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia*

[1*] mouureta@gmail.com, [2]ykmugijatna@gmail.com

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The concept of male gaze has been present for a very long time, evident even before Laura Mulvey coined the term in her famous essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema in 1975. It is present in literature, albeit literature being an entirely different media. In The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides, this theme seems to be very apparent along with themes such as voyeurism and objectifications. Drawing on the structuralist and gender studies, this article emphasizes about the effect of the male gaze and how this specific way of viewing affects the girls in a way that it shifts their function as a character, by reading the novel as a fairytale—a form of literary work of which the elements are easy to understand—helped by Vladimir Propp's theory of dramatis personae. The findings attained from literature reading and library research concludes that the way the neighborhood boys' view of the Lisbon girls does affect their roles in the story. I argue that the Lisbon girls were put on a very high pedestal since the very beginning; therefore positions them as the fairytale princess. However, due to the nature of the gaze applied in the work, there are possibilities that it may shift to other characters.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of male gaze has been present for a very long time, evident even before Laura Mulvey coined the term in her famous essay Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema in 1975. Portrayed as a way to depict the world (usually specifically women) from a point of view of heterosexual male, male gaze is an exercise of exerting power and domination towards female. It is present in visual arts, from Picasso's Weeping Woman to the box office Transformers franchise by Michael Bay (Hustvedt, 2016). It is everywhere, in every movie, in every piece of culture, in everyday lives. It is present every time a woman becomes the "spectacle", and a man becomes "the bearer of the look".

It is present in literature, albeit literature being an entirely different media. It is abstract, as the images are invented by the writer and reivented by the reader, making literary male gaze being a lot more complicated to dissect (Goh, 2017). However, it is surprisingly common to find. From fairy tales to novels written by men, and in some cases even woman authors, how women are "seen" has become something significant to be discussed, especially now that the way we view pieces of culture has evolved as time goes by (Temple, 2018).

Similarly, in The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides, this theme seems to be very apparent. Arguably, along with themes such as voyeurism and objectifications, The Virgin Suicides relies entirely on the male gaze. The literary work tells a story about a group of siblings, all female, who commits suicide after the death of the youngest siblings, which is also a suicide. It is narrated by a group of unnamed men, looking back on their pasts as the neighborhood boys who are so dearly obsessed with the Lisbon daughters during their adolescence years. Through the point of view of the obsessed neighborhood boys, readers are forced to peek from a distance, to figure out what drives the girls to their tragic destructions.

These boys are obsessed. They yearn for some connection towards these beautiful and mysterious Lisbon girls, some kind of happily ever after. Unlike of other aspects in the story, this yearning of happily ever after is reminiscent of the main characters of fairytales have in common. It is easy to assume based on previous researches that these girls are essentially royal to the boys, fulfilling the role of the tragic fairytale heroine of the story. But are they?

In that distance is where this research takes place. Eugenides did something very interesting by combining and subverting both archetypes and the stereotypes of the fairytale princess across the Lisbon Girls and the Neighborhood Boys. Therefore, drawing on structuralist and feminist point of view, the topic of this research is selected on how the male gaze that drives the story may cause the "princess roles" to shift between the characters and if that affects their depictions in the story

At a glance, The Virgin Suicides is not in anyway resembles any fairytales ever written. Fairy tales are often associated with stories for children to begin with, with the princes and princesses, the mythical creatures, and the happily ever after. The Lisbon girls in The Virgin Suicides are not princesses by any stretch. The novel starts and ends with the haunting presence of the girls' destruction instead of a happily ever after that sets in suburban America in 1970. However, fairy tales are a form of literary work whose elements are continuously recycled and thus familiar, making it helpful to society in terms of making meaning of various situations.

This research will be specifically looking to The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides on the roles that the Lisbon girls have in the story, and that the way the neighborhood boys view them may affect that role to shift. Therefore, this research will focus on The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides as the main source of data instead of the movie adaptation of the same title by Sofia Coppola.

From the explanation, the objective of this research is broken into two:

1.	How does the way the neighborhood boys view the Lisbon girls affects the girls' role in the story?
2.	Who serves the role of the primary fairytale princess in The Virgin Suicides

1.1. Male Gaze

The Male Gaze, in a nutshell, is where women in the media (in this case mainstream films) are represented as passive objects of male desire. Audiences, no matter their genders, are forced to view women from the point of view of a heterosexual male. The men are placed as the active bearer of the look, and women are the passive signifier of men's desires (Mulvey, 1975). The female characters are typically displayed on two levels on eroticism: 1) as an erotic object of desire for the characters in the filmed story, and 2) as an erotic object of desire for the male spectators of the story.

Examples of this include shots that pan and fixate on a woman's body, who are strategically situated in a compromising position. The famous shot of Megan Fox in the first installment of the Transformers franchise by Michael Bay, in a tank-top that shows a lot of skin bent over a car engine, with very strategically placed camera shots that only intensifies the sexual gratification towards heterosexual male falls under that category (Sampson, 2015). That being said, the male gaze relies on spectatorship or the act of looking, whether it is at images of people on visual mediums or the gaze of those depicted in visual text.

This theory derived from the statement that the mainstream film forms depend on the Freudian concept of schopophilia, which translates to "the act of deriving pleasure from looking at something or at someone" (voyeourism to some extent) and narcissism, which translates to the way female spectators (or homosexual men spectators)' desires are completely dismissed as the male gaze belongs exclusively to the male and partriarchy.

