

A STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TURMOIL IN LAUREN JAMES’ *THE LONELIEST GIRL IN THE UNIVERSE*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of escapism has been examined from various theoretical perspectives, each offering unique insights into its nature and functions. Psychologists have explored escapism as a coping mechanism, highlighting its role in managing stress, anxiety and existential concerns. Literary scholars have analysed escapism in the context of narrative fiction, considering its impact on reader engagement, empathy and imagination. Sociologists have investigated escapism as a cultural phenomenon, exploring its relationship to leisure activities, media consumption and identity formation. Escapism is driven by a diverse array of motivations, ranging from the desire for relaxation and entertainment to the need for emotional regulation and self-expression. Individuals may seek escape from mundane realities, interpersonal conflicts, or existential dilemmas, drawn to alternate worlds, fantasies, or activities that offer temporary reprieve from their concerns.

Keywords: Escapism, coping strategy, form of escapism, fantasies, and isolation.

Lauren James is the founder of the Climate Fiction Writers League, and member of the Society of Authors’ Sustainability Committee. She works as a consultant on climate storytelling for museums, production companies, major brands and publishers, with a focus on optimism and hope. Her books have sold over two hundred thousand copies worldwide in seven languages. write climate fiction. She writes about climate change, environmental issues, and social injustice which are often dealt with dystopian society. She uses short sentences and paragraphs, simple words and metaphors, and catchy titles to create a clear and engaging narrative voice. From her very young age she always wanted to do something science based, because she really enjoyed science. Thus, she tried to write from the very beginning about characters who are interested in science and have things that they’re good at, but who are also just normal people trying to live a normal life.

I really wanted to make a flawed character because every woman is worth reading about, as long as they are human: with whatever strengths and weaknesses that includes. They don’t have to be likeable and admirable and special to be deserving of attention. Being an individual is all women need to do to be strong and respected. That’s it. Wear pink dresses or wear black combat trousers. Long for a relationship or spend your time fighting enemies (or both). Girls don’t need to prove themselves as

strong. They are already enough. (James, Author Interview: Lauren James – *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe*)

This is what Lauren James responded to the interviewer with. Readers who have experienced comparable difficulties in life may find inspiration in Romy. The narrative centres on Romy Silvers, the lone survivor of a spacecraft that is on its way to a new planet to create a second home for humanity amid the stars. Until Romy learns about a new spacecraft that left Earth carrying just a guy named J, she is *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe* and is stranded alone in space. Their sole means of contact is email, and because of their remote location, it takes months for their letters to get across space. Romy discovers that she is in love with J. Love, loneliness, and the value of human connection are among the issues that are explored in the book.

Escapism is the repeated use of an activity or behaviour to distract the mind from reality or unpleasant emotions. Anyone who wants to avoid pain or discomfort may seek escapism. This may relate to life's regular challenges, traumatic events, or situations. Many types of escapism include daydreaming, reading, physical activity, work, overeating, shopping, and addictive behaviours such as alcohol, drugs, other substances, pornography, and gambling. Through Romy and J's journeys, we explore how individuals cope with adversity, seek refuge, and find solace—even in desolate circumstances. They remind us that even in the vastness of space, we seek solace, hope, and the warmth of another soul. There are several forms of escape. When daydreaming and social media scrolling become into regular coping strategies to escape reality, they are examples of escapism. These kinds of activities are acceptable and, when done purposefully and sparingly, may even be advantageous. Escapism, can be detrimental if overindulged in. It is concerning if you are indulging in a certain kind of getaway unintentionally or for longer than you meant to. Common types of escapism are media, physical activity, daydreaming, overeating and literature. Instead of analysing or experiencing emotions, escapism can be used to repress them.

The novel also explores the psychological effects of isolation and loneliness on Romy, who has spent her entire life on board *The Infinity*, without any human contact or physical touch. She suffers from anxiety, panic attacks, and nightmares, and she relies on therapy videos and fan fiction to cope with her stress and boredom. She also has low self-esteem and doubts her abilities as a commander and a writer. She craves human connection and validation, which makes her vulnerable to Jeremy Shoreditch's manipulation and deception. Commander J exploits Romy's loneliness and insecurity by pretending to be her friend and love interest, and by hacking into her ship's systems and sabotaging her mission. Romy is a resilient and resourceful heroine, who manages to overcome J's betrayal and violence by using her intelligence, courage, and creativity. She fights back against J and escapes from his ship. She also manages to repair her ship and resume her mission. She realises that she is not alone, as she has a connection with the people on Earth and the new planet. She also finds

hope and happiness in herself and her dreams. She learns to trust her own instincts and to value her own voice. She becomes the author of her own story, rather than a character in J's fantasy.

