

UNVEILING IRONY IN THE FLY EPISODE OF BREAKING BAD: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: This research analyzes irony through the lens of Ecocriticism in the Fly episode of the *Breaking Bad* TV series. *Breaking Bad* is one of the most popular series that raises many environmental aspects and issues and presents Crime Drama as its main genre. The study applies the theory of Ecocriticism, especially its concept of pollution as the main theme in the Fly episode. The visual and narrative elements of the laundry and the fly to serve as vehicles for deeper ecological themes and reflections on human-nature relationships within the context of the series. Drawing upon the Ecocritical concept of pollution, this research reveals irony where the laundry which is a place of cleaning, instead becomes a place of contamination and pollution. Meanwhile, the fly in the episode becomes a trigger to show changes in Walter's environment and character. Walter's efforts to eliminate the fly are in vain because the fly ironically represents his contaminated self. This study aims to reveal the ecological commentary on popular works such as *Breaking Bad* and enrich Ecocritical research that has rarely been applied to this series.

Keywords: Breaking Bad, Ecocriticism, Film Studies, Irony, Pollution

Breaking Bad is a famous and influential television series gripping audiences all around the world with its impressive storyline and ways of exploring the characters (McCormick, 2021). *Breaking Bad* mainly follows the story of Walter White, a methamphetamine kingpin who formerly had taught high school chemistry, and Jesse Pinkman, his former pupil and business partner. The critically acclaimed criminal drama was produced by High Bridge Production, Gran Via Productions, and Sony Pictures Television which started in 2008 and continued for five suspenseful seasons (McCormick, 2021). Although *Breaking Bad* is known for its many themes like drug trafficking, crime, and gangsterism, the show also brings environmental issues that demand critical analysis. One of the episodes that received a lot of attention in the series is the episode of the third season of the show. McCormick et al. (2024) argue *Fly* become one of the most talked about episodes of *Breaking Bad* by interestingly exploring the characters. Moreover, Lee (2019) refers *Fly* as the greatest and most hated episode of *Breaking Bad*. Because this episode is widely discussed and has a deep narrative, this study wants to dig deeper into the environmental aspects contained in the episode. This study therefore wants to analyze further how the *Fly* episode depicts Ecocritical themes such as contamination and pollution which are symbolically shown throughout the show as irony.

To understand this episode better, the *Breaking Bad Fly* episode is known as a “bottle episode” which has a different pace narration, and plot. Also, the episode is filmed in a relatively lower production value where the scenery and characters are limited. *Fly* can be considered different from other episodes in the series due to its more intimate narration and pacing. This episode presents a simple plot, where Walter White notices a fly entering the laboratory, causing possible contamination. He believes that even a single insect can cause contamination and destroy the purity of the methamphetamine produced. Throughout the episode, Walter and Jesse are in Gus Fring's laboratory, which is situated in a laundry, trying to catch the fly while getting to know each other, which builds the intimacy of the episode. Given the focus of the episode with themes of contamination and pollution within the laundry setting related to the fly, Ecocriticism is chosen as an approach to analyze these related aspects.

Ecocriticism has emerged as one of the literary and cultural studies fields with the fastest growth rates since its inception in the 20th century (Zapf, 2016). Ecocriticism takes an earth-centered (environmental) approach to literary study. Ecocriticism is simply stated by Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) as a study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. More than that, Ecocriticism explores ways of imagining and depicting the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production. Greg Garrard (2004) states that Ecocriticism investigates how people conceptualize and express their relationship to the environment and all facets of their existence. Through exploration in his study, Garrard develops several key

concepts, including pollution, wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, animals, and earth. The concept of pollution is of importance here. According to Garrard (2004), pollution is an ecological problem as an implicit normative claim that many things exist in the environment, usually in the wrong place. This Ecocritical focus aims to fill gaps in research that has been conducted previously.

