

## Narrative Discourse of Painting “The Barque of Dante” 1822 in the Scene of the Movie “The House That Jack Built” 2018

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study is to learn how director Lars Von Trier implemented metatextuality discourse from a visual narrative text, the painting *The Barque of Dante* (1822) by Eugène Delacroix, for a scene of the film *The House That Jack Built* (2018). The film offers a visual narrative text similar to the painting whose represents a verbal narrative text, the epic poem *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. Qualitative research methods and Gerard Genette's narrative discourse analysis will be used in this study. Hence it would be found how the metatextuality occurs from the visual narrative text of the painting to the film scene. The technique to collect data using literature study and observation, for critically explore and observe the research object. The study result could demonstrate how a visual narrative, the painting, is present in another visual narrative in the form of a metatextuality film scene. After the metatextuality implemented by Lars Von Trier, it helps to construct the visual narratives of his film scene so the main story and message could be delivered well to the audience. This research is capable of having an impact on the development of cinema's visual narrative power by providing metatextuality in it.

### 1. Introduction

The epic poem "*Divine Comedy*" written by Dante Alighieri is a verbal narrative text that is very well known and has a great influence on human civilization. His narration is delivered in a discourse that is allegorical or parable. The story is about his life after being exiled from the Florentines and is likened to a spiritual journey from *Inferno* (hell) to *Paradiso* (heaven) to face God. In addition to making himself the main character, Dante also likens the person who inspired his work, a Roman poet named Virgil, as his guide. Dante's work can become a guide and philosophy of life for Catholics, influencing the way of life in the and politics in Italy. The influence of the narrative text of Dante's Poetry does not stop at his time. His work has inspired artists in the west for centuries to interpret their verbal narrative texts into visual narrative texts. Previous related research explains that due to his sincerity in meaning and philosophy, he became famous and got a place in people's hearts. Dante's work was so important to humanity in Renaissance Europe and created significant changes in cultural traditions not only in artistic poetry but also in philosophy. Creative people were inspired by his work, thus many representations were created, such as painting and film [1].

One film that represents Dante's work is *The House That Jack Built* in 2018. Directed by Lars Von Trier in the thriller and horror genre, this movie is not just rich and complex in its own narrative. But also because of the use of metatextuality narrative discourse from Dante's *Divine Comedy* poem in it. This metatextuality as explained in past research is a form of intertextual discourse in which one literary

text makes critical comments on another text. This concept is related to Gerard Genette's concept of transtextuality in which a text changes or expands the content of another text [2]. The most distinct part is a scene that shows another visual representation of the poem. The oil painting *The Barque of Dante* 1822 by the French romanticist Eugène Delacroix. Delacroix chose the 8th canto from the *Inferno* (Hell) section for his painting. Previous research also emphasizes Lars's film style which always combines different media such as art, literature, and film [3]. Other research explained that the film also uses iconicity. This icon consisted of three types: image, diagram, and metaphor, which share the qualities of the object it resembles or imitates [4]. The previous research also explained the possibility of metareferential of *The Barque of Dante* 1822 in *The House That Jack Built* film scene [5].

Considered by the previous research, which suggested that Delacroix's painting is the metareferential that is used in the film scene [5]. The other research [2] added that the painting plays as iconicity in the film and [3] research tells that it's Lars Von Trier style by combining different media like art and literature. Following those similar suggestions of the relationship between *The Barque of Dante* by Delacroix painting and *The House That Jack Built* by Lars Von Trier film scene from previous researchers, this study will extend the study about it. The difference of this study is the focus that more on the object metatextuality discourse. It's following to an explanation that metatextuality refers to an explicit and implicit reference of one text in the other text. The relationship between one text could be explaining, denying, or approving another one [6]. Also, change or expand one text to other as explained in [2]. It makes difference from the previous research because the use of metatextuality discourse analysis for the same object hasn't been done yet.

