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Identity Design: Challenging Archetypes with Feminist Approaches to Video Game Design

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IDENTITY DESIGN: CHALLENGING ARCHETYPES WITH FEMINIST
APPROACHES TO VIDEO GAME DESIGN

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
in Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design

by
Lauren Woolbright
May 2016

Accepted by:
Dr. Jan Rune Holmevik, Committee Chair
Dr. Kimberly S. Manganelli
Dr. Beth Ann Lauritis
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ABSTRACT

Lack of diversity in video games and the mainstream games industry warrants an inclusive, feminist approach to game design. Producing a feminist video game as a core component of my dissertation will impact rhetorical, literary, game, and feminist studies, emphasizing the benefits of embracing electrated and playful modes of identity formation and pedagogy.

DEDICATION

To women of every gender playing and designing games, especially those facing discrimination in game spaces and gaming communities, I dedicate this work in hopes that our situation may see improvement every day.

To my family, without whose constant affection this project could never have come into being.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There is a lot to love about video games, especially for those of us who have grown up with games in our lives, in whatever form they took. For me, it was *Warcraft II*, *3D Dinosaur Adventure* on CD-ROM, *Jetpack's* level-creator, and *Aladdin* for Sega Genesis that shaped me. But it didn't take many years for me to drift away from games, subconsciously understanding that they were not really *for* me, but for my brother and his friends, who played mostly *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Quake III*. I got caught up in sports, dance, and band instead.

Why are games marketed to boys and not girls, men and not women? What was it making me feel excluded when I enjoyed games so much? Why were college boys so resistant to sharing the controller when they were playing capture the flag in *Halo 3*, and why, when I did get a chance to play, did I feel so exposed and judged that I quickly gave it back and went back to watching? I was uncomfortable, but I shook it off and moved on to other things.

Only in 2013 when I read about the trolling and harassment of Anita Sarkeesian as she attempted to crowd source her new feminist series about video games did I realize just how much negativity women in the gaming world face. Sarkeesian's YouTube channel, Feminist Frequency, had already established her as a voice of cultural critique with regards to popular culture, and her series "Tropes Vs. Women" had received a respectable level of attention from viewers. But her proposal on Kickstarter asking for

\$6,000 in support of a new series entitled “Tropes Vs. Women in Games” elicited a level of rage and harassment only the internet could muster. The opposition to her campaign had the unintended effect of bringing the project to the attention of 6,968 supporters, and her proposal closed with \$158,922 of funding raised.¹ Given the level of funding, Sarkeesian increased the number of proposed videos from five to thirteen, which has since gone even beyond that, and as they continue to be released, she faces continuous trolling in the form of rape and death threats, weaponized pornography, impersonation, and conspiracy theory.²

It all went downhill from there, because #GamerGate’s explosion of open misogyny toward women participating in any aspect of video games culture was right around the corner in August of 2014, and I found its proponents’ sentiments mirrored in politicians, the Men’s Rights movement, and my own students. #GamerGate is just a microcosm for our society as a whole. That means the questions it raises are posed to everyone, and not just gamers.

#GamerGate began with a bitter ex-boyfriend seeking revenge on a woman for choosing another partner over him, and for developing a video game with a larger purpose than entertainment in a fantasy world. Under a thin façade of outrage at breaches of ethics in video games journalism³ (which is an actual problem #GamerGate has done little to change), #GamerGaters targeted, not the major companies and publications guilty

¹ “Tropes Vs Women in Video Games.” Kickstarter.com. 19 Jan 2016. Web. 10 Feb 2016.

² Anita Sarkeesian. “Harassment Through Impersonation: The Creation of a Cybermob.” FeministFrequency.com. 10 Dec 2015. Web. 8 Feb 2016.

³ When a game is about to be released, companies will send out free, exclusive copies to certain prominent publications in order to solicit positive reviews, the implication being that should the reviews be less than pleasing to the company, that publication will no longer receive insider information or sneak-peeks at upcoming titles.



Fig. 1.1: “An example of the harassment as captured in “GTFO.”” From: Christopher Rosen, Huffington Post. 13 Mar 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/13/gtfo-sexism-in-gaming_n_6804106.html (accessed 10 Feb 2016)

of infringement of those ethics, but women making games—any games, mainstream or independent—female journalists, and critics like Sarkeesian. Not only did these women receive a deluge of alarming rape and death threats against themselves and their families, but they also suffered doxxing, a method in which a hacker can determine where someone’s IP address is physically located. #GamerGaters find a woman’s physical address and then blast it all over social media with calls to those opposing her to go there (or at least threaten to) and, at the very least, harass her in person. This practice takes the idle talk of rape and death threats to a whole new level of fear and psychological harm, as these women must always ask themselves as they try to go about their normal lives whether some hateful and rage-filled gamer might be lurking in the bushes outside their homes, waiting to make good on their online promises.

These were not the only forms of trolling women experienced. Sarkeesian explains in her 2014 talk at XOXO how people make fake accounts on social media posing as her, using her image and logo, and saying awful things so that she could then be quoted as having said them and thus outrage and hatred against her might be spread. For example, when Nintendo CEO Satoru Iwata passed away in July of 2015, an imposter Tweeted from an account posing as Sarkeesian, “Satoru Iwata was the pinpoint for most of the misogyny in this industry, although we are not glad he’s dead, we’re glad he’s gone” and “With his death, perhaps Nintendo will finally be able to break from the male supremacy narrative it has been forcing on its fanbase for so long.” Sarkeesian points out in Tweets just after this that she saw the hateful responses to these supposed messages of hers before she even read about Iwata’s death.⁴ This tactic is referred to as impersonation, and it is common when, as Sarkeesian points out, “Slander and libel are the background radiation of [women’s] lives on the internet.”⁵

Locating the individuals behind these tactics is next to impossible, and even if they were found, current laws and limitations in law enforcement would prevent meaningful consequences for their actions. Awareness is spreading, “safe” spaces online are being created, and laws are improving all the time, but things are progressing too slowly to put women’s minds at ease, and many speaking out about this online wonder whether it will take an actual incident to spur the changes needed to make a difference to

⁴ Anita Sarkeesian. “Harassment Through Impersonation: The Creation of a Cyber Mob.” FeministFrequency.com. (10 Dec 2015), accessed 10 Feb 2016

⁵ “Anita Sarkeesian Speaking at the XOXO Conference.” FeministFrequency.com. (Sept 2014). Last update 7 Oct 2014



Feminist Frequency
@femfreq

Follow

Today marks the 3rd time I've gone on stage after specific death and bomb threats were issued to an event where I'm scheduled to speak.

Reply Retweet Favorite More

RETWEETS
1,543

FAVORITES
901



3:04 PM - 11 Oct 2014

Fig. 1.2: Anita Sarkeesian continues to speak at events, even when threats abound. From: Sarah Burke, "Moral Combat" 15 Oct 2014 East Bay Express, <http://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/moral-combat/Content?oid=4097307> (accessed 10 Feb 2016)

those being harassed. In the meantime, fear has pushed a number of women out of the game development industry entirely or pushed them from mainstream to independent development, and the situation does nothing to encourage young women to enter any technical field, least of all games.

Cultures online are not the only space perpetuating problems in game development. I am a member of the Facebook group "Women in Gaming and Tech," and discussion frequently revolves around the lack of respect and minor to blatant sexual harassment women face in the tech workplace on a daily basis. Women are routinely passed over for promotion, their opinions are devalued, and they find themselves unwelcome in the social cultures of the gaming industry in comparison with their male associates.

As women have tried to advocate for themselves in this industry, they find themselves ostracized even further by their male peers, perceived as having “no sense of humor” and “ruining” the fun of working in the industry. The stereotype that women are constantly overreacting and falsely accusing men of harassment, using the basis of Title IX, is prevalent across the Western world even outside of games. The reality is that white men, who have held power for so long, have no sense of the effects of their day-to-day attitudes and demeanor toward others, and it will take some time for them to adjust to be more sensitive to how their learned and historically culturally-sanctioned behaviors affect others. In the meantime, bitterness about having to be politically correct all the time will run rampant. I am convinced that this is why Donald Trump appealed to so many people, particularly white men, during the 2016 GOP election cycle.

Exigency

Part of the impetus behind this dissertation is a quest to peer into the appalling darkness of #GamerGate and make some sense of its senselessness, thereby leading to some way of improving the situation. Rather than focusing on these problems in all their intricacy, I would propose solutions open to those adversely affected. First, there is no conversation to be had on #GamerGate, in its sub-reddit communities, or on 4Chan about these questions; GamerGaters have no interest in considering anyone else’s perspective, but only of loudly and violently asserting their own, so don’t feed the trolls. Instead, we should turn to online spaces where meaningful discussion *is* happening. If those truly trying to discuss ethics in video games journalism want to have that conversation, they

need to show their empathy for the women being harassed in the GamerGate hashtag and remove themselves to some other place to put forward their ideas.

Second and most crucial of all is the reality that if we, the feminists of all genders, races, and backgrounds, want to see changes in the games we play, the industry that makes them, and the expectations and attitudes of players themselves, we are going to have to roll up our sleeves and start making those games ourselves. Speaking out from the powerful position of critique as Sarkeesian and others have done is a first step, but it does nothing to recommend us to the (for the most part) men who feel so threatened by our perspectives, and there is no point in trying; it only fuels their fear and hatred. If we instead design games that accomplish what we would prefer to experience through gameplay, then we will have what we want: games for a new generation. There is no time to waste sitting around waiting for a myopic industry to see the light. We have to make the games we want, or they will never come into being.

To make this second call to action a reality, there are many levels at which we need to move. We need to encourage and facilitate young women and minorities learning the coding and design technologies used in the games industry, starting with children all the way up through adults considering a career change. And while indie development is a vital space of experimentation and exploration of what is possible in games, and should therefore be a welcoming space for designers, unless we enter the mainstream game development field in greater numbers, we will remain outsiders and our outsider perspective will never—or rarely will—make it inside.

We also need to recognize that game development is not purely a computer science endeavor; we need excellent writers, good leaders and project managers, artists, and musicians to consider working in the games industry as well. Thus we should also encourage young people—and those considering a career change—of all disciplines to think about how their skill sets might contribute to making games. Better writing in particular will go a long way in helping games appeal to the diverse audiences they now encompass.

Third (and closely related to my first point), no matter how negative the trolls may be, we should try our best to take a leaf out of James Gunn's book and treat them—or at least think of them—with some empathy. Gunn wrote an open letter when Joss Whedon was forced by hateful Tweets to temporarily abandon his Twitter account, and in an encouragingly human take on the concept of trolling, he writes,

It's easy to be outraged by these tweets," he wrote. "But whatever these angry tweeters are in need of, I don't think it's more anger and more rage thrown back at them on Twitter. I actually think that's what they're seeking. But what they need is something different. Compassion, maybe? A kind request for boundaries? I don't know. Maybe you guys have some ideas.⁶

Because I am a gamer myself, I understand well how play comes to define some part of a person's identity, and given how much time and energy some people put toward their play—how seriously they take it, how much of their life it can take up—I also understand how watching someone like Sarkeesian take to task the very content that has become part of the fabric of someone's being would be threatening to the very core. Gamers—indeed, nerds of all stripes—have traditionally faced intense bullying and been socially ostracized for being different. That is precisely why many of them have turned to games in search of

⁶ James Gunn, personal Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/jgunn/posts/10152654464001157>

companionship, validation, the chance to be the hero, the freedom to choose who to be, and the opportunity to be truly powerful and good at something. Understanding that while still not condoning reactive behavior is key to progressing beyond GamerGate. I must insist, though: this does not mean we need to engage with trolls on any level; I strongly urge against it. We will never convince them to see our perspective. That is not what they want. They only want our silence. Instead, we should move away from the internet's troll holes, block those spreading hatred, and spend our energy speaking to those who are willing to engage in meaningful dialogue on these issues.

I married a gamer who never had to question whether he belonged to the subculture that partly forms his identity, and I have been lucky in that he never questioned my welcome-ness in it, either, even though I have a strong (and stereotypical) preference for certain genres of video games; puzzle-platformers are dearest to my heart, and my first-person shooter skills are woefully under-developed. But in listening to Sarkeesian call out games for their thoughtless representations of women, I found myself yearning to *do* something, not just add my voice to the mounting criticism of games, and so in spite of the fact that the very gamers I am trying to reach will discredit me as a “casual” in the most negative sense imaginable, I have brought my love of storytelling, character development, and the true poetry that results when form and content seamlessly align to create a game that answers my concerns about representation and stereotypes in video games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Game Studies and the Rhetorics of Design

Reality and virtual reality have always had a strained relationship. Beginning with scholars like Johann Huizinga—who focuses on play in general, developing the idea of “homo ludens,” or the “man as player”⁷—and transforming through McKenzie Wark’s dark claim that we never leave gamespace⁸ and Jane McGonigal’s sunnier call to make life more enjoyable by gamifying it,⁹ scholars have often struggled to distinguish or blur the lines between “reality” and digital spaces. Huizinga coined the term the “magic circle” to discuss the separation of game worlds from ordinary worlds, claiming that there is little crossover, and Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman co-opted the term for video games, expanding it to explain that in-game ethics and personas do not necessarily translate into ordinary world attitudes or repercussions (partly a response to claims that video games make people more violent).¹⁰

The magic circle is not impermeable, however; evidence put forward by Adrienne Shaw in her qualitative study *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* suggests that video gamers bring their ordinary world attitudes and issues into games perhaps more so than they are impacted by those they come across in games. She also claims that, based on her interviews, players are more likely to identify with characters with whom they share some sort of background experience or whose

⁷ Johan Huizinga. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. (Roy Publishers), 1950

⁸ McKenzie Wark. *Gamer Theory*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP), 2007. 001

⁹ Jane McGonigal. *Reality is Broken*. (London: Penguin), 2011

¹⁰ Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, eds. *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. (MIT Press), 2006.

personality traits they like than they do with characters representing their own demographic.¹¹ Representation, Shaw claims, does not equal identification, an important point for games scholars trying to make a case for more diversity and fairness in representations of characters. Play can also be an outlet for repressed, inappropriate, and taboo subject positions; it can also be a way to explore ideal selves or consider “what-ifs.” So it seems to be more accurate to claim that play is likely to help video gamers understand themselves better and gives them a way to express what would otherwise be inexpressible than to say that games dramatically change people, whether for better or worse.