Mulvey states that the gender power imbalance in the cinema becomes a control force, which results in why mainstream films are adamant in using women as a token—something to be looked at and derived pleasure from, and that the men to-be-looked-at-ness is compensated by their activity in the film's narrative. This is proven to be problematic and arguably the reason why Mulvey pointed the issue out in the first place. Films serve the same purpose as language: as an advanced system of representation, therefore engraving and reinforcing the patriarchal ideologies and discourses that stems from the old-fashioned, male- driven society in the form of camera shots and women passive portrayal may result in accepting every unconscious and conscious attempts in putting women in a very inferior position.

While the discussion about male gaze may stem from visual art, it is important to note that the idea and practice of male gaze and the belief that women exist only for men's pleasure will always exist as long as there is an imbalance between men and women's representations in all forms of mainstream media. The discussion regarding the male gaze transcends beyond visual arts.

Berger argued in his essay (1972) that men and women's representations in visual arts are already different, even from centuries before. This idea is emphasized in European oil paintings, in which women are usually painted to express their attitude to herself (exhibiting their sexuality self-consciously, enforcing their to-be-looked-at-ness) and do not go beyond that, in contrast of the men whose presence is all about power, potential, and ability. This results in the difference in seeing woman and man, which influences not only the relationship between man and woman but also a woman to herself—as the woman may objectifies herself as a subject of a gaze.

However, as the time goes and more people get more educated on such matters, it is natural for female to become more aware on how they are perceived by the society for being female. Female are definitely aware of how they are being perceived by society just because they are female. Berkowitz (2018) raised this point in an article that touches the discussion about the male gaze in the literary world.

In 2018, an inspiring podcaster Whitney Arner tweeted a challenge for women to "describe yourself like a male author would" and almost all book readers who identify themselves as female on Twitter accepted the challenge. A lot of the responses underline the stark difference between the description of male characters and female characters written by male characters: male writers describe men like they are introducing an actual person by creating a vivid image of who this character is and what he is made of, and yet they describe female characters like they are rating someone to fuck. The responses vary, some highlights on the common trend of using culinary words to describe the skin of women of color and the seemingly never-ending obsession with describing the female character's breasts. This is similar to how the camera pans to a female character's body in cinema, in a way that it paints the female in an inferior position and as a mere token whose function is limited to their own's to-be-looked-at-ness. The only difference is the form of media that this phenomenon takes place of.

This specific point is relevant in The Virgin Suicides, as the theme of men projecting their ideas and desires to the girls in the story is a constant plot point from the beginning to the end—that the literary male gaze is as real as the concept of male gaze itself. Therefore, I am determined to prove that if the male gaze is powerful enough to ingrain the idea of putting a whole gender as inferior, it may affect the roles of each character in a literary work.

1.2. Vladimir Propp's Dramatis Personae

According to Vladimir Propp (1968), there are two main features of fairytales: the functions of the characters and the types of their roles, which Propp calls dramatis personae. The dramatis personae consists of a limited set of eight broad character types that are defined by the function given to them:

1) the hero, the character with whom the reader will normally associate themselves to,
2) the false hero, a variant on the villain who appears to act heroically and may even be mistaken for the real hero,
3) the helper, the supporter of the hero, usually a wise old man or a wizard who appears when the hero is in a pinch,
4) the donor, who usually gives the hero something special, such as a magical weapon or some particular wisdom to help,
5) the villain, the counterpart of the hero, present to make hero fails their quest,
6) the dispatcher, the character who gives the hero the quest,
7) the princess, the one that is usually "saved" by the hero,
8) and the princess' father, who may dispatch the hero on the mission or who constraint the princess.

However, Propp notes that unlike other dramatis personae that have specific functions, the princess' role is more ambiguous—enough for it not to be defined by a specific function, as she is only limited to be the one 'saved' by the hero, or the 'reward' for the hero in the narrative (Propp, 1968). The princess is usually only recognizable by the relationship to the hero. Lin (2010), in her paper, stated that based on the feature of lacking a specific function, the princess' role is usually examined as an archetype instead.

Therefore, the role of the princess can be applied to whoever exhibits the characteristics resembling the fairy tale princess. In addition, as Propp notes that the role of any dramatis personae are transferable through different characters in the story, any of the characters is able to be identified as a princess, whether it be male or female.

However, before I use this theory to identify the characters in the literary work, I need to know what the fixed features of the archetypal fairytale princess are, and how the princess stereotypes came into play.

In some ways or another, archetypal princesses possess the quality of being noble in character, mind, birth, or rank. Most princesses in fairy tales are of good virtues and usually written as kindhearted. If not, they are usually a pretty young thing—that they possess beauty so great that they become such awards. They are usually ranked high socially, obtaining royal status by birth or sometimes by marriage. However although we can easily pinpoint this quality on the a lot of fairytale princesses, this does not mean that all princesses can all be sorted into one category based on nobility only, as there are so many versions of fairy tales written in the world.

There are no specific categories that can determine whether fairy tale princesses are proper or not. Fairy tale princesses (and heroes, and heroines) are supposed to work their way around their archetypes and adapt to or bend their storylines in their ways, as archetypes only serve as "mental models" for the audience (Falsafi & Abedin, 2011). However, when those archetypes become predictable by fulfilling cultural expectations more than the narrative's need, the archetypes turn into stereotypes.