The text reference the *Divine Comedy* poem's by Dante and *The Barque of Dante* painting that is presented in *The House That Jack Built* film scene as commentary will be studied by its visual text form. This visual text form is everything that is framed in a scene or usually called *mise-en-scène*. Referring to [7] that the actor's dialogue is not the only way to engage the audience to the film narrative. The way everything is set up in the movie visually (*mise-en-scène*) could engage the audience more because they usually won't miss any detail about what they see rather than hear. Hence, after we interpret them it'll be found that the metatextuality discourse from the painting helps to construct the film's visual narrative to be even better.

## 2. Method

This study uses a qualitative Research method. The process of qualitative research is carried out by collecting various kinds of data such as images and text, then interpreting it to understand the problem and find conclusions from the problem. As explained by Creswell that the qualitative approach method is used to process open data sets, analysis of text or images, representation of information in figures and tables, and personal interpretation the findings. Qualitative research makes researchers have personal interpretations in interpreting the data they get [8]. This research object of research datas are contained of text and image. Therefore qualitative method is suitable to be used because this method is helped to interpreting those kind of datas, then understanding the problem that researcher found from the interpreted and finding conclusion for that problem. The object of research is Eugène Delacroix's painting *The Barque of Dante* 1822. Then *The House That Jack Built* film, directed by Lars Von Trier in 2018. The film is a thriller/horror genre. Film scenes similar to the painting *The Barque of Dante* are the focus to be researched.

The metatextuality discourse analysis of Gerard Genette was used in The study. As explained by Genette, metatextuality indicates an explicit or implicit reference from one text to another text. One text is presented to another, without having to quote it, without even having to mention its name. Metatextuality act as a relationship between two texts, where one text can be explaining, denying, or approving the other text [6]. The first narrative text *The Barque of Dante* painting explicitly and implicitly presented in a visual composition form that creates the film scene visual narrative text. The visual composition is analyzed by seeing the *mise-en-scène* framed in the scene. In [9] explained that what is framed in *mise-en-scène* is including setting, lighting, costume, and make-up, then staging and



performance. Those visual compositions will be divided into the background and foreground groups so it will be easier for researcher to seek every text in the film scene depending on its narrative usage.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The House That Jack Built (2018) has a scene that represents The Barque of Dante (1822) painting. This representation is in form of metatextuality discourse. The first visual narrative text is the painting which gives commentary to the second visual narrative text which is the film scene. Mise-en-scene that appears as the film scene visual composition like lighting, costume, and make-up, then staging and performance would be interpreted. The focus that will be interpreted is only on that visual composition which has a connection with the painting as the first visual text composition who's explaining, denies, or approves of the film scene visual narrative text.

#### 3.1 The House That Jack Built (2018)

The House That Jack Built film was released in 2018 and was directed by Lars Von Trier. The genre is thriller/horror. This film tells the story of a failed architect and serial killer named Jack, played by Matt who has committed multiple murders over the 12 years. The interesting thing about this film is it's scene shown in figure 1 that use metatextuality discourse from Eugène Delacroix's painting The Barque of Dante shown in figure 2. Its also explained in the studies [5] the possibility of the Delacroix's painting as metareferential of this film scene.



**Figure 1.** The House That Jack Built (2018) film scene that use metatextuality discourse from Delacroix's painting.







**Figure 2.** "The Barque of Dante" 1822 painting by Eugène Delacroix.

The film plot begins with a series of flashbacks from Jack's life which is arranged in 5 acts which he calls incidents. The voices of other characters Verge comment and argue about his crimes. At the end of the fifth incident, Jack is surrounded by the police in his hiding place and sees Verge's figure as an old man in a room that is always locked throughout the story. Verge inspires Jack to build the dream house he always talks about throughout his flashbacks. Jack is get more pressured by the police and Verge leads him to jump down a hole leading to the underground. The plot returns to when Jack tells the story and Verge cuts in to refuse Jack's opinion that murder is a work of art. The journey through the underground passage led by the Verge is a journey to hell. Verge's character is part of the metatextuality of the film. Jack is escorted by Verge to get his punishment in hell. The two of them went through the circle of hell as written in of Dante's epic poem. When Jack and Verge go through the cycles of hell, metatextuality discourse is used to present a visual narrative text in the form of the painting "The Barque of Dante" by Eugene Delacroix. The scene shows Jack and Verge arriving at the fifth round of hell and crossing the Styx River by boat. In previous studies, it was explained that someone would be able to interpret the reference to the scene as Dante's Inferno. By using well-known fictional representations of historical figures (Verge who is the Roman poet Vergil/Virgil/Vergilius), such as Dante in Divine Comedy, as one of the main characters, this film establishes itself as a work of fictional narrative [5].