This is not to discourage designers from making serious games that attempt to sway their audiences to certain ideologies or political positions¹² such as the persuasive games Ian Bogost is famous for and about which he has written widely (*Persuasive Games, How To Do Things With Video Games*). These genres are still useful in communicating political and social issues quickly and in the context of the events they speak to, and they have obvious ordinary world connections that obliterate the magic circle. Longer games designed primarily for entertainment still have plenty of content worth analyzing for how they represent ordinary world problems, race and gender being of primary concern for me in their connection to in-game identity creation.

Games can be valuable educational tools, regardless of whether they claim to be educational or not. James Paul Gee has written quite a bit on the subject of games as

¹¹ Adrienne Shaw. *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P), 2015.

¹² For example, *September 12th* by Gonzalo Frasca, *Darfur is Dying* by Susanna Ruiz, *Hush* by University of Southern California MFA students Jamie Antonisse and Devon Johnson, *Windfall* by Ian Bogost

education, particularly for school-age kids (the most famous being *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*), though he fails to recognize the lack of ludic literacy in students, assuming, as many do, that they are the digital natives we expect them to be. Henry Jenkins argues in “Gendered Gamespaces” using his own childhood compared to his son’s that exploratory play in video games is not fundamentally all that different from playing outside (not an argument most parents want to hear, nor most environmentalists). Jane McGonigal outlines how important play is continuing into adulthood, compiling evidence about connections between hard work and human happiness and what about playing video games fulfills criteria for happiness. In *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games* Jesper Juul picks apart the value of failure as a core component of games, the main lessons being that failure is not the end of the world, we must cope with frustration and failure if we want to succeed, and success is more meaningful when it is hard-won.¹³

From their foundations as purely ludic artifacts (early games attempted to tell no story or had only very basic plot elements, think Pong, Pacman), advances in technologies and ever-expanding audience bases have made possible a wide variety of narrative forms in games, and thus was born the war between ludology and narratology. Ludic elements of games include the limits set by mechanics, coding languages, and design choices from art style to avatar design. But scholars like Brenda Romero and Henry Jenkins, drawing on McLuhan’s discussions of the characteristics of new media, argue that mechanics and narrative are inextricable. Miguel Sicart also favors games

¹³ Jesper Juul. *The Art of Failure: An Essay on the Pain of Playing Video Games*. (MIT Press), 2013.

whose stories are reinforced or even entirely bound up in their mechanics. In games that lean toward the ludic, story resides almost entirely with the player: the story is the story of that person playing the game the way they played it that one instance. There is little in the game that directs the player through a formal plot. Sandbox games do this well, though some such as Costikyan would argue that these are not games, but toys.¹⁴

Yet increasingly popular are narrative games that place the player on “rails”¹⁵ and do not allow for much straying. Beginning with Japanese role-playing games (JRPGs), in which the player directs their avatar—a set and pre-determined character over whose development they have no say—through combat, but has no control over the story, which is told in cut-scenes between combats. One example of this is *The Last of Us*, which encourages players to think of themselves as driving the action, but which really has them on rails—a much simpler prospect from a design standpoint than coding in every potential option. This narrative-driven style has yielded extremely popular and critically acclaimed games by TellTale (*The Walking Dead season 1&2*, *The Wolf Among Us*, *Game of Thrones*). In these games, the player’s decisions regarding their relationships with other characters are meaningful and alter the outcome of the game, but the major plot points are set and cannot be altered by players. TellTale strikes a balance here in that they simplify game design by determining the general plot, but still allow players to experience a variety of consequences based on their decisions in certain moments. In some ways, these games feel true to real life, in which much about our situation is out of our control, but our choices do matter. The variety of possibilities on the spectrum of

¹⁴ Greg Costikyan. “I Have No Words and I Must Design.” *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. (MIT Press), 2006.

¹⁵ This is a common metaphor in games culture without a clear origin.

narrative-driven to mechanics-driven games means that some games do certain things very well by sacrificing in other areas, and that makes for an exciting breadth of design potential in developers' choice of where on the spectrum of narratology to ludology their game falls.

Video games call player ethics into question in ways that other media never do, leaving game scholars like Henry Jenkins and Miguel Sicart to contemplate what makes games ethical or not and what steps might we take as designers to make more ethical games. In the 1990s, several female programmers (Brenda Laurel, Theresa Duncan) started thinking about what made games so appealing for boys, but not as appealing to girls, and they took it upon themselves to design games that were meant to cater to female interests.¹⁶ Jenkins discusses some of these games in his article “Complete Freedom of Movement: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces.” He points out that Laurel and Duncan both created slow-paced, exploration based games that mimicked popular girls' fiction in their focus on relationships over adventure, and these games—Laurel's in particular—failed to empower girls by representing narrowly defined gender roles that were perceived as just as insulting as the one-dimensional shoot-'em-up games were to boys.¹⁷ Designing and marketing games “for girls” was not working.

Jenkins aptly picks up on the failings of the “games for girls” movement even writing his article in the midst of it, before its decline. But what exactly went wrong, aside from the reinforcement of strict gender boundaries and rigid stereotypes? Greg

¹⁶ It is noteworthy that in spite of the ungendered abstraction of many 1980s games and the violent themes arising in video game content of the 1990s (*Duke Nukem*, *Quake*), marketers and programmers alike seemed to accept video games as primarily a medium meant for children, a perspective that is now incredibly outdated.

¹⁷ Henry Jenkins. “Complete Freedom of Movement: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces.” *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. (MIT Press), 2006.

Costikyan, a game designer writing around the same time, brings lessons from his background experiences with tabletop roleplay and game design to video game design. In “I Have No Words and I Must Design,” he explains that not all games are really games; some games are puzzles (these are static) and some are toys (these have no goal; sandbox video games like *The Sims*, for example). To qualify as a game, the designer must include a token (in video games, an avatar) with whom a player makes decisions, uses meaningful resource management mechanics, and has a goal, several components of which “games for girls” were missing.

Roland Barthes famously referred to some types of writing as “readerly” and others as “writerly” in *S/Z*,¹⁸ and he brings it up again in *The Pleasure of the Text*.¹⁹ Readerly texts are thought to have fixed meanings that are merely inscribed on or transferred to the passive reader. The messages in such works are linear and authors conform to standards of writing that are traditional and generally accepted. Texts like this attempt to clarify rather than conceal or question meaning, and their writers would prefer them not to be subject to multiple possible interpretations. Writerly texts, by contrast, are open to control by the reader. They expose the illusions perpetuated by readerly texts, one being that language can communicate universal truth universally. The possibility of multiple interpretations of any given piece of writing is the basis of Barthes’s claim that the author is dead; he means that the author’s intended meaning is unimportant, not to mention impossible to know in most cases, and the reader is the site of meaning, not the

¹⁸ Roland Barthes and Honoré de Balzac. *S/Z*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil), 1970. 5

¹⁹ Roland Barthes. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Robert Miller. (New York: Hill and Wang), 1975.

text. Costikyan ends his article on a similar note with the statement that meaning does not reside in game mechanics or in the story, but with the player.

In *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay*, Miguel Sicart continues to develop his ideas regarding video game ethics from his previous works, emphasizing his claim that for games to be ethical, they must not provide overt mechanics that reinforce a structure of right and wrong developed by game designers, but should allow players to explore this for themselves. The most ethical games provide players with challenging moral situations, but do not proscribe in the game's code which choice is the "right" one. Even if players make what ethicists might call the best possible choice, this does not guarantee a positive outcome.

Making design decisions like this for Sicart means thinking in "designerly" ways,²⁰ and while he states that he did not have Barthes in mind when he chose this term,²¹ it troubles Barthes's binary in productive ways. Barthes intended the term "writerly" to denote an approach to reading as a creative act, but he never goes so far as to call the writerly reader to do much beyond creating another text to be read. He is firmly entrenched in literate modes, which is not surprising given that he was writing well before the computer age. If we alter Sicart's term to mean something more like "playing the text" and think of it as reading the text and then making something of it, specifically something multimodal, something digital, something with aesthetics and play in mind, then we advance reading to include more types of texts than ones made up of

²⁰ Miguel Sicart. *Beyond Choices: The Design of Ethical Gameplay*. (MIT Press), 2013.

²¹ Per email correspondence with him.

written words, and we privilege “reading” (play) as an integral part of design and making as an integral part of reading.

Players are rhetoricians, and there are a number of ways in which this is true. Hewing closely for now to Barthes’s writerly reading practices, the ways that video gamers choose to play and which games they play have a great deal to say about them as human beings, whether we are talking about ethics or their Dasein in general. Richard Bartle wrote an article in the 1990s²² describing the different ways that people approach play, specifically in online group environments. He was writing about multi-user dungeons (MUDs), which were an early form of massively multiplayer online (MMO) games, but the types apply to any games with an open-world format (allowing players freedom to explore at will, but still providing some structure and goals). Bartle uses the suits from a deck of cards to represent each player type: hearts is the social player, the person who is online to make friends, hang out with friends, and work cooperatively together; diamonds is the player who wants the most resources and all the best stuff; spades is the explorer, the player who wants to see everything, complete every quest, and find every Easter egg (hidden thing, especially if it references something familiar outside the game world); and clubs is the killer, the one who wants to be unbeatable in combat. Each type of play requires a different set of strategies and skills, and each one has a different set of goals to pursue through play.

Sandbox games are even more open and allow even more freedom than open-world games do. These are the kinds of games that Costikyan refers to as toys rather than

²² Richard Bartle. “Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades: Players Who Suit MUDs.” 1996. *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. (MIT Press), 2006.

games because they have no goal, so they get boring quickly unless the player makes her own goals.²³ *Minecraft* drops players in a pixelated natural landscape and lets them figure out how to survive starvation, build things, and fight off the zombies and creepers that attack in the night. Players have been known to create vast cities in *Minecraft*, and the “seed” walkthrough has become its own genre on YouTube (players can determine to a small degree what kind of landscape they play in by typing in a code or word or phrase; the corresponding area and its terrain is known as a “seed”). There are some mechanics in *Minecraft* that can be easily exploited without negative repercussion. Players can breed livestock, for example; they can toss two of the same type of animal together in a pit and they will breed until the pit is full. If the hole is deep enough, players can have thousands of sheep in a pit, and they will constantly make more, will not die, and do not suffer.

Games like *The Sims* give players a godlike status, allowing them to control everything from what characters look like and whether they live or die to the weather and natural disasters in the world. Sadistic players of *Sims* games have been known to drown characters in pools or wall them up in rooms and watch them go insane and starve, bringing a conversation about player ethics back to the forefront.

Single-player games are fairly low-stakes ethically speaking when one compares them to the behavior of video gamers in online environments, partly because of the blurring of the boundary between ordinary and game worlds. *World of Warcraft*'s infamous Serenity Now! incident²⁴ is a case-in-point of that blurry line; on a server where players can kill other players, one guild held an in-game funeral for a player who had

²³ Greg Costikyan. “I Have No Words and I Must Design.” *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. Eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman. (MIT Press), 2006.

²⁴ “Serenity Now – Funeral Crash.” Longstreet42. YouTube.com. 18 Jun 2008.

recently passed away in real life, and as the event was publicized on the online forums, a guild from the opposite faction showed up at the funeral and massacred all the attendees.

Games are fast becoming accepted as art with notable recognition as such by the Supreme Court in 2011. In this case, the state of California made the same claim many games scholars have made: the immersive nature of games sets them apart from other media. But the state saw this as a disqualification from First Amendment protections for games, wanting the freedom to limit game designers' ability to create games with violent, sexual, or otherwise morally "questionable" content; however, the court maintained that reader/viewer choice in media is nothing new (we have the choose-your-own-adventure genre of literature, for example) and violence has been a part of human storytelling from our roots as oral cultures.²⁵ Therefore, as an expressive medium, games deserve the same protections afforded film, television, and literature, effectively legitimizing them as art.

In her book *Rise of the Video Game Zinesters*, Anna Anthropy describes her impulse to design video games as one that stemmed mainly from the fact that she loved to play video games, but in looking around, there were simply none that represented experiences that were anything like her own.²⁶ Up until recently, most triple A titles were gun-based rhetoric with little concern for diversity, and while the indie games market is thriving and full of interesting, beautiful, and off-beat games, there is still reason to want to compose for oneself. Anthropy happily acknowledges the availability of many game

²⁵ John Sutter. "Supreme Court sees video games as art." CNN.com. (27 June 2011). Accessed 5 October 2015.

²⁶ Anna Anthropy. *Rise of the Video Game Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Drop-Outs, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You Are Taking Back An Art Form*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012. Kindle edition.

engines and the ease with which a person with no coding experience can pick some of them up, she calls for more effort to make game design more widely accessible.

Feminism and Monstrosity, Then and Now

Hélène Cixous, as well as many of the most prominent French feminists of the 1960s and '70s (Irigaray, Kristeva) rejected the term “feminist” and insisted that they did not wish to be associated with feminist ideology in France. These writers saw feminism as a movement trapped in the same binary structure that it attempted to protest. They saw a distinction between feminism and the women’s movement, the former being a static demand for power and the latter demanding respect and “social legitimization” of women. Strangely, as Toril Moi points out, feminist protests during this period would often be in turn protested by women’s movement proponents. The lack of solidarity among women was a major problem for both attempts to advance women’s rights and did much to harm them politically, but unification was precisely something the writers in question wished to avoid.

Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva all write from the perspective that language is itself a masculine system in which all women are trapped and from which they must struggle to break free, and each has a unique approach to accomplishing this. In the 1970s, Cixous produced several seminal feminist texts, including “The Laugh of the Medusa.” In it, she discusses what she calls “écriture féminine” (“women’s writing”), at the same time rejecting the term as a label made possible by the patriarchal structure of binaries, which she means to dismantle by claiming that women are inherently bisexual while men are

hopelessly trapped in phallic thinking and phallic writing.²⁷ Cixous's own style embodies the non-rational, metaphorical, abstract techniques she saw as integral to bisexual writing. Irigaray and Kristeva tend toward the same style as Cixous, though with slightly different voices. It is difficult to separate what is meant by "women's writing" and bisexual writing, since they share many of the same characteristics. Bisexual writing, it would seem, serves to acknowledge the influence that patriarchy has had on women's writing through education and language itself, but the writing style is innately feminine, according to the parameters Cixous sets. This view also figures prominently in Irigaray's "This Sex Which Is Not One."²⁸

As it shifted from second- to third-wave, mainstream feminism continued to exclude, and many see this as an on-going problem. The term feminism is widely associated with white bourgeois women, and the French feminists with their emphasis on psychoanalysis and theory in the context of the women's movement of the 1960s and '70s do nothing to remedy this.