This can be seen on Disney's adaptations of classic fairy tales. According to Zipes (1999), Disney successfully appropriates fairy tales, "robbing it out of its voice and changes its forms and meanings." Zipes claims that the Disney adaptations were all simplified to its core, including reoccurring archetypal characters and putting it in predictable storylines to which the constant patriarchal idealism was incorporated—how

many Disney princesses that we know of who has dreams of true love as their only desire? Surely we can list at least five of them. These fairytale princesses that came from the tales of Perrault and the Grimm brothers are molded into what is needed to support the patriarchal values at the time, exposing the ideas of a young lady in a Westernized culture through Disney (Do Rozario, 2004), spreading messages like being pretty and passive gets you good things in life to young children (Lieberman, 2014).

We can see the examples of this in the adaptation of the tale Snow White. In the Disney animation, Prince Charming and Snow White first meet in the very beginning of the film. The love song that they sing to each other implicates the romantic feeling blossoming between the two, which later justifies the Prince's act of kissing Snow White's lying corpse in her glass coffin, in excuse of the True Loves Kiss—which is a concept that Disney invented, by the way.

In fact, in the real story by the Brothers Grimm, other than the kiss is nonexistent, the only reason why Snow White awakens from her deep slumber is because one of the Prince's servants carrying the coffin trips on the way, causing the piece of poison apple in Snow White's throat dislodges. To add, the Prince is only introduced later in the story, after the princess is already dead/asleep. This difference strengthens Do Rozario's idea stated before, implying that Disney enhances the idea of Prince Charming and his active masculinity as the savior, while Snow White, the fairytale princess, is depicted as the damsel in distress yearning for love from the very start (Lin, 2010). Lin continued in her studies, saying attributes like being the damsel in distress and dreaming for true love easily becomes the stereotypes of fairytale princesses in the twenty-first century.

Other reoccurring themes included maltreatment and abuse. Tatar (1987) quoted Vladimir Propp in her study, who said "a fairy tale begins with some harm and villainy done to someone (for example, abduction or banishment)   ", furthering said point. The acts of maltreatment and abuse are common in fairy tales, although we have seen the gory details being omitted completely in the Disney adaptations. This point is highlighted in The Theme of Child Abuse in Selected Fairy Tales by the Brothers Grimm by Ansam Yaroub Khyoon (2014). One of the examples included in the research included is how Snow White's mother, the evil queen sends a huntsman to kill Snow White out of jealousy and specifically asks the huntsman to bring back her heart, lungs, and liver so she can cook them and eat them. Other examples are Cinderella being treated very poorly by her stepmother and stepsiblings, also Rapunzel being locked up in a tower (social exclusion) all her life due to her mother's intense cravings. The cause of these theme of maltreatment and abuse in fairy tales with heroines varies, though Bettelheim (1976) argued that the heroine/princess is usually seen by her stepmothers (or birthmothers) as a possible rival and sexual threat based on Oedipal tension, seen from a psychological point of view.

Maria Tatar later indicates that most of the princesses after this maltreatment are going to "rise or return to the ranks of royalty once they have been humbled and humiliated" (1987). In other words, she implies that fairy tale heroines are expected to endure and behave well, as fate will bring them happiness—that these degradations are what is needed to a brighter future. Experiencing humiliation therefore becomes one of the common points for fairy tale princesses, which Tatar also argues it is the fruit of patriarchal beliefs. It later becomes one of the common qualities found in the fairy tale princess stereotypes.

Taking all of the academic studies into account, in this study I combine both the archetypal and stereotypical qualities of fairy tale princess said above to view The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides. This decision is taken because as traditional fairy tales incorporate both archetypal and stereotypical qualities in their heroes and heroines, making fairy tale heroines not limited to only just one—both qualities are taken into account to consider if one is considered as fairy tale princess or not.

2. METHOD

This research is qualitative descriptive research, which describes the object of research based on facts or as they are (Nawawi & Martini, 2005). Qualitative research aims to find the meaning that attaches to behaviors, to find the interpretation of the situation, and how to view particular issues (Woods, 1999). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research analyzes data that is based on words rather than numbers, which is a way that I feel to fit this research the most as this research focuses on analysis of certain texts in the literary academic studies. Therefore points and findings are made and found through close reading and documentary research.

This research falls under the category of Literary Studies, in which Trimpi (1970) once defined it as the understanding and the preservation of literary text. The Literary Study focuses on literary content of the work, which may cover extrinsic and intrinsic elements, whether explicit or implicit in the work. The approach that is used as a standpoint or a viewpoint in analyzing and understanding the literary work (The Virgin Suicide) is the feminism approach. The theory applied in the study is the Male Gaze theory, also Dramatis Personae by Vladimir Propp.

The primary data were taken from the novel The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides, focusing on the plot and the physical and psychological description of the main female characters: the Lisbon daughters, consisting of Cecilia, Lux, Bonnie, Mary, and Therese Lisbon. Due to the first-person nature of The Virgin Suicides, the

perspective of how these characters are described and presented are also taken into account. Secondary data were taken from outside sources such as books, journals, and articles that focuses on the discussion and application of Laura Mulvey's Male Gaze and Vladimir Propp's Dramatis Personae that are deemed relevant to the topic of this research.

The data analysis began after highliting relevant texts from the data source, by referring back to the research questions and theoritical frameworks that are chosen, in this case Mulvey's Male Gaze and Propp's Dramatis Personae. Mulvey's Male Gaze is used to determine which perspective the female characters are viewed by the audience, and Propp's Dramatis Personae are used to determine what roles the characters in the story have, and as a checkpoint to determine whether or not the way the characters are viewed makes the role of the characters shift.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. *The Lisbon Sisters and How They Manage to Enchant the Entire Community*

Before we can start discussing the Lisbon Sisters, it is essential to remember that the entirety of The Virgin Suicides is written from the first-person point of view. While there is always a certain distance between the reader and the narrators, said distance is not as far as it would have been if the story were written in the third person point of view. It is easy to get caught up inside the narrator's head and see how the world in the literary work the way the narrators see it, and it is essential that the readers remember that we are the spectators of the story.

