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## Revisiting Surveillance and Exposure through Aging Masculinities: Fede Álvarez's *Don't Breathe* as a Contemporary Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart"

### ABSTRACT

Fede Álvarez's film *Don't Breathe* (2016) and Poe's classic tale "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) present a significant number of intertextualities, which pave the way for approaching Álvarez's film as a contemporary adaptation of Poe's tale. Both narratives comprise pervasive references to the gaze and the act of looking, methods of invigilation and disclosure, the house as a projection of its dweller, and the relevance that age and gender discourses acquire in them. This article offers a comparative analysis of both narratives with the view to prove that Álvarez's film reflects and subverts the dynamics of surveillance and exposure displayed in Poe's original tale.

### KEYWORDS

transtextuality; gaze; house; aging; gender

### 1. Introduction

Fede Álvarez's *Don't Breathe* (2016) has been praised as one of the most successful horror films in the last decade, insofar as it has attracted favourable critical acclaim as well as enormous popularity from audiences. Its plot revolves around three Detroit thieves – including Rocky (Jane Levy), Alex (Dylan Minnette), and Money (Daniel Zovatto) – who make a living by breaking into houses. As they learn that Norman Nordstrom (Stephen Lang) conceals a great amount of money in cash after a settlement with a young wealthy woman, who killed his daughter in a car accident, they decide to burglarise his house. When they find out that his intended victim is an elderly blind man, they initially categorise him as an easy prey judging him on the basis of his disability, although they soon realise that his dexterity and extraordinary skills put in jeopardy their intended wicked purposes. Following the release of his film, Álvarez claimed that he envisioned *Don't Breathe* as "an exercise in reversal" (Rife, 2016), inasmuch as he intended to subvert tropes in horror, refusing to resort to supernatural occurrences, depicting

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the house of horror as apparently decent and appealing, and portraying a lethal antagonist as aged and blind. Álvarez's film includes latent references to classic horror films like Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) given the antagonist's name and the secret concealed in the basement of the house, along with conventions pertaining to slashers, as happens with the character of 'the final girl,' to use Carol Clover's (1992) term, whom Rocky personifies in the film. Nonetheless, the plot, characters and thematization of Álvarez's film mostly bring to mind Edgar Allan Poe's tale "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843), in which a nameless narrator recalls how he conceived the idea of killing an elderly man in his house as a result of the fact that the narrator could no longer bear the elderly man's vexing eye.

Drawing on Harold Bloom's notion of the anxiety of influence, in relation to Poe's classic tale, Álvarez's film is alleged to exemplify the typology of influence whereby the predecessor's work is read in terms of the successor's work (Bloom 1975). In this respect, an analysis of Álvarez's film reveals a series of instances of transtextuality with Poe's tale which pave the way for approaching subjects addressed in both narratives, such as the dynamics of surveillance and exposure, the trope of the house in gothic narratives, and the relevance that the discourses of age and gender acquire in both texts. In terms of the analysis of transtextuality in both works, Gérard Genette's typologies will be used in order to identify instances of intertextuality, architextuality, hypertextuality and metatextuality between both narratives. Besides, the omnipresence of the gaze and the act of looking as a means of subjectification from a Freudian perspective also becomes pervasive in both narratives as an allegory of the battle between factions. Insofar as both textualities mostly develop in a domestic location, the trope of the house as a reflection of its dweller and as legacy of gothic narratives is further developed, while it also explores the dynamics of surveillance and exposure in terms of Michel Foucault and Thomas Mathiesen, along with Alice Marwick's contemporary explanations. Finally, drawing on the entanglement between age and gender, the pulse between the youth and the aged brings to the fore the subject of aging masculinities based on Margaret Gullette's statement (2011) that aging has often been associated with a narrative of decline. Approaching Álvarez's film *Don't Breathe* as an adaptation of Poe's short story "The Tell-Tale Heart" will give evidence that contemporary narratives are not only rooted in classic texts, but also contribute to transforming them and updating them in a modern context.

