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Script Analysis M 6:00 PM

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Get Out: Confronting Your Audience Through Monomyth

It should surprise no one that Jordan Peele's first endeavor into the world of serious filmmaking was a record-shattering phenomenon: ever since his Comedy Central show *Key and Peele* first aired, bits and pieces of his short-form comedy have become cultural mainstays. Whether mocking the ever-unorthodox names of NFL players, sweating bullets at the near discovery of his internet browsing history, or translating President Obama's dignified speeches to reveal their underlying anger and frustration, it's clear that Peele has an exceptional understanding of American cultural interests, and how to unpack and explore them in a way that both lastingly appeals to and informs audiences. His first solo film, *Get Out* (2017), utilizes this often-comedically rendered aptitude for cultural exploration in dissecting modern liberal hypocrisy and racial anxieties through a lens of darkly comedic horror. However, *Get Out* refuses to make a distant statement, or one that's easy for any viewer to brush off and dismiss as external. It slyly implicates its viewers through the exceptional use of stereotypes, relying on the subversion of the innocent in a practically Lynchian manner. Not since *Blue Velvet* (1986) has a film dissected the dismal maze of the suburbs or upper crust minutiae in a more gruesomely revealing way, and *Get Out* does so in the name of legitimate social justice. Peele knows that in

order to subvert viewers' expectations and make a social statement that sticks, one must use traditional tools in new ways. Therefore, adhering to the genre's own conventional take on traditional three-climax structure, the film shrewdly and extensively plays on the widespread unconscious understanding of the hero's journey and Campbellian archetypes to make a layered, poignant cultural statement.

Horror films have never been too ripe for traditional three-act structure and the hero's journey: they demand revelry in the suspense of trials. The known world must be quickly established, the tests drawn out and guttural, and the final climax - in one way or another - a sigh of relief. *Get Out* is no different in this regard. The quick pre-credits scene is an inversion of a traditional stereotype, as a white man isn't nervous walking through the urban decay of a black ghetto, but rather a black man is nervous about walking through the eerily-sterile maze of a New England suburb. And for good reason, considering the world of *Get Out* is one in which the threat of false "post-racial" sentiments is not simply a pathetic misunderstanding of American cultural anxiety, but very real and very personal. This single, long shot establishes the world of the film as one of uncomfortable familiarity, and adds dimension to the unknown world our hero is soon to wander into.

After the title card, opening song *Redbone* by Childish Gambino choruses "Now stay woke! Don't you close your eyes!", as the movie truly starts in a swanky Brooklyn apartment. Evoking an ultimately ironic sense of dread, these lyrics seem tonally spot on and almost direct advice for the film's black hero, Chris: don't rely on a self-concerned facade of liberal goodwill to be an indicator of misplaced best intentions — call racism what it is — and don't allow

yourself to close your eyes and go to the “sunken place” that ultimately results in the forfeit of your own voice as a black individual.

The adventure in this hero’s journey is not having to throw a ring into a volcano or blow up a giant spaceship, but rather, to simply survive veiled bigotry in a land where it’s not known to what extent one is being patronized and objectified, emphasizing the seriousness of the threat in non-satirized everyday life. The tragic irony here is that even if there weren’t a malicious racist cult on the other side of the curtain, the adventure would remain the same, only to a less-intensified extent. The call to this adventure comes in the form of a trip to Chris’ white girlfriend Rose Armitage’s rural family estate. But of course, the call to adventure is refused by our hero several times over as he requests she tell her parents that he’s black, in order for him to understand exactly the kind of threat he will be up against from the start and, if necessary, avoid altogether. This refusal is not accepted by Rose, who dismissively mocks and patronizes her boyfriends’ anxiety. She at first may seems like an ally or even soulmate to audience members who aren’t immediately turned off by her virtue signaling and dismissive nature of Chris’ worries, but heightened skepticism or review show Rose to be a very deliberate, sociopathic, shapeshifting villain. And perhaps this is what makes *Get Out* such a lastingly thought-provoking subject of discussion: the first viewing can serve as a sort of litmus test for the previously-preached “wokeness”, or the ability to detect faux-moralistic, backhanded and condescending concern. However, even the most pessimistic or cautious of viewers are in for a blunt reveal of just how dangerous a seemingly run-of-the-mill white-savior complex can be. So while some may not buy into Rose’s pedantic concern for one second, others may be shocked when at the second climax her face drops as she clearly abandons any sort of concern for Chris. Since her

neoliberal attitude here is eventually revealed as a facade, this trivialization of Chris' cultural concerns is proven not to be a genuine deflection of a potentially uncomfortable unmasking of minor prejudice, but rather a carefully constructed guise of such in order to protect a more devastating brand of racism. Rose, even when carefully planning this hate crime, knows to put our black hero at ease by condescending him. Through this, echoed in the rest of the film, white viewers come to realize how they may be complicit in a system in which there is comfort in the belittlement of a white frame of reference, while black audiences are presented as culturally recognizable an unsettling backdrop as any "cabin in the woods".