What we know of the girls are merely memories that the narrators have when they are younger, repressed sexual urges, along with expired observations that the boys and other people around the neighborhood made when they are younger. One may argue that there is no credibility to what they say about the girls throughout the whole book whatsoever because nothing about what they knew is immediately known from the girls themselves.

Therefore, as I explain how Lisbon Sisters manage to have a presence so significant that they become some sort of a local legend in the neighborhood without saying anything remotely essential, it is necessary to remember that The Virgin Suicides actively plays with the idea of perspective. It becomes the main point of this research. Putting that into mind, then we can move on.

3.1.1 Appearance and Desirability

The Lisbon Sisters consist of five daughters that are all one year apart. Cecilia is thirteen and the youngest, followed by Lux, who is fourteen, Bonnie, who is fifteen, Mary, who is sixteen, and the oldest Therese, who is seventeen. The boys have troubles differentiating them at first and see all five of them as a single entity with their roundish cheeks that carry dorsal softness (Eugenides, 1993, p. 5), that altogether they look like a congregation of angels (Eugenides, 1993, p. 23).

It was only after the boys are allowed in the house for Cecilia's party, just a few hours before her successful suicide attempt, that these boys realized that they were all different girls and finally pointed out their physical attributes.

Instead of five replicas with the same blond hair and puffy cheeks we saw that they were distinct beings, their personalities beginning to transform their faces and reroute their expressions. We saw at once that Bonnie, who introduced herself e as Bonaventure, had the sallow complexion and sharp nose of a nun. Her eyes watered and she was a foot taller than any of her sisters, mostly because the length of her neck which would one day hang from the end of a rope. Therese Lisbon had a heavier face, the cheeks and eyes of a cow, and she came forward to greet us on two left feet. Mary Lisbon's hair was darker; she had a widow's peak and fuzz above her upper lip that suggested her mother had found her depilatory wax. Lux Lisbon was the only one who accorded with our image of the Lisbon girls. She radiated health and mischief. Her dress fit tightly, and when she came forward to shake our hands, she secretly moved one finger to tickle our palms, giving off at the same time a strange gruff laugh. Cecilia was wearing, as usual, the wedding dress with the shorn hem. The dress was vintage 1920s. It had sequins on the bust she didn't fill out, and someone, either Cecilia herself or the owner of the used clothing store, had cut off the bottom of the dress with a jagged stroke so that it ended above Cecilia's chafed knees. She sat on a barstool, staring into her punch glass, and the shapeless bag of a dress fell over her. She had colored her lips with red crayon, which gave her face a deranged harlot look, but she acted as though no one were there. (Eugenides, 1993, p. 23-24)

From that excerpt, it can be concluded the Lisbon girls have physical similarities— blond hair, puffy cheeks, typical American beauty. However, it is said that on that occasion, the boys finally found out that the girls are different after all, with their facial features and little quirks that make their personalities. This is, arguably the first and only time the narrators ever look at the girls up close and see the girls for what they are.

Peter Sissen, one of the boys in the neighbourhood, describes the girls in a way that glorifies the womanliness of the sisters. Being the first boy who has ever been allowed in the house by Mr. Lisbon, he describes that the

girls' bedrooms that he passes on the way to the bathroom are filled with things that to him very foreign—crumpled panties, a crucifix draped in brassieres, gauzy chambers of canopied beds, and the effluvia of so many young girls becoming women together in the same cramped space (Eugenides, 1993, p. 7). He even describes in detail that there is a bloody tampon in the trash can, fresh from the inside of one of the Lisbon girls (which he learns later belongs to Lux, because she knocks on the door asking to be let in not long after, saying she needs something private), and it is not gross but a beautiful thing, like "a modern painting or something (Eugenides, 1993, p. 8)".

There are a lot of descriptions that are similarly vivid and sexualizing about the girls. Curt Van Osdol made a comment during Cecilia's open-casket funeral, saying he would have copped a last feel (of Cecilia), right there in front of the priest and everybody, if only (the narrators/the other boys) were there to see it (Eugenides, 1993, p. 36). When the school startsd after the summer Cecilia dies, the boys watches as the four sisters walk into the school in uniforms that are already too tight. Somehow for the narrators, it is vital to note that Lux's school tartan now "exposed her naked knees and an inch of thigh" (Eugenides, 1993, p. 60). To top it off, as the narrators admits to watching Lux's daily sexual rendezvous on the roof, they also acknowledge that years after that, the image of Lux is the one they still make love to in their minds to this present day (Eugenides, 1993, p. 142).

When Trip Fontaine, Lux's most potential love interest first enamoured by Lux, he iss doped up on marijuana that he only registers her blue eyes and that he misses her pulpy lips, her blond sideburn fuzz, and her nose with its "candy-pink" translucent nostrils (Eugenides, 1993, p. 74), and proceedes to describe her as "the still point of the turning world". While this may sound romantic, he later proceedes to describe her as "the most naked person with clothes on he had ever seen", and that no matter how baggy Lux's attire are, "there was always at least one untidy marvel to unravel him: an untucked shirttail, a sock with a hole, a ripped seam showing underarm hair". He said, "when she smiled, her mouth showed too many teeth, but at night (he) dreamed of being bitten by each one" (Eugenides, 1993, p. 75).