Romy Silvers, the main character who spends years alone on a spacecraft, embodies the idea of escapism. Romy uses her obsessive obsession with her favorite TV program, "Loch & Ness," as her main means of escape from the weight of her obligations and her loneliness. Romy uses her escape as a coping technique to save herself from facing her more serious worries and fears. Romy's dependence on escapism grows as the plot develops and her connection with Earth is hampered, making it harder to distinguish between fact and fiction. Romy's primary means of escape is her fixation on the made-up television program "Loch & Ness." She takes her mind off of her loneliness and the weight of her duties as the captain of the ship for a short while.

Romy's distress can be seen throughout the novel in various situations like the ship nearly being hit by an asteroid, when she lost the communication with the Earth and afraid of losing Molly. When Romy hears about the arrival of *The Infinity* from NASA she was filled with happiness. "I break out into giggles, leaning back in my seat and smiling at the ceiling. I'm not going to be on my own any more" (21). She was happy to meet a person in real life after so many years. At the same time, she was sad thinking that The NASA would *prioritize The Eternity*. A person who wants to escape from reality tries to find fault with one's own self or with others. Romy thought that she has been replaced by *The Eternity*. She was the only option that they had to complete the mission, now *The Eternity* had been launched she felt that the crew members of *The Eternity* would hate her because she feels inferior.

Romy's escapism is a psychological coping strategy that she uses to deal with her loneliness and isolation on the spaceship *The Infinity*. She escapes from her reality by creating fantasy worlds where she is not alone and where she can find love and happiness. She emails J every day and tell him everything about herself and her life on *The Infinity*. He makes her feel less lonely. Romy escapes from her boredom by watching movies, listening to music, and reading books that she downloaded from Earth. She enjoys the entertainment and the culture that she missed out on. She also learns new skills and hobbies, such as baking, knitting, and coding. "I learnt to juggle when I was ten" (96). The emails with J provide her with a sense of connection, even though they are delayed and distant. They allow her to escape the crushing loneliness of her reality.

Romy wants to escape from reality by writing fiction not to think of the memory of her mother. This can be seen in the following quotation. "Forcing myself to think of something else, instead, I start writing a new fiction" (83). Romy always write about the things that she wants to experience in her real life. "My fanfics are always set on Earth too. Museums and thunderstorms are so much more exciting than rocket ships and supernovas" (19). She was advised to write a diary



instead of a fiction by Molly. “As a distraction, I decide to write a fic” (23). But she chose to write a fiction because she felt “that would be too real” (23).

Lauren James skilfully weaves this theme into the fabric of the novel, inviting readers to consider the power of escapism and the lengths we go to find solace, even in the most desolate circumstances. Technology becomes her lifeline, bridging the gap between her and J. This highlights how technology can both isolate and connect us, depending on how one use it. Overall, *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe* intricately weaves escapism theory into the fabric of its characters, particularly Romy Silvers, as they navigate the challenges of isolation, loneliness, and the blurred lines between fantasy and reality. Through their journeys, the novel explores the complex ways in which individuals cope with adversity and seek refuge from their harsh realities.

The novel thus offers a nuanced and realistic portrayal of the human condition, as it shows the dark and light sides of escapism. It shows how escapism can be a coping mechanism, a source of inspiration, or a form of denial, depending on how one uses it. It also shows how escapism can have positive or negative consequences, depending on how one balances it with reality. The novel challenges the reader to reflect on their own relationship with escapism, and to question the role of technology, media, and fiction in their lives. The novel ultimately celebrates the power of human connection, hope, and agency, as it shows how Romy transcends her loneliness and becomes *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe*.

Ultimately, Romy’s journey in *The Loneliest Girl in the Universe* is not just a physical one but also an emotional one, as she learns to confront her loneliness and embrace her inner strength. Escapism theory provides a lens through which we can understand Romy’s character development and the ways in which she navigates her isolation in space.

Works Cited

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