There are previous studies discussing the setting and landscape in *Breaking Bad*. Lovell & Fox (2022) analyze how the fundamental role of the desert in *Breaking Bad* is presented to strengthen visual storytelling and also represents a place of emptiness, experimentation, new capitalism, and so on in the series, and only focus on the landscape which has a role in strengthening the visual and not the plot of the series. In addition, Bell (2019) brings up the theme of pollution as she analyzes the landscape presented in the series to portray the transformation of Walter. This study analyzes the fly episode to show Walter's obsession with the purity of his product and his attention to detail. In the similar ecological approach of Lovell & Fox and Bell (2019), this research tries to analyze the series further not only the setting, but also the theme, dialogue, and mise-en-scene in alongside the ecological aspects, and this study focuses more on the *Fly* episode.

In previous research conducted by MacDuffie (2020) using an Ecocritical approach to analyze the dialogue and visuals in the series, he argues that environmental issues are raised in *Breaking Bad*. Through his research, MacDuffie (2020) reveals that some dialogues and visuals express unsustainability, contamination, and economic growth in the series and that there is no intention in this series to increase environmental awareness. According to MacDuffie (2020), the show's success may be ascribed to its capacity to introduce fresh ideas and characters while preserving a steady narrative framework (2020). MacDuffie (2020) also mentions the *Fly* episode which contains a lot of the word contaminant through the dialogue and narrative analysis carried out. Continuing along MacDuffie's argument, this study wants to delve much deeper into the *Fly* episode and focuses on the theme of contamination.

In particular, this research employs Film Studies to analyze relevant cinematic elements in reading of its environmental elements in the episode. Sikov (2010) states that by analyzing visual elements such as the mise en scene, expressive meaning can be known in more depth. In films or TV series such as *Breaking Bad*, the audience is presented with various details and information in filmed images which has meaning in each detail. Therefore, Film Studies provides a method to analyze the cinematic expressions and meanings that indicate irony in episodes through mise-en-scene and dialogue.

To conclude, this study will examine environmental aspects that enrich the analysis of the *Breaking Bad* series and present a new perspective as many of the previous studies have not discussed. Themes such as environmental issues or those containing ecological elements are still rarely raised and used as research material. Also, this research aims to enrich research in the field of Film Studies, Ecocriticism, and environmental analysis in popular works such as *Breaking Bad*. Thus, through the use of Ecocriticism and Film Studies, this research tries to dig deeper into the theme of pollution contained in the *Fly* episode of *Breaking Bad* by analyzing the depiction of irony, especially in the cinematic representation of the laundry and the fly..

METHOD

The present study mainly analyzes the *Fly* episode from the third season episode ten of *Breaking Bad* using Film Studies method especially the Ecocriticism approach, focusing on the portrayal of environmental issues and the interactions between society and the natural world. Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* (2004), states the key concept of pollution as an implicit normative claim that much of something is present in the environment, usually in the wrong place. Whenever necessary, this study also looks at how the ironic element and Ecocritical themes that exist in the *Fly* episode are also developed in other episodes of the *Breaking Bad* series, namely the episodes *Más* (Season 3 Episode 5), *Over* (Season 2 Episode 10), *Box Cutter* (Season 4 Episode 1), and *A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal* (Season 1 Episode 7), to get a full understanding of these elements and themes. This is done so that this study can explore deeper the theme of pollution raised mainly in the *Fly* episode through the irony of the laundry and the fly.

According to Dobie (2012), irony is a circumstance or statement when the intended meaning differs from what is actually said, done, or expected. Due to the concerns of such aim of this study, Film Studies is applied to analyze cinematic elements of the episode. This study mainly applies the understanding from Sikov that suggests that such Film study can focus mainly on narrative and visual elements such as the mise-en-scene, character actions, and dialogue, so that the expressive meaning contained therein can be fully interpreted (2010). Mise-en-scene analysis is carried out by paying attention to setting, color, composition, and shot analysis, focusing on possible expressive meanings that indicate irony. The character actions and dialogue are also analyzed to provide further meaning of the pollution theme. Since the laundry and the fly are the main focus of the *Fly* episode, they are analyzed to find out how they symbolize the irony of the pollution theme raised in the episode.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The *Fly* episode in the *Breaking Bad* series plot mainly deals with how Walter White and Jesse Pinkman, the protagonist and main character of the series, deal with the contamination of a fly that enters the meth laboratory, situated underneath a laundry. The setting of the place is the high tech laboratory hiding as a laundry. Understanding this setting as the main environment is important as a starting point in gaining the interpretation of irony within the Ecocritical perspective.