These girls are the typical American beauty, with their fair complexions, puffy red cheeks, fair colored hair. They fit the image of princesses and goddesses in fairytales and mythologies, or any good-valued characters like fairy godmothers, angels, saints, and goddesses (Juni & Roth, 1985), therefore yes, it is agreeable that they are pretty and desired to some standards.

However, there is an allure of otherness that the boys make the girls have by glorifying them, and almost all of those allure are sexual. They are put into such high pedestal, some sort of sexual goddesses who star in these narrator boys' teenage dreams. Due to this specific way of seeing the girls, it is sometimes implied that these boys easily forget who these girls are—teenagers. To them, the Lisbon girls are their manic pixie dream girls, their unattainable blond ghosts that are just a touch out of reach.

It is easy to say that this way, no matter how much the narrators claim that they want to understand the girls personally, these boys see the girls as an erotic object of desire. This book is written in the first-person point of view, which means the readers experience the story the way the narrators experience the reality of the literary work. We as readers are placed into the shoes of a heterosexual male spectator and also see the girls as an erotic object of desire—which aligns with Mulvey's male gaze theory. We can see this correlation in the next points as well, as the significance of the gaze holds so much more.

3.1.2 Damsels in Distress

As it has been established that the Lisbon girls are indeed pretty young darlings and that their attractiveness is somewhat sexual, we can move on to the side that the narrators often overlook: the personalities of the Lisbon girls. To remember, the Lisbon girls are such a big mystery to the narrator boys, who always want to understand what went wrong along the way. Spoiler: the answer might be in plain sight.

The personalities of each Lisbon girls are shown in a way that is subtle enough to miss, however enough to label. Cecilia Lisbon is dubbed as the "weird" one of the bunch,
always wearing her vintage wedding dress, does not speak too much. She shows a lot of care in animals, having knowledge about fish flies and other animals that turns endangered.

Sometimes in her diary, she speaks of her and her sisters as a single entity. The community mirrors this way of seeing, however setting Cecilia apart of the other sisters because they think Cecilia is a freak of nature (Eugenides, 1993, p. 107). It is said that when the other people speak of her, it is to say that they have always expected Cecilia to meet a bad end. She first attempts to die by slitting her wrist, and when it dios not work, she jumps to her death and lets herself pierced by the fence.

Lux Lisbon is the pretty one, the one who makes all sorts of troubles and the most mischievous, the one who holds the most attention from the boys and has a penchant for rock music. She is the main face of the Lisbon girls, the epitome of fantasies the boys have of the Lisbon girls. Lux used to be seen with all sorts of boys who the narrators think are "the stupidest boys, the most selfish and abused at home, and they make terrible sources of information (Eugenides, 1993, p. 65)". She is the sex symbol of the Lisbon daughters, the one who keeps the plot going. She dies by suffocating herself with carbon monoxide.

Bonnie Lisbon is the quiet one, the religious one, who is taller than the other girls and has a long neck. She carries her rosary everywhere, and as their house decays, she starts going outside her house to recite the rosary. However, Bonnie lets Joe Hill Conley kiss her during prom, even asking if he will call her later, indirectly showing a contradictive quality that she has as a teenage girl. She dies by hanging herself in the basement.

Mary Lisbon is the one who cares about her appearance the most. She shows an interest in beauty, hiding her stash of makeup in the bathroom and using them to school, modifying her uniform, also wearing her bright sweaters when she takes out the trash. Mary spent a lot of time in the mirror that has weather light settings, figuring out what makeup to wear during certain weathers. She first attempts to die by putting her head in the oven, and when it does not work, she dies by sleeping pills.

Therese Lisbon is the oldest Lisbon sisters, the one who is fascinated by science— likes trees, grows seahorses in drinking glasses, attends science conventions, and obsessed with her ham radio. She is intellectual yet awkward, with a heavy face reminiscent of a cow and two left feet. She applies for Ivy League colleges before she commits suicide, which she attemptes by downing a mix of sleeping pills and gin.

However, these personalities are usually not something the narrators pay most attention to, no matter how much they whine about wanting to "understand" the girls. These boys are attracted to their beauty, their sensuality, their otherness. However, like other people in the neighbourhood, what these boys want to know the best is the Lisbon girls' feelings regarding the tragedy of Cecilia and what happens after. The narrators observe the girls' behaviours to make deductions, but they are never completely successful in trying to understand them as person, dismissing their personalities as mere decoration to make them remember that the girls are slightly different than others.

This is due to the fact that these narrators believe, wholeheartedly, that these girls are in deep misery after the death of Cecilia. It is shown in page 49, in which they describe that their interest towards the Lisbon girls after Cecilia's funeral only increase.

Added to their loveliness is a new mysterious suffering, perfectly silent, visible in the blue puffiness beneath their eyes or the way they would sometimes stop in midstride, look down, and shake their heads as though disagreeing with life. (...)

In the Kriegers' basement, we lay on a strip of leftover carpeting and dream of all the ways we could soothe the Lisbon girls. Some of us want to lie down in the grass with them, or play the guitar and sing them songs. Paul Baldino wants to take them to Metro Beeach so they can all get a tan. Chase Buell, more and more under the sway of his father than the Christian Scientist, says only that the girls needed "help not of this world." (Eugenides, 1993, p. 49- 50.)

Both love and lust so blind our narrators that seeing the girls in deep grief makes them want to play as the hero. For them, it is easier to see the girls as a tragedy and pretty damsels in distress than a human with personalities. This can be seen in a conversation Kevin Head has with Therese during prom night.

