

Posthumous Popularity; Fathoming Vincent van Gogh through Select Biofictions

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Abstract

This paper studies a few fictional representations of Vincent van Gogh in contemporary biofiction. The objective of this research is to analyse the life of a genius artist and his posthumous popularity by using the transmedia storytelling technique. Vincent Willem van Gogh, a Dutch painter who lived between 1853 and 1890, is widely regarded as one of the best exponents of post-impressionism. His eccentric life has been a perpetual obsession for creators to fictionally recreate him periodically after his disastrous end in the past hundred years. The paper captures three fictionalised biographical texts in the form of a novel, an animated movie and a documentary that transgress genre boundaries and renegotiate the relationship between historical facts and fiction. Throughout the 21st century, biographical materials, whether they are based on fact or fiction, have made significant contributions to this legend. The sources of the study pivot on three of van Gogh's biofictions within film and literature; the novel *Leaving van Gogh* (2011) by Carol Wallace, the documentary *Van Gogh: Painted with Words* (2010) directed by Andrew Hutton and *Loving Vincent* (2017), a movie directed by Dorota Kobiela. The creators have taken artistic liberties by altering the stories with more engaging narratives as a way of rewriting the portrayal of the artist through fiction. Biofiction is a category of life writing that includes fictitious biographies and is typically a metafictional narrative in which a biographical subject is the protagonist or plays a significant role in the plot. Transmedia storytelling is an approach to integrating contemporary digital technology to communicate a cohesive narrative across several platforms and mediums. By utilising intermediary allusions and formal imitative techniques, van Gogh's art, as well as the fundamental principles of artistic creation and his ubiquitous presence in contemporary times are explored.

Keywords: Biofiction, Biopic, Life studies, Transmedia storytelling, Tormented artist

1. Introduction

A fine education, a middle-class background, a family of wealthy dealers, and finally experience working in a sophisticated, profitable international art gallery ill served Van Gogh's image as self-taught outsider, tortured genius, and martyr to the philistines. (Salzman, 1998, p.59)

Vincent Willem van Gogh, a Dutch painter who lived between 1853 and 1890, is widely regarded as one of the best exponents of post-impressionism. Vincent rose to fame in the 20th century and curiosity for his work has begun to progressively increase. Prior to World War II, most Americans was familiar with van Gogh, including all his mystery and sorrow. That is after Irving Stone's best-selling novel *Lust for Life* (1934). In the previous versions of the story, he is variously referred to as a martyr, a lustful satyr, a maniac, a genius, and a layabout. However, Stone's work portrays him as an optimistic person who wants to live but does so in vain.

In the 1980s, the estimation of Vincent's artworks eventually rivaled, then surpassed that of any other contemporary artist as interest in his life and work steadily increased. The books and films have made it possible and have made to maintain momentum.

Vincent is regarded in the contemporary world as one of the great artists with unimpeachable genius. But his works are repudiated by his rivals, artistic community and sold as junk at the flea market. The momentum of Vincent's fame rose tremendously since the publication of the work *Lust for Life* in 1934 and the academic community of art history has started to indicate serious and in-depth attention to him as a historical figure. In evaluating a scientific understanding of the artist and his work, the qualities of Vincent's personality and disposition are given a new magnitude of significance.

The artistic side of van Gogh, his real accomplishments towards post- impressionism, are obscured by his unorthodox lifestyle. He is a suffering recluse, an advocate for the poor at Borinage, a misunderstood genius with no professional success, an anomaly in the depths of despondency, a deranged madman, a living paradox between a saint and a sinner. His act of self-mutilation, considered as a victim of societal expectations, a man ahead of his time and, of course, his suicide, which adds to the notoriety of why he is eminent today and popularly referred as tormented artist.

The primary sources analysed in the study include *Leaving van Gogh* (2011) by Carol Wallace (Novel), *Loving Vincent* (2017) directed by Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman (Movie), and the documentary *Van Gogh: Painted with Words* (2010) directed by Andrew Hutton, which are some of the select biofictions of van Gogh.