The Irony of Non-Cleaning Laundry

The laundry is called *Lavandería Brillante* (“Brilliant Laundry” in Spanish) with an industrial, a factory-like appearance. The presence of washing machines and dryers equipped with piles of dirty clothes adds an industrial impression to this laundry. In contrast to ordinary laundromats which are open to the public so anyone can enter, this industrial laundry has permanent employees with fairly organized working hours and activities. This normal and unsuspecting image was created by Gustavo Fring, the main antagonist in the series. Gustavo is the owner of this business and the methamphetamine lab hidden beneath it. By creating this contrasting image, this laundry is understood to become a good front for a nest of criminals hiding beneath.

From this understanding, the laundry in the *Fly* episode is not only a setting and something that attracts the fly to come in, but also symbolizes irony by being a place that is supposed to look clean and make things clean but instead, it is dirty. The industrial laundry not only washes dirty clothes, but also serves as a façade for a meth lab underneath it; it ‘produces’ dirty money from the dirty business owned by Gustavo with the help of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman, the series protagonist, as meth cooks whose products Gustavo then sells. The non-cleaning laundry then becomes the irony of how the place is “dirty” and it pollutes people and environment by essentially becoming a meth factory, producing hard drugs that destroys people, their lives, and their environment. The first clue of this is the industrial appearance of the laundry, different from other laundromats, seems to give in a clue that this laundry also functions as a factory that produces something, which is meth.



Fig. 1. Inside the laundry, in the third season, episode 5, *Más* (Walley-Beckett & Renck, 2010, 21:43)¹

Figure 1 shows the entrance of the laundry that is wide open so that anyone can see the activities of the employees and the working laundry machines inside. The laundry looks industrial with its many buttons, workers, and cables attached to the wall of the laundry and its large quantity of cloth to be washed. The pipes and machines also give away the industrial theme of the laundry. Previously, in the *Más* episode, Gus mentions that the filtering system technology he uses is state-of-the-art, which is useful for disguising meth lab pollution underneath (Walley-Beckett & Renck, 2010, 24:50). Gustavo also mentions the concept of not being open to the public customer and only employing trusted and well-trained permanent employees who keep their mouths shut about what is actually hidden. These are the reasons why the industrial laundry can look as a legitimate cleaning business, hiding its real function as a meth-producing lab producing hard drugs that pollute its people and environment.

¹ The screenshot above has been edited with increased brightness and contrast to show the scene more clearly. The scene is from the fifth episode of the third season, *Más*, when Gustavo introduces his industrial laundry. This scene taken from another episode aims to provide a clearer picture and condition of the laundry which is not shown enough in the *Fly* episode.

Walter, the protagonist who mainly produces the drugs, is overly concerned in the purity or cleanliness of his product as well. Of course, Walter and Jesse's 'pure' meth does not have a 'purifying' or 'clean' effect as its 'pure' appearance may suggest, but their products pollute anything involved with them. In relation to the concept of pollution as the result of human and nature relationships, Garrard (2004) stated that Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between human and the environment in all areas of cultural production. The laundry and the meth portray the relationship between human and the environment, the laundry represents the human and the meth represents the product that pollutes the environment. Meth seems to be polluting the environment around it, making things dirty from what it touches. Meth pollutes the environment where it is located. Waste from cooking meth can pollute the environment, by contaminating soil and surface water (Dittmar, 2020). Meth production can then result in the poisoning of living creatures that take advantage of the planted land or simply drink the contaminated water. As explored by Dittmar (2022), methamphetamine production has serious negative impact on the environment. Furthermore, the impact of meth as a hard drug is also severe on its consumers, with the drug damaging its users mentally, physically, and socially. Therefore, law enforcers prohibit these illegal goods from being produced, distributed, and consumed. The industrial laundry which should only clean dirty clothes, actually functions as a dirty business: a laundry that produces dirty goods methamphetamine. The laundry is depicted as a place that ironically produce pollution and its cleaning purpose is fake.