Black feminism, however, provides a fruitful counterpoint. Angela Davis's *Women, Race, Class* clarifies the black experience of theoretical and political feminism, correcting fallacious analyses of gender in black communities beginning with slavery and describing black women's experiences of the women's rights movements of the 20th century.²⁹ Audre Lorde, a black lesbian writer who considers herself first and foremost a poet rather than an activist or feminist, speaks strongly about inclusivity as a necessity for feminism's success. In "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,"

²⁷ Helene Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Chicago Journals*. 1:4 (Summer 1976) 875-893. *JSTOR*.

²⁸ Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 1985.

²⁹ Angela Davis. *Women Race & Class*. (New York: Random House), 1981.

she calls out academe as a primary offender in considering feminism only from the perspective of white middle class women, excluding LGBTQ, minority, and indigenous communities of women, likely without even realizing their omission.³⁰

French feminism still has much to offer an ethic of heuritic design and play. Luce Irigaray's famous reading of Plato's Cave allegory, which appears in "Speculum of the Other Woman," presents several interesting considerations for game designers and players thinking about identity creation in games. She calls us not to emerge from the cave (for her, a womb) into the harsh light of patriarchy where everything takes on Aristotelian genus/species analytics of perfect scientific classification and rejects all contradiction; she would rather turn inward and, freed from the chains and the shadow puppets of Plato's philosophic nightmare, explore the cave more deeply. Irigaray discusses the male gaze (the speculum being the object used to gaze more deeply into the vagina) and the simultaneous usefulness of the speculum in allowing for the deeper exploration of the feminine as well as its problematic positioning of the subject outside the feminine and insistence on categorization and interpretation of the view from a masculine perspective.³¹ Thus springs her call to start from within the cave and never emerge, but to find a passage that leads down deeper into the darkness, into the self, however terrifying it might be at first. Recognizing the exclusion of women of color and women living in poverty from mainstream feminism, for example, would be one trip down into the darkness for feminism as a social movement, one that might be productive

³⁰ Audre Lorde. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 2007.

³¹ Luce Irigaray. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 1985.

for society precisely in the possibilities it holds for the individuals making such a journey.

The turn inward toward individual selfhood is also a productive one for players and game designers. Games have the potential to not only present us with a variety of new subject positions to inhabit, but also help us cope with our darkest desires. In “The Monster Within,” her review of *Hotline Miami*, an extremely difficult indie game featuring a high level of violence, Liz Ryerson analyzes the murderous intent of the player and the results of entering the mind of a killer through the experience of play. She posits that games are a “safe” way to explore the more disturbing aspects of humanity, particularly the violent ones. Games can help us face the fact that we revel in violence and understand what makes it so compelling to us. She points out—as many speaking against fears of video game violence have—that while many people play video games with violent content, only a few already disturbed individuals take up real guns and leave the living room.³²

Second wave feminism is as much a product of the angst of the Victorian period as we are today. Elaine Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle* outlines many of these connections, though I will not go into them here; suffice to say that Victorian fears of the feminine are foundational (more or less consciously) for French feminist thinkers like Irigaray and Kristeva.³³ Julia Kristeva has much to say about feminism, female writers, and feminine writing, but for this project I am more interested in her work on abjection. She is well known for her subversion of norms and

³² Liz Ryerson. “The Monster Within” (*Midnight Resistance*. 5 Nov 2012, accessed 18 August 2014)

³³ Elaine Showalter. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle*. (New York: Penguin Books), 1991.

defiance in taking up positions that some have described as “disturbing.”³⁴ Like her French feminist contemporaries, she rejects binary thinking, rationality, and labels in general as they can only simulate understanding. It is a dangerous thing, she implies, to fool ourselves into thinking we understand something when we do not.

In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva outlines her ideas on the abject. Essentially a psychological state of rejection, the abject refers to the things we exclude, our human impulse to expel unwanted things from our bodies and our lives. She writes of horror as the breakdown of boundaries between self and other, a contamination whereby the rejected person/object/concept returns to penetrate the one who rejected it (physically or psychologically, depending on what situation or genre we are considering). Abjection is “radical exclusion;” it attempts, however futilely, to strengthen the barriers erected between the self and a threat to the self, typically another person or type of person, a disease, a monster.³⁵

In her analysis of Second Wave French feminists, Toril Moi explains the move from human to posthuman and its consequences for identity, which has a strong connection to Kristeva’s abjection:

The posthuman recognizes the impurity of every available source of self; there is no retrievable authentic self. Because there is no “outside” position from which to critique ideology and representation, however, radical feminist and queer writers of genre fiction parodically immerse readers in traditional discursive histories of female sexuality in order to break up oppressive patterns and narratives of identification and identity, subjectivity and desire. Identity then becomes overwhelmed by impure, excessive discourses; it becomes a site of revolt and contestation.³⁶

³⁴ Toril Moi. *Sexual/Textual Politics*. (New York: Methuen), 1985. 175.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia UP), 1982. 1.

³⁶ Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*. 177

The posthuman self can find no identity other than a host of monstrosities, according to Moi's perspective, and that anxiety is reflected clearly in the storytelling of the Victorian period and continues through its evolution to the monster narratives of the 21st century.

Kristeva's abjection—the repulsive, rejected Other—offers some helpful points applicable to monstrosity. She writes, “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable”.³⁷ Like trauma, the abject, though rejected consciously, always returns to terrorize and never “cease[s] challenging its master”.³⁸ Female monsters are a prime example of the abject, and I am calling for them to continue challenging the master narrative of what it means to be a monstrous woman. Writers across media need to take this on in a bigger way to avoid harmful and mindless stereotyping.

The return of the abject is trauma. Kristeva focuses on what causes it; other scholars have studied its results. Eminent trauma studies scholar Cathy Caruth uses Freud's case studies of Holocaust survivors to analyze how human beings handle trauma and its repression. Even if a person cannot remember what happened to them, cannot recall the moment of trauma, it consistently resurfaces in their psyche through nightmares or flashbacks, which the person may not even understand because of the mind's repression of the event itself.³⁹

The advent of feminism coincides with the vampire's rise in the latter part of the nineteenth century in Britain and was cause for much anxiety and consternation from

³⁷ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 1.

³⁸ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 2.

³⁹ Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Intro. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP), 1995.

men and women alike. The concept of idealized femininity, the Angel of the House, was in full swing, but plenty of women rebelled against it, both in fiction and in real life.

Gissing's odd women plus open lesbians and disgruntled housewives were advocating for the New Woman, speaking in public and to the men in their lives in support of women's suffrage, the discontinuation of the confinements of traditional marriage, for appreciation of women's minds, and better understanding of women's bodies, which were unceasingly declared hysteric, weak, and vampiric by established medicine (Robinson) and religious institutions.

British empire was going strong in this period; the economic benefits, cultural curiosities, and marvelous treasures from abroad titillated the British public and made it possible for the first time ever for second and third sons to earn their fortunes in the colonies. But empire also meant a clash of cultures and the hybridity that inevitably results from such encounters. Fears of reverse colonization from immigration, of solid English men corrupted by tribal women, and of a loss of British national identity were rampant.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Bram Dijkstra writes,

When women became increasingly resistant to men's efforts to teach them, in the name of progress and evolution, how to behave within their appointed station in civilization, men's cultural campaign to educate their mates, frustrated by women's 'inherently perverse' unwillingness to conform, escalated into what can truthfully be called a war on woman—for to say 'women' would contradict a major premise of the period's antifeminine thought. If this was a war largely fought on the battlefield of words and images, where the dead and wounded fell without notice into the mass grave of lost human creativity, it was no less destructive than many real wars. Indeed, I intend to show that the intellectual assumptions which underlay the turn of the century's cultural war on woman also permitted the implementation of the genocidal race theories of Nazi Germany. (Dijkstra vii)

Elaine Showalter adds to the idea of the gender war that, "Thus while many critics and historians have described this period as a battle *between* the sexes, a period of sexual antagonism that came from male resentment of women's emancipation, I would argue that it was also a battle *within* the sexes. Men, too, faced challenges in their lives and sexual identities" (9), and importantly points out the often-forgotten fact that, "It is important to keep in mind that masculinity is no more natural, transparent, and unproblematic than 'femininity'" (8).

So the feminist movement's growth on top of all this was just too much for some. The threat of corruption within was perhaps more terrifying than the fear of invasion from the Other. British women were meant to be the foundation of virtue and model perfect Englishness so that wayward English soldiers and gentlemen could return home and be healed of their colonial entanglements and nurtured back to purity. Additionally, Showalter points out, "Racial boundaries were among the most important lines of demarcation for English society; fears not only of colonial rebellion but also racial mingling, crossbreeding, and intermarriage, fueled scientific and political interest in establishing clear lines of demarcation between black and white, East and West."⁴¹ Tales of miscegenation were particularly anxiety-producing; H.L. Malchow's *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain* centers around just this idea and illuminates a number of the fictional depictions of racial corruption that figured heavily in the Gothic, including such icons as Frankenstein's monster and Dracula.⁴²

As unrealistic as the hope of English femininity saving English masculinity was, the prospect of its being thwarted by the campaign for women's rights terrified many Englishmen and –women into reliance on rhetoric demonizing feminists as unnatural, unmotherly, unloving, murderous, oversexed, fallen women determined to bring about the nation's downfall.⁴³

⁴¹ Elaine Showalter. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle*. (New York: Penguin Books), 1991.5

⁴² Howard Malchow. *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP), 1996.

⁴³ As Toril Moi writes in *Sexual/Textual Politics*, "... behind the angel lurks the monster: the obverse of the male idealization of women is the fear of femininity. The monster is the woman who refuses to be selfless, acts on her own initiative, who *has* a story to tell—in short, a woman who rejects the submissive role patriarchy has reserved for her" (58).

Monsters of any sort embody fears and anxieties that generally indicate a society's attitudes toward the human situation. Often, they represent a struggle between body and mind. Monsters who consume their victims address problems of human appetites and self-control, and female monsters that do this add a layer of dangerous sexuality or corrupted motherhood. Victorian Gothic monsters (vampires in particular) tend to try to "pass" as normal, infiltrating the home and family before anyone suspects anything is amiss. Many of them are female, as the monster's most effective guise is one of innocence and the need for protection of men. Additionally, sexuality—embodied in the female form—was a major point of anxiety for Victorians. A woman's purity (at least an upper class woman's) was analogous with the moral strength of the nation, and if it faltered, letting corruption into the domestic sphere, Victorians feared that all sorts of evils would infiltrate England more generally. Racial corruption was another concern, as Howard Malchow explains in depth in *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain*, and many novels (and non-fictional accounts) of the time depict cannibalism, vampirism, miscegenation abroad, and the horrific possibility of British men "going native," never to return to their wives and families.⁴⁴

This has everything to do with British colonialism and empire. As England spread itself over the various lands it colonized, Victorians were at once mesmerized by the exoticism of the tribal cultures in these locales and paralyzed by fear of the Other. English men who served in the military or expanded their business ventures abroad put themselves at risk of contamination by the cultures and people they encountered.

⁴⁴ Malchow, 179

Knowing this to be an inevitable consequence of empire, recognizing the importance of British nationalism in the face of the foreign and its potential to immigrate to England or come home latent in the men who had gone abroad, Victorian writers picked up on the dangers of this collision of cultures, and the Gothic genre was born. Characterized in general by fear of the Other and often including motifs of exoticism, monstrosity as a racial characteristic, and the vulnerability of women in particular to corruption from outside forces, Victorian Gothic explored the dangers of a changing and increasingly globalized world.

Internal corruption of women was a concern of this period as well. As the turn of the 20th century approached, the women's suffrage movement picked up steam. The concepts of the New Woman (working woman), the Odd Woman (unmarried woman), and the female vampire came into British cultural imagination, and fears about the willful corruption of femininity through civil rights or sexual misdemeanor were rampant. Elaine Showalter discusses these fears at length in *Sexual Anarchy*,⁴⁵ as does Dijkstra in *Idols of Perversity*.⁴⁶ The literary genres of sensation fiction and Gothic horror as products of female writers with female audiences responded to these widespread anxieties, and works in these genres often express considerable ambiguity with regards to the female protagonists as women gained more influence outside the domestic sphere and were simultaneously challenged in doing so.

⁴⁵ Elaine Showalter. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siecle*. (New York: Penguin Books), 1991.

⁴⁶ Bram Dijkstra. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. (New York: Oxford UP), 1986.

The Power of Electracy

Greg Ulmer introduced the term electracy in *Internet Invention*. For Ulmer, electracy constitutes a new phase in the development of human communication—a transformation of text-based and voice-based forms as in literacy and orality to the image-based forms common to our technological world, with its reliance on the image (a subject on which much theoretical work has been done from Barthes on photography to Rancière, just to scratch the surface). Electracy combines elements from orality and literacy with new digital elements. Orality and literacy are not lost, nor are their values. Ulmer writes that during our history as oral cultures, we were concerned primarily with right and wrong, and most stories were religious or spiritual in purpose and communicated lessons about how to behave toward one another and toward the gods, subjects with which we are still concerned and which many texts—digital ones included—still discuss.

Literacy gradually took hold from its beginnings in ancient Greece with a reluctant Plato, and at its peak (the Enlightenment), religion was usurped to a great degree by science. Morality gave way to ethics and the perceived necessity of proof, the ability to reliably demonstrate something to be true or false. Reason was the order of the period, and it remains a force to be reckoned with. For example, in light of our recent economic downturns, economists have begun to theorize that markets and the philosophies thought to govern them may not operate the way taught in classrooms since the Enlightenment because humans do not behave rationally with any kind of consistency. Electracy does not rely on rationality, but on conductivity, Ulmer's word for

the idea that our brains are wired to make quick and irrational associations—almost like word games—most of the time rather than thinking in structured or even language-based ways. Allowed to wander (to think conductively without asserting structure on them), our minds are open to these cognitive leaps, which can serve as a basis for creativity—for heuristics, which I will discuss in a moment.