Chris, feeling comfortably numb, accepts the call, and piles into Rose's white BMW in order to cross the first threshold. A phone call at the start of the ride to Rod, Chris' best friend, introduces a singular ally: a lowly government employee who warns and advises through hilarious, ironically-accurate hyperbole. Later, the two accidentally hit and kill a deer, recalling memories of Chris' mother, who herself was struck by a car and died several painful hours later. This tragedy in Chris' life forms an Achilles' heel, a vulnerable spot that later gets him into great danger. He ends up calling the police, for him a culturally recognizable invitation of danger. This is something of a sacrifice, made from the belly of the whale: the first of several formative moments in the film where he refuses to relive his tragic past even if he must face modern day structures of resistance. The police officer who shows up and profiles Chris is therefore our threshold guardian, and Rose's refusal to let him act on his obvious prejudice again holds up her veil of liberalism that actually undermines Chris' sense of security. The way in which throughout this first act Rose's "endearing" and "progressive" actions actually greatly heighten Chris' anxieties again go to put a white audience in a place of twisted sympathy, in which they are

forced to understand how they may be complicit in a system of patronization and belittlement in exchange for a tinge of moral superiority. Black audiences, however, likely immediately realize the dreadful nuisance of this grandstanding, and if not, are surely in for a shock. It is at this first mild but thematically significant climax of uncomfortable tension between mock-progressive virtue signaling and piqued cultural anxiety that Chris comes to terms with the fact that the countryside does indeed fulfill its stereotypes, and negate Rose's sentiments that things are not how they are often portrayed.

As the road to the Armitage Estate ends, the road of trials, initiation, and enemies begins. Immediately, Rose's dad Dean is revealed as a "hugger", or as the screenplay describes him, "the kind of guy who pronounces garbage, Gar-bahge" (17). He immediately begins to use ebonics and pathetically, cross-culturally flaunt his dad-jokey lack of tact as an endearing sign of innocence. Dean's later pathetic, guardedly self-aware acceptance of some of the family's more racially-conspicuous tendencies (such as hosting an all-black housekeeping staff) come across as the typical hypocritical cop out when confronted with actually having to explain morally-iffy red flags, because this is the most easily acceptable explanation that will ease Chris into realizing that he is just in an everyman's, mildly prejudiced presence. Navigating this layered realm of hypernormal racism puts him contradictorily on edge and at ease, providing a bulk of the films tension. The diabolical intentions of this sociopathic brand of double-bluffed, we-can't-be-racist self-awareness are made clearer as the boundaries are pushed at an absurdly heightened rate from here on out, perhaps crescendoing with Rose's bizarrely-caucasian celebratory meal of dry Fruit Loops and glass of milk. Along this hegemonic roller-coaster ride of emotions, white viewers will be forced to confront their own "post-racial" behaviors as the Armitages hold up a mirror to

the audience. *Get Out* is perhaps the modern, racial equivalent to Michael Haeneke's *Funny Games* (1997), as not since has a director more directly looked at the audience to walk out of the theater questioning their own proclivities for what they are so eager to detect on screen as immoral and malicious.

On a tour of the house Dean points out to Chris a framed photo of Rose's grandfather, Roman, running track, and tells him the story of the moment that cemented racism in this family: he barely lost to Jesse Owens, a black athlete, in the 1936 Berlin Olympic qualifiers, before Owens went on to win against all white competitors as Hitler watched from the stands. The founder and notorious perpetrator of Aryan sensibilities was forced to watch (as an audience member) as the black man proved physically superior, and Roman Armitage sat watching knowing that he allowed the black man to prove himself. Dean comments, "he almost got over it". This singular, catalytic moment of bitterness concretely places Roman as the Shadow character: it is his jealousy and egotism that drives his racist belief that he is entitled to a black body, which in turn proves the rest of the Armitages as merely complicit henchmen in his racist operation. Such a cringe-inducingly straightforward portrayal of white fetishization and objectification of the black body as something separate from black identity altogether will later stun audiences, and leave them seeking to understand the rest of the film's subtext. Since here, Roman really represents the complete embodiment of white patriarchy, as is evident in the enormous effects of his trickle-down racism and how devastatingly pervasive it has been to black people, which makes the driving metaphors behind each of *Get Out*'s main characters all the more clear. With this symbolical Rosetta's Stone established, one must hope that Chris will

become a modern Jesse Owens, and beat the oppressor at his own game, as the audience must grapple with its repercussions.