The article tries to synthesise and recast the biographical descriptions offered by the novelists and directors, being cautious of the interpretations and narratives that they might impose in accordance with their own interests. Both the novel and movies provide an in-depth character treatment by going beyond the bounds of earlier tales, even though they only do so to return to the memoir and letters as their standard primary sources. The memoir written by Johanna van Gogh, the sister-in-law of Vincent, is considered the pioneering primary source for all the existing life writing about Vincent. She also published the letters exchanged between Vincent and Theo from August 1872 until their demise. She edited the first draft of letters in three volumes and published them in 1914 titled *The Letters to Theo*.

Each rewrite contributes to the legacy of van Gogh in popular culture, but they might not necessarily add to the body of information that proves the veracity of his biography. Eventually, there is a humiliating or disgraceful portrayal of van Gogh in the past as a madman. In contrast with contemporary times, there is a radical departure in celebrating him and there is a humanistic and empathic depiction. Authors and adapters have used documented facts to weave them into numerous kinds of multimedia patterns that gradually, have rendered a broad range of 'Vincent van Goghs' displayed in multiple media.

2. Objective

This paper studies a few fictional representations of Vincent van Gogh in contemporary biofiction. The objective of this research is to analyse the life of a genius artist and his posthumous popularity by using transmedia storytelling techniques. Biofictions focus on both historical periods and their own contemporary milieu. The purpose of the present study is to expand on past research and offer fresh approaches to conceptualising and analysing a significant contemporary fictional genre by putting forth an intermedial theoretical framework for biofiction. The nature of these stories is redundant manifesting van Gogh from a psychological perspective rather than from an artist's aesthetic perspective and as a human who strives for perfection.

3. Literature Review

Referring to the sources in general, current research focuses on the theoretical framework of life studies. According to Kacandes, in his work *Experimental Life-Writing* (2012), examines with the medium of life-writing that have multiplied in recent decades. Several of these attempts have expanded beyond print and now include performance in audio-visual and digital media like film, documentaries, etc. George F. Custen, in his book *Bio/Pics* (1992), initially discussed the term 'Biographical Picture'. He defines the term as a film genre with a life-story narrative. Bingham, in his methodical study on biopics investigates the earlier biographical films that only projected "the great (white) man biopic". A popular or conventional biopic celebrates the lives and accomplishments of chiefly white men, who have traditionally acted as the primary subjects in historical tales and served as role models and pillars of society. One of the exponents of biofiction, Michael Lackey terms biofiction "a dominant literary form" (2016), meaning that this particular genre is capable of unveiling the unrevealed facets of stories imaginatively by recentring the marginalised subjects. Emma Filtness' study focuses on the importance of writing biofiction on subjects who have rarely been acknowledged within the realm of history "[t]he addition of fiction and techniques of fictionalisation to life writing can enable the sharing of stories that otherwise would not get to be heard." (Filtness, 2014, p.88). Christopher Zara, a critic and journalist, has written the work, *Tortured Artists from Picasso and Monroe to Warhol and Winehouse, the Twisted Secrets of the World's most Creative Minds* (2012). The book provides a notable and inspirational analysis of the tortured-artist phenomenon; however, it leans more toward the popularisation of the artists than scholarly research. Jørgen in his work *The Intermediality of Narrative Literature: Medialities Matter* (2016), explains his idea about intermediality and transmedia. There is also documentation of the letters of van Gogh. Kendall in his study on *Van Gogh's Van Goghs* (1999), explains the role of letters, as it is not until the letters are published posthumously that the meaning of his entire life could not have become known. "As a tool for interpreting Vincent's art, as an expression of the richness of his thought, and, of course, as a moving account of daily struggles, the letters played a crucial role in stimulating interest in his works." (Kendall, 1999, p.13).

The researchers Naifeh and White Smith have done extensive research on the artist by bringing forth a recent biographical study on *Van Gogh: The Life* (2011). The biographers have exhausted three substantial primary sources; his paintings, his copious letters, and his memoir which becomes a crucial read to understand his life. Recent investigations continue to interpret that in 2008, the list of top the ten expensive artworks in the world featured three works by van Gogh. His posthumous popularity is also due to the inclusion of van Gogh in popular culture. *Shakespeare's Literary Lives: The Author as a Character in Fiction and Film* by Paul Franssen is another significant contribution to biofiction study. It adopts a broad, multimedia method for investigating the writer by examining Shakespeare as a subject in novels, plays, and films.