"What made you guys ask us out?" "What do you mean?"
"I mean, do you feel sorry for us?" "No way."
"Liar."
"I think you're pretty. That's why."
"Do we seem as crazy as everyone thinks?" "Who thinks that?"
She didn't reply, only stuck her hand out the door to test for rain. "Cecilia was weird, but we're not." And then: "We just want to live. If anyone would let us." (Eugenides, 1993, p. 128.)

We can see this fact mirrors in the entire community as well, as everyone does their best to deduct and "help" the girls and their families. The death of Cecilia was the first in a long time for their calm and quiet neighbourhood; therefore, everyone seems to have a say in everything. Suddenly the neighbours work together to get rid of the fence to which Cecilia had jumped to her death, tending the lawn and getting rid of the dead fish flies (there's a lot of them, fish flies are mentioned a lot throughout the book). Suddenly the school dedicates a full day to do activities that "prevent" the possibility of suicides. Everyone wants the grief to go away, to alleviate the feeling of "bad omen" feeling that looms ever since Cecilia, defying the decay with all they might.

However, this might not have the desired effect—the girls do not budge nor speak, always ask to be excused from such activities. It is said that Lux has an affected hardness that might have been a reaction to pain, telling her distaste about going to school, also seen lying on top of the lockers after smoking, hugging herself (Eugenides, 1993, p. 97-98). Their peers treat them as if they have not moved on from the death themselves, causing these girls to alienate themselves and distancing themselves from the world. In addition because they stay together, other girls find it difficult to talk or walk with them, and many assumed they wanted to be alone (Eugenides, 1993, p. 98).

The narrators continue to look for the littlest signs—are the girls' pupils dilated? Have they lost interest in school activities, in sports, in hobbies? The narrators read all these pamphlets about suicide that are distributed at school, they learn about them, and then they wonder about the girls even more. These narrators feel the urge to know what is going on in their pretty little heads, but are never brave enough to ask, relying more on gossips and rumours and what other people said.

When the girls are in house arrest, these narrators wonder more, thinking about how they could help. They interview everyone who wants to speak about the girls to look for something to lead their investigation, something to observe. They talk to a kid who smoke together with Lux on top of the lockers in the locker room, to Trip Fontaine, to the neighbours, and even to doctors, to know what the girls are feeling, to understand what they needed.

However, the only time when these boys are brave enough to do something for the girls is when the girls call them first towards the end of the book. By then, it is already too late because when they arriv at their house, the girls are already in their positions, ready to die.

To conclude, these girls are just that: girls, teenagers who have their sister passing away, with their quirks and interests—but even that decreases in the eyes of the narrators, as to them these girls are a mystery to solve and princesses to save. The reason why these sisters hold a massive presence to the whole community is not because of who they are as person. It is rather because everyone never lets go of Cecilia's suicide, ruthlessly labelling the other four Lisbon girls as these mysterious doomed sisters haunted by grief.

3.2. Princess Galore: A Breakdown on Dramatis Personae Analysis

If we sort the categories based on Propp's Dramatis personae, the most influential character to fill the princess role is the Lisbon girls—mainly Lux. Other than the fact that they are the main female heroine to focus on, they check the boxes in almost all the essential criteria: pretty young things, high social status (Lux won prom queen), experienced humiliation (social exclusion), the damsels in distress who are yearning to be saved. Sure, they do not manage to marry the hero in the end like all princess in fairytales do. Still, if that one part is omitted, the Lisbon girls are the "reward" for the heroes—assuming the heroes are the neighbourhood boys—after years of relentless adolescent pining if pining could be considered as "quests."

Lux Lisbon is depicted as a naughty and a little boy-crazy from the start. She gets into all sorts of troubles—from wearing exposed clothing, writing boys' names on her panties, to sunbathing on the front porch, wearing the swimsuit that causes the knife sharpener to give her a fifteen-minute demonstration for nothing (Eugenides, 1993, p. 98). The boys even keep note of rumours about Lux wandering around at night and join a group of boys with motorcycles for a ride. This mirrors the idea of fairytale princesses who dreams for love, though in Lux's case, it is less about love and more about thrill and adventure.

During prom, the girls undergone a short transformation reminiscent of Cinderella just before the ball—though the narrators describe their homemade dresses remind them of choir robes (because Mrs. Lisbon added another inch to the bustlines and another two to the waist), and that their stiff hairdos shows their lack of experience in the dating area. It is the only moment in the book in which the girls hold so much presence purely because they are present, as human, as girls. This is the part of the book in which the narrators and the readers can see just how vocal the girls can be, without not too many people putting words in their mouths. They comment on their neighbours on the way to the school, causing the boys to be surprised at their volubility (Eugenides, 1993, p. 119). Mary says that she is "having the best time of her life" (Eugenides, 1993, p. 127). Lux even gets crowned as the prom queen during this night (obtained a high social status), though not long after loses it due to her and Trip's sexual intercourse on the football field.

The Lisbon girls all experience parental abuse in the form of house arrest, which mirrors the alienation and banishment aspect of the tale of Rapunzel. Only they are not locked up in a lone tower in the middle of the woods; they are just not allowed to leave the house—even to school. Mrs Lisbon is already strict to begin with, raising her children in a proper Christian manner, not allowing them to wear makeup and dress too freely. However, that is taken up a notch after Lux's rendezvous with Trip Fontaine when she is left to go home by herself the morning after the prom night, far long after curfew. The girls have little to no freedom at all. In addition, Mrs Lisbon go as far as making Lux burn all of her rock records as a punishment.

