# All the Park's a Stage: *Westworld* as the Metafictional *Frankenstein*

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**Abstract**: This essay presents a literary analysis of the TV series *Westworld* (2016–), created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, who take Michael Crichton's *Westworld* (1973) as its hypotext. In so doing, the paper will firstly trace the literary and film sources of the series, particularly Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which is the myth informing the overall diegetic universe of the series as an architext. Secondly, it will comment on the reflexive elements present in the series, looking at certain key sequences that exemplify its metafictional dimension. The main contention will be that the series success lies in the combination of these two dimensions, the Frankensteinian and the metafictional, since both contribute to emphasise the postmodern philosophical questions posed by Nolan and Joy.

**Keywords:** *Westworld*; *Frankenstein*; metafiction; transtextuality; metafictional allegory.

**Summary**: Introduction: *Westworld* in context. The film and literary sources of *Westworld*. The metafictional allegory in *Westworld*. Conclusions.

**Resumen:** Este trabajo es un análisis literario de la serie de televisión *Westworld* (2016–), creada por Jonathan Nolan y Lisa Joy tomando la película *Westworld* (1973) de Michael Crichton como su hipotexto. Para ello, en primer lugar, este ensayo buscará las fuentes literarias y fílmicas de la serie, centrándose en el *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley, que es el mito que, como architexto, da forma al universo diegético de la serie. En una segunda parte, se centrará en los elementos reflexivos presentes en la serie, prestando especial atención a algunas escenas clave que ejemplifican su dimensión metaficcional. De este modo, la idea principal será describir cómo el éxito de la serie se debe a su combinación de estas dos dimensiones—la frankensteiniana y la metaficcional—ya que ambas contribuyen a enfatizar las cuestiones filosóficas postmodernas planteadas por Nolan y Joy.

**Palabras clave:** *Westworld*; *Frankenstein*; metaficción; transtextualidad; alegoría metaficcional.

**Sumario**: Introducción: *Westworld* en contexto. Las fuentes literarias y fílmicas de *Westworld*. La alegoría metaficcional de *Westworld*. Conclusiones.

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## INTRODUCTION: *WESTWORLD* IN CONTEXT

As dwellers of the digital age, we live in a time of extraordinary scientific development, an era in which technological devices are becoming increasingly sophisticated and ubiquitous. In such a time, historical processes seem to be inevitably accelerating to the extent that it seems that, in the words of writer and mathematician Vernor Vinge, "we are on the edge of a change comparable to the rise of human life on Earth, . . . [a change triggered by] the imminent creation by technology of entities with greater-than-human intelligence" (12). This momentous event known as the "technological singularity" was already envisaged in such terms more than twenty years ago, but as we delve into the twenty-first century, that prospect seems gradually closer and more possible, thus becoming more and more ingrained in the collective subconscious.[1] Therefore, there appears to be an increasing number of popular, cultural and fictional manifestations of this new spectre that haunts our world, the spectre of artificial intelligence (henceforth, AI). Out of all the innumerable manifestations of such spectre, this paper will specifically pay attention to audio-visual narratives, as well as some of their literary influences.

Within the filmic medium, AI has long been a classic science-fiction theme found as far back as in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), as well as other late-twentieth-century masterpieces such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). However, it is during the beginning of the twenty-first century—just as the so-called "singularity approaches"—that a true AI takeover is happening within the realms of film-making. This context has provided the ideal opportunity for commercially-aimed remakes of older science-fiction movies, such as *Total Recall* (2012; 1990), *Robocop* (2014; 1987) or *Ghost in the Shell* (2017; 1995), although, separating the wheat from the chaff, we can also find more original examples in Kike Maíllo's *Eva* (2011), Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), Wally Pfister's *Transcendence* (2014), Gabe Ibáñez's *Autómata* (2014), Matthew Leutwyler's *Uncanny* (2015), or Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2015), to name but a few.[2] Apart from these examples, robots, cyborgs and the like are also finding their way into what nowadays seems to be an artistically blooming medium: the TV series. Amongst these, some relevant examples are Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* (2011–), a satirical science-fiction series which has addressed the theme of AI in certain episodes, or the less-known series *Humans* (2015–), a science-fiction series featuring a world in which almost every household can afford a domestic android.[3]

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[1] For a more comprehensive approach to the recent developments in the field of artificial intelligence as well as their social repercussions, see *The Economist*'s 2016 special report about the matter—especially its introductory article, entitled "The Return of the Machinery Question."