Vincent has unquestionably attained the status of both a cultural icon and a real-life archetype for 'tortured artist' who resembles a model, in accordance with the concept of cultural icon developed by Danish researchers Bent Sørensen and Helle Thorsøe Nielsen.

A commercialized, yet sacralized visual, aural or textual representation anchored in a specific temporal/historical and spartial/geographical context, broadly recognized by its recipients as having iconic status for a group of human agents within one or several discursive fields/communities (2015, p.7)

The previous review gave ample scope for exploration. In contrast to prior decades with regards to fictional representations of the artist, a

more romantic or idealised portrayal has been delineated; however, the select works pivot on to humanising van Gogh by highlighting his professional habits with interspersing verifiable facts about his personal life, fiction, and clinical perspectives on his physical and mental difficulties.

4. Methodology

The specific subject selected for study includes the portrayal of the painter Vincent van Gogh to examine how an artist is interpreted differently throughout various genres. The methodology of the study is qualitative textual analysis by using a novel and movies as its primary sources. By examining the connections between their themes, this comparative study intends to add to the body of knowledge on transmedia storytelling, which needs fresh analysis considering the ongoing development of biographical fiction on the artist van Gogh. The methodical study of life studies enables one to face a theoretical paradox that perplexes the bifurcation between the literary and historical disciplines. To shed light on the ways in which authors have engaged with and broadened the scope of contemporary biofiction, the current study investigates experiments from the twenty-first century that are situated at the intersections of biography and fiction. The argument is that Vincent is not included in the works examined in this paper on a purely arbitrary basis. These select biofictions represent Vincent as an artist, how he conceived the role of the artist, how his paintings were made and received both during his lifetime, posthumously, how mental health and psychiatry played a major role in affecting his artistic process.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Confluence of Biofiction and Transmedia Storytelling

Life studies examine personal writings that encompasses both autobiography and biography, along with less objective or more introspective genres like letters, memoirs and diaries. Both fictional and nonfictional texts fall into this category. The running theme of a life, or the self unites them all. However, life studies not only centralise more than just life accounts but also have the ability to cut through genre and disciplinary barriers.

The confluence of genre labels is indicative of the current growth in the experiments within fictional life writings such as ‘biofiction’, ‘auto/biografiction’, ‘heterobiography’, ‘biographic metafiction’, ‘autofiction’, etc. Biofiction is an intersection of biography, biographical novel, and historical novel. The biographical novel aims to combine not only its primary source biography and the novel but history as well. It must accurately recreate the protagonist against the backdrop of his times, with all the historically authentic flavours. Michael Lackey discusses the narrative style of biofiction in his work *The American Biographical Novel* (2016), claiming that the author names his protagonist after a real-life historical individual, which increases the novel’s and film’s literary merit. The popularity of the form is indicated by the novels *Claudius* series of novels by Robert Grave, *A Man Called Cervantes* (1934) by Bruno Frank, Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours* (1998), *The Damascus Road* (2019) by Jay Parini, etc.

The biographical novel is a true and documented story of one human being’s journey across the face of the years, transmuted from the raw material of life into the diligent and purity of an authentic art form. (Lackey, 2016, p.271)

Character development is one of biofiction’s significant qualities, as it constantly centres on people instead of impersonal factors. The respective fictions bring up the issue of how biofiction serves as a platform for subjects who are frequently overlooked as not suitable as historical subjects. Biofiction in the present study is been used self-reflexively to address significant contemporary concerns by engaging with a particular subject, such as Vincent van Gogh, which opens up the possibility of contrasting the past through his lived life with the present through fictionalised narratives about him.

Transmedia storytelling is the process of recounting stories across several media platforms, with each one adding something distinctive to the overall universe of the story. It is often referred to as transmedia narrative or multiplatform storytelling, is an approach for integrating contemporary digital technology to communicate a cohesive narrative or story experience across several platforms and mediums (Jenkins). They create an intermedial reference when one media product is inserted into or mentioned in another, for example when a novel is discussed in a movie. “evo[ocation] or insert[ion] of a medial reference to another real or fictional media product [for instance, from a novel to a film]” (Bruhn and Gjelsvik 2018, p.12).