## **2. In Poe's footsteps: instances of transtextuality**

Poe's tale "The Tell-Tale Heart" and Álvarez's film *Don't Breathe* present a series of parallelisms, particularly in terms of plot, characters and themes, which pave the way for providing a comparative analysis, particularly in terms of the dynamics of surveillance and exposure displayed in both narratives. In Poe's tale, a homodiegetic narrator gives his personal account about how he felt constantly

threatened by an elderly man's gaze until he decided to counteract his symbolic power of surveillance by watching him over and slaying him in order to release himself from his overwhelming powers of observation. In Álvarez's film, a gang of three young home intruders break into the home of a war veteran, whom they choose as an easy target, since they categorise him as a vulnerable elderly blind man, although they soon find out that their powers of surveillance are retaliated by his extraordinary skills in spite of his disability. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism and Julia Kristeva's (1986) notion of intertextuality, Gérard Genette (1992) coins the concept of transtextuality, which responds to "all that sets the text in relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (p. 83). Textual correspondences between Poe's tale and Álvarez's film display instances of different kinds of transtextuality, comprising intertextuality, architextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality.

On the basis of Genette's terminology, intertextuality involves direct allusions between texts, which, in relation to Poe's tale and Álvarez's film, mostly amounts to the iconic portrayal of the elderly man's gaze. In Poe's (1978) tale, the narrator puts forward that "one of his eyes resembled that of a vulture – a pale blue eye, with a film over it" and "whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees [...] I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever" (p. 792). Correspondingly, Álvarez's film includes numerous visual allusions to this passage in Poe's tale, inasmuch as the elderly man's eyes are continuously portrayed through close-ups and dramatic lighting that draws attention to his gaze. According to Isaac Rooks (2019), the blind man's eyes were also featured prominently in advertisements to publicise *Don't Breathe* as a horror film (p. 29), hence giving evidence that the elderly man's gaze acquires particular symbolism.

Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" has been widely acclaimed as one of the finest tales of horror of all times, even to the extent that the American master of contemporary horror Stephen King (2001) claims that "terror is the sound of the old man's continuing pulsebeat" in Poe's tale (p. 37). Analogously, Álvarez's film is also a psychological horror narrative that takes place inside a house that conceals a secret, which acts as a metaphorical counterpart to the heart beatings in Poe's tale. In terms of architextuality, which involves the designation of a text as part of a genre, both narratives comprise features that categorise them as pertaining to the genre of the fantastic. Drawing on Tzvetan Todorov's terminology, the fantastic consists of a literary genre of hesitation which responds to the marvellous, when actions do not obey natural expectations and are considered supernatural, or the strange, when events are ultimately given a natural explanation. As narratives of the fantastic, Poe's tale and Álvarez's film fluctuate between the marvellous and the strange. "The Tell-Tale Heart" includes displays of the marvellous, as the old man's beatings of the heart appear to persist even after his death, although it is

suggested that this apparently supernatural event might respond to the narrator's nervous condition, which would ascribe the tale to the strange. Correspondingly, as a narrative of the fantastic, *Don't Breathe* mostly pertains to the strange, given its realistic approach, but the elderly man's uncanny skills in spite of his disability, along with the terrible secret that he conceals in the basement of his house, are initially interpreted as possible displays of the marvellous.

The transtextual relationship between Poe's tale and Álvarez's film also displays instances of hypertextuality, which involve the connection between a later narrative known as hypertext which transforms, elaborates or extends a previous narrative known as hypotext. Considering Poe's tale as a hypotext and Álvarez's film as a hypertext, the original narrative, in which a homodiegetic narrator confesses having murdered an elderly man as a result of feeling overwhelmingly exposed to his omniscient gaze, is further elaborated in terms of plot development, characterisation, motivation, and the narration of events. Poe's tale exclusively revolves around the narrator's confession of his murder of the old man and his final arrest, whereas Álvarez's film elaborates further on the story, portraying the events prior to the entrance in the house and those taking place until the final release. If the characters remain unnamed in Poe's tale, in the film, the elderly man is called Norman Nordstrom, a veteran of the Gulf War who was blinded by shrapnel, and among the thieves, Rocky – on whom the narrative mostly focalises – is a young girl from a dysfunctional family who feels obliged to steal to support her sister, Money is a professional thief and Rocky's boyfriend, and Alex comes from a middle-class background, but feels moved to help Rocky out of his love for her. Accordingly, the narrator's statement in Poe's tale that he was not interested in the elderly man's money is reversed in the film and becomes the actual motivation for the thieves to break into the elderly man's house. Besides, in terms of the narration of the events, if Poe's tale responds to analepsis, as the narrator unfolds events from the past, in the film, the sequence of events mostly follows a chronological order except for an instance of prolepsis, which subtly anticipates a scene taking place toward the end of the film, when the elderly man captures Rocky.