Methamphetamine is at the heart of the dirty business run by Gustavo, Walter, and Jesse. In the episode *A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal*, Walter mentioned that even though the meth is blue, it does not reduce its level of purity (Gould et al., 2008, 43:27). The blue color gives it its characteristic so it is called "Blue Sky". This characteristic is what then made Gustavo recruit Walter on the recommendation of his lab cook, Gale Boetticher, in *Box Cutter* episode (Gilligan, V., 2011). "Blue Sky" meth produced by Walter and Jesse is a highly pure product, so it has a clear and bright blue appearance. The blue color of the meth is also a sign and characteristic of the products made by Walter and Jesse. Because of that, the laundry also becomes a symbol of irony by being an illustration of how external 'blue' appearances can often be deceptive, by hiding what is really happening beneath a fake appearance.

This industrial laundry is a seemingly 'clean' façade to cover the dirty, polluting activities underneath, which seems to also represent Gustavo and Walter. The laundry gives a good and organized image even though the laundry's true identity is to protect the laboratory below. The laundry becomes an irony of how a clean place becomes what actually pollutes it. Furthermore, the irony of the laundry as still continues to wash dirty things in it and makes it even dirtier by becoming a shelter for criminals who continue to produce dirty things in it.

The Irony of the Dirty Laboratory

The meth laboratory is the main setting throughout the episode where Walter and Jesse's keep their work environment clean of all dirty substances. This lab is physically kept clean to maintain the sterility of the drugs that they make, namely methamphetamine. What is ironic is that methamphetamine is something that is dirty and has many bad impacts on many aspects, especially the environment. In line with this, Deitering (1996) suggests pollution as a toxic landscape may function as a metaphor for pollution, which in the episode is rather different since the lab is shown as an irony for pollution. The laboratory shows the irony of how something that is actually dirty cannot be cleaned perfectly. The laboratory can also be understood to show how human efforts to control nature have failed.

The meth laboratory is Walter and Jesse's workplace which is then represented as a completely controlled environment. A completely controlled environment thanks to Walter and Jesse's efforts to keep it clean and free from other pollutants. The lab also tries to show that contamination can change how people perceive the environment. Walter thinks he himself is clean and assumes that the fly, a natural insect, is dirty and ruining his product. Walter is still not aware enough that he has done dirty business and activities all the time. Walter feels that way because recently he left his job as a chemistry teacher at a high school in Albuquerque even though he has worked in a different environment. The classroom where he taught was a completely clean place while the meth lab was a dirty place, and he still acts like a chemistry teacher who still pays attention to the cleanliness of his environment². The fly that comes to the meth lab seems to be a trigger to remind Walter of the difference in the environment where he works now.

² In the series, Walter White is depicted as suffering from terminal lung cancer. Walter's sickness is one of his main reason of 'breaking bad' and turned his life around from being a chemistry teacher to being a meth cooker. His twisting of using a laundry to instead pollute and dirty things can be considered as part of his characterization as being a 'sick' person, a kind of a mad scientist fixated on cleanliness only to twist cleanliness into pollution in his 'sick' mindset.



Fig. 2. Walter and Jesse cleaning the lab, in the third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 02:25)³



Fig. 3. The Laundry, in the third season, episode 5, *Más* (Walley-Beckett & Renck, 2010, 21:22)