The prominent strategies of transmedia storytelling are to create a distinct perception of the original content and its context, such as when a comic book is turned into a computer game or a book into a movie. The study on transmedia storytelling was pioneered by Henry Jenkins in 2006 through his work *Convergence Culture, Where Old and New Media Collide*. The narrative framework of transmedia storytelling intersects concurrently with media (narratology) and language (semiotics). According to one of the pioneers of media theory Marshall McLuhan, terms transmediation as the act of translating a work into a different medium. Elleström elucidates the intersection between media as,

The repeated (although certainly not identical) representation of media characteristics by another medium, such as a television program featuring the same characters and themes as a children’s book or being narratively structured as a classical drama. (Elleström 2017, p.511)

Biofiction traverses fiction and criticism in distinctive ways because it constantly studies and revisits biography and history. Biofiction as a genre belongs to the broader discipline of transmedia studies, which addresses how a subject traverses diverse media. To become acquainted with the subject and their work, biofictions frequently use transmedial strategies, which involve the implicit and explicit portrayal of one medium over another, such as the depiction of an artist at work in a film where artistic activity is illustrated by cinematic

techniques. In other words, biofiction ought to be viewed as a transmedial phenomenon; its form, meaning and content may manifest in different media and be explained by intermedial theories.

These select biofictions, which cover print, digital media play a crucial role in the development of contemporary biofiction and are significant for multiple reasons. The works of biofiction offer readings of Vincent that encounter and defy a variety of preexisting perceptions of the artist. However, there has not been much scholarly attention paid to his life and paintings with an intermedial appeal.

5.2 *Unravelling a Life from Obscurity; Reading Van Gogh Through Novel*

“It is sometimes said that all great art comes from pain” (Zara, 2012, p.7)

The novel *Leaving van Gogh* by Carol Wallace (2011) is narrated through the eyes of Dr. Gachet, van Gogh’s physician and an art connoisseur. Van Gogh is considered the most potentially challenging patient throughout the career of Dr. Gachet. From the eyes of Dr. Gachet, it narrates the last seventy days of the artist’s life, which culminate in the mysterious suicide of the artist. He bears witness to the anguish engulfing his mental health, his conflicts, and his dwindling career. Wallace’s new perspective on her fictive narrative is pervaded with profuse psychological observations and diligent research on the subject. The novelist reimagines the conversations that van Gogh has with Dr. Gachet, with the inmates of the asylum and more importantly, with his brother Theo. The maniac episodes of van Gogh in the asylum are not exaggerated but poignantly handled with sophistication. Wallace’s artistic authority is a profound story that unites a unique blend of genius and madness.

The doctor in me could not help looking for something else as well. Phrenology is out of fashion now, but I am an old man. When I began my medical training, there were doctors who believed the shape of a skull betrayed or predicted a man’s mental state. What should this skull have told me then? Should I have detected from it that Vincent was mad? Or that he was a genius? Perhaps that he was both? (Wallace, 2011, p.7)

The novel is set in the 1890’s of the 19th century, at the inception of modern psychiatry. It is apparent that a precise diagnosis of Vincent’s ailments may never be possible due to the absence of complete clinical record keeping and the numerous medications prescribed to him over the years. The psychiatric medical labels with which Vincent is possibly diagnosed are bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, hallucinations, etc. There is incomplete knowledge about Vincent’s troubled medical history even one of the reviewers commented, “Looking at Vincent through his eyes is a wonderful and richly detailed experience, that also includes a fascinating look at the state of mental health treatment in the 1890’s.” (Van Beeren). Several instances from the novel that are based on true events regarding the examination of the malady in Vincent are either misdiagnosed or treated with an assumption. While their friendship develops, Dr. Gachet concludes that he is unable to treat the patient because he fails to recognise the underlying root of his mental disorder.