According to Maria Tatar, this is the point where princesses are going to "rise or return to the ranks of royalty once they have been humbled and humiliated" (1987). This is when they would have to endure the pain and keep their good virtues to have the happy fairytale ending they are meant to be. But instead, we see Lux Lisbon doing precisely the opposite: starting a series of late-night sex on the roof with random men, essentially self- destructing herself even further. The house, which serves as the metaphor of the mental state of the Lisbon family's mental state, at this point becomes more and more disarray, and this time no neighbours are helping to defy the decaying.

Since fairy tales endorse the idea that female needs to be lesser than the male and be the subordinate of male's desire, the whole idea of the Lisbon girls becomes the damsel in distress does identify the Lisbon girls as the fairytale princess. However, if observed with

more depths, the reason why they are the damsel in distress is solely created by the boys. This is where the play of perspectives takes part.

The Virgin Suicides is a literary work that heavily uses the concept of gaze as the primary storytelling point. But what happens if the story is told differently? What if the gaze is not a thing in this literary work? Will we see the girls the same way we do now? Will they fill the role of the princess fairytale just as they do now? This is how

the way of storytelling affects the princess roles in the story: the only reason the Lisbon girls can be considered as a "reward" or the sought-for person for the hero is when we assume the hero is the neighborhood boys, solely because these neighbourhood boys are fascinated and obsessed by the girls. They are the ones who want to save these girls from the grief, desiring them both romantically and erotically, dreaming that they would be happy if they ended up together.

The question is if those desires and fascinations are taken away, would the girls still serve the role as the fairytale princess? Yes, perhaps, as The Virgin Suicides is a story that focuses on the Lisbon girls. But perhaps, if we tilt the gaze a little, there is still a possibility that other characters may embody the fairytale princess just as well. For example, instead of glorifying the Lisbon girls we glorify Trip Fontaine for a change, Trip can fit the role of the princess fairytale as easily.

Luckily, we can see this a little bit more easily, as Trip Fontaine has half of the attention of the narrators, being one of the only ones who are willing to talk about their brief time with the Lisbon girls.

Trip Fontaine is described in a way the narrators describe the Lisbon girls: in a passive way that signifies the narrators' desires. The only difference however, lies in the desire—while the desire towards the Lisbon girls is based on infatuation between adolescents, the desire the narrators have towards Trip Fontaine translates more to a feeling of wanting to become Trip. Understandable, since Trip is described to have female students and neighbourhoods' mothers swooning over him, indirectly making him an object of desire for both female characters in the literary work and female spectators of the story. This makes the neighbourhood boys develop some sort of respect towards Trip. Trip does not have the level of glorification of all five of the Lisbon girls, but he has enough for him to tick some boxes of the fairytale princess criteria.

When Trip is first introduced, he has just gone through a transformation that makes him more desirable—though if the Lisbon girls' transformation relies on dresses and hairdos, Trip's transformation relied entirely on puberty.

Only eighteen months before the suicides, Trip Fontaine had emerged from baby fat to the delight of girls and women alike. Because we had known him as a pudgy boy whose teeth slanted out of his open, trolling mouth like those of a deep-sea fish, we had been slow to recognize his transformation (Eugenides, 1993, p. 65).

It is essential to mention that part of the transformation happens thanks to the older woman who makes love to Trip that summer when he and his family go on a trip (considering the age gap should be illegal and considered a case of sexual conduct with a minor, because Trip is still underage). Due to this, Trip prematurely develops a persona of a grown man, surpassing every other boy in his peers, which is the reason why the girls show attraction towards Trip as if he was a magic man. The way the female characters see Trip puts him in a pedestal, enough to make him comparable to Lux Lisbon herself. In a way, Trip Fontaine is Lux Lisbon if she was a man.

Due to this, Trip has a lot of lovers and suitors, which in turn causes him difficulties in getting together with Lux, as he is always the one approached first, not the one approaching, leading to a part where he gets humbled and humiliated.

The humiliation part happens when Trip manages to go to the Lisbon house to make an impression, only to not be able to sit next to Lux, not to be able to talk to Lux, or even receives any meaningful attention from any of the sisters and their parents. The visit to the house is deemed unfruitful, ending up with him parting with Lux at the door with "a sad smile that promised only frustration" (Eugenides, 1993, p. 81). However, that humiliation is soon compensated by the appearance of Lux, who sneaks out from the house into his car and both of them share super passionate kissing. Apparently, the makeout session is so impactful to Trip that he grows up never forgetting that moment despite never stopping to grow and develop, that years later he is still amazed by Lux's singleness of purpose, her total lack of inhibitions, the mythic mutability that allows her to possess three or four arms at once (Eugenides, 1993, p. 83).

During prom, he calls dibs to take Lux to prom and gets crowned as the Prom King (in which he officially acquires the high social status) and later committs sexual intercourse with Lux in the field—where he suddenly "lost the magical feeling" and leaves Lux to go home by herself. By this point, Trip Fontaine has all the criteria down: he is pretty-looking, he has as much as a high social status you can get in high school, experienced transformation, experiences abuse (albeit briefly explained, and more sexually than parental), and even experiences a brief mental humiliation.

However, what makes Trip Fontaine different than the Lisbon girls is the part where he committs sexual intercourse with Lux and "lost the magical feeling." Since the very beginning, his character goal is stated clear: to get with Lux Lisbon. The part of him "losing the magical feeling" after reaching his goal implies that his goal does not give him the fulfilment and the happy fairytale ending he desires. This contradicts the whole point of a fairytale princess, who indirectly serves as a source of fulfilment to the hero and for the entire fairytale story as well.