In those two screenshots, the use of the colors red and blue seems to signify irony through mise-en-scene analysis. As stated by Sikov (2010), through the manipulation of compositions, colors, areas of focus, and other visual elements, filmmakers are able to guide the viewer's attention to particular areas within the shot's mise-en-scene. Figure 2 above shows Walter and Jesse cleaning the environment they work in. This scene on Figure 1 is dominated by colors red and blue. The lab setting is dominated by red on the floor of the lab and the uniforms worn by Walter and Jesse. The red in the setting here seems to enhance their appearance; highlighting their hazmat suits as signs to their high effort in keeping their environment clean. In the scene, Walter and Jesse clean the lab while grumbling about their work, while they wearing red cleaning uniforms with black gloves. Meanwhile, the color blue also becomes a major part of the visual construction of the shot here, as a blue tarpaulin in the shot. The blue surface is not 'sky blue' dirty and full of wrinkles, symbolizing that something that is actually dirty and becomes a mask for dirtiness. The building of the industrial laundry, as shown in Figure 3, is painted mainly in blue color, and the color blue signification so far with blue being the 'pure' drugs, and also its reference to 'sky blue' act again as a seemingly 'clean' or 'natural' color that masks the dirty lab below. As mentioned before, the industrial laundry is ironically dirty, but through the two screenshots above, the blue and red color shown on the scene involving the lab can represent the irony, where the colors red and blue visually represent the laundry covering up the meth lab's dirty existence.

³ Figure 2 above has been edited for brightness and contrast



Fig. 4. Jesse and Walter eliminating the fly, third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 42:03)

The screenshot above shows Walter and Jesse's final attempt at eliminating the flies. In this scene, the flies are successfully eliminated by Jesse while Walter slumps limply holding the stairs after drinking sleeping pills that Jesse deliberately gave him. Through the screenshot above which has been edited for brightness and contrast, it can be seen that Walter and Jesse are enveloped in blue light from the storage next to them. The color blue on the persons here can be understood to indicate what or who is dirty. The blue shirt that Walter wears represents a visual irony: Walter's blue clothing indicates that he is the one who is actually dirty, doing the dirty work of meth production, and while actually wearing a color usually associated with cleanliness and 'purity.'

On the other hand, the color red is used to indicate disappointment, anxiety, and obsession with something. The use of red in Figure 3 and 4 is in the color of the lab floor. From the beginning to the middle of the episode, the color red is used a lot to show Walter's obsession with eliminating the fly. The use of red color also shows Walter's disappointment over his failure to catch the fly, especially shown on Figure 7 and 8 below, which is discussed later in this article. However, as the color is shown in figure 4, the scene is dominated by low-angle shots focused on the characters and often shows the red color of the lab floor as the lower foundation of the shot, signifying that blue is dominating red, as the 'redness' of Walter's obsession and anxiety are increasingly disappearing after he is given sleeping pills by Jesse, thus his rather defeated but relaxed pose on the chair in Figure 4. Presently, Jesse seems to have more power than Walter to get rid of the fly. The fly, which can be considered dirty because it is thought to have 'polluted' the lab environment that Walter and Jesse have kept clean all this time, is not the actual dirty substance; the lab producing meth is. Walter and Jesse are dirty, routinely producing meth which has an impact on polluting the natural environment. Here, the episode shows that Walter and Jesse's failure to 'clean' and control the environment they had guarded so well before. Through this, the lab indicates the irony of how a dirty environment, no matter how clean it is, will still remain dirty.

The Irony of the Contaminating Fly

The *Fly* episode continues as the fly disrupts Walter and Jesse's meth production activities by becoming a contaminant in their environment, the meth laboratory. Walter, who was frustrated by the fly's arrival, forbade Jesse from continuing their cooking process. Walter explicitly labels the fly as a 'dirty' contaminant or pollutant that must be removed in order to resume Walter and Jesse's normal activities. Although flies are closely related to dirty environments, where flies will come to something dirty like trash, it can be assumed that the flies in the episode come because they are attracted by the smell of dirty clothes in the industrial laundry that had piled up above the lab. Ironically, this episode shows flies are not attracted to meth but are labelled as contaminants to the meth simply because of their presence.

There are indications that the fly is actually not interested in the lab or its products, and that it actually does not contaminate the meth. Throughout this episode, meth is never physically shown on screen and meth becomes only a topic of conversation. The fly is also rarely shown landing on machines or tools in the lab that are directly in contact with the raw materials for making meth. The depiction of the fly's tiny body can illustrate that the fly's arrival is a small problem, but it is because of its continuous presence that never goes away that is what bothers Walter, physically and psychologically. Moreover, the fly so far is shown going around the lab but it is never shot precisely in the middle of the frame, as indicated in Figure 5 and 6 below.