Álvarez's film also provides a series of instances of metatextuality, which consists of an explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another. Poe's tale presents displays of metafiction, as the narrator explicitly refers to the act of telling the story. Correspondingly, Álvarez's film follows the conventions of the horror genre, which establish links with previous cinematic narratives and literary texts of the genre, particularly Poe's tale. From a narratological perspective, Poe's story has been heralded for its unreliable narrator, which leads to calling into question the veracity and accuracy of the events. The critical interpretation of Poe's tale, which questions the consistency of the narrator's confession, paves the way for alternative readings of the story, as is the case with Álvarez's contemporary

adaptation of the tale in which the elderly man survives and fights back against his assailants. Moreover, critical approaches to Poe's tale underscore that the narrator and the aged man may be described as doubles of each other, since they appear to be watching over one another. As Tony Magistrale (2001) claims, "the identities of the old man and the narrator run together" and "by killing the old man [...] the narrator is attempting to kill a part of himself" (p. 84). In the film, if Norman has lost his daughter, Rocky has also lost her father, which symbolically binds both characters together, but also underscores their rivalry, thus categorising them as symbolic doubles. In particular, drawing on psychoanalytic readings of Poe's story, as those provided by Marie Bonaparte (1949) and Daniel Hoffman (1998), the elderly man has been interpreted as Poe's repressed father figure. In Álvarez's film, insofar as Rocky has also tried to stifle the figure of her father, she finds herself fighting against her trauma as a daughter when she faces Norman. Finally, theorists like Frederick Frank and Anthony Magistrale (1997) note that, even though the narrator in Poe's tale has often been considered male, insofar as the sex of the narrator is never mentioned, there is no reason why the narrator could not be a woman. Drawing on this critical interpretation, in Álvarez's film, the narrative mainly focalises on the character of Rocky, a young female who threatens to overthrow the elderly man's authority, and thus, arises as a female counterpart of the narrator in Poe's tale.

### **3. The power of the gaze, methods of surveillance, and domestic gothic**

In Poe's tale and Álvarez's film, there are recurring references to the acts of looking, prying, and invigilating, which draw attention to the dynamics of surveillance and exposure. In both cases, the intruders choose their victims making explicit mention to their eyes, insofar as the elderly veteran in *Don't Breathe* is blind, whereas, in Poe's tale, the narrator plainly states that the aged man's eye irritates him. The description of the aging man's gaze in Poe's tale faithfully matches Álvarez's portrayal of the elderly man's blindness in the film by means of a series of recurrent close-ups that draw attention to his eyes. In Sigmund Freud's essay "The Uncanny" (1919/2003), eyes become an embodiment of subjectification, even phonetically evoking the self. The characterisation of the elderly men's eyes in both Poe's tale and Álvarez's film evokes a depersonalised subject who holds the gaze, and by extension, the power of subjecting others. As Phillip Grayson (2019) argues, in Poe's tale, "the old man is reduced to solely his eye" (p. 131), so that the narrator waits until he stares at the elderly man's exposed eye in order to commit his murder, since it is his overwhelming gaze that leads the narrator to dehumanise the elderly man. As is stated, "it was open – wide, wide open – and I grew furious as I gazed upon it [...] I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person" (Poe, 1978, p. 795). Analogously, Álvarez's film emphasises the

elderly man's eyes paradoxically conveying that his blind eyes endow him with an omniscient, almost god-like, kind of vision that oversees everything. Nevertheless, as Isaac Rooks (2019) claims, Norman's blindness also indicates "the character's inability to move on" (p. 28) and let go of the past. As the plot unfolds, when his daughter was killed in a car accident, Norman lost his faith in legality and rather resorted to a retributive system of his own, as his blindness symbolically reverts back to the classic notion of blind justice. Norman's home is secured by means of a series of outdated and analogue devices, like bolts, chains, barred windows, bells, padlocks, firearms, a rudimentary safety box, and a trained dog. The only concession that the aging man has made to technology is a home alarm system, which ironically proves more defective than the analogue security devices, since the young intruders manipulate it to break into the house. Hence, the elderly men in Poe's tale and Álvarez's film embody a depersonalised and omniscient gaze as aging patriarchs prevailing from former times and extending to present days.