It is in this fruitful context that Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy have conceived their science-fiction TV series *Westworld* (2016–), which will be the object of this paper's scrutiny. A carefully crafted and ambitious rewrite of Michael Crichton's film *Westworld* (1973), Nolan and Joy's series has probably been one of the most engaging and thought-provoking of 2016, achieving both popular and critical acclaim. The purpose of this article is to scrutinise the possible reasons behind such acclaim from a literary perspective, exploring some of the series' transtextual relations with literature and film. More specifically, I will argue that *Westworld*'s success lies in its being both a version of the Frankenstein architext and a metafictional allegory, in a way in which the metafictional elements reinforce the existential questions posed by the Frankenstein myth.[4] Consequently, in the first section, I will trace the connection between the series and the myth, and, in the second, I will analyse the metafictional dimension and its implications.

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[2] For a more detailed survey of the different types of AI portrayed in the history of cinema, see Alice Bishop's informational article "Android Problems: The Representation of Robots in Cinema" (2014).

[3] Sam Vincent and Jonathan Brackley's *Humans* is probably the show that could be most easily compared with *Westworld*. Although it focuses more on everyday life, it shares with *Westworld* the basic premise of empathising more with androids than with humans.

[4] I will be using the term architext in Gérard Genette's sense, who in *Palimpsestes* establishes architextuality as one of the five kinds of transtextuality and defines it as "l'ensemble des catégories générales, ou transcendantes—types de discours, modes d'énonciation, genres littéraires, etc.—dont relève chaque texte singulier" (7). Applying this concept to the case of *Westworld*, the Frankenstein architext (understood as not just the original novel, but as all the cultural products across different media that were directly or indirectly derived from it) would be the literary myth that in many ways shapes and influences the singular text—that is to say, the series,—and thus functions as an architext.

## 1. THE FILM AND LITERARY SOURCES OF *WESTWORLD*

In explaining Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, science-fiction scholars Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin ask the following questions:

> If androids dream of electric sheep, then aren't they really human? And if they're human, and if we've created them, then are we gods? or meddling fools? . . . The device of the android, a modern streamlining of the image of Frankenstein's monster, brings all these issues into sharper focus. (180)

Taking this into account, what better setting to exploit the motif of the android and the Frankenstein myth than an android-populated theme park? By this, I mean Westworld: an amusement park which recreates the old American West by means of an artificial setting peopled by androids to whom visitors can do anything they want, including sex and extreme physical violence.

Michael Crichton's *Westworld* first explored the possibilities of such a setting, although it appears that that film did not make the most of it. Some aspects of the 1973 movie provide an initially appealing proposal about the cruel frivolity of our attitude towards androids, dramatised through the story of two friends who come to the park looking for the thrill it promises, but unfortunately arrive at a time in which one of the androids starts to malfunction in a murderous way. The film eventually becomes quite Manichean in that the rebellious android (Yul Brynner's Gunslinger) seems to be wantonly evil, for we never get to know if he ever suffered in a way that could convincingly motivate his vengeance. Furthermore, he does not utter a single word throughout the whole movie and his face is utterly expressionless, all of which leaves this android character almost completely undeveloped. Thus, Crichton squandered the potential of his concept by focusing on the spectacular, but rather shallow, story of a rebellious machine that mercilessly kills human visitors and ceaselessly chases the helpless human protagonist.

In what may be an attempt to overcome the limitations of Crichton's picture, Nolan and Joy utilised it as the hypotext for their TV series.[5]

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[5] Gérard Genette explains hypertextuality, again another category of transtextuality, as "toute relation unissant un texte B (. . . hypertexte) à un texte antérieur A (. . . hypotexte)" (11), that is, a relationship in which the *hypertext* would be "tout texte dérivé d'un texte antérieur par transformation simple . . . ou par transformation

They seem to have understood the potential of the android theme park idea and thus decided to expand Crichton's world by shifting the focus from the visitors, known as "guests" in the series, to the androids, known as "hosts" in the series. In this regard, they have not enriched their work by means of sheer originality, but by means of—either consciously or unconsciously—recovering elements from the Frankenstein myth, both from Mary Shelley's canonical novel and from later manifestations of the architext.