Electracy has barely begun. It has seen technologies that enable oral and literate forms to become digital and to mix with one another and with visual forms easily. Perhaps the most useful concept in electracy is heuristics. Ulmer thinks of our society's teaching methodologies' grounding in hermeneutics as a holdover from literacy, a concept that needs something more to make it meaningful for a digital world. Enter heuristics, which takes the interpretations of our objects of study (hermeneutics asks, "what can we make of these things?) a step further and asks, "what can we make *from* these things?" This is designerly thinking, and it has the power to alter how we think about new media, the possibilities of video games, and ourselves as we inhabit games and digital spaces.

How This Work Unfolds

This project is not just a critique of video games, gamer culture, or the games industry. This is a call to action. To all who would weigh in on games, feminists in particular, don't just criticize: design. To that end, this project develops several perspectives of the intersections between game design and feminism.

Chapter two, “The Dasein of Design: Rhetorics of Identity and Avatar and the Dangerous Enframement of Women in Video Games,” brings Martin Heidegger’s concept of Dasein—Being—to bear on the digital worlds of games, exploring how avatar is an extension of identity, and therefore, play impacts being. That being the case, and based on Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” representations of avatar that perpetuate harmful stereotypes can deeply damage the Dasein of players, making the risks of play much higher than most players tend to suspect.

Entitled “Trickstars vs. ‘Strong’ Women: Creating a Feminist Archetype for Video Games,” chapter three develops my thinking on current trends in feminism, which I assert to be soundly in its fourth wave. Using gender theory, I examine the cultural attitudes behind #GamerGate and its proponents and offer caution and advocate for alternative approaches to feminism that rely on inclusivity and intersectionality above all. Through analysis of several major figures from folklore, I propose that feminist gamers take up the subject position of the trickster in approaching discussions of games, as the trickster serves to parody culture, encourage change, and bring humor and empathy to volatile and taboo conversations whose consequences would otherwise be very serious. I also encourage development of one variant of the trickster archetype, the monstrous woman.

The ideas formulated in chapter three are the foundation of chapter four, entitled “Holding Out For a Monster: A Call for Monstrous Heroines in TV and Video Games,” in which I navigate the roles of women in monster narratives, focusing on the archetype of the female monster. This trope is maligned across media, and writers tend to rely on

flat and unambiguous characters to further their plotlines, but I identify the female monster as potentially productive, if these women can be explored as flawed, but admirable heroines, which male monsters have increasingly been able to do in 21st-century vampire narratives. I introduce *The Blood of the Vampire*, Florence Marryat's 1897 Victorian vampire novel on which I have based my video game and discuss the development of its heroine as I have designed her.

Chapter five moves this discussion from the archetypes I have developed and situates it in the concepts and techniques of game development, explaining how my video game answers the concerns I have raised and points I have made in the previous chapters. I describe the specific choices made and scenes included in the game, drawing on the concepts and theorists explored in the previous chapters.

Finally, chapter six moves from the “knowing” chapters one through three and the “making” of chapter four and the game itself to the “doing” of pedagogy. I explain how I have in the past and plan in the future to use video games, transmedia storytelling, and the specific game I have designed in a classroom setting, detailing assignments and readings/viewings/games to play and discussing the ludic literacies necessary to make play possible in higher education, given our society's defamation of play in general as useless or a waste of time.

Through these forays into rhetorics, feminisms, and game studies, I hope to illustrate not only where we are now, but where we might go to facilitate rather than close off dialogue about game development as well as actual design. Moving away from critique to the generative potentiality of game design is a productive tack for feminists

and scholars as well as anyone interested in the repercussions of video games in our lives, as they grow more abundant and accessible and expand the audiences they reach.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DASEIN OF DESIGN: RHETORICS OF AVATAR AND IDENTITY AND THE DANGEROUS ENFRAMEMENT OF WOMEN IN VIDEO GAMES

“Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing.”
(Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” 5)

Play in the form of video games has become a powerful aspect of our culture. Triple-A title video games⁴⁷ regularly make as much or more money than blockbuster films, and the US Supreme Court has ruled that games qualify as art.⁴⁸ If there is anything that is not a game, we talk about wanting to gamify it from careers to classrooms to daily chores.⁴⁹ We play because we are fascinated and because we are bored.⁵⁰ We play to maximize our wellbeing, to claim agency, to create and discover self. Play is a process of becoming self, in that how and what we choose to play comes to define us, whether in major or minor ways, and direct our thinking. In spite of its perceived levity, play has ethical dimensions: at their best, the media in which we play constantly test the boundaries of our principles.

With play so prevalent and so accessible in our lives, our choices in play carry more importance for our self-identification than ever before. Nowhere are the stakes higher for self-identity than in Heidegger’s concept of Being, which he calls Dasein—

⁴⁷ These are high-budget, widely promoted video games expected to be commercially successful and of high quality in terms of gameplay, graphics, narrative, and voice acting. Triple-A games are the ones most people have heard about before, even if they do not play games themselves.

⁴⁸ John Sutter, “Supreme Court sees video games as art.” CNN.com. 27 June 2011. Web. 5 October 2015.

⁴⁹ Jane McGonigal, *Reality is Broken*. McGonigal discusses how the biological and psychological benefits of play should be applied to the rest of our lives to maximize happiness.

⁵⁰ McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory*. Wark uses the analogy of Plato’s Cave, claiming that now that everything about our lives is either already a game or can be metaphorically considered one. Thus, we never leave the “cave” and enter “reality;” games are reality. Reality is made up of games.

meaning something more like “Being-there”—his idea of human identity existing in greater depth than animals or objects, Being as a state of constant development rather than static existence (becoming), the necessity of seeing Being in the context of the situation we are born to and the world around us (world), and the importance of death to Being, just to gloss a few key points. Dasein applies only to Beings “for whom Being is at issue.”⁵¹ Heidegger’s treatment of Dasein does not merely involve Being in the “real” world, but, I argue, extends to being-in-any-world. The important component is the person for whom Dasein is at issue; as players, we direct and inhabit our avatars, and even if the avatar feels to us like no more than a glorified cursor⁵², it is still our point of interaction in the digital world and is thus an extension of self, constantly enacting the decisions we as players are making as we play. To be concise, avatar is rhetorical being enacted through play.

Therefore, I introduce Dasein to the digital world of play in this chapter, questioning the shifting relationships of self to play, specifically in certain genres of video games.⁵³ Accepted with the level of gravity Heidegger ascribes to Dasein, approaches to play and avatar as well as game design choices put our personal development and conception of our selves at stake. With Dasein in view, player inhabitation of avatars in video games is of deepest importance, and is particularly perilous when these avatars depict narrow stereotypes; this can be read as a sort of

⁵¹ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Trans. John McQuarrie and Edward Robinson. 45.

⁵² In *Gaming at the Edge*, Adrienne Shaw takes up questions of the relationship of representation to identification, and several of her interviewees commented that the avatar was no more than their way to manipulate the game. One even said of *God of War*’s protagonist Kratos that, “he could be a bunny rabbit for all I care.” 78.

⁵³ I will be focusing on role-playing games (RPGs), massively multiplayer online RPGs (MMORPGs), action-adventure games, and puzzle-platformer games.

in/affliction in games whose character creation options are slim (such as *World of Warcraft*, which has limited skin tone and body type options for each race) or that rely on set, pre-established characters who embody and thus reinforce stereotypes (such as Lara Croft of the *Tomb Raider* games). This can lead to the (further) objectification of real people in real life, and furthermore, to the stereotyping of self—the Enframement⁵⁴ of Dasein.

The Avatar for Whom Being is at Issue

While representation of bodies in video games is dubious across demographics, female bodies tend to suffer more from negative stereotyping and objectification than do male. Even when they are powerful figures—such as the female character Bayonetta from the game series of the same name—their bodies supersede and undermine their power. Bayonetta is a complex woman in search of her lost identity, and her games are populated with significant and powerful female characters and explore themes of the quest for selfhood, female friendship, and motherhood. Most of the antagonists are male. In spite of being an amazing female character with a female- and identity-focused plot, Bayonetta’s body is designed for a straight male spectator/player: her games are coded in third-person view so she is always central to any in-game shot; she wears a low-cut, skin-tight leather body suit; and one of her most powerful attacks reveals that her clothing is

⁵⁴ Heidegger’s term from “The Question Concerning Technology.”



Fig. 2.1: Bayonetta fan art. From molybdenumgp03, <http://www.deviantart.com/art/Bayonetta-131689931>



Fig. 2.2: One version of Bayonetta's hair special attack. From: http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_D1Y7HP6eX8U/S-34B9JCdBI/AAAAAAAAAJ0/1Tk8G93AVTE/s1600/Bayonetta.jpg

actually her hair as it lashes out to strike enemies, leaving her fully naked body exposed. My experience of playing the *Bayonetta* games was that they foreground the mechanics of combat rather than the plot, and since Bayonetta's body is constantly emphasized, it is the "thing" that leaves a lasting impression. The ostensibly feminist plot and character development can almost feel like apologies for the visual rhetoric of Bayonetta's body.

What happens when players play games like this? Are their attitudes influenced? Which attitudes? To what end? Does it alter how they see themselves in relation to the world? How they see others? These are questions that plague current game studies both in academia and beyond, and they have no clear answers. They boil down to an issue of whether representation is synonymous with identification, and while recent qualitative studies, such as Adrienne Shaw's,⁵⁵ indicate that they are often not in direct relationship, contrary to what most scholars typically assume, there are still correlations that have yet to be fully articulated by gamers themselves.

When applied to the interactive genre of video games, Heidegger's concept of Dasein is a way of revealing what is at stake in the identity creation of play-as-avatar in games. If the essence of the player—Dasein—is at stake in how we play, then the perpetuation of simplistic and harmful stereotypes in games can be even more detrimental than a scholarly stance oriented toward cultural critique⁵⁶ can reveal: these stereotypes can impact the development and recognition of Being and cause us to subconsciously objectify it in ourselves and in others, to accept stereotypes as applicable to ourselves. To

⁵⁵ Shaw, Adrienne. *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015. Print.

⁵⁶ Such as Anita Sarkeesian's *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* series on her Feminist Frequency YouTube channel.

use Heidegger's terms, they can dangerously Enframe Dasein itself, making for even deeper consequences for players.

We risk quite a bit more in games than we otherwise might; games allow players to venture more than they would in real life. In "The Monster Within," her review of *Hotline Miami*, an extremely difficult indie game featuring a high level of violence, Liz Ryerson analyzes the murderous intent of the player and the results of entering the mind of a killer through the experience of play.⁵⁷ She posits that games are a "safe" way to explore the more disturbing aspects of humanity, particularly the violent ones. Games can help us face the fact that we revel in violence and understand what makes it so compelling to us. She points out—as many speaking against fears of video game violence have—that while many people play video games with violent content, only a few already disturbed individuals take up real guns and leave the living room.

Players can build or destroy anything in *Minecraft*, embrace or reject their destiny as Dragonborn in *Skyrim*, and steal, murder, and torture in *Grand Theft Auto*. These worlds allow for experimentation with identity in ways that no other medium offers. We try out different approaches to problem solving, we are more direct or more sneaky, we speak bluntly or we lie when we otherwise might not, we are more than willing to put aside ordinary world concerns like family and jobs to help others or fight bad guys or just explore. We experiment with diplomacy or intimidation. We make the evil choices to see what will happen. We act on a whim. We kill. We kill by accident. We kill gleefully. We die—over and over again. And if we do not like the outcome of our choices, we go back

⁵⁷ Ryerson, Liz. "The Monster Within." *Midnight Resistance*. 5 Nov 2012. Web. 21 Jan 2016.

to the last save point or start a new playthrough. The consequences for our actions remain confined to the game worlds. So we think.

But players' sense of self and how they feel about the in-game world and their own choices in it resonate in them as human beings, not as avatars—which are, after all, just a set of ones and zeros—and thus may reveal and impact Dasein. How we see ourselves, and the world, is the root of how we comport ourselves within it. If we are used to Enframing it and this Enframing is reinforced in the games we play, then many real-life things become easy to justify, from misogyny to environmental degradation.

Thoughtful game design with attention to issues like representation and choice with more than the bottom line in view can do much to influence player in-game experience, and the more players encounter games that challenge them ethically, ones that foreground the meaningfulness of their choices, the more likely they are to be shaken out of going through the motions—the more likely they are to be shaken into considering their Being, which is at issue.

Gendered Game Design: A Bit of History

A widespread call for better representations of gender and race in games has been gaining steam over the past several years as player demographics have changed from mostly teenage males to just about everybody.⁵⁸ In the 1990s, several female programmers (Brenda Laurel, Theresa Duncan) started thinking about what made games

⁵⁸ An ESA (Entertainment Software Association) study shows that women make up a major demographic of gamers (more of them play games than do teenage boys) and that they are playing the same kinds of games as men, not predominately casual mobile and online games as previously believed. Sullivan, Gail. "Study: More women than teenage boys are gamers." Washington Post. 22 August 2014. Web. 5 October 2015.

so appealing for boys, but not as appealing to girls, and they took it upon themselves to design games that were meant to cater to female interests. (It is noteworthy that in spite of the ungendered abstraction of many 1980s games and the extreme violence common to video game content of the 1990s, they were thinking of video games as primarily a genre meant for children, a perspective that is now incredibly outdated.) Jenkins discusses some of these games in his article “Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces.” He points out that Laurel and Duncan both created slow-paced, exploration based games that mimicked popular girls’ fiction in their focus on relationships over adventure, and these games—Laurel’s in particular—failed to empower girls because they represented narrowly defined gender roles that were perceived to be just as insulting as the one-dimensional shoot-‘em-up games were to boys. Designing and marketing games “for girls” was not working because of widespread assumptions essentializing gender.⁵⁹

Jenkins aptly picks up on the failings of the “games for girls” movement even writing his article in the midst of it, before its decline. But what exactly went wrong, aside from the reinforcement of strict gender boundaries and rigid stereotypes? Greg Costikyan, a game designer writing around the same time, brings lessons from his background experiences with tabletop roleplay and game design to video game design. He explains that not all games are really games; some games are puzzles (these are static) and some are toys (these have no goal; sandbox video games like *The Sims*, for example). To qualify as a game, the designer must include a token (in video games, an avatar) with

⁵⁹ Toy companies had created the distinction between boys’ and girls’ toys to improve their profits (see “Adam Ruins Everything: Why People Think Video Games Are Just For Boys”), and the extreme genderization of the toy aisles is becoming a highly contested space as fans of popular media demand more equal representation in merchandise for their favorite female characters (see articles by Michael Schick and Sam Maggs).

whom a player makes decisions, uses meaningful resource management mechanics, and has a goal,⁶⁰ several components of which “games for girls” were missing.