Then introduced are the characters of Georgina and Walter, black servants on the land, who seem eerily straight out of the 1960s. Their roles at first seem to be as villains, since they are the only people in this foreign land who should put Chris at ease, and yet their bizarre behavior only make him feel far more alienated. Later, it is revealed that they are allies in a constant struggle against powerful villains, and as white minds having infected and written over muzzled black ones: the Armitage pater and materfamilias have taken mental refuge in the usurped minds of these kidnapped people. The pair of helpers represent the effects of Roman's lobotomization and objectification of black people. and the kind of cultural dissonance that comes from internalized oppression, or the loss of a black voice by a thorough breaking-down of resistance to a normatively white frame of reference.

This loss of black voice becomes a major point of the film toward its midpoint, as Missy, Rose's mother, lures Chris into her study for a psychotherapeutic hypnosis session to stop his addiction to smoking. Against Chris' will, she prods at his Achilles' heel, and traps him in agony over thoughts of how he was implicit in his mother's agony, at which point he falls into "the sunken place". This is very thematically revealing, as she piles guilt onto Chris for the historical suffering of his people, and uses his own self-resentment to beat him into submission. Under her spell, this becomes his off switch, and ultimately the tool that would be used to completely repress his consciousness for replacement with a white one. This mental, hegemonic suppression of Chris' black identity is a clear parallel to thorough systemic injustices of modern black people, and is only further established by a comment later revealing that if the mental persuasion of

hypnosis failed, Rose's MMA-fanatic brother Jeremy, who is initially jealous of and concerned by Chris' physique and fighting potential, would have physically submitted Chris with his lacrosse stick. This darkly satirical, ultra-caucasian show of force would have been an easy double for the violent, physical crushing of black resistance throughout American history as well.

The next day, as the road of trials steepens, a large extended family reunion of sorts wakes Chris up. The objectification and fetishization of the black body is again made all too cringe-inducingly obvious by tactless family friends, including a blind art dealer, as they not-so-subtlely inquire to Chris as to how his body could serve their needs were they to invest wisely. He spots a black man, Logan, escorting an elderly white woman, and although this stranger too is acting bizarrely out of fashion, Chris swears that he thinks he knew him. A call to now-distant ally Rod proves all too useful: his detached perspective provides truth in humor, that Chris doesn't take seriously. Rod specifically and continuously references white people making black people "sex slaves", which Chris laughs at, ironically unaware that a woman with a dying husband earlier asked Rose if the sex with a black man was better, so that she would know whether to bid on him to replace her husband. It is telling that although fully in the midsts of racist oppression, Chris refuses to see through the humor and to the truth of what Rod warns him of from his grounded place in relative cultural comfort: a one-way frustration that writer Peele surely knows all too well. Later, when Chris tries to take a picture of Logan to see if Rod can confirm his suspicions, the flash sends him into a nose-bleeding fit of seeming rage, where he throttles Chris and cries "Get out!". Logan, obviously having been neurological, racially neutered, briefly reignites in this moment, and the black mind that has been suppressed for so long comes alive against its white captor: the white, squatting tenant yells in frustrated anger

while the black owner cries out to save Chris. It's worth noting that Chris is a photographer back home, whose works seem to speak to the modern black experience, and in this unknown world his photography is able to elucidate similar, yet faded themes.

Get Out nears its second climax as an auction over Chris takes place while he and Rose decide to leave together. As they pack to head out early, Chris seems near-fully aware that the faux-progressivism which earlier put him at normalized ease is now far more severe in this place. After providing his ally with sufficient ammunition for suspicion, it's when Rose leaves the room that Chris approaches the inmost cave, and the land of the dead: Rose's closet. Here, he finds dozens of pictures of Rose clearly with black significant others, when he has always been told he was her first. Included in the pictures are a less-traditional-appearing Walter and Georgina, clearly of a different mind, now simply shrouds of their former selves. As Chris cues into what many viewers may have at this point, he begins to panic, and futilely tries to get the car keys from Rose before she drops her caring facade entirely. The second climax comes with his return to the sunken place through Missy's villainous tool of hypnosis.