There is also evidence of other dynamics of surveillance in both narratives. As a counterpart to the aged man's overwhelming gaze, the narrator in Poe's (1978) tale acquires the habit of prying and peeping into the elder's room. As is stated in the tale, "it took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him" (p. 793). In the film, the young intruders, especially one of them, Money, supervises the blind man's movements and routines, and pries into his house to make arrangements for the burglary. In addition to individualised acts of surveillance, there are also instances of mutual gazing, which symbolically stand for a confrontation of subjectivities. Correspondingly, in Álvarez's film, the elderly man and the young intruders oppose each other, aware that, with the lights on, these interlopers play with advantage, whereas, in the pitch dark of the basement, the blind man rules to their disadvantage. Similarly, in Poe's tale, in the darkness of the elderly man's room, the narrator exerts the power of the gaze over the elderly man, who feels vulnerable and at the mercy of his slayer, although the elder will eventually manage to expose the narrator in the presence of the policemen.

Both narratives also display a recurring pulse between concealment and exposure. In Poe's tale, once the narrator has disposed of the old man's body, officers search the premises, urging the narrator to feel "excited to fury by the observations of the men" (p. 797), to the point of exposing himself to reveal the body's hiding place. Analogously, in the film, aware that the intruders have been searching the house, the blind man checks his safety box to ensure his money is still in it, and in so doing, unaware that he is being watched over, Rocky spots the place where the man conceals the coveted booty, when the man precisely intended to secure it.

The dynamics of surveillance and exposure in both narratives also extend to involve the audience in practices of voyeurism. The narrator in Poe's tale often boasts about his skills to get rid of the aged man's eye, ironically stating that, after concealing his body, "no human eye – not even *his* – could have detected anything wrong" (p. 796), and appealing to the reader, exclaiming that "you should have seen me" (p. 792). In resemblance, Álvarez's film presents recurring voyeuristic frames into the different rooms of the elderly man's house, drawing the audience's attention to the blind man's concern about security enforcement and enclosure, which has urged him to turn his apparently welcoming house into an actual fortress. Consequently, both narratives underscore the fallacy of intimacy and assumed safety. At the end of Poe's tale, the narrator feels as exposed and vulnerable as the elderly man used to feel in his presence. Likewise, as Álvarez's film progresses, the young intruders also feel helpless and unprotected in the blind man's house, insofar as, precisely owing to his blindness, the aged man knows his house as well as if it were an extension of his body.

Drawing on Alice Marwick's (2012) notions of power, hierarchy and reciprocity, the dynamics of surveillance and exposure are portrayed in a diverse manner in Poe's tale and Álvarez's film. The narrator and the elderly man in "The Tell-Tale Heart" respectively exert their powers of surveillance alternatively, whereas, in *Don't Breathe*, Norman Nordstrom and his assailants are simultaneously surveilled by one another. As Marwick (2012) notes, drawing on Michel Foucault's premises (1995), power is possessed by the surveillors and is exerted over the surveilled, although Foucault proposed an alternate model, known as the capillaries of power, which is decentralised and allows the flow of power between authorities and individuals. In Poe's tale, the narrator boasts about his power over the elderly man, although he also concedes that he felt subjected to the old man's evil eye, so that each of them displays his power of surveillance alternatively. Conversely, in Álvarez's film, the elderly man and his assailants rather engage in a continuous pulse of power which takes place simultaneously. In relation to hierarchy, if traditional models of surveillance involve that hegemonic power structures watch over individuals, Foucault's model of capillaries of power entails that power remains in flux between individuals. In Poe's tale, it is the narrator who mostly invigilates upon the elderly man, whereas, in Álvarez's film, both the elderly man and his assailants watch over one another. Finally, in terms of reciprocity, there is asymmetry when individuals are watched by powers that they cannot watch back, whereas, in social surveillance, the subjects who practice it are simultaneously surveilled by others. In Poe's tale, the asymmetry of surveillance between the narrator and the elderly man becomes more prevalent, whereas, in Álvarez's film, all the subjects symmetrically invigilate upon one another. Hence, the triad of power, hierarchy and reciprocity correspondingly give rise to different patterns of surveillance and exposure in both narratives.