Costikyan’s “rules” for what qualifies as a game are not taken terribly seriously by gamers, especially since they would exclude sandbox games, such as *Minecraft* or *The Sims* games, in which player interaction with the world is the most important thing about the game, and players are free to do and build as they wish without the constraint of character or a plot. These games might facilitate exploration of Dasein more than most. In these games, players entertain themselves by creating their own goals: build a city, find a place where the game’s coding ends, make a successful business, play for a long time without dying, create beautiful art, destroy things others have made. Ethics are still at play in gamespaces like these because players interact with each other, and in sandbox RPGs like the *Elder Scrolls* games where designers have provided numerous side-quests, players still have decisions to make that impact the development of their character, and thus their Dasein.

Even with the best of intentions, these games designs forced women into a certain set of un-self-critical roles and encouraged exclusion of men, both problems that foreclose the revealing of Dasein. Games for Girls not only encouraged the Enframement of women; it encouraged women to willfully Enframe themselves.

Bringing-forth Games: Designerly Thinking

⁶⁰ Costikyan, Greg. “I Have No Words & I Must Design.” Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, eds. *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*. 235.

As treacherous as representation of anything through video game design proves to be, Dasein is nonetheless available to us in design just as it is to any craftsman in any medium. Heidegger writes, “. . . what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist. . . has the bursting open belonging to the bringing-forth not in itself, but in another, in the craftsman or artist” (“QCT 5). In other words, an act of making has its creative origin in the maker, and the bursting forth of the designed thing—Heidegger uses the metaphor of the “bursting of a blossom into bloom” (“QCT 5)—is part of the essence of the maker rather than of the thing itself, as it did not come into being on its own. Thus design is not only one process of encountering one’s own Dasein; from the player’s perspective, it is also a way of encountering a maker’s Dasein. So games, then, at their simplest with one maker and one player, can be interpreted as a revealing of both of these Beings. If the player is open to Dasein, they may also find the maker in the world created for them⁶¹ as they go through the process of revealing their ownmost self (to use Heidegger’s term) in discovering how they want to play the game, what actions they want to take, what they think about the game, and what meaning they discern from these.

Of course, games are usually designed and coded by teams with a certain power structure in place such that many hands come together to realize the creative vision of one or a few collaborators. Todd Howard, the lead designer of the much-anticipated RPG *Fallout 4*, commented in an interview at E3⁶² 2015, “People don’t realize, like, they think we know everything in the game. . . but we don’t. . . I’ll be playing the game and I’ll run

⁶¹ This concept is more fully explored in developer Davey Wreden’s game *The Beginner’s Guide*.

⁶² Electronic Entertainment Expo, an annual conference and show focused on video games and taking place in the Los Angeles Convention Center.

into something and be like ‘Who built this? What is this?’ ”.⁶³ This surprise is a moment of revealing some small part of one person’s Dasein through their contribution to the game design. And even in his role as lead designer, Howard is still able to experience the authentic surprise of a player in his own game because of its sheer size and the number of designers, and thus he can encounter his own Dasein, even in a game he supposedly knows everything about.

This complicates the Dasein available from the maker side, but the player’s Dasein is still undisputedly available and at issue throughout their play. *Fallout 4* does quite a bit more with identity creation than previous games have. Not only do players create their own avatar, but they also design their spouse, and from the two player-created designs, the game generates a baby. So players have a stake in three avatar identities in the double sense as players but also as designers. What happens to these three figures over the course of the game is therefore much more meaningful to the player, who will likely more carefully consider their every decision than they might if the spouse and child were mere non-player characters (NPCs). And for the player who wants to throw caution to the wind and experiment, i.e. play playfully rather than seriously, even more possibilities for enjoyment and ethical challenge are present because of the multiplicity of avatar identities available for manipulation. As avatar multiplies, so do possibilities.

In *Beyond Choices*, Miguel Sicart further develops his ideas regarding video game ethics from his previous works, emphasizing his claim that for games to be ethical, they must not provide overt mechanics that reinforce a structure of right and wrong developed

⁶³ Bethesda Softworks. “The Team Bringing *Fallout 4* to Life, parts 1 & 2.” *YouTube.com*. 1 October 2015, accessed 5 October 2015.

by game designers, but should allow players to explore this for themselves. For example, in the *Star Wars* MMO (massively open online) game *The Old Republic* (SWTOR), players can see how each decision they make falls on the spectrum of Light Side to Dark Side and can easily always make the choice with the result they want. Thus ethics in this game can be read as inorganic and meaningless unless one attempts to play authentically and ignore the color coding on their screen.⁶⁴ According to Sicart, the most ethical games provide players with challenging moral situations, but do not proscribe in the game's code which choice is the "right" one, and games that approach decision making this way facilitate rather than foreclose player exploration of Dasein.

In the most interesting games, even if players make what ethicists might call the best possible choice, this does not guarantee a positive outcome. Sicart cites the Tenpenny Tower quest line from the post-apocalyptic first-person shooter and RPG *Fall Out 3* as an example. The player is tasked with resolving (or walking away from) a tense situation between the humans living in the tower and the ghouls excluded from it. The ghouls want to share the virtual technologies that are keeping the humans sane and happy enough in the post-apocalyptic wasteland, but the humans are afraid of the ghouls. The player may choose to kill all the humans, kill all the ghouls, or negotiate the sharing of the space and the technology; however, if the player negotiates, the ghouls end up killing

⁶⁴ This reading is complicated by the fact that many of the choices coded Dark Side are desirable from a standard position of Western ethics. The possibility of playing as a Sith also complicates the dichotomy of Dark to Light as a clear opposition of wrong to right, as Dark Side choices are preferred and encouraged while playing a Sith. Even that assumption is not true across the board since treating those around them poorly will make the player's life harder, since none of the NPCs will want to help them achieve their in-game goals. In the end, the game's mechanic of overtly coding the player's decision-making as Dark Side or Light Side communicates a message that balance is the best course of action, not necessarily what one might expect to see in the *Star Wars* universe.

all the humans anyway, the lesson being that player ethics do not dictate the ethics of everyone around them.

Making design decisions like this for Sicart means thinking in “designerly” ways, and while he states that he did not have Barthes in mind when he chose this term, it troubles Barthes’s famous binary of readerly/writerly thinking from *S/Z* in productive ways. Barthes intended the term “writerly” to denote an approach to reading as a creative act, but he never goes so far as to call the writerly reader to do much beyond creating another text to be read. He is firmly entrenched in literate modes, which is not surprising given that he was writing before the computer age. If we alter Sicart’s term “designerly” to mean something more like “playing the text” and think of it as reading the text and then making something of it, specifically something multimodal, something digital, something with aesthetics and play in mind, then we advance reading to include more types of texts than ones made up of written words, and we privilege “reading” (play) as an integral part of design and making as an integral part of reading.

(Mis)Representation

In extending Dasein to digital spaces, we highlight how important digital identity is as a part of our modern Being, and just how excellent video games are at facilitating exploration of avatar identities—and how destructive it can be. As Stuart Hall writes,

actual identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how

that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation.”⁶⁵

Self-representation is the currency of identity, and online, it is power: the power to become (or pretend to become) anything or anyone, and the power to dismiss anyone else by categorizing them in a negative way, which is what happens with stereotypes. Hall emphasizes the significance of representations, which extend beyond the ways we represent ourselves and impact our perceptions of the characters we see in media as well. Reliance on archetypes for storytelling is common to many media, particularly video games as I will discuss shortly, and it is a short step from using archetypes to creating and/or perpetuating stereotypes. –Typing of any sort leads to Enframement. There is no freedom for Dasein in categorization.

Categorical thinking has been a major ordering paradigm since Aristotle’s genus/species analytics.⁶⁶ In “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger points out that modern science and philosophy tend to operate through a values system of objective, unambiguous categorization, a thing he means to critique.⁶⁷ Categorization is arguably most harmful when it relates to people. Social psychologist Charles Stangor explains that while social categorization is useful because, as sets of criteria, categories are informative and allow us to assess someone quickly, “[it] distorts our perceptions such that we tend to exaggerate the differences between people from different social groups while at the same time perceiving members of groups (and particularly outgroups) as more similar to each

⁶⁵ Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, “Who Needs ‘Identity?’” Intro. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1996), 4

⁶⁶ Aristotle. *The Categories*. Salthart Publishers, 2013.

⁶⁷ Heidegger, Martin. “What is Metaphysics?” *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995. Print.

other than they actually are.”⁶⁸ In sum, stereotypes emphasize distinctions between groups, but sameness among individuals in those groups. So a man may perceive a woman to be very different from himself, and all women as the same.

It makes sense why video games would turn to archetypes as a foundation for storytelling. Archetypes are familiar and predictable. We know what to think of them and how to react to them. We don't need words to explain what a dashing young man in armor is like, or what to think when we meet a mysterious old woman who lives alone in the woods; we only have to see them and we already know what to expect. This certainty is appealing and makes players feel powerful and knowledgeable, like they have all the answers. In a world of archetypes, being heroic is easy.

The problem arises when the comfort and pleasure of archetypes turns into harmful stereotyping, that is, when characters are reduced to a set of criteria rather than enriched by their belonging to a group. For example, when a female warrior character is scantily clad, admiration for her prowess in battle becomes secondary to admiration of her body. We see her body first and witness her skills second. Then the two become dangerously entangled. In the extreme, the incredible power of the Sorceress in

⁶⁸ Charles Stangor, “Social Categorization and Stereotyping.” *Principles of Social Psychology*. 12, no. 1 (2012)



Fig. 2.3: Sorceress art on home screen from *Dragon's Crown*, 2013. From: <http://www.technologytell.com/gaming/files/2013/07/dragons-crown-sorceress-jerrica.jpg>

Vanillaware's 2013 game *Dragon's Crown* is super-ceded by the exaggerated animation of her breasts. She is no longer the Sorceress; she is just bouncing breasts; that is, her identity is lost; she becomes an object (or two). That is Enframement, and it is encouraged by the design of the character. Since the avatar is the player's vehicle of exploration of Dasein, the way they enact their Being in the game, the question of the extent to which this loss extends to the player is of central concern here.

Scholars writing about games have also been known to categorize players themselves. Richard Bartle famously claimed that there are four types of players corresponding to the four suits of cards: hearts are players who primarily want to interact with others and make friends in games; diamonds are players who want to be wealthy in whatever the game's resources are; spades are players who want to explore and experience everything possible in a game; and clubs are players who focus on

achievement in combat.⁶⁹ But boiling down all of play to four archetypal player-types is not as productive as it might seem, even just for MUDs, though it is amusing; most players phase from one type of play to another, trying out several approaches to a video game, exploring what is possible—as well as what they themselves are ethically and morally interested in doing. And widely known and held perspectives like these—impulses to categorize—can encourage self- and community stereotyping.

The importance of the label “gamer” cannot be understated here. Video gamers have a complicated system of categorization by which they judge themselves and others and which they use to discredit those they feel do not belong. Among the stereotypes common in gaming communities are “hard core” gamers versus “casuals,” who are disdained for not devoting as much time to games as the “hard cores.” Special designations are also imposed on women, who have faced greater identity challenges in the world of gaming, the most common being the “gamer girl,” i.e. the woman playing online who says that she is a gamer, but does not actually play herself, relying on the help of her boyfriend, male friends, and males encountered online to get through games. The “gamer girl” also appeals to men in her sexual allure, her willingness to portray herself as a gamer for the sake of male pleasure, but not as a serious identifier, not as a “real” gamer. Some “gamer girls” post images of themselves posing provocatively with gaming console controllers.

⁶⁹ Bartle, 757



Fig. 2.4: Gamer girl. From: <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/36/a6/b3/36a6b3a11a06024ed6fa1e6d7343c845.jpg>

I have observed in playing World of Warcraft that if I play a male avatar, no one talks to me or bothers me. But if I play a female avatar, I will be catcalled (yes, in a video game) or have rude comments directed at me, and almost as often, random people offer me help or stuff in the game, even without my soliciting aid. If I do ask for help, I am pretty much guaranteed a response. This has been true for my male friends as well, so all that matters is a player's avatar, even though most everyone understands that it may not always—or even mostly—be a woman playing a female character.

While certainly there are women doing these things—manipulating male heterosexual desire for their own gain—but the women who do are not all that outspoken in the gaming community because they simply are not invested, and most women who game are not behaving this way; they just want to play the games without unwanted male



Fig. 2.5: Gamer girls are real. The stereotype is not. From <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/492862752943297605/>

attention.⁷⁰ Yet the stereotype runs rampant and is frequently cited by male players in online forums and social media discussions involving women in games.

The Dangerous Enframing of Women

Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology “spiritually in hand.” We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control.⁷¹

We cannot expect to encounter the essence of a thing from just one example of it; to use Heidegger’s example, “That which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all other trees.”⁷² So we cannot expect to meet our own essence—our Dasein—in just one way, in just one place. We must consider all the ways

⁷⁰ For examples of actual unwanted male attention received by women while playing, see the website “Fat, Ugly, or Slutty?.com.”

⁷¹ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” 2.

⁷² Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” 1.

we come into Being, including in the digital spaces we inhabit as avatar, one of which is games. And similarly, we cannot expect to meet Dasein in just one experience of play; rather, every game a player chooses, every avatar they create or play as, every choice made in game, and how a player interprets the outcomes of those decisions taken together with all the other aspects of our lives is the essence of Dasein. Thus Dasein is always in flux, as we are, and to keep up with ourselves—to keep in touch with Dasein—we must constantly remind ourselves to open up to and be aware of it, as Heidegger carefully explains in the essay, “What is Metaphysics?” and in *Being and Time*.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger cautions against the human mistake of imagining that nature exists for him/her, which is connected to the basic assumption he means to undo that technology is merely a means to an end or a set of tools for human use, fundamentally no different from tools prior to the Industrial Revolution. In examining the human relationship to nonhuman nature, he writes,

Thus when man, investigating, observing, ensnares nature as an area of his own conceiving, he has already been claimed by a way of revealing that challenges him to approach nature as an object of research, until even the object disappears into the objectlessness of standing-reserve.⁷³

When we objectify the world, imagining that it only exists for our use, it becomes mere standing-reserve, a set of resources to use and abuse according to human “need,” and we obscure any notion of non-humanity’s being, whether worldless, poor in world, or otherwise. We conceal from ourselves what the world and each entity in it are in terms of being—including our own relation to any of it. He calls this “*Ge-siell*,” which has been translated as “Enframing.” When we enframe the world, we jeopardize our own Dasein

⁷³ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” 9.

because we cannot see ourselves as part of an interconnected web of being, and we assume we can maintain our integrity—indeed, our purity (a negatively charged concept for Heidegger)—apart from the world—the great mistake of modern philosophy he discusses in *Being and Time* (21-24). By contrast,

Whenever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed.⁷⁴

When game designers choose to represent women in games in ways that imply that female worth is inextricably tied to physical attractiveness, that female bodies are meant for male consumption, that women are not meant to be protagonists, but serve other, less significant purposes in a story or a game world, these designers (companies, teams, etc.) reinforce or even create stereotypes that threaten Dasein, not only of the women who play these games, but the men as well, who may begin to internalize and bring these attitudes about women out of games and into their non-digital lives.