Act three begins with Chris' coming to, restrained in a mid-century modern game room, complete with mounted deer head: a symbol for the glorification of what has been used as a tool of subjugation against him. In the Armitage's basement, there is no patina of liberalism: the heritage is hate. The ordeal unfolds as a home video-style infomercial begins to play for Chris, who is informed of the full details of the mind-altering procedure, and audiences must begin to wonder what kind of statement the filmmaker will make. Will our hero overcome his captors and the long-con of veiled oppression, or will he be defeated by the thorough, self-indulgent routine of casually catastrophic racism? Even in the home video, where Roman, the Shadow, has a

Bond-villain like opportunity to fully indulge in honesty about his intentions, seems wholly complacent with what he's doing as a victimless measure for self-sustenance. This is the classic, rationalized explanation many bureaucratic racists provide for their policies, when in fact it proves deeply-rooted racism and the inability to humanize that which is different. The film cuts away to a greatly concerned Rod, as audiences are left to worry about Chris' fate as he is surely soon to return to the sunken place, seemingly doomed for operation.

However, as Jeremy returns to Chris and undoes his restraints to wheel him into surgery, it's revealed that he is conscious, and strikes Jeremy with a bocce ball. Chris managed to avoid falling back into the sunken place by tearing open the chair he was tied to and stuffing his ears with its cotton lining. Obviously, Chris' resorting to picking cotton to save himself is no one-dimensional resolution: it represents the subversion of a traditionally racist tool to overcome oppression. Chris must play the the white man's game and escape on his terms. However, it is only when he resorts to the mounted deer head to kill Dean, the primary villain, that the true seizing of the sword is seen. Chris is able to take the white fetishization of his self-reproaching guilt and turn it completely inside out. He overcomes his past and the way it has loomed over him and instead harnesses it for progress against tyranny.

Chris knows he must make it back to Brooklyn: having survived what he has survived gives him a unique perspective that could change his known world. He struggles against the remainder of the family, and finally gets into the car, ready to cross the final threshold. Here, he finds an unconscious Georgina, who he now knows is a black woman trapped as a passenger to the white experience. Recalling his mother, he refuses to repeat the past on someone else's terms again and decides to bring her with him, overcoming a personal demon in the process. Chris is

on his way back to the known world when this proves to backfire, as the white consciousness within Georgina crashes the car. As he lays outside the car, one realizes Chris has been transformed by these heroic acts of acceptance of the tools required to persist, resistance to the overcome past, and deciding for himself to use what he's learned to save others who weren't as fortunate as him. Fully woke, on the cusp of the threshold, he faces an armed Rose, as he is loomed over by Walter, his antagonist with an ally's roots. Using his camera, the device that has always enabled him to further understand the black experience and enlighten others, he awakens the ally behind Roman, who then defeats the final enemy of Rose, and eliminates himself. Chris is left alone, having defeated unknown villainy with his own tools of cultural enlightenment, a changed man. And yet, sirens approach. The brief moment of complete cultural relief is extinguished immediately upon a harrowing realization: Roman was the antagonist, and yet the forces that cast him in shadow loom outside of him. The same racial oppression that he allowed to pervade throughout the system did not stop with him, but persist outside of him, having spread like an ancient virus.

At this closing point of the third act, where Chris lies on the road home, the elixir within him, *Get Out* has an ultimate decision to make. Will our hero return with his newfound mastery of two worlds? Will he come back to society with knowledge of the tools that have been used to enact systemic racism from within it? Or will those tools prove to be too deeply embedded within society for him to even return at all? In the original screenplay, Peele has Chris arrested on sight, and seemingly serving life in prison in the long run, martyred for his cause. This grim conclusion would have ultimately decided that Chris' trials were not lesson enough. There would be no happy ending, and it would be the audience's fault, painting a bleak, stern, harrowing

portrait of the modern American racial climate. But Peele changed his mind, and decided to trust his viewers: the sirens are revealed to be Rod's Airport Security vehicle. Chris' journey has been thoroughly exhaustive enough, and Peele lets the screenwritten nuance become the tool for each viewer to see the cold hard truth. Like he gave to Chris, Peele gives to audiences the chance to overcome their pasts. The film is the tool, like a camera or a deer, with which to discover one's own ability to make change where one sees its need. Chris is permitted to return to society, as viewers will do soon after the credits roll, more woke than they were before, and more fully equipped than ever to concern themselves with how their own intentions and the intentions of others can be misplaced and part of something unfortunately sinister.

Works Cited

Peele, Jordan. *Get Out.* Blumhouse, Universal. 2017.