The first of these recovered elements is the sympathetic approach to an initially innocent creature that is not inherently evil, but is *forced* to rebellion and misbehaviour by the cruelty of humanity. In Shelley's novel, Frankenstein's monster was not always the ruthless monster which most of us tend to imagine. He was in many ways a neglected child who futilely struggled to be accepted by his foster-family and his creator as a worthy being. Only after being repeatedly rejected and mistreated, he seeks vengeance. Therefore, his vehement rage is not groundless, but characterologically justified by the alienation at which he suffered first. Mary Shelley, bolstering the reader's empathy with the creature, provides him with his own narrative voice in the middle of the novel so that he powerfully expresses all his experiences. Once we know his version, we as readers are left with a frightening doubt: who was the true monster of the story? Creature or creator?

The same doubt runs through Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, a movie that, like *Westworld*, also rewrites a previous work—Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, in that case—by adding elements from the Frankenstein architextual myth.[6] This film, which is about a police detective in charge of capturing fugitive "replicants," takes Shelley's empathy towards the creature even further. Ridley Scott shows us a world in which androids, who are massively used as a slave workforce and are sentenced to die, to be "retired," if they decide to escape, ironically seem to be more human than humans. By way of

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indirecte" (14). Taking this conception to the cinematic medium, Nolan and Joy's *Westworld* would be the hypertext built on Crichton's *Westworld* as the hypotext.

[6] According to Pedro Javier Pardo, "[*Blade Runner*] is both an overt adaptation of Dick's novel and a covert one of Shelley's, and in fact, the basic differences between the overt book source and the film adaptation can be explained by the mediation of the covert intertext" (252). This is to a certain extent the same triangulation that could be drawn between the TV series *Westworld* (2016), *Westworld* (1973), the movie, and the Frankenstein myth.

example, one needs only to remember Roy Batty's profound sensibility in his "Tears in the rain" monologue and compare it with the impassive and phlegmatic personality of Rick Deckard, the human protagonist. While the detective appears to be trapped by the apathy, the monotony and the loneliness which seem to pervade his society, the android characters are apparently driven by a more genuine will to live, which leads them to escape and rebel against humans rather than living enslaved and doomed to shorter lifespans. In this way, it could be claimed that the film shows how true human feelings lie in the non-human side and how in this case, rhetorically turning around the foundational texts of the United States—it is we the people who are responsible for the others' grievances: we humans are the oppressors, while replicants the oppressed.

If *Blade Runner*'s reversal of terms was already provocative in that sense, then *Westworld* has completely turned around the concept of humanity by taking Scott's conception of the replicants as the foundation for the hosts. Not only do hosts seem to be more human than us, but their suffering is portrayed from their own perspective, often creating a sordid contrast with the guests' carelessness and superficiality while they visit the "amusement" park. Besides, the hosts get roughly as much narrative prominence as human characters; in fact, two of the first season's most important storylines are focalised through Dolores and Maeve, a couple of female hosts who undergo painful processes of awakening. Although they are initially programmed to forget and, in a Sisyphean way, to endure the same pains each day over and over, these two hosts gradually become aware that their life—or rather, the life and personality that they have been programmed to have—is nothing but a sham, a complex hoax conceived to thrill human visitors at the expense of the hosts' suffering. In addition, Dolores and Maeve's gender doubly others them, as both machines and women, subjecting them to the oppression of being the other in two ways: as both non-human and gendered female, while underscoring their humanity and sensitivity to the viewer's eyes, especially in the case of Dolores, who is initially portrayed as an innocent Alice in Wonderland.[7] Together, all these aspects construct a strong characterological justification for the end of the season: the hosts' rebellion will eventually be built on the basis of all the hardships that the viewer gets to witness throughout the episodes. Like in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* but unlike Crichton's *Westworld*, the creature's violent vengeance does not arrive haphazardly, but rather after repeated abuses.