Wallace took real facts from the life of Vincent as primary sources from approximately 700 surviving letters that were exchanged between the brothers to create a work of fiction. Vincent spent his last seventy days in Auvers, where he generated most of his masterpiece. He also reciprocated the trust and reliance with Dr. Gachet, as he confessed the same in his correspondence to Theo. “And then I have found a true friend in Dr. Gachet, something like another brother, so much do we resemble each other physically, and also mentally. He is a very nervous man himself and very queer in his behavior.” (Van Gogh, letters 469, W22)

Biofiction is a genre that is classified as fictitious biographies and is typically a metafictional narrative in which a biographical subject is the protagonist or plays a significant role in the plot. One of the intricacies of biofiction is blurring the line between factual and fictional expressions. Van Gogh has developed to become one of the best contemporary cultural icons in the entire globe as a result of blurring fact and fiction in his biofictions. Wallace ingeniously envisions her narrative by layering actual events with imaginative insights. The enigmatic artist Vincent is depicted as a human being with honest emotions who is desolate, capricious, yet diligent in his artistry. It deals with how art and imagination can uplift and soothe the human spirit. The novel can develop one’s ability to discover beauty where others might only pick out flaws. The surviving accounts paint a picture of a young man full of life but with a challenging demeanor. The readers are presented with a eulogy in which the beauty of art supersedes and redeems the artist from the errors and misdeeds that he has committed in the past. Wallace’s novel imagines van Gogh in an unconventional manner, from how readers could have previously conceived of him, to how he is depicted in popular culture.

5.3 *Traversing Intermediality; Animating van Gogh through Paintings*

Due to its widespread popularity, cinema serves as both an artistic expression and a mass spectacle for the public, encompassing all its interpretations and readings. The plot of the movie unfolds as if the viewer slept off in a museum and dreamt about art that came to life, with settings and characters that drew inspiration from several of van Gogh’s works.

The animated movie *Loving Vincent* (2017) is being promoted as the first feature film in history to be entirely hand painted. It is produced by ‘Break Thru’ films in Poland and Trademark films in the UK, the film is being written and directed by Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman. Each of the 65,000 frames in the movie is hand painted by 125 experienced oil painters who travelled from over the world to the ‘Loving Vincent Studios’ in Poland and Greece to work on this project. The live-action portion of the movie is originally recorded with actors, then each frame is individually hand-painted.

Despite exploring innovative tropes, the directorial pair emphasise reverence and adheres to the conventions of the biographical film paradigm without making profound changes to it. Accordingly, it appears that the myth of eminent artists is a construct, particularly in the instance of *Loving Vincent*, which is a social and posthumous creation.

The film critic André Bazin comments on the interplay between painting and cinema as,

Like a Lichen born from the symbiosis between the seaweed and the mushroom, the combination of cinema with painting here gives birth to a new aesthetic being; its ontology will perhaps enlighten us on some fundamental laws pertaining to the existence of painting and of cinema. (Bazin 1949, p.525)

The expository scene is set in the summer of 1891, when a letter is entrusted to Armand Roulin, an aimless young man from France, to hand-deliver in Paris by his father the postman Joseph Roulin. Armand must give it to the brother of Vincent van Gogh, Theo van Gogh a close friend of his father. Armand is disgruntled with his assignment since he feels embarrassed about his father's relationship with Vincent, a Dutch painter who has amputated his ear and has been admitted to the asylum. In the course of his investigation, Armand is left wondering whether he underestimated his father's friend. He is curious as to why the artist chose to end his life just as he is about to achieve success after all of his hardships. In order to learn the solution, Armand proceeds towards Vincent's final destination, the tranquil village of Auvers-sur-Oise in Paris. There he confronts Dr. Paul Gachet, who treated Vincent in his last days. Despite investigating various friends and acquaintances of Vincent, it appears to him that the truth is being withheld from him. Finally, he meets the much-expected Dr. Gachet who expounds to a heart-wrenching disclosure. Gachet says, "You want to know so much about his death, but what do you know about his life?" (Kobiela & Welchman, 2017, 1:10:02 – 1:10:16). At the climax of the movie, they interpret the death of Vincent as he purposefully committed suicide and stoically underwent out of fear, continuing to live as a burden to Theo and choosing to be a martyr. "The only word he said, 'Maybe it is better for everyone.'" (Kobiela & Welchman, 2017, 1:18:22- 1:18:23). On the contrary, he did nothing concrete to tackle these problems.

Loving Vincent is an animated movie that depicts the intermediary relationships between art, film, painting and photography. By faithfully recreating and mimicking the artist's aesthetic, the animated movie pays homage to the artist and his creations. In fact, the majority of the sequences, objects or themes mimic the original paintings. Every shot and frame of the film displays van Gogh's passionate brushstrokes and colour palette, which are used to portray filmic elements like transitions. The paintings of the artist are used to make the movie and are 3D photographed and digitalised. The movie took more than ten years to complete and each image's content is modified to fit a consistent narrative. The animation is achieved by using a complex combination of cinematic techniques called rotoscoping with a device that has been specially designed and named Painting Animation Work Stations (PAWS).