### 3.2 Metatextuality Analysis of *The House That Jack Built* (2018)








Therefore, it will be seen how Delacroix's Painting as the first narrative text being metatextuality and commenting the other text narrative text which is the film scene of *The House that Jack Built*. I As said in [2] one text change or extend other one. Bellow is the metatextuality described by the visual composition in form of mise-en-scene which framed in the scene and divided into background and foreground section:

**Table 1.** Metatextuality in the film scene background

<b>Background</b>	
<b>Film Scene</b>	<b>Description</b>
 <p><b>Figure 3.</b> The background set atmosphere in <i>The House That Jack Built</i> Movie Scene are researched.</p>	<p>In the background of the scene shown in figure 3, has the same set atmosphere is used as in the Delacroix painting shown in figure 4. A dark smog covers the left part of the scene and a blazing fire on the right of the scene frame. The smog is shown to give an eerie feeling in the fifth round of hell and the blazing fire is the hallmark of the City of Dis in the sixth round of hell. The color contrast creates a flame effect that is fierier. In [10] it's explained that this setting is contain of the eighth canto poem <i>Inferno</i> (Hell). Whereas Dante and Virgil arrived at the fifth round of hell and looked up at a tower of the City of Dis with fire above in the sixth round of hell. The colors used in film scene figure 5 are bolder than in the painting figure 6. In the smoldering flame, the orange color used is more vibrant, with a little extra yellow and red. The city of Dis showed as a raging volcano with its fiery flames and red smog. It was also described in previous research that the CGI was used with the purpose to more realistic effect representation of the painting in the film scene [5].</p>
 <p><b>Figure 4.</b> The Barque of Dante painting atmosphere</p>	
 <p><b>Figure 5.</b> The smog and the flames of the City of Dis in the film scene.</p>	
 <p><b>Figure 6.</b> The smog and the flames of the City of Dis in the painting.</p>	



**Table 2.** Metatextuality in the film scene foreground

Film Scene		Foreground	Description
 <p><b>Figure 7.</b> Characters Jack and Vergo Cross the Styx River.</p>		<p>In the foreground, the main narrative of the scene is displayed. There are main characters Jack and Vergo shown in figure 7 who arrive at the fifth round of hell and cross the Styx River by boat. As in Delacroix's painting featuring Dante and Virgil. But there are some differences. It's the red robe that Jack wears in figure 8 match the color of the flames blazing from Dis Town on the back. The choice is very similar to the color of Dante's headwear in the Delacroix painting shown in figure 10. Unlike the paintings belonging to Delacroix Vergo or Virgil, in figure 9 it is shown as an old man wearing a quite modern black suit. Proof that both are the same character only in terms of name. The outfit is Lars Von Trier's attempt to create a more modern version of Vergo according to the narrative time setting. His visuals as an old man are considered to be seen as a wiser person with a longer life experience. The color of the black coat is used to contrast the color of the robe worn by Jack. The style used is modernized because the tableaux vivant used where the movie character putted in the painting not the real painting subject Dante and Virgil [5].</p> <p>The psychological contrast between the two main characters is also present in this scene as in a painting. Shown in figure 10 Jack's gestures and expressions in figure 11 shows anxiety and fear in the face because of the tense atmosphere in the fifth round of hell. Vergo, on the other hand, was upright with a calm expression in figure 12. Vergo's right arm wrapped around the back of Jack's waist to comfort him in figure 13. In [11] it's explained that the painting explores the psychological contrast that points to the different expressions between the two main characters. Virgil's expression seemed calm from the horrific happenings around him, the movement of his right arm to calm Dante in</p>	
 <p><b>Figure 8.</b> Jack's red robe.</p>	 <p><b>Figure 9.</b> Vergo in his black suit.</p>		
 <p><b>Figure 10.</b> Dante's headwear.</p>			
 <p><b>Figure 11.</b> Jack's face expression.</p>	 <p><b>Figure 12.</b> Vergo's face expression.</p>		
 <p><b>Figure 13.</b> Vergo's right arm movements.</p>			