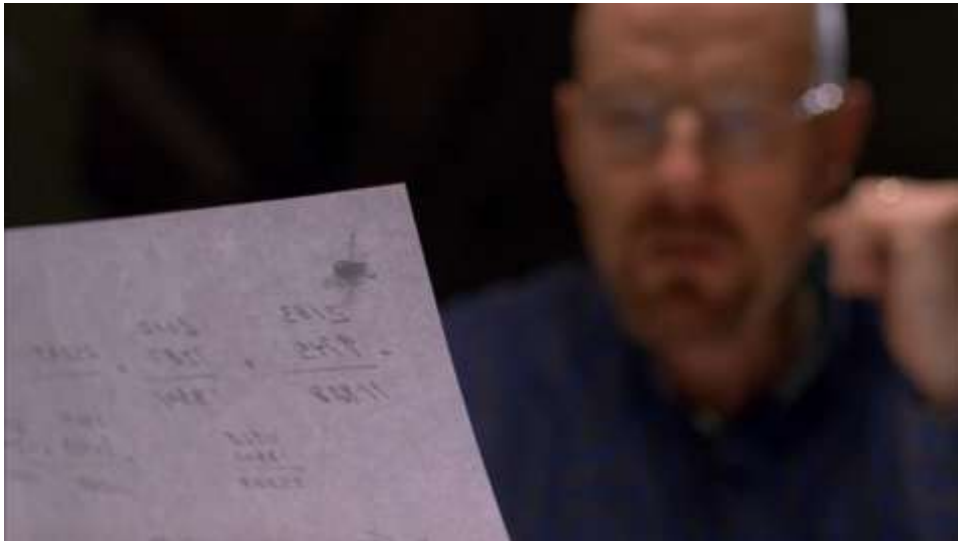


Fig. 5. The fly on Walter's note, in the third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 05:56)



Fig. 6. The fly on Walt's glasses, in the third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 09:36)

Figure 5 shows the fly on the edge of Walter's paper, annoying him doing his business in the lab, while Figure 6 shows the fly on Walter's glass, directly invading Walter's space and becoming more bothersome to him. However, the fly is never exactly located exactly in the middle of the frame. The two shots above shows that the fly is growing to be bothersome and Walter decides it must be removed. This is because Walter places great importance on the sterility of the environment and the products he cooks. Walter emphasized, "...This fly, any fly, cannot be in our lab. It's a problem, it's a contamination and that is in no way a misuse of the word. Okay? So in terms of keeping our cook clean and our products unadulterated, we need to take this very seriously." (Catlin et al., *Fly*, 2010, 13:10). Walter does not want any contaminants that could pollute his 'pure' cooking products, even though he contaminates and pollutes by making hard drugs that are dirty to the environment. Walter who is already 'dirty' ironically wants the fly to be removed because he thinks it is dirty. However, as the episodes continues Walter is then frustrated by the fly becoming an even bigger problem.



Fig. 7. The fly on the alarm flash, in the third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 46:20)

Figure 7 above shows the fly appearing in Walter's bedroom alarm flash in the closing scene of the episode, the fly shows that it is still lingering in Walter's lab. In this shot, the fly is placed exactly in the middle of the frame. More importantly, the fly fills the frame, placed center of the shot, exaggeratingly large within a big red light, to visually show that the fly has become the center of Walter's problem. Here the color red again used to represent Walter's disappointment, anxiety, obsession, or even panic at this point. From the beginning to the middle of the episode, the color red is used a lot to show Walter's obsession with eliminating the fly. The use of red color also shows Walter's disappointment over his failure to catch the fly. The use of static camera movement and the brief appearance of the fly between the red flashes of the alarm gives a deeper meaning to the fly's actual presence. Along with this, it also shows a visual composition that is different from the fly's previous appearance throughout the episode. On this scene, the fly cannot be eliminated or denied from the characters' 'clean' environment in the episode. This scene also indicates that every activity that humans do must always be in contact with nature, and humans cannot avoid this natural truth. The natural truth is that the lab is dirty and it creates pollutants; therefore the fly resides there and cannot be eradicated. The fly illustrates the irony of human's thoughts of cleanliness present in Walter's warped idea of a 'clean' meth lab, as the fly really is not interested in the meth; thus the fly cannot contaminate the already meth and meth lab, yet the fly is still labelled as a 'contaminant' and 'pollutant' to the already dirty drugs.