The characteristics of an artistic bio picture are defined by the film critic George F. Custen. The archetype of an outcast genius whose sensitivity separates him from the ordinary side of existence. The conflict between the individual and community is a recurrent theme in this biopic. In these biofictions Vincent is shown as a prodigy who possesses the ability to create beauty and uncover the truth. However, the claim of brilliance bears with it the costs of misery and rejection. The destiny of Vincent is either disregarded, misinterpreted, or castigated by the same society to which he has given his skills. His intuition compels him to deny this society after experiencing a great deal of disillusionment and annoyance and to turn away from people who are likely to harm him.

One prevalent trait of the biopic genre is the blending of scenes from the artist's work with events from the artist's life, which makes a connection between his life and his work. This animated movie gives the spectators a chance to experience the world from Vincent's point of view, especially through the lens of his artistic style, known as post-impressionism. The movie illustrates some of his renowned paintings, such as *Wheatfields with Crows* (1890), *Portrait of Armand Roulin* (1888), *Marguerite Gachet at the Piano* (1890), *Starry Night over Rhône* (1888), *Café Terrace of Night* (1888) and *Portrait d'Armand Roulin* (1888). Thus, the movie successfully traverses the transmedia by interspersing its primary source in the form of a printed version (memoir and letters), taking inspiration from painted a version (van Gogh's oeuvre) and converting it into a movie.

5.4 Cinematically Documenting a Life; Painting van Gogh through Words

The documentary *Van Gogh: Painted with Words* (2010) is hosted by Alan Yentob, a former creative director at the BBC who collaborated with director Andrew Hutton to adapt van Gogh's story for the screen. The documentary, with a running time of one and a half hours, traces the microcosm of van Gogh's living conditions, his adult life and depicts his deplorable living conditions. Critics praised the documentary for its intriguing glimpse into the life of the artist and its distinctive narrative technique, which helps it win 'Best Arts Documentary' at the Banff World Media Festival in 2011.

This van Gogh documentary receives a considerably wider viewership surpassing other U.K. broadcasts because of the man who plays him, Benedict Cumberbatch, one of the most renowned actors. The arduous challenge for a creator lies in building a story from a real-life character that is familiar to the audience while also creating it entertaining with a screen-mediated reality. Hila Shachar explains the significance of biopic, "While literary biopics have always featured in cinematic history, it is only in recent times that they have boomed into a considerable cinematic trend that is worthy of investigation and exploration in and of itself through detailed, focused analyses of certain representative films within this trend." (Hila 2019, p. 2)

The documentary, which covers van Gogh's career from a young, ecstatic art dealer in London to a devoted clergyman to a failed pastor, features him in nearly every scene. The sequences are kept consistent by Cumberbatch's body language. Even if they are modest, recurring mannerisms, particularly hand motions, improve the performance and aid in exposing a far larger emotional range. It is to Cumberbatch's great credit that he seldom overplays it and carries it with subtlety. Van Gogh smoked a pipe, which became a useful prop that the actor frequently twirled in his hands or abruptly tapped on a table by mimicking his idiosyncrasy.

The presenter, Alan Yentob incorporates voiceover narration to relate the sequences as he talks about van Gogh's artwork and influences. The exceptional paintings, sketches, studies, and drawings by Vincent himself were seamlessly incorporated into the story. Every phrase and dialogue delivered by the actors in the documentary are sourced directly from letters sent by van Gogh to his brother Theo and from people around him. The letters provide the most personal and intimate details of the artist's trials, agonies, insecurities, insomnia and destitution. As an epistolary vent, it reveals the pensive and contemplative side of the artist. Theo, the younger brother of Vincent is gaining a name for himself as an art dealer in Paris. He is the figurative and archetypal psychological anchor who selflessly handled Vincent's idiosyncrasies.