Certainly this possibility is no longer hypothetical. In August 2014, the Twitter hashtag #GamerGate appeared and instantly became a hotspot of gender debate regarding all levels of video games culture from game design to game journalism to players, skyrocketing to over a million tweets over the following year. Although it was put forward as a forum for gamers to voice their displeasure over a perceived lack of ethics in video games journalism, what it actually became was a site of targeting, harassment, and doxing (in which hackers determine the IP address of a Twitter user and find out where they are physically located, then publish this information online with the missive for

⁷⁴ Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology.” 9.

people to go and harass someone in person) of women who the male creators of the hashtag perceived as threats to the sanctity of their gamespace. The culture critic, Anita Sarkeesian, who had already come under fire from angry male gamers in 2013 as she Kickstarted her project “Tropes vs. Women in Games,” was one prominent target; the vitriol against her became so violent that when she was scheduled to give a talk at Utah State University in 2015, someone issued a threat to perpetrate “the worst school shooting in history” if she was allowed to present. When the university could not guarantee the security of the venue, Sarkeesian was forced to back out of the talk.

I do not wish to dwell on this complicated social issue here, but merely to mention it as evidence that this conversation is imperative. Suffice it to say that when, by contrast, game designers open avatar creation to the player with systems that allow for a wide range of possibilities (*Skyrim* and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* are games that do this well) and then communicate the game’s story through a system of meaningful player choice, they can begin to present players with richer scenarios for identity formation. And while no ethical game design should insist on a certain course of play, the possibility of playing something other than a white male protagonist operating through mechanics of physical violence is certainly refreshing.

Power (of Being) to the Players

In her book *Rise of the Video Game Zinesters*, Anna Anthropy describes her impulse to design video games as one that stemmed mainly from the fact that she loved to play video games, but in looking around, there were simply none that represented

experiences that were anything like her own. Anthropy writes that, “As a queer woman in 2012, in a culture pervaded by video games . . . I have to strain to find any game that’s about a queer woman, to find any game that resembles my own experience.”⁷⁵ Anthropy has been designing her own games for many years, and in this book, she calls for others to do the same and hopes that the continued development of easy-to-use game design engines will facilitate the creation of a greater variety of games.

To be clear and to complicate my argument a bit more, representation and identification are not the same thing, as Adrienne Shaw explains in her qualitative study and analysis of representation in video games, *Gaming at the Edge*.⁷⁶ I take this book up in the following chapter to examine questions about cultural identity and representation, focusing on women and feminist theory, but for my purposes here, her interviews reflect that players do not consider avatar to be all that important to them.

I question whether the significance of avatar might be subconscious for most people, especially those who see games as nothing more than a way to unwind after work, no different than watching Netflix. I wonder whether these players have fallen prey to Enframement, seeing themselves in no avatars, or in every possible avatar, and thus failing to encounter Dasein at all. Have they written off games as unimportant to the extent that they cannot possibly be open to questions of identity formation? This has everything to do with player perception and reception of games, what role games play in a player’s life (whether they are considered mainly as entertainment or if the player is

⁷⁵ Anthropy, Anna. *Rise of the Video Game Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Drop-Outs, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You Are Taking Back An Art Form*. Introduction.

⁷⁶ Shaw, Adrienne. *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2015. Print.

seeking something else, a message or meaning as one would seek in any other medium), in addition to what Heidegger would see as the human propensity to not involve oneself in deep inquiries, but to generally coast along through life. Most people never encounter their own Dasein, he argues in *Being and Time* because they are simply not open to it.

I argue that design can do more to encourage players to consider their own identities in the context of the rich worlds in which they can be found in the form of avatars. Then there is potential to extend these attitudes to the non-digital world and develop a deeper awareness of and connection to Dasein, avoiding placing the self in standing-reserve, and thus making us also less likely to Enframe others through objectification.

Plenty of small-scale indie (independently designed) games accomplish this. One notable example has created an entirely new games genre called “world games;” it is called *Never Alone* and is a puzzle-platformer game with a native Alaskan girl as protagonist and one of the game’s playable avatars (players can also switch to play the girl’s fox companion, further deepening ideas of what a playable avatar should look like or be). The game designers took the stories and legends of the Inupiat people and turned them into playable story-puzzles, which also challenges the norm of mechanics of violence most triple-A games involve. Through the experience of this game, players learn about the native Alaskan culture by playing through the tales and real-world perils particular to the Inupiat, which puts players’ personal life experience in perspective and opens cross-cultural dialogue in a way that can lead to a meaningful encounter with Dasein. Designed as a collaboration between computer scientists and the Inupiat

themselves and thus far less likely to fall into the trap of Enframing, the game has been marketed as an authentic encounter with another culture—and further, it and games like it might be more likely to reveal to players their own Dasein—and consequently open them to that of others—as well.



Fig. 2.6: Never Alone, 2014. From <https://dragonelegy.wordpress.com/2015/04/10/never-alone-kisima-ingitchuna/>

CHAPTER THREE

TRICKSTARS VS. “STRONG” WOMEN:

CREATING A FEMINIST ARCHETYPE FOR VIDEO GAMES

“I favour an understanding of femininity that would have as many ‘feminines’ as there are women.” (Kristeva “A partir de” 499)

“It is important to remember that masculinity is no more natural, transparent, and unproblematic than ‘femininity.’ It, too, is a socially constructed role, defined within particular cultural and historical circumstances. . . .” (Showalter 8).

Do a Google search for “women and video games harassment,” and only a few lines down you will come across a website titled *Are You Fat, Ugly, or Slutty?.com*. The purpose of the site is for women who have experienced sexism, trolling, and threats as they play video games online to share screenshots and audio clips of what was said to them for the purpose of commiserating, realizing they are not alone, and hopefully laughing it off. But the sheer volume, frequency, and lackadaisical attitude underpinning

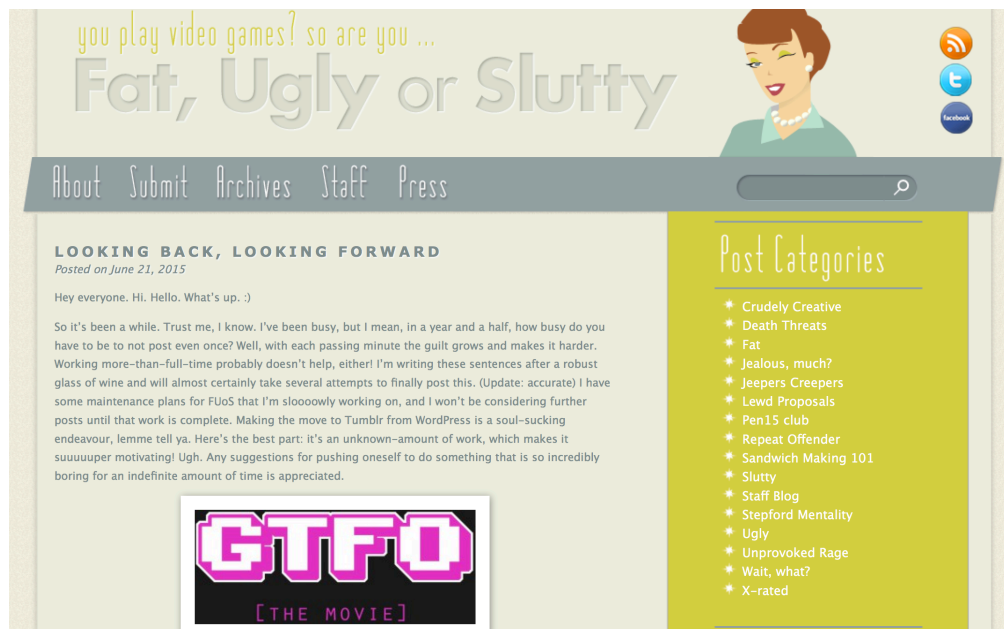


Fig. 3.1: Homepage for Fat, Ugly, or Slutty.com. From fatuglyorslutty.com

many of these traumatic attacks is troubling. The necessity and sustainability of such “safe” spaces online is indicative of the climate women face in attempting to play games competitively or cooperatively—merely to exist as women online.

Beyond this everyday context, one event stands out from the rest of the harassment. In September 2014, the Twitter hashtag GamerGate exploded in social media. With well over a million tweets within only a few months, the topic of women’s roles in the games industry and gaming communities appears to be prominent in our cultural imagination. Begun as an act of revenge and jealousy,⁷⁷ it quickly grew into an international phenomenon, endorsed by celebrities like Adam Baldwin, and spawning off-shoot hashtags such as #NotYourShield.⁷⁸ Though its proponents claim that their crusade is a call for ethics in video games journalism, the tweets and comments across media reveal an insidious agenda to undermine, discredit, and harass female members of the games community at every level: design, criticism, journalism, and play.

Part of their anger stems from assertions like Leigh Alexander’s that the term “gamer” is “dead,” outdated, and should be abandoned. From her essay, “Gamers Are Over:”

“Gamer” isn’t just a dated demographic label that most people increasingly prefer not to use. Gamers are over. That’s why they’re so mad. These obtuse shitslingers, these wailing hyper-consumers, these childish internet-arguers -- they are not my audience. They don’t have to be yours. There is no ‘side’ to be on, there is no ‘debate’ to be had. There is what’s past and there is what’s now. There is the role you choose to play in what’s ahead.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ A guy accused his ex-girlfriend, Zoe Quinn of sleeping with a games journalist to get a favorable review of her game, *Depression Quest*; she did not deny dating the journalist, but he never reviewed her game.

⁷⁸ #NotYourShield is populated with Tweets from women and minorities discussing how they do not feel underrepresented in games, do not want games to change, and like GamerGaters are bitter over the assault on games from culture critic Anita Sarkeesian, female developers voicing their opinions, and female games journalists.

⁷⁹ Leigh Alexander. “Gamers don’t have to be your audience. Gamers are over.” *Gamasutra*. 28 August 2014, accessed 8 April 2015.

And others agree with her, but they are also games journalists and thus somehow perceived to be outsiders to gamers. Here is Sheffield's distinction in his commentary on Alexander's piece: "The word 'gamer' is regressive. It accepts the portrait of us painted by the mainstream news media... So play games, of course, but don't let the playing of games define you."⁸⁰ This flies in the face of how gamers have come to self-identify as such. Gamers are those who devote most, if not all, of their spare time—and some of their not-so-spare time—to achieving the most and becoming the best at games. They are—as they call themselves—"hard core." Their abilities, born of sheer volume of play, necessarily set them apart from everyone else playing games, whom they condescendingly referred to as the "casuals." Casuals need not speak up about games because they simply do not know as much as hard-cores, as far as these gamers are concerned. No self-described gamer, who has internalized that identity entirely, would ever stop using the term because it gives them power and credibility over everyone else.

Because of the heated spats taking place on social media—especially Twitter—many prominent women in the games industry were doxxed (had their accounts hacked, their home addresses posted publicly, and everyone participating in their online harassment encouraged to go continue this in person), and several had to flee their homes with their families. Culture critic Anita Sarkeesian⁸¹ was scheduled to speak at the University of Utah State, but in the weeks preceding the event, she received a bomb/shooting threat stating that if she spoke there, the university would have the "worst

⁸⁰ Brandon Sheffield. "Let's retire the word 'gamer'." *Gamasutra*. 15 May 2013, accessed 10 April 2015.

⁸¹ Sarkeesian's Tropes vs. Women in Video Games series was crowd sourced through Kickstarter in 2013, earning almost \$160,000. She also earned the ire of gamers who felt her analysis threatened

school shooting on record.” When the university claimed they could not secure the venue due to Utah’s gun laws, Sarkeesian canceled her talk.⁸²

Many analyses of GamerGate have been published in the months since its inception, but I have gathered a few quotations to indicate the opinions of those publishing pieces outside the fray of social media. From Eordogh: “what we have here is a bunch of people pretending that games media not reporting on a woman's adultery is evidence of some feminist conspiracy;”⁸³ and Robertson: “If a major plank of your platform is that misogyny is a lie propagated by Sarkeesian and other ‘social justice warriors,’ it might help to not constantly prove it wrong.”⁸⁴ The concept of the social justice warrior is meant to be satiric and refer to someone who does not actually care about the issue they are discussing with regards to games or that is featured in the game they are designing; supposedly, these people are only taking these approaches to make themselves “look good” in some way, to bolster their reputation. Ringo explains the concept in her article about GamerGate’s rhetoric and campaign to be perceived as the “good guys” or victims of feminist meddling:

People who, according to Urban Dictionary, engage in “social justice arguments on the internet... in an effort to raise their own personal reputation.” In other words, SJWs don’t hold strong principles, but they pretend to. The problem is, that’s not a real category of people. It’s simply a way to dismiss anyone who brings up social justice—and often those people are feminists. It’s awfully convenient to have a term at the ready to dismiss women who bring up sexism, as

⁸² Susan Brooks, “Anita Sarkeesian Cancels Speech Over Utah State University Allowing Firearms at Her Event.” *Huffington Post*. 15 Oct 2014, accessed 10 Feb 2016.

⁸³ Fruzsina Eordogh. “The Anti-Feminist Internet Targets ‘Depression Quest’ Game Creator Zoe Quinn.” *Motherboard*. 19 August 2014, accessed 8 April 2015. Quote from Escapist, qtd in Eordogh.