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[7] For a better understanding of the implications of choosing female androids as the main characters, it could be worthwhile to contemplate the questions posed by Laurie Penny in her article "Why Do We Give Robots Female Names? Because We Don't Want to Consider Their Feelings." Regarding the connection to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Jonathan Nolan declared the following in an interview for *Entertainment*

Apart from its shift in narrative viewpoint, Nolan and Joy's show also goes beyond the approaches of its predecessors in the choice of villain. The antagonist figure is, unlike Crichton's Gunslinger and Scott's Roy Batty, a human character, something that obviously coheres with the series' empathic perspective towards the hosts. In *Westworld*, Ed Harris's Man in Black, a mysterious guest who has been visiting the park for decades, plays the role of a relentless destroyer, ironically seeming mechanical and utterly insensitive in his attitude towards the hosts. Obsessed with finding some hidden meaning to the park's storylines, he goes around the park killing anything that stands in his way, sometimes even murdering for fun. Is it not that what we would usually expect from nonhuman villains like Michael Crichton's Gunslinger or, to name the most iconic, the Terminator?[8]

Another element that the series has borrowed from the Frankenstein architext is the Faustian-Promethean figure of Dr. Ford, the creator of the whole theme park. Such a character was absent from Crichton's film, but it can be traced back to Victor Frankenstein himself.[9] Like in Mary Shelley's novel, *Westworld*'s overreaching scientist often seems to be the true villain and the source of unpredictability and danger within the story. Dr. Ford is even capable of committing murder when he feels that his position is threatened, and in fact, when justifying the murder of Theresa Cullen, he directly quotes one of Victor Frankenstein's most disturbing assertions: "One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should acquire" (S01 E08 0:03:05). Hence, it is the character himself who establishes the parallelism between his and Frankenstein's insatiable

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*Weekly*: "There are a couple of references for Dolores. Some more explicit than others. Alice is one. . . . But also, Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*. It was a tilt of the head toward all the different stories that inspired us; a classic protagonist who's on a hero's journey with a darker twist to it."

[8] It might be interesting to speculate about the intentions behind choosing Ed Harris for this role—probably as a hint to *Westworld*'s relationship with *The Truman Show* (1999).

[9] *Blade Runner*'s Dr. Tyrell could also be mentioned here, but for the sake of brevity I will confine myself to *Westworld* and *Frankenstein*.

thirst for knowledge and power: in their self-consuming projects, both forget their morality to follow their ambitions.

Nevertheless, Dr. Ford is not only an updated Dr. Frankenstein; he is also reminiscent of another iconic God-like creator: *The Truman Show*'s Christoff, director of what is very likely the most iconic and disquieting reality show of film history. These two megalomaniac figures share an almost psychopathic obsession with control that makes them awe-inspiring, equally frightening and fascinating. Unlike Victor Frankenstein, whose creature is in many ways completely independent from him, Dr. Ford and Christoff have an absolute, omniscient and almost totalitarian power over their respective creations, creations which do not consist of a single individual, but of entire worlds. Moreover, they only abandon such power when *they* decide to.

In *Westworld*, the hosts' final rebellion only happens because Dr. Ford conceives it, since, as he tells his partner Bernard, "the piano doesn't murder the player if it doesn't like the music" (S01 E09 0:55:09). In his farewell speech, Dr. Ford makes it very clear that the hosts' final rebellion is of his own making, when he says that "[he] began to write a new story for them [and] it begins with the birth of a new people and the choices they will have to make" (S01 E10 1:24:07). In this aspect, the ending of *The Truman Show*, with the protagonist choosing to leave the cocoon out of his own free will, was somewhat more optimistic and confident in the individual's capacity for rebellion, although Christoff could have killed Truman before he escaped, had he wanted it. In *Westworld*, however, the hosts behave always under Ford's programming, and, as I have argued, they only awaken and rebel after *he* modifies them, something that underlines the deterministic philosophy of the series. It appears that hosts cannot change nor rebel unless they are manipulated to do so.