**Figure 14.** Virgil's right hand movements and expression.



**Figure 15.** Dante's body movement and expression.



**Figure 16.** The souls of sinners in the movie The House That Jack Built.



**Figure 17.** The souls of sinners in The Barque of Dante painting.



**Figure 18.** Devoured Filippo Argenti.



**Figure 19.** Phlegyas in The House That Jack Built film scene.

figure 14, who looked scared and restless. In figure 15 Dante's facial expression looks uneasy, Dante gestures are leaning with his right arm raised as if trying to avoid the terrible events around him.

Figure 16 shows the souls of sinners in the fifth round of hell of the film scene. The composition used is exactly the same as the Delacroix painting with 7 souls in figure 17. Although the character is more realistic because it uses real human actors, they don't create demon-like expression to show the sin caused by the anger that consumed him during their life. The expressions of these souls show more of their misery and struggle not to drown in the Styx River. The motion of his body holding onto the boat did not show him trying not to sink, which made it difficult for the boat carrying Jack and Verge to move. The details of the expression of the characters presented in the painting do not appear. Like the two characters at the bottom left of the painting can be seen in figure 18, one soul trying to tear the other's soul body apart. Based on the narrative text of the poem in [10], the character painting that was devoured by other soul was Filippo Argenti, who as recognized by Dante. Because here Jack is the main character hence one from those two characters cannot be identified as Argenti.

The character of Phlegyas who is rowing the barque is also present in this film scene as shown in figure 19. Move his body back to the camera so that his back is visible with his face facing to the left. Because the direction of the boat is different from Delacroix's painting in figure 20, the face of Phlegyas is visible. His body leaning to the left with hand gestures gripping the wooden stick.





**Figure 20.** Phlegyas in The Barque of Dante Painting.



**Figure 21.** Slow motion effect on the scene of The House That Jack Built.

The blue color used on the cloth of Phlegyas' clothes. This contrasting color style from Delacroix is maintained by Lars Von Trier. Apart from Phlegyas. Phlegyas is the manifestation of Dante's sympathetic towards Greek and Roman myth as explained in [12].

The movement in the scene uses a slow-motion effect (motion is slowed down) shown in figur 21. The goal is to give a dramatic effect from the events shown. Previous Research it told that the static shot creates painting like effect [5]. Even though the motion was slowed down and almost static, it was still visible how the wind that hit Jack and Verge was so strong. The folds of Jack's robe and Phlegyas' cloth moved like waves. In addition, the motion of the water from the Styx River is also made as if it affects the motion of the swaying boat. The characters in it are also given motion, such as Jack and Verge who seem to be rocked on the barque due to the waves of the Styx River. Then Phlegyas who moved rowing the barque and the sinners who swam and struggled by the strong waves of the water. The whole movement is made to support the atmosphere of the journey of Jack and Verge which is so difficult.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Barque of Dante (1822) visual narrative text is used as The House That Jack Built (2018) film scene metatextuality discourse. The use of metatextuality discourse by Lars Von Trier helps him to construct his film scene visual narrative. Most of the mise-en-scene that appears in the film scene is helped by the explanation and approval from the painting's visual narration. Even though the film narrative has its own story and character but it's always designed to be similar to the painting. Because the message of the film scene that Lars Von Trier wants to deliver is about how he thoughts and beliefs in the life vision and philosophical values contained in the epic poem Divine Comedy by Dante which appeared as visual text in the painting.

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