⁸⁴ Adi Robertson, “Trolls drive Anita Sarkeesian out of her house to prove misogyny doesn’t exist.” *The Verge*. 27 August 2014, accessed 8 April 2015

in, "You don't really care. As an SJW, you're just taking up this cause to make yourself look good!"⁸⁵

But the reality is that this person does not exist except in the rhetoric of GamerGate, and being accused of something they perceive to be so positive has not drained advocates of diversity in games of the will to protest; on the contrary, they have made SJW t-shirts to proudly challenge the terminology meant to communicate GamerGate's hatred of them.⁸⁶

The whole concept of people who, I assume, have jobs and families and lives outside of Reddit, 4Chan, and Twitter spending so much of their time sowing vitriol on the internet made no sense to me and befuddled many, but after reading Michael Kimmel's book *Guyland: The Perilous World in Which Boys Become Men*, I understand more where these guys are coming from. Kimmel explains the cultural norms and systemic ideals propping up our society's concept of the masculine and how these stunt men emotionally, make it almost impossible for them to seek out help of any kind, and protect them when they step outside the bounds of the law. GamerGaters are even more insecure than the average Millennial guy because their medium of choice, the medium that defines them and structures their lives, is under threat—as they see it—from women, the very women whose bodies they feel entitled to, who should be staying in their place, which is anywhere these men do not want to be. The feminist foray into video games

⁸⁵ Allegra Ringo. "Meet the Female Gamer Mascot Born of Anti-Feminist Internet Drama." *Vice*. 28 August 2014, accessed 8 April 2015.

⁸⁶ Samantha Blackmon, Purdue professor behind the blog and podcast *Not Your Mama's Gamer* created these, and they are available on the NYMG website.

culture is simply too much for a fragile masculinity to bear, and with the protection of anonymity in place online, the trolls emerge.⁸⁷

It is difficult to think through the mentality behind trolling without outrage, but some of director James Gunn's comments on trolling point out the level of fear and insecurity behind the power wielded by trolls. With the release of Marvel's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* movie came a lot of hatred directed toward writer/director Joss Whedon because of his story arc for the character Black Widow. The campaign of hate got so bad that Whedon deleted his Twitter account—not an easy move for a writer so beloved and so in touch with his fans. His colleague at Marvel Studios James Gunn, who directed *Guardians of the Galaxy*, wrote an insightful Facebook post expressing empathy for the people whose rage caused his retreat. He writes,

My plea to all of you—and this is nothing new—is that we all try to be a little kinder, on the Internet and elsewhere. And, honestly, that includes being kind to the people who are tweeting this nonsense. I don't believe you can tweet about wanting to find a movie director and "curbstomp" him and be a happy person. That person's statement might make you a little angry—that makes me angry too. But thank God the circumstances of my life and your life didn't lead us to being the person that has the need to anonymously tweet that to someone on the Internet.⁸⁸

It is clear that in order to improve the situation for women, the most meaningful move we can make is to start considering how our society treats the men who cause these and so many other cultural problems and then rethink those practices.

Women are leaving the games and tech industries in droves, which is precisely the opposite of what these fields need in order to be functional, ethical producers of media in

⁸⁷ "Troll" is a widely used internet term describing someone who responds negatively to ideas others post, not for the sake of meaningful conversation, but just to upset the person who posted them. Trolls are understood to delight in making their targets angry beyond all reason. They are the ultimate devil's advocate, but for their own pleasure, not the advancement of any mutual understanding or personal growth.

⁸⁸ James Gunn, personal Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/jgunn/posts/10152654464001157>

our culture. GamerGate shows unequivocally the urgent need for more diversity and attention to race and gender in the games industry and video games communities. The extremity of the backlash demonstrates just how hostile gaming environments can be for women, and the only way to combat misogyny and racism in these areas is to do precisely what the GamerGaters don't want: design and market games that question social norms, that represent diversity, and that deal with the problems we really face in our culture. To allow ourselves to be silenced would set us back decades in our fights for equality.

GamerGate reflects a broader national sentiment about women and feminism; it starkly reveals the problems real women face in their everyday lives at work, at play, and in their relationships with others. This issue couldn't be more important to the humanities. As Jonathan Glover has pointed out in his essay on GamerGate, "The Poisoned Well of Public Discourse," this movement (and, I would add, in addition to the meninist movement and men's rights movements) are indicative of a widespread anti-intellectualism and lack of respect and understanding of the humanities in general, something our disciplines have suffered from for many years. Glover writes, "...the faux-rationalism of her more reasonable detractors may be even more damaging to public discourse, as it misunderstands disciplinary differences between the sciences and the humanities to disastrous effect... misconstruing Sarkeesian's analysis of an art object as a personal attack on gamers themselves."⁸⁹ This is precisely why designing games and using archetypes of our own is a more powerful alternative rhetoric to effectively

⁸⁹ Jonathan Glover. "The Poisoned Well of Public Discourse.: Anita Sarkeesian, #GamerGate, and the Value of Humanities Education." 8 Nov 2014, accessed 10 Feb 2016.

combating criticisms levied against women like Sarkeesian calling out games as problematic.

The goal of this chapter is to locate a positive and meaningful archetype for a female character in video games by exploring archetypes from the role of feminism in video games culture, as well as how men have reacted against it, which involves not only the games themselves and the blogs and forums dedicated to discussion of games, but also the online cooperative and competitive play of games and the discussion of games happening on social media. Misogyny appears to be the order of the day, and it has only become readily apparent due to the recent influx of women into gaming communities as games diversify and become increasingly popular and available. The rise of the female gamer has come with a host of harmful stereotypes, harassment, and backlash from male members of gaming communities, to the point of emotional, psychological, and professional harm to women working in the gaming and tech industries, women critiquing and writing about games, and women playing games. Recent works of gender studies focused on men will help to explain why this is happening, and I will offer solutions from both the male and female perspective using gender studies, games studies, and, surprisingly, folklore.

The approach of one particular female trope—the trickster woman—is a potentially useful one in terms of representations of women in games, but further, it is also a productive character archetype to explore for feminist gamers to adopt as they move in gaming circles hoping to enjoy the medium they love and avoid the trolls who are constantly trying to ruin it for them. This is both about the harmful ways women have

been depicted in games, a topic has been well covered by others elsewhere,⁹⁰ and about the real women behind the avatars. We need to think through the causes of the situation we face with empathy toward our aggressors, but without endangering ourselves, and given what we can gain from applying principles of inclusive feminism to gaming and game archetypes, we have every reason to be optimistic about the future of games.

Gaming in the Age of Feminism

One culture that has grown up entirely in the age of feminism, yet seems utterly resistant to its progress is video games culture. The brief history of digital tech revolves around a subset of men who in previous decades would have been socially marginalized, but through historical timing and technological expertise, they have risen to prominence and power in Silicon Valley and elsewhere and empowered a whole generation of young men like them, who are inspired by them. Tech fields are lucrative, innovative, and growing. Computer science ought to be the college major of choice, yet despite the enormous demand for professionals who can develop software and code, not very many students are choosing this track, and women are few and far between with little relief in sight, in spite of efforts to target them and bolster their interest.

Video games began on a very small scale as the internet was developing. People would spend sleepless nights coding a game and then pass it around their group of friends. It was a subculture with its own secret passwords and hidden passageways, a happily subversive club that happened to be virtually all male. Perhaps this is where their

⁹⁰ Sarkeesian, Anita. *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. Feminist Frequency. *YouTube.com*. 2015. Web. 8 Aug 2014.

insecurity regarding gender lies. Most gamers I have known have horrific tales of harassment and bullying on which to base their misanthropy and xenophobia, and in online communities, these tendencies become magnified by the safety of anonymity.

Is it any surprise, then, that gamers are threatened by feminism? Serious gamers are concerned that a feminist or other “agenda” could ruin the fantasies they claim to need after a long day at work. And men feel entitled to the kind of special treatment they have received as video games’ sole demographic. They are not ready to give up something else they have been promised their whole lives. They are not ready to let themselves feel sad about another loss; instead, they get mad, and that is how we end up with the kind of trolling that leads to women and their families being forced to flee their homes because of death threats, simply because the woman in question works in the games industry or dared speak her mind on the internet. This is how we get #GamerGate.

Fourth wave feminism may be widely contested, but it is happening.⁹¹ Situated in the technologies and new media in which Millennials thrive, the wave is not as simple as some have claimed,⁹² nor is the “call-out culture”⁹³ that is a main feature of it and is also facilitated by the internet. I argue that because of the accessibility and speed of the internet, feminism has finally opened beyond the elitism of its foundations and, indeed, its progression up through third wave, and is now readily available outside the ivory

⁹¹ I will not go into a review of the history of the feminist wave controversy or the disputes over whether we are ready to mark out a fourth one here.

⁹² Jennifer Baumgardner. “Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?” Feminist.com. 2011, accessed 15 May 2015.

⁹³ Munro explains “call out culture” as the ability to quickly respond to the statements of others, calling them out for whatever wrongs we happen to notice, made possible by the speed of the internet and social networking sites. Munro, Ealasaid. “Feminism: A fourth wave?” *Political Studies Association*. Accessed 15 May 2015. Asam Ahmad also discusses this: Asam Ahmad. “A Note on Call-Out Culture.” Briar Patch Magazine. 2 Mar 2015, accessed 10 Feb 2016.

tower, for better or worse. Let me explain, starting with my claim that feminism is elitist.⁹⁴

First wave feminists were white “ladies” who wanted the vote, some of the same rights as their husbands, plus women who could not or did not wish to marry for whatever reason, but wanted political and social representation and legitimization.⁹⁵ Its focus may have been its practical aim of earning the vote, but its concerns were still very much so part of every aspect of culture at the fin de siècle, and this feminism did not represent lower class women or women of color. In the 1960s and ‘70s, Second wave brought deep theory to feminism, mostly psychological theories championed by Freud and Lacan, but thoughtfully repurposed by female students of theirs. This emphasis by female writers on acceptance by high-minded academe was an elitist move in itself and was caught up in the conflict between feminists and the Women’s Liberation Movement (with whom most prominent second-wavers identified, eschewing the term “feminist”). The benefits this wave reaped for women were widespread, but could only trickle down to lower class and minority women; they did not fundamentally change their situation. bell hooks’s paradigm-altering *Ain’t I A Woman* brought the exclusion of black women from feminism to light and spurred the Third wave, which took place in the 1990s, and was characterized by queer theory, new terms for genders and sexualities, and an opening

⁹⁴ I also want to acknowledge just how inaccessible the supposedly World Wide Web is for many. In spite of how supposedly widespread internet access is, many remain outside the conversation, and they are precisely the people inclusive feminism reaches out to: minorities and the poor. According to the Pew Research Center’s report on cellular internet use in April of 2015, 64% of American adults now own smart phones, and many rely on these devices as their main or only internet access (25% have limited or no other internet options). The Pew Research Center Broadband Technology Fact Sheet states that “74% of whites and 62% of African Americans and roughly half of Hispanics (56%) have high-speed internet access at home, according to the data collected this past September,” meaning that the remaining 26%, 38%, and 44% do not have access.

⁹⁵ Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

up of gender to fluidity and a wide range of possibilities. Judith Butler, Cordelia Fine, and Jack Halberstam's work stand out in this period of flux.

But their works are still academic and are not the kind of reading the average person will peruse, though politics has certainly brought gender queer issues to the masses. Third wave also spawned Kimberlè Crenshaw's "Inclusive Feminism," and the ethic of inclusion has been something sought by academic feminists since, though this part of feminism seems to be unknown or widely misunderstood, whether willfully or ignorantly.⁹⁶ Academics often discuss the need for intersectionality in feminism, what that means, and how it should take place, but no one outside academe has seemed to pick up on it. At least not on social networking sites where ideas are spread like wildfire.

So what has the rise of the internet and especially the smart phone made possible for feminism? For one thing, its wide dissemination, but that broadness has also caused problems. N. Katherine Hayles has discussed the phenomenon of deep and hyper attention in her work,⁹⁷ and the millennial generation is, as she points out, adept at exploring issues widely, but shallowly, and lack of deep reading makes misinterpretation and misunderstanding a sad norm. Welcome to fourth wave feminism: Tumblr feminism, YouTube feminism, Twitter feminism.

Women in this generation have been raised to believe that they can be or do anything they want, that they either already do or almost possess equality with men. Many young men and women alike believe that feminism is dead because equality has

⁹⁶ I am referring to the misconception that all feminists are man-haters who believe women are superior to men or are at least their equals, including questions of physical strength. People who believe this tend to throw around the term "Femi-nazi" with abandon.

⁹⁷ N. Katherine Hayles, "Hyper and Deep Attention: The Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes." *Profession*, 2007, 187-199.

been achieved.⁹⁸ They get this impression mostly from the media they constantly stream via the same technologies that have created Fourth wave. The media, is, of course, telling us many contradictory things about gender and feminism simultaneously, as it does with race, sexuality, and poverty, so conversely, many of these young women are angry about mansplaining, manspreading, income inequality, and they use the readiness-to-hand of call-out culture to vehemently call out anyone they feel threatens them. Thus they create enemies. Vocal ones, with YouTube channels and Twitter accounts of their own. Lots of them. And sadly, they often misspeak, misrepresent, and misunderstand the feminism they are trying so desperately to espouse, whether through lack of education or simply tweeting before thinking.

The enemies millennial feminists make have started to martial their power. They have become the “meninist” movement,⁹⁹ Men’s Rights movement, and #GamerGate, all pushing an agenda that does not hold rhetorical weight, but has the power of anger and hatred behind it. A mob mentality. A mentality that spawns events like May of 2014’s Elliot Rodger’s murder of six people and injury of fourteen others, all because, according to his “manifesto video” of women rejecting him. He called his plan for violence a “War on Women.”¹⁰⁰

There is not much scholarly literature out there about the effects of feminism—any wave of it—on men. Not directly, at least. Plenty of studies deal with issues of gender and the attitudes and perceptions we hold about it, and plenty of studies focus in areas where the effects of feminism might be revealed: the gym, the frat house, the

⁹⁸ Both of these assertions come from years of class discussion with college students on this topic.

⁹⁹ Meninist Twitter. *Twitter.com*. 2015.

¹⁰⁰ “2014 Isla Vista killings.” *Wikipedia*. 16 May 2015, accessed 16 May 2015.

college classroom, the corporate office, even domestic spaces which women inhabit less and less and men more and more. Certainly, any trans- or gender queer male has third wave feminism and any number of female and female-identified writers to thank for at least some of his social and self-recognition and that of his community. But watching the widespread and commonplace attacks on women online leaves me wondering: What is going on with guys, anyway? And once GamerGate happened, it seemed imperative to find out, not just for myself, but for society's sake.