The Irony of the Dirty Laboratory

Walter White, who is the protagonist in this episode, continues to try to eliminate the fly. Walter overthinks about the fly which could contaminate the product or the meth being cooked. In the episode, Walter says that the fly can contaminate and damage the products they cook in the lab, "This fly, is a major problem for us, it will ruin our batch and we need to destroy it and every trace of it so we can cook. Failing that, we're dead." (Catlin et al., *Fly*, 2010, 20:51). As previously explained, it is ironic that the fly is actually not attracted to meth. Then, Walter's ambition to eliminate the fly as he thinks that the fly could contaminate the meth illustrates the next irony in the episode. The irony of how fruitless his effort is to eliminate something that is not actually polluting.

Walter demands a sterile and clean environment when carrying out work cooking methamphetamine. The fly's presence is a small problem that becomes bigger because of Walter's demands. Jesse, who does not really think that the presence of flies could cause fatal contamination of their products, wanted to continue his work. Walter's character can be considered as a naive hero in maintaining structural irony throughout the episode, confirming to Abrams & Harpham categorization of irony (2005). Walter's efforts eliminate the fly becomes a futile ambition, as also shown by the visual elements in the episode.



Fig. 8. Walter fails to catch the fly, in the third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 09:27)

In the scene above, Walter falls after failing to catch the fly. This portrays Walter's anxiety because the fly does not get caught. When Walter falls to the red floor of the lab, Walter's failed obsession with catching the fly is visually transcribed. The color red, previously established as the theme of disappointment, anxiety, and failure, now visually dominates him. This visual sign, together with the plot progression and the character's defeated pose and acting, carrying a message of him wallowing in disappointment and anxiety because he cannot catch the fly. Walter falls repeatedly, hitting a lab machine before falling to the floor. This scene illustrates how Walter fails to stop himself from his ego and his efforts to eliminate the fly from his environment. The push-in camera movement in this scene highlights Walter in pain, giving the impression of the audience being taken closer to feel his failed thinking process and his frustration in catching the fly. In contrast to when Walter first felt the presence of the fly earlier in the episode (Figure 4), where the red floor is at the bottom of the shot's composition, now the red floor surrounds Walter in his defeat. Walter falls onto the red floor of the lab, showing that he still cannot escape his obsession with catching the fly and his anxiety about it. The blue shirt highlights him in the red domain, as the color blue here still symbolizes his 'clean' ideation, but here it is defeated, as his idea of clean is ironically dirty, and he is really no cleaner than a dirty fly.



Fig. 9. The blackout lab, in the third season, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 23:27)

In the earlier part of the episode, Jesse is displeased with Walter's treatment of him and deciding to cut off the lab's electricity, which makes the environment then appear disorganized. In Figure 9, it can be seen what happens after the electricity is cut. Walter here is covered in red from the lab's emergency lights, visually showing that Walter is sinking into his ego, obsession and deeper anxiety. The red scene with its dark, messy, and foreboding look, gives the sense that Walter is now in purgatory over his demands and ambitions. Jesse here acts as a stopper to Walter's ego. Walter is too consumed by his own ego and ambition, and one of these ambitions can be related to his ruthless ambition to protect his territory from competitors. In the episode *Over* (Walley-

Beckett et al., 2009) from the second season, Walter warns another meth competitor to stay out of his territory. Similar to this, in the *Fly* episode, Walter is also considered by Jesse to be too dominant and overdemanding like a ruthless boss. Jesse refuses to be controlled and ordered, replies “You can't order shit, Adolf, all right? We're 50-50 partners, remember?” (Catlin et al., *Fly*, 2010, 18:19). This shows that Walter is consumed by his own ambition to achieve something and later getting punished for it.