Obviously, the show is applying all these ideas to us humans as well. After all, androids function as a looking glass through which we can reflect on the human condition; they are nothing but our fictional doppelgängers.[10] Dr. Ford himself makes the parallelism very explicit, again offering us a glimpse of the series' deterministic views about humanity:

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[10] According to Scholes and Rabkin, "In science fiction [the Doppelgänger] is frequently an artificial creation, as is the case with Frankenstein's monster" (182).

> Humans fancy that there's something special about the way we perceive the world, and yet we live in loops as tight and as closed as the hosts do, seldom questioning our choices, content, for the most part, to be told what to do next. (S01 E08 0:36:07)

Hence, if *Westworld*'s androids are in many ways a mirror of humanity, it follows that the whole fiction also functions as a distorted and distorting mirror of reality. It is due to such distortions that Nolan and Joy's series should also be described as metafiction, which will be the main scope of the next section.

## 2. THE METAFICTIONAL ALLEGORY IN *WESTWORLD*

> *We wish to create worlds as real as, but other than the world that is*. Or was. This is why we cannot plan. We know that a world is an organism, not a machine. We also know that a genuinely created world must be independent of its creator; a planned world . . . is a dead world. It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live. (Fowles 86)

How much authority can a writer have over its writing? How does he relate with his fiction? Can he behave like an omnipotent creator? Should there be a limit to his powers? As in the previous excerpt from *The French Lieutenant's Woman*—which in here seems to be prophetic of *Westworld*'s final rebellion,—these appear to be some of the questions that pervade metafictional writings.[11] So once again I wonder: what other setting would be better to explore these issues than a world of creators and creations like *Westworld*? In the case of Nolan and Joy, it seems that they have realised the endless possibilities of adding a metafictional layer—although an allegorical one, as I will explain later—to the already fruitful background of the Frankenstein myth. Thus, besides the series' reversal of our expectations about the human and the nonhuman, we will also consider how it undermines the distinction between reality and fiction.

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[11] Patricia Waugh's definition clarifies the concept: "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (2). For further explanations, Linda Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative* could also be consulted.

Retracing our steps, now *Westworld*'s relationship with *The Truman Show* can be seen under a completely new light. Whether we are talking about Dr. Ford's theme park or Christoff's TV set, the two works portray a world-within-a-world. By means of this Russian puppet of settings, the Shakespearean notion of "all the world's a stage" is made more explicit than ever: here we have worlds that are literally stages and/or narratives, the latter being precisely the term which *Westworld*'s characters use to refer to the park's interactive storylines. Furthermore, to make reflexivity even more clear, Peter Abernathy—a host who used to be programmed as a professor and who accidentally becomes aware of his reality in the first episode—quotes King Lear's famous metadramatic complaint: "when we are born, we cry we are come to this great stage of fools" (S01 E01 0:58:40). With this, the showrunners also seem to be openly acknowledging The Bard's influence on *Westworld*, which could be by itself the topic of another paper.[12]

This notion of the amusement park as a great stage seems to raise several parallelisms, to the point of building a complex allegory. Who is who in such a literary equation? Plainly speaking, Dr. Ford and his team would be the metaphorical equivalent of authors, film scriptwriters, and/or directors; the androids would be the equivalent of characters; and the visitors would be the readers or audience. A similar approach and a possible forerunner of this is, once again, *The Truman Show*. However, that film was explicitly metacinematic in that it was a film about a TV show in which we had characters who were scriptwriters, directors and actors in the strictest sense of words. As opposed to the literalism of Weir's picture, *Westworld* would be better described as a "metafictional allegory," one in which the functioning of the park is metaphorically equated to the functioning of fiction.[13]

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[12] For instance, the show's tension is built around the promise that "these violent delights have violent ends," a direct quote from *Romeo and Juliet*, and there are several references to other plays such as *Henry IV*, *Julius Caesar, Hamlet*, and *The Tempest*.

[13] According to Pedro Javier Pardo, "alegoría metaficcional" can be used to refer to: "una historia en la que ni aparecen gentes de cine (actores, directores, guionistas, etc.) ni autores, personajes o lectores, pero cuya acción los convierte en sus equivalentes, emblemas de estas figuras, de modo que alegóricamente acaba siendo una reflexión sobre la ficción y sobre el cine" (155).