Additionally, Poe's tale and Álvarez's film respectively display instances that exemplify the dyad between surveillance and coveillance, the panopticon and the synopticon, and the notions of 'glass house' and 'blind house'. As Marwick further notes, in instances of surveillance, whereby systemic structures supervise individuals, there is an imbalance of power in favour of the surveillor, an asymmetry in which individuals are surveilled by structural entities, and a lack of reciprocity, since individuals are prevented from watching back their surveillors. Conversely, by means of sousveillance or coveillance, the surveilled subjects are allowed to watch over their surveillors, while watchers also invigilate upon the watched. If Poe's tale mostly consists of a narrative that displays instances of surveillance, as the narrator supervises all the elderly man's movements, even though it is implied that the narrator had previously been exposed to the elderly man's supervision, in Álvarez's film, it is rather claimed that surveillors and surveilled watch over each other permanently. Besides, the dynamics of surveillance and exposure that are at work in these narratives bring to mind the notions of the panopticon and of the synopticon. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's model of the ideal prison, in the context of discipline society, Foucault (1995) refers to the panopticon as the model whereby the few monitor the many, hence reinforcing social inequalities and persuading people into conformity. Conversely, following Thomas Mathiesen's (2008) concept of synopticon, in the context of the viewer society, the many watch the few, as new techniques of surveillance and exposure allow individuals to turn into watchers. In Poe's tale, the narrator adopts the model of the panopticon, as he watches over the elderly man constantly without him noticing that he is being watched. In contrast, in Álvarez's film, the young assailants watch over the elderly man's movements prior to breaking into his house, thus focusing on a single subject who is invigilated upon by many. Furthermore, abodes are classified into glass houses, which turn into a prime site for voyeurism and total disruption of privacy, and blind houses, in which all access to the outside has been apparently removed. In Poe's tale, even if locked in his room, the elderly man is totally exposed to the narrator's gaze, as if he were in a glass house, whereas, in Álvarez's film, the assailants find it hard to gain entry into the elderly man's house, which, like its owner, looks particularly vulnerable, but truly arises as a paradigm of a blind house, having removed all access to the outside.

Both Poe's tale and Álvarez's film display the portrayal of the house which pervades domestic gothic fiction, in which, the abode arises as a character of its own that protects and threatens its dwellers. In this respect, the house becomes a source of the Freudian notion of the uncanny, which etymologically refers both to the home and the unhomely. According to Noël Carroll, in horror narratives, there are "creatures that transgress categorical distinctions" (2004, p. 43) and, by means of fusion, "blur the distinction between living and dead" (2004, p. 43), as often happens with houses with a secret of their own. More recently, Rebecca Janicker

(2015, p. 2) claims that houses possess connotations of security and secrecy, while they address the fears of individuals in relation to society. The respective houses in Poe's tale and Álvarez's film bring into contact dwellers with subjects who no longer inhabit the abode, but whose latent presence still remains to haunt the present residents. At the same time, the houses in these narratives underscore the isolation of their inhabitants, and their sense of being exposed to the dangers that threaten them from the outside. Besides, theorists like Patricia García (2015) establish a distinction between the fantastic of place to refer to houses which host the fantastic transgression, and the fantastic of space to involve abodes which cause the supernatural (p. 21). In Álvarez's film, the elderly man's house turns into the receptacle where he displays his uncanny skills in spite of his disability, thus arising as an example of the fantastic of place. In Poe's tale, the house where the events unfold paves the way for the emergence of the supernatural, as the narrator still hears the elderly man's heart beatings even after his death, hence the house turns into an example of the fantastic of space. According to Elaine Hartnell-Mottram (2019), in domestic gothic narratives, the home also bears witness to abusive intergenerational relationships (p.185). In Poe's tale and Álvarez's film, there is a clear rivalry between the elderly owner of the house and his younger assailants, who not only threaten to subvert the role of the elder as owner of the manor, but also his alleged authority.