Walter's ambition to eliminate contaminants is also seen in Figure 7, which shows the fly suddenly appearing between the alarm flashes. The red flash in the scene symbolizes that Walter's obsession that will never escape him and his anxiety will get in his way. This scene seems to convey that the fly is Walter, who is still involved in his dirty business and cannot separate himself from its dirtiness. The fly is also very often shown in the same frame as Walter, showing the connection between the two, becoming a part of his plan and vision in Figure 5 and 6. When Jesse manages to eliminate the fly, the fly's body finally fell next to Walter's foot.



Fig. 10. The fly killed, episode 10, *Fly* (Catlin et al., 2010, 45:09)

The fly here finally falls to Walter's foot, in a way showing its defeat to Walter. However, it is not Walter that kills the fly, it is Jesse. The fly is superimposed to Walter's foot, showing closeness to Walter, even becoming part of him. This scene shows the fly falling in a dramatic slow sequence seemingly implying an emotional death of sorts. It can be understood here that the movement in the scene asks the audience to think more about the fly's death. So far, Walter is terminally sick and is pursuing a criminal undertaking of producing meth, thus making himself 'unclean,' breeding pollution which is meth. Walter's efforts throughout the episode is him trying to ironically cleanse his uncleanness by killing the fly, an insect naturally a part of his unclean endeavour. Walter's futility here is his dirty self ironically trying to eradicate a contaminant that is essentially himself. Walter's ego, which is growing bigger and bigger, makes him deny his essentially dirty being. This is what makes Walter too preoccupied about the fly – the fly reminds Walter of his dirty side. The fly becomes the focus of his hidden hatred toward how dirty he himself has become, as the real contaminants and pollutants of nature here are the drugs that he himself produces. Therefore, Walter's efforts to eliminate the fly is an irony of his futile effort to somehow making himself 'clean' by making a 'clean' drug.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Through Film Studies' analysis of setting, mise-en-scene, and dialogue, the fly and the laundry symbolize irony related to the theme of pollution as one of the environmental issues. Applying the key concept of pollution by Garrard (2004), this ecocritical study investigates different representations of nature depicted with irony through the setting of the industrial laundry and the fly in episode 10, *Fly*, from the third season of *Breaking Bad*. The laundry acts as a façade for the meth lab, depicting the irony of how a place that is supposed to clean something but instead is itself dirty. The laundry is a perfect hiding place for criminals because it has an appearance that is not suspicious, a legitimate business that is running normally. The laundry appears to be a hypocritical representation of Gustavo and Walter, having a fake cleanliness that hides them from their true dirty identities. Meanwhile, the fly depicts the irony of Walter's futile efforts to look clean. The fly becomes a trigger to show hidden ecocritical meaning in Walter's environment and character. Walter's efforts to eliminate the fly are in vain because the fly ironically represents Walter's own self. Walter and the fly are dirty and they inhabit a naturally dirty environment as pollutants; it is ultimately ironic that Walter thinks himself 'clean' and wants to 'clean' his environment by eradicating a natural inhabitant to Walter's polluted environment, the fly. To achieve this understanding, implicit meaning and symbolic expression in the use of the colors red and blue are also

interpreted. In the episode, the color blue indicates a twisted sense of cleanliness where ironically, the blue shows the real dirtiness of the characters hides, while the color red indicates disappointment, anxiety, and obsession. The fly which is a dirty contaminant represents Walter who is also in essence a dirty contaminant who produces dirty products such as meth in a dirty environment. Walter is morally, legally, and environmentally dirty. Understanding irony through an Ecocritical lens in the *Fly* episode of *Breaking Bad* not only explores the complex visual and narrative of the series but also the moral message about the inseparable human-natural relationship.

This study limits itself in focusing only on one episode and on a very specific ecocritical interpretation of irony in the *Breaking Bad* series. Other episodes can contain more ecocritical themes, carried through by other character, natural representation, and plot devices. Further studies can explore more ecocritical themes in other episodes in order to gain a fuller understanding of how the environment is represented in the *Breaking Bad* series.

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