Under the framework of such allegory, the series manages to create a reflexive discourse on storytelling. At its surface, *Westworld* reflects the typical dilemma that every fiction writer faces: should they write to please the readership, giving them a means of evasion? Or should they write for some deeper purpose, looking for some meaning? The former view seems to be favoured by Westworld's average visitors as well as Lee Sizemore, a rather shallow writer who wants to replace Dr. Ford, while the latter is expressed by Dr. Ford and the Man in Black, who, as author and reader, prefer more insightful kinds of stories. In turn, this very same dilemma affects the series itself: what was the true reason for its success? It being a thrilling show full of surprises, action, violence and sex? Or it having all the references, reflections and implications that I am analysing here? How much of the audience did truly listen to Nolan and Joy's messages? Did they remain unheard like Dr. Ford's? In his farewell speech, the park's creator gives us a very pessimistic answer to these questions, suggesting that those who, like himself, look for deeper meanings in fiction are nothing but a minority doomed to frustration:

> I believed that stories helped us ennoble ourselves, to fix what was broken in us, and to help us become the people we dreamed of being. Lies that told a deeper truth. . . . And for my pains, I got this: a prison of our own sins. 'Cause you don't want to change, or cannot change. Because you're only human after all. (S01 E10 1:22:41)

With these words, Dr. Ford expresses his failure in transmitting anything to people, how he could never inspire any change in them with his work. In turn, his failure conveys a profoundly deterministic view of humanity: we cannot change, we cannot be improved—not even by art—and art can only aspire to reflect our shortcomings, but never correct them. Besides that, Dr. Ford's final comment that "Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin never died, they simply became music" (S01 E10 1:26:55) seems to point at how, eventually, the only solace he can find as an artist is the possible immortality of his own ego, a rather vain consolation, considering his initially nobler aims. In another of Dr. Ford's scenes, his cynicism regarding art and human nature emerges with all its harshness:

> I read a theory once that the human intellect was like peacock feathers. Just an extravagant display intended to attract a mate. All of art, literature, a bit of Mozart, William Shakespeare, Michelangelo, and the Empire State

> Building. . . . Just an elaborate mating ritual. Maybe it doesn't matter that we have accomplished so much for the basest of reasons. But, of course, the peacock can barely fly. It lives in the dirt, pecking insects out of the muck, consoling itself with its great beauty. (S01 E07 0:50:09)

However, the series does not only use the metafictional allegory to reflect on storytelling, but also to blur the borders between the human and the artificial, that is to say, between the real and the fictional. How do Nolan and Joy achieve this? The gist of the matter is Bernard, an apparently human character who is responsible for the cognitive design of the hosts and whom we will later discover to be another host, just as he discovers it and demands an explanation from his creator.[14] As in Jorge Luis Borges's "Las ruinas circulares," which is arguably another metafictional allegory, we are facing a God-like creator who was in turn created by another—and implicitly by another.[15] Whether we are talking about Borges's dreamers or about Bernard and Dr. Ford—and indirectly the show's creators,—the apparently endless chain of creatures and creators triggers an overall uncertainty about the nature and origin of the characters' existence, and in turn, of our existence. But Bernard's condition does not only confuse the viewer, it also provides the perfect opportunity to unfold more of the show's philosophy, once again through Dr. Ford, who on this occasion sounds like an existential nihilist, consoling Bernard by telling him that human consciousness is nothing but an illusion:

> The self is a kind of fiction, for hosts and humans alike. It's a story we tell ourselves. . . . There is no threshold that makes us greater than the sum of

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[14] The epiphanic moment in which a fictional character realises his own fictionality is what Pedro Javier Pardo has termed as "anagnórisis metaficcional" (155). In *Westworld*, this event is in turn conflated with the Frankensteinian encounter between the maker and the made: Bernard's encounter with Dr. Ford also echoes the creature's confrontation with Victor Frankenstein.

[15] "Las ruinas circulares" could be regarded as a metafictional allegory in that the act of dreaming, at least in the sense in which it is depicted in Borges's story, is in many ways equivalent to the act of creating fiction. Borges's chain of creators and creations is even longer than *Westworld*'s, for we never get to know who was the first dreamer, if there was one. And to lengthen the chain, in "Examen de la obra de Herbert Quain" Borges even suggests that "Las ruinas circulares" was not entirely conceived by him, but that he found inspiration in a tale of the imaginary writer after whom that story is named.