#### **4. Aging masculinities and intergenerational doubles**

The politics of surveillance that are manifested in Poe's story and Álvarez's film are deeply entrenched in discourses of age and gender. The literal, but also symbolic, rivalry between the old man and the young narrator in "The Tell-Tale Heart" is resumed by means of the contention taking place between the old man and the young criminals in Álvarez's *Don't Breathe*. In Poe's tale, the narrator displays instances of hegemonic masculinity – a term coined by sociologist Raewyn Connell in 1987, which has conventionally associated manhood with values such as courage and physical strength – as he powerfully watches over his older victim, who exhibits traits pertaining to aging masculinities – a term used by Pamela Gravagne (2013) to refer to the declining effects that aging is usually alleged to have on the perceptions of masculinity. Nonetheless, as the story progresses, the roles are exchanged insofar as the young narrator becomes increasingly powerless, whereas the elderly man's presence, in spite of his absence, overwhelms the young narrator. Analogously, in Álvarez's film, the young criminals – particularly, Money, who embodies instances of hegemonic masculinity – takes for granted that the elderly man is helpless as a result of his apparent aging masculinity, although the roles are eventually exchanged, when the elderly man unexpectedly displays instances of hegemonic masculinity, as he invigilates upon the intruders and gives evidence of his strength and skills.

In terms of age and gender, the young male characters in Poe's tale and Álvarez's film comply with tenets pertaining to hegemonic masculinities in contrast with aging men, who appear to have left behind traits associated with hegemonic masculinities. In Poe's (1978) tale, the young narrator confesses that "never, before that night, had I felt the extent of my own powers – of my sagacity" and that "I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph" (p. 793). Analogously, in Álvarez's film, among the three thieves who break into the blind man's house, as Rooks (2019) notes, "Money wants to cultivate his thuggish persona" (p. 22). The notion of hegemonic masculinity has traditionally connected manhood with values, such as courage, physical strength, and impassiveness. As critics Robert Meadows and Kate Davidson (2006) argue, if hegemonic masculinities legitimise patriarchy by means of extolling values which have often been connected with youth – such as strength and self-control – conversely, features conventionally associated with old age – like vulnerability and even disability – may result in the exclusion of elderly men from hegemonic conceptualisations of masculinity (p. 296). Accordingly, in Poe's (1978) tale, as he watches over the old man, the young narrator explains that, when his elder discovers that he is being watched, he cannot help a "low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe" (p. 794). Similarly, in Álvarez's film, as Rooks (2019) argues, the blind man's disability makes him seem vulnerable, thus being categorised as a helpless victim, even to the extent that one of the assailants, Alex, expresses his reservations about attacking an elderly blind man (p. 29). As Gullette (2011) claims, in Western society, old age often complies with a narrative of decline, inasmuch as old age has conventionally been connected with a process of loss and decreasing capability. These essentialist categorisations of old age have effect on the ways of defining manhood, since, old age is alleged to have a decaying and weakening effect on the perceptions of masculinity.

According to Hilde Lindemann Nelson (1995), by means of resorting to counter-narratives, individuals are allowed to reclaim part of their threatened identity. As Gravagne (2013) claims, aging patriarchs "reclaim their age-threatened masculine identities by offering a conservative discourse of masculinity as triumphant" (p. 53) in order to counteract the spectre of old age and its associated powerlessness. In Poe's (1978) tale, even if the young narrator underlines the elderly man's fear and fragility as he invigilates upon him every night, he also admits his concern about the elderly man's evil eye, as an embodiment of his identity as a patriarch and as a source of authority that the elderly man still retains. Analogously, in Álvarez's film, it is unveiled that, despite his disability, the elderly man still holds on to his way of life as a war veteran and he still retains his skills as a proficient soldier, while he has learned to develop other senses that make up for his blindness. Accordingly, instead of succumbing to embracing old age as a narrative of decline, the elderly