The director visualises Vincent's life by constituting harmoniously on the *mise-en scène*, historical details, and intimate drama. The documentary is pervading with technical facets. Location, colour grading, lighting, music, set design, shots and frames pertain to *mise-en scène*. The instrument that effectively transmits mood is lighting. The most effective strategies for using colour palettes in films foster visual storytelling. Colour blue is used in a most saturated tone. According to colour theory, blue symbolises coldness and isolation which mirror Vincent's psyche. The documentary often employs low-key lighting, which uses a high-contrast lighting pattern to both brighten and darken various portions of the frame; in this way only the silhouette of the actor is accentuated. In the asylum scene of the drama, the key light and back light are used to create a harsh shadow on the actor's face. The shadow is revealed as the personification of the darker aspect of humanity, apart from the conventional metaphors of light and darkness. Especially when delivering this dialogue, "that in my mind there's hardly any really clear desire or hope left. I'm thinking of squarely accepting my profession as a madman." (Hutton, 2010, 1:03:56- 1:04:04). It is apparent that the creator wants to foreground the fact that van Gogh, inevitably a tragic victim and part of the adage that the source of all brilliant brains is from a twisted and dark place.

A shot's composition is determined by the deliberately chosen frames and camera angles. The camera is repeatedly positioned in the closeup shot to capture the frenzied emotions delivered. Also stationed in the low angle shot when Vincent is admitted to the asylum specifically to make him appear diminutive, meek, and vulnerable.

The physical attributes, such as prosthetics, blood, or ageing procedures, in hair and makeup assist actors in turning into their roles. In the initial frames, the actor is shown as cheerful, healthy and ambitious contrasting the docility, stoicism and exasperation reflected in his countenance in the latter. The location of the documentary shifts from real historic places like museums, the tomb of the van Gogh brothers to specifically designed sets to mimic van Gogh's residence in France, his studio, asylum, etc. The actor adopts a roughened whisper, as though his voice has not been used lately. His eyes well up with tears as he talks about his hallucinations and nightmares at night, and his speech gets gradually more frenzied. The redundant themes of denial and rejection also course throughout the documentary.

In truth, when facts are lacking, ambiguous, conflicting, or even only available from disputed sources, as with historiography or biography; biofiction would intervene to establish certain claims and bridge the grey areas with fictional narratives. "[t]hey invent stories that never occurred in order to answer perplexing questions, fill in cultural lacunae, signify human interiors, or picture cultural ideologies." (Lackey 2016, p. 14). This documentary addresses the horror of imprisonment, in contrast to other media adaptations that superficially talk about his days inside the asylum.

A major reason for the popularity of biofiction is that it provides readers with a chance to actively participate in history by elevating them from mere spectators to participants. Through the words of Lackey that the emphasis must shift from history to the lived life of the subject, "The story must flow swiftly, lyrically. It is a story of people, not history. People come first, history follows." (Lackey, 2016, p.78). The documentary's narrative style metafictionally benefited both Vincent and the audience by allowing him to speak aloud and breaking the fourth wall by staring straight into the camera while delivering crucial dialogue to imagine how he felt after undergoing trauma. The motive of the documentary is to traverse the bridge between past and present by simultaneously juxtaposing Vincent and the presenter.

5.5 The Continual fascination of van Gogh in the Contemporary Times

"It is so good, after so many years of public indifference, even hostility towards Vincent and his work, to feel towards the end of my life that the battle is won." (Jo van Gogh-Bonger to Gustave Coquiot, 1992)

There is no shortage of information in the media about recent investigations into his body of work or personal affairs, debates over conflicting hypotheses regarding 'the truth' of specific events in his life, or fans' artistic ways of paying homage to their favourite artists. Owing to the many paradoxes in van Gogh's life or work, adaptations frequently highlight one facet of the artist; therefore, there are numerous 'van Goghs' that influence the audience. The public has a limited attention span and is constantly searching for the newest trends in an online environment. Van Gogh's name will continue to be widely displayed online and in a variety of locations outside of museums and galleries until there is something new to witness, learn, or experience about him.

Van Gogh continues to enthrall the public, as a result, he contributes significantly to popular culture through his own works of art and artistic interpretations of his life in the form of fiction. The volume of items produced and the various ways in which van Gogh's iconography is commercialised, as well as the number of adaptations of his life, all point to the fact that people's reactions to him are both extremely individual and deeply diversified.