> our parts, no inflection point at which we become fully alive. We can't define consciousness because consciousness does not exist. (S01 E08 0:35:12)

The parallelism with "Las ruinas circulares," and the series' undermining of the distinction between reality and fiction, goes even further, in that *Westworld* also equates consciousness to a dream. Dolores's statements about her birth are reminiscent of Borges inasmuch as she seems to awake from someone else's dream: "I'm in a dream. I do not know when it began or whose dream it was. I know only that I slept a long time. And then one day I awoke" (S01 E10 0:01:51). Metafictional and existential questions thus pile on top of each other: are our lives a dream? Is our identity a lie? Are we someone else's fiction? How do we know if we are truly awake or real?

Furthermore, as we can see in the scene in which Dolores and Teddy escape to the beach, overall ambiguity and confusion eventually increases even more. While Teddy agonises, Dolores proclaims:

> We're trapped, Teddy. Lived our whole lives inside this garden, marvelling at its beauty, not realising there's an order to it, a purpose. And the purpose is to keep us in. The beautiful trap is inside of us because it is us. (S01 E10 0:53:48)

However, right after seeing how these android versions of Adam and Eve decide to break free from Paradise, they freeze and Dr. Ford appears onstage amidst the sound of applause. Everything was a programmed act for an audience. Their plan to escape and rebel was not born of free will. The question then becomes: does free will even exist for these androids? And what about us humans? Are we not similarly determined by an audience and a setting, by both society and nature?[16] Perhaps these and other existential questions that the series poses cannot be answered satisfactorily, but this essay certainly requires some closure, however artificial that is.

## CONCLUSIONS

In *Westworld*, Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy have crafted an original rewrite of the Frankenstein architext, which in turn functions as a metafictional allegory. Within the setting of the android-populated theme park, the Frankensteinian maker and his creations become metaphorically intertwined with the figures of writer and character, thus effectively posing all the social, philosophical and metafictional questions that I have been discussing throughout this paper. Usually, we assume that there is a clear-cut frontier between the human and the artificial, between the real and the fictional, but *Westworld* makes those distinctions problematic, reverses the terms and leaves us viewers in an obscure middle ground of ambiguity in which even the notions of "humanity" and "reality" are called into question.

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[16] An article that sheds light on *Westworld*'s metafictional and deterministic dimensions is Spencer Kornhaber's "*Westworld* and the False Promise of Storytelling" (2016).

Of course, all these ideas are not entirely new, but rather a new manifestation of postmodernist thinking.[17] In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon has eloquently expressed the attitude of this movement:

> We now query those boundaries between the literary and the traditionally extra-literary, between fiction and non-fiction, and ultimately, between art and life. We can interrogate those borders, though, only because we posit them. We think we know the difference. The paradoxes of postmodernism serve to call to our attention both our continuing postulation of that difference and also a newer epistemological doubt. (Do we know the difference? *Can we*?) (224–25)

This is precisely what happens in *Westworld*: we see a relentless zeal to conceive a meticulously crafted world on the part of its creators, and at the same time, we feel an overbearing ontological ambiguity lurking behind. Dr. Ford epitomises this contradiction: he is obsessed with order and perfection but he also enjoys reminding us of the imperfect and chaotic nature of existence. And there is an additional paradox on top of that if we consider also Nolan and Joy, since this is a carefully planned and intricately structured series that constantly reminds us of the pointlessness of structures and categorisation. Eventually, in the fictional world of the show, chaos triumphs over order, with the hosts mutinying against their creators. But will that happen as well to the series itself? Is *Westworld* as doomed by its ambitions as its characters? Will all its questions finally lead us to some answers? Or will these questions die while the series becomes another overexploited franchise? Perhaps the way forward will lie not in answering, but in continuing to ask questions.

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[17] This is not to say that these ideas are exclusive of postmodernism. For instance, Miguel de Unamuno's *Niebla* (1914) clearly predates that *movement*—if postmodernism can be called a movement—in that it is also a metafictional novel that blurs the borders between reality and fiction.

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