man in Álvarez's film rather exemplifies the tenets of positive aging which allows him to compete and defeat his younger assailants. Nonetheless, in both narratives, it is also portrayed that, even if the aging men resort to the hegemonic masculinities that used to characterise their youth, they increasingly realise that their aging masculinities seem to be at odds with the values often associated with dominant manhood. Consequently, in Poe's tale, the old man is slain by his younger counterpart, as the latter admits that "his eye would trouble me no more" (p. 795), whereas, in Álvarez's film, not only do the assailants manage to break into the elderly man's house, but also to open his safety box and rob him of his money. In this respect, theorist Gabrielle Mueller (2009) even implies that standing by the tenets of hegemonic masculinities in old age may bring forward a symbolic "process of emasculation" (p. 151). In Poe's tale, it is the strong beatings of the old man's heart that ultimately render him helpless and manage to threaten his hegemonic masculinity. Correspondingly, in Álvarez's film, as a result of his disability, the old man has developed a symbiotic bond with his house, which compels him to stay home. Additionally, having lost his daughter in an accident, the aging blind man kidnaps the woman who was responsible for his daughter's death and incarcerates her in his basement with the view to artificially impregnate her so that she will conceive his child, as a symbolic process of emasculation, which urges him to indulge in an aberrant attempt to enjoy motherhood of his own. Consequently, as Meadows and Davidson (2006) claim, rather than attempting to conform to hegemonic forms of masculinity, aged men may resort to alternative masculinities which incorporate actions that are not derived from physical strength, but instead, embrace vulnerability, in terms of psychological exposure and physical fragility (p. 302).

Displays of alternative masculinities on behalf of the elders and of hegemonic masculinities as exemplified by their younger counterparts contribute to blurring the roles initially assigned to old patriarchs and their young assailants. As a case in point, in Poe's tale, the beatings of the heart that haunt the young narrator may come from the deceased old man, but also from the young narrator himself as a result of his disorder and sense of guilt. Hence, as a result of a symbiotic process, both characters symbolically turn into doubles of each other, as the young narrator leaves behind his self-confident ways and embraces the old man's sense of fragility, whereas the old man eventually exerts his power over his younger counterpart. Similarly, in Álvarez's film, as a result of an extended process of mutual surveillance, the aging man and one of the young assailants, Rocky, develop a symbiotic process which leads them to blur their initially distinguished role, as the victim turns into a victimiser and vice versa. In particular, Rocky has lost her father, while the old man has lost his daughter, both are socially ostracised, and refuse to accept the parts according to age and gender that society has assigned

them. Hence, the elderly man and his young assailant turn into symbolic doubles, who feel condemned to watch over each other.

## 5. Conclusion

A comparative analysis between Poe's tale and Álvarez's film gives evidence of significant transtextual connections ranging from intertextuality to hypertextuality and metatextuality. In both cases, younger assailants plan to attack an elderly man in order to take advantage of his apparent weakness and vulnerability only to realise that their older counterpart possesses the skills and resolution to defeat them. The pervasive references to the elderly man's gaze in Poe's tale find correlation in the recurrent close-up shots of Norman Nordstrom's eyes in Álvarez's film. In addition, the dynamics of surveillance and exposure between the young narrator and his older victim are reinstated in the film, as the young assailants watch over the elderly man before breaking into his house. Nevertheless, Álvarez's film takes over and elaborates further on the dialectics between the surveillance and exposure of the narrator and the elderly man, insofar as, in the film, the characters reciprocally invigilate upon each other and display instances of mutual gazing, while the film also underscores the urge to vindicate the figure of the elderly man. In this respect, it may be argued that one of Álvarez's contributions in comparison with Poe's tale is that it focuses explicitly on the potential of aging masculinities and defies ageist prejudices on behalf of younger counterparts. Conversely, though, the elderly blind man, as a contemporary successor of the aging man in Poe's tale, still represents the figure of the aging patriarch who holds on to the ways of the past and rejoices renewed popularity in the contemporary political context. As theorists like Rooks claim, "an old white man waving a gun and literally blind to the world around him, feels like a grotesque parody of a Trump voter" (2019, p.23). As is evinced, the dualities and dynamics of surveillance and exposure rooted in Poe's original tale are taken over and elaborated on in Álvarez's film, hence displaying the potentiality and current relevance of Poe's story, which is still explored and reconfigured in contemporary horror narratives.

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