Instead of the fairytale princess, arguably, Trip Fontaine fits the role of a "false hero" more. He completes quests that are directly made to pursue Lux Lisbon (the princess), for a brief moment mistaking him as a real hero, which in turn makes him the strongest candidate to "save" the Lisbon girls (or mainly Lux) from grief. Instead, he pushes Lux to a mental state that is more in disarray, that to some extent can be considered as the villain. In other

words, Trip Fontaine's functions are unstable—yet constant, and it may shift from one role to another, depending on how you see it.

Then if the Lisbon sisters and Trip Fontaine are not the fairytale princess, then who is? There are other female characters, however, the most obvious candidate that we have not talked about are the narrators (who will be called the neighbourhood boys as the discussion goes on). This is due to the fact that the character that we know the best other than the Lisbon girls themselves are in fact the neighbourhood boys, whose eyes we borrow to understand the world inside the literary work.

The problem is that the neighbourhood boys are never glorified or romanticized the way Trip Fontaine and the Lisbon girls are. We do not see the neighbourhood boys as a separate character than us, the reader, due to the first-person point of view. We, as readers, identify ourselves as the neighbourhood boys, therefore creating some sort of humbleness and enough self-consciousness whenever we refer to them.

However, there are certain elements that make us readers can see the narrator boys as the fairytale princess: the long, ongoing longing that these boys have towards the Lisbon girls. Sure, I make all sort of points that show the fact that these boys see these sisters erotically. However, if we put the adolescent hormones factor aside, the attractions that these neighbourhood boys feel towards the girls are similar to the attractions the fairytale princess feel towards the concept of true love—almost obsessive, but mostly dreamy and longing.

Unable to go anywhere, the girls traveled in their imaginations to goldtipped Siamese temples, or past an old man with bucket and leaf broom tidying a moss- carpeted speck of Japan. As soon as we learned the names of these brochures we sent for them ourselves to see where the girls wanted to go. Far East Adventures. Footloose Tours. Tunnel to China Tours. Orient Express. We got them all. And, flipping pages, hiked through dusty passes with the girls, stopping every now and then to help them take off their backpacks, placing our hands on their warm, moist shoulders and gazing off at papaya sunsets. We drank tea with them in a water pavilion, above blazing goldfish. We did whatever we wanted to, and Cecilia hadn't killed herself: she was a bride in Calcutta, with a red veil and the soles of her feet dyed with henna. (Eugenides, 1993, p. 164).

From the quotation, we can understand that these boys got the same travel catalogues the girls do, and after learning the catalogues soon mirrors their dream to get out of the house arrest to accompany them in their travels. It is one of the very little occasions that these boys express their pure infatuation—underneath the hormones and the voyeuristic tendencies, these boys only want to be close to the girls, that they want to be alongside them in their journeys. This infatuation we can see in almost every Disney fairytale princess we can think of: Snow White, who sings about her dreams of how someday her prince will come to save her from her reality. Sleeping Beauty, who yearns for the man she walks with once upon a dream. Even Cinderella, who dreams of going to the ball just for a night. Throughout the whole book, we focus on what we thought was the neighbourhood boys' journey as a hero, trying to understand fairytale princesses—but turns out we follow the journey of a group of nameless fairytale princesses yearning for the five prince charmings. However, it is hard to see anything else, as these neighbourhood boys are written solely as a spectator of the Lisbon girls. Therefore the observation of them serving the role of the fairytale princess ends at that.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Lisbon girls are put on a very high pedestal since the very beginning; their whole being and personalities are diminished into their desirability and their tragedy. This specific way of viewing affects the girls in a way that it shifts their function as character. Instead of being female heroines of the story, the girls are desired enough to be thought of as a reward and sought-for person, which is one main traits of the role of fairytale princess, according to Vladimir Propp. Eugenides does have fun with the concept of perspectives and gazes enough for the princess role to shift to other more unconventional candidates: Trip Fontaine and the Narrators/Neighbourhood Boys, based on what functions of the characters serve, which leads to my second point of research.

Propp states that there is a limited set of eight broad fairytale character types that are defined by the function given to them. One of them is the fairytale princess who is more ambiguous, unlike any other dramatis personae, because it is not defined by a specific function, as she is only limited to be the one 'saved' by the hero, or the 'reward' for the hero in the narrative. Based on this, there are two different candidates to be the fairytale princess already: the Lisbon girls and Trip Fontaine. Also, based on the feature of lacking a specific function, the princess' role is usually examined as an archetype instead, adding another candidate to the list: the narrators themselves.

However, Trip Fontaine's rendezvous with Lux Lisbon points out the fact that while he may have every trait of a fairytale princess, he seeks fulfillment rather than serves as a source of fulfillment—at least not to the Lux Lisbon (who represents the Lisbon girls). In addition, without the same gaze that we, as readers, apply to the Lisbon girls and Trip, the only resemblance the neighborhood boys/narrators have to the fairytale princess role is the fact that the attractions that these neighborhood boys feel towards the girls are similar to the attractions the fairytale princess feel towards the concept of true love especially if we put the adolescent hormones aside.

Therefore, as stated before, the character who shares the most resemblance to the princess figure remains the Lisbon girls, because they are the only ones who serve as a "reward" to other male characters in the book, albeit

being diminished to their desirability only. The crown is always the Lisbon girls' from the start, however, had it not been for the fact that they are put on such high pedestal like that by the neighborhood boys and the entire community, the Lisbon girls would have lost their crown.

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