Cultures of Guyland

Michael Kimmel has done some of the most thorough and thoughtful work on young American men to date. His book *Guyland* came out in 2008, the year most scholars pick as the beginning of Fourth wave feminism, coinciding also with the most recent economic downturn, which has had a profound effect on Millennials as well in the lack of available jobs, which means many of these young people find it necessary to live with friends and continuing a the kind of social scene they lived in college dorms, or move back home with parents, a trend that has many Baby Boomers unfairly railing against the laziness and apathy of Millennials.¹⁰¹

Kimmel only briefly addresses gaming in *Guyland*, and then mostly to emphasize online gambling and to quickly mention the misogyny and violence immediately evident from any cursory glance at the video games being played in any typical frat house. His investigation was not mainly about gaming, so he did not get much information about

¹⁰¹ Ross Pomeroy and William Handke. "The Most Entitled Generation Isn't Millennials. It's Baby Boomers." 8 Jan 2015, accessed 10 Feb 2016.

issues in gaming communities, but I mean to apply the rest of his work on guys to the gaming world, because it stacks up perfectly.

More importantly than the generation in question, Guyland¹⁰² consists of a set of attitudes, especially ones held toward gender roles, women, and relationships, that are fundamentally damaging to our society and to the guys who are trying to get through the most difficult and uncertain transition of their lives. Kimmel outlines the “Guy Code,” which consists of ten rules for being male. They all boil down to the frequently spouted adage, “Be a man” and its variants (it is not manly to cry, but it is manly to get angry, for example). A recent Upworthy.com video¹⁰³ explains that these three words are the most damaging things a man can ever hear. The reason seems clear enough, even though the words spring to our mouths quickly and in many contexts: “be a man” insists that men quell their emotions, deny them, hide them, which can only be psychologically damaging and create men who are ill prepared to handle life’s twists and turns. At the same time we tell them to just “deal with” whatever they are facing (i.e. on their own, without help or advice, with the expectation that they can such that failure is utterly shameful), we also point out that they have it all. It’s a patriarchy, after all; men are highly paid, free to sleep around, and powerful. The tension between the two messages creates the rift that is Guyland. Meanwhile, since their emotions must be held barely in check at all times and

¹⁰² Guyland is Kimmel’s term for the ambiguous space that now exists between childhood and adulthood, roughly ages 16 to 26, and more particularly how men inhabit this space. They are “guys,” significantly not yet “men” because they have yet to meet the cultural markers for adulthood in our society (stable job, marriage, owning a house, kids, etc.). From adolescence through college and continuing well after graduation, he observes, guys struggle to form and protect their identities as men as they try to develop relationships, get jobs, and afford housing with their crushing student loan debt burden. Financial differences are one of the main reasons this group even exists. Few young adults can afford to live alone, and very few jobs are available, even to college graduates with degrees, so they are forced to move back home with their parents or live with friends in similar situations. Kimmel, *Guyland*, Chapter 2: “What’s the Rush?” Guyland as a New Stage of Development

¹⁰³ Joseph Lamour. “There’s Something Absolutely Wrong With What We Do To Boys Before They Grow Into Men.” Upworthy.com. 2 Jan 2014, accessed 10 Feb 2016.

thus their true selves must be hidden behind a mask of posturing, confidence, and trash talk meant to test out the strength of other guys' masks. If a chink is found, it is to be exploited mercilessly because cutting down someone else's masculinity is the surest way to bolster one's own.

To illustrate how this works, Kimmel outlines the three cultures of Guyland in chapter 3: entitlement, silence, and protection. Because they have been told how powerful they are, even though in reality they feel so very powerless and precarious, guys feel entitled to things that they have been told their whole lives would be theirs: jobs, women, wealth and prosperity, and when they fail for whatever reason to acquire these "things," which they are "supposed" to have as part of their masculine identities, they are understandably crushed.

Furthermore, the culture of entitlement means that men feel entitled to women's bodies because the media puts them on display like commodities (which for them, they are) everywhere and almost always in sexualized fashion. The anxiety that other men are having lots of sex with women all the time (an impression gleaned from advertisements, television and film, other guys bragging about their conquests, whether true or not, and of course, porn) is fierce and generates a lot of the negative behaviors men have towards women, not least of which is the kind of extreme overreaction to consistent rejection that played a role in Elliot Rodgers's murder spree in May 2014. His manifesto is clear: he specifically targeted women who had rejected him or who would be likely to reject him (in this case, the sorority sisters of Alpha Chi and Delta Delta Delta).

The culture of silence means that no one, male or female, adult or adolescent or child, feels free to step in and stop the hazing, harassment, and bullying that comes along with Guyland. Moms may talk about violence not being the answer, but dads agonize over whether their sons can take a hit and advise one another to get their sons out of their mothers' spheres of influence and into more homosocial situations to "toughen them up."¹⁰⁴ The culture of silence means that when someone witnesses questionable male behavior at a college party, they look the other way. When a girl tells her friends or school counselors or college advisors that she has been raped, she is universally advised not to push the issue. The culture of protection means that our society protects boys, guys, and men alike from real punishment for crimes that are perceived as "just boys being boys," one of which happens to be rape, another being domestic abuse, as well as alcohol abuse and verbal abuse. We say this when men cat-call women on the street, when they participate in hazing rituals on sports teams or in fraternities, when they make lewd comments about women or racist comments, when they solicit nude photos of female gamers online. None of these things is about the person targeted; it is always about impressing other guys with how manly the guy doing the talking is. Yes, strangely enough, even catcalling has nothing to do with the woman and everything to do with the perception of the guys listening.

Kimmel's three cultures of Guyland and the Guy Code help explain what is happening now in video games culture. Believing as they have been taught that gender is rigid, men are already always on high alert for threats to their masculinity, and video

¹⁰⁴ p. 52 Anecdote about this being said to the father of a three-year-old boy due to his crying while in pain. "You have got to get this boy away from his mother!"

games is one of the spaces—like sports and the board room—that is supposed to be free of all female judgment and political correctness that feminism has forced on men. It is supposed to be a safe haven of homosocial bliss. If women want to come there, they are supposed to quietly accept—never challenge—what goes on there because it is not about them, or they can even pretend to like it and be part of it for the sake of safety and acceptance. But since that is no longer happening in video games culture, the attitudes that formed GamerGate are rampant and close to the surface.

Gender is Fluid: What I Learned From Bronies

I started paying attention to masculinity and the problems men face when I discovered bronies. Bronies are men ages 13-35 who enjoy Hasbro's television program *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, a show targeted at little girls ages 2-6. This is not as creepy as it at first may seem, but it took correspondence with social scientists studying the fandom at Wofford University¹⁰⁵ to prove it beyond doubt. I watch the show with my young daughter, and its themes are great for women. The six main characters are all female, but are all very different versions of femininity, and the storylines center around how they negotiate friendship with one another in spite of their differences and the difficulties they face (plotlines can get pretty epic).

¹⁰⁵ Griffin, Edwards, Chadborn, and Redden, thebronystudy.com; The first assumption people make when they hear about this is that these men must be pedophiles; but the study's results show that an insignificant percentage of bronies watch the show with its intended audience members, and if they do, it is their younger siblings. There have as of yet been no reported instances of a connection between bronydom and pedophilia. This fandom is entirely adult, and they like to hang out with each other. The next common assumption is that bronies must be gay men, but the brony study reveals that the brony population has no greater percentage of homosexuality than the general population, although it does have a higher instance of bisexuality.

But why would a guy want to watch this show? I was able to figure it out on a case-by-case basis with friends of mine who I learned were bronies, but how did it become such a common demographic? What is the appeal? The Brony Study of 2013 (which is ongoing) and the 2012 documentary *Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fandom of My Little Pony* both present answers, respectively, as statistics from extensive surveys and firsthand personal accounts from bronies themselves. The young men drawn to *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* are almost always socially marginalized in some way. Many of them live in small towns with small pools of people who have known each other their whole lives. Most have been shamelessly bullied for being different. The show offers them hope that acceptance is possible, that love and friendship can thrive even in spaces of difference. They identify with these characters who represent different personalities within the same gender and who are all mutually supportive, even though things are not always easy.

I find it telling that the main appeal to men here is the openness of what it means to be female. Because there is no equivalent media representation of masculinity to turn to, *MLP:FiM* gives viewers of all genders hope that masculinity, too, is flexible. Bronies are an indicator of the intense male need for reassurance that they do not have to perform masculinity the way our fathers and grandfathers have; the John Wayne masculinity our culture still idolizes is quite harmful to men. We need to know that more is possible.

GamerGaters can relax because there is plenty of space in video games development and culture for a wide variety of approaches to design. And games need not lose their appeal as fantasy and fiction in becoming more serious; rather gamers and

scholars alike call designers to offer within the fantasy and fictional worlds richer and more diverse characters, better plots, and more thematic depth. They should leave more choices up to the players, especially in the character creation process.

Of all media, one would think video games have the potential to be one of the richest experiences because it is exactly that: an experience. No one can passively absorb a game. But maybe characteristics of the genre have been precisely what has kept it from developing a more feminist awareness more quickly. Game designers are tasked with coding engaging mechanics to sell games, so story and character may fall by the wayside in favor of excellent gameplay. Production companies have priorities, and pleasing gamers is at the top of that list, so whatever they believe will fit the bill is going to happen, and they tend to stick to the safety of what has been successful before, which means a general fear of too much innovation. What's more, game writing is not traditionally the most sought-after position for students of literature and creative writing; the best writers would prefer to make it writing for other screens. The game industry has been accused of a general lack of diversity, and though more and more women are making up the teams that design video games, it is a slow transition for a juggernaut bent on making money before all else, as just about as many women flee tech fields due to toxic work environments.¹⁰⁶ Convincing game companies that a feminist approach to game design will be good for their company is a losing battle, but one that continues to be hard-fought, and it makes sense that most of the progress on these issues will continue to

¹⁰⁶ Weiner, Joann. "The STEM Paradoxes: Graduates' lack of non-technical skills and not enough women." *The Washington Post*. 26 Sept 2014, accessed 15 May 2015." 'Women find that their teachers perceive that they're not good at math, they aren't encouraged to continue studying math, and they feel an explicit or implicit bias that they're not as good as the men.' Almost all of the factors that drive women out of the STEM jobs are cultural, Groome said. These issues were identified in a 2011 study from the Department of Commerce."

take place in the indie and crowd-funded markets where they currently reside for the most part.

The Female Avatar: From Archetype to Stereotype

Archetypes pervade video game narratives regardless of gender, partly because they are easy to write—which is preferable for game design companies since most games privilege gameplay over narrative—and partly because they are easily recognizable and do not need much introduction; players know at a glance what these characters are like. Heroes are knights in shining armor or vigilantes or dark and brooding anti-heroes; villains are thugs, evil monarchs, warlords, drug lords, wild animals, and monsters of all stripes. Female characters are badass fighters, love interests, girls-next-door, prostitutes, eye candy, hyper sexualized demon seductresses, witches, and femmes fatales. Few games offer any sort of positive representation of body image or complex level of character development, let alone elderly characters or playable parents because that is not what sells games: young men are the target audience, so sex sells games, violence sells games, protagonists in whom young men recognize themselves, who they think are cool, and who they want to be sell games.

Archetypes can be very appealing because of their familiarity and our comfort level with them. They make games enjoyable and ethics in games clearer. But the tone shifts when playful archetypes become harmful stereotypes, perpetuating myths about the genders and reinforcing entrenched negative attitudes that can then be directed at living human beings. To sell video games, companies do not care whether their archetypal

writing becomes stereotypical. They simply rely on the tropes that best accomplish their goals, which are profit-driven.

While players can find thousands of free and indie game titles that feature innovative approaches to gender (*Walking Dead Season 2*), sexuality (*A Closed World*), race (*Never Alone*), character (*Thomas Was Alone*), ethics (*Limbo*), and what it means to be a game in the first place (*The Stanley Parable*), the vast majority of video games, particularly AAA titles (the ones that sell like summer blockbusters), feature male protagonists representing masculinity a certain way—a one-dimensional way. Male avatars promote muscular, grizzled physiques as the norm, as the one desirable type of male body and violence as the male approach to problem solving. Women are either entirely absent from games like this or are consigned to be side-kicks or are present only in the background or are used as context for the establishment of evil in the setting or a revenge or rescue plot for the protagonist male. Abuse against women is often a justification for the level of violence demanded of players in video games, as Anita Sarkeesian has pointed out.¹⁰⁷ If women are playable, there is generally just one female option—the token girl—and she perpetrates the same level of violence as the men and does nothing to challenge the game's stereotypes. Race in games is often a justification for violence as well. If the game is in a realistic setting, race is either stereotyped or a non-issue, and if the game is in a fantasy setting, tensions often run high between races because there is less chance of designers being accused of actual racism when the races in question are dwarves and elves.

¹⁰⁷ Sarkeesian, Anita. *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. Feminist Frequency. *YouTube.com*. 2015. Web. 8 Aug 2014.

When male characters deviate from violence as the main game mechanic, as in games that promote player agency as the most appealing game feature, such as Bioware's *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* series, male avatars generally retain the stereotyped physique, but can choose to problem solve through negotiation, persuasion, friendliness, bribery, or intimidation rather than outright violence. Violence is still a major game mechanic in these games, make no mistake, but the story is driven by conversations as well as combat. In these games, women are exactly the same as men mechanically, differing only in the look of outfits and armor and in their romance options. Even in the aforementioned Bioware games, which feature well-rounded female NPCs and the ability to play the protagonist as a female avatar, the costumes and armor are skin tight, at times even skimpy. Womens' gender difference here is merely an aesthetic, which effectively erases gender as a consideration at all, especially with regards to the protagonist. The male and female Commander Shepard have exactly the same scripts and exactly the same actionable game mechanics with only slight variation in romance options. At least the game allows for gender queer romances, a fact that was highly disparaged by outsiders to the gaming community prior to the games' release. Some critics even claimed that the game's sex scenes, no more explicit than what is shown on evening television and which are cut scenes—thus not playable—were pornographic.¹⁰⁸

The only reason *Mass Effect* featured a female option at all was because players called for it, and loudly. The resulting female avatar is known as “Femme Shep,” and she is an example of Sarkeesian's trope the “Ms. male character,” the female version of a

¹⁰⁸ “Fox News Smears Mass Effect.” *GamePolitics.com*. 22 Jan 2008, accessed 16 May 2