The pressure created by fictionalising a biographical subject is highlighted since it throws a responsibility on the creative makers that they are incapable of evading. Moreover, the creators are apparently implying that biofiction is incapable of attaching anything to the story that is not already supported by biographical information, which acts as their primary source. The novel and movie stick to a very specific

degree of factuality rather than strictly adhering to historical or biographical facts and bending towards fictionalising the facts in an aesthetic way.

Diverse popular theories about van Gogh's persona or works speak as much about viewers or readers as they do about the artist, whose public image is coloured in various shades when creators, composers, lyricists, dramatists, performers, or marketing professionals are imaginatively influenced by this artist and attempt to understand him with the cultural lens of modern times.

Vincent van Gogh is portrayed as a character who is morally ambiguous. Indeed, he is the most referenced and represented tortured artist ever in art history. The significant function of art is not only to restrict itself by writing about inspirational characters but to attempt and picturise the entire spectrum, which is inclusive of good, bad and ugly. The ability to comment on and express a response to social and historical events is one of literature's fundamental goals.

The artworks of van Gogh are introduced to children and adults in museums, art institutions, and galleries through guide narratives, audio or textual explanations of art, and exhibitions. These methods have just as much of an impact on how the public views this artist as do more conventional popular culture artefacts like books, television shows, films, plays, music, and even merchandise. His ubiquitous appearances are delineated in books, movies, commercials, art displays, biographical sketches, etc. Van Gogh's myth has already taken over the entire world and this phenomenon is still soaring. The surmised reason for the exceptional fame is that basic human inquisitiveness is ravenous for intruding into the personal lives of others.

The films, novels and documentaries on a particular subject have become near-perfect fossilisations of history and the era of their setting. The critics frequently view contemporary biofiction's methods for destabilising biographical subjects by recontextualising and redefining them. This modifies and contradicts the meanings that have been ascribed to them by prior readings.

"[a]ncient readers and writers—like modern authors of biofiction—invented stories to fill lacunae, skirting over the flimsy borderline of verifiable historicity into the realms of imaginative fiction." (Lackey 2019, p.5)

In the select biofictions, the artist is shown as a prodigy who possesses the ability to create beauty and uncover the truth. However, the claim of brilliance bears with it the costs of misery and rejection as manifested in the movie *Loving Vincent*. In the novel *Leaving van Gogh* a pathetic, pitiable van Gogh is presented who is dealing with his mental issues. In the documentary *Van Gogh: Painted with Words*, the destiny of Vincent is either disregarded, misinterpreted, or castigated by the same society to which he has given his skills. His intuition compels him to deny this society after experiencing a great deal of disillusionment and annoyance and to turn away from people who are likely to harm him. The select fictions does not just represent him as a madman but as a human who wants to grapple with society and fight for validation.

Van Gogh and the numerous interpretations of all or portions of his life serve as the foundation for personal interpretations, public debates, and a worldwide fascination with this mysterious figure. He is the subject of an abundance of material, making it seem as though every fact or possible interpretation was previously disclosed. Nevertheless, fresh material about van Gogh's art or life keeps appearing in the media, and each new nugget of knowledge adds to the man's mystique.

6. Conclusion

In interpreting the artist's life studies, it has its success in presenting Vincent as a wounded, abject person in the private realm but a genius in the public arena. The paper explores the tenets guiding each depiction of van Gogh, both as presented by how the author is fictionalised and to what ends this retelling serves in a contemporary context, by analysing how each fiction utilises the essential features of the biofiction genre under transmedia storytelling. In search of a place in the world and a position in society, he moved from job to job and from place to place. He spent the remaining ten years of his existence dedicating himself to becoming an artist after more than a decade of travelling and coming to the realisation that his destiny belonged to art. It is undeniably true that Vincent is a well-known cultural phenomenon as a result of his exceptional life and premature grave, his early and fervent followers, the rising value of his artwork, and most importantly the continued promotion of the van Gogh myth. The perceptions of the artist that exist currently are greatly influenced by fictional biographical portrayals of his life and work. Now, van Gogh is more than just a person and an artisan. He has undergone a transformation into a renowned public icon and importantly elevated to a household name. The enormous amount of attention that has been continuously committed to van Gogh in the form of stories, biographies, comics, mystery novels, posters, cartoons, advertisements and merchandise has helped to sustain this legacy throughout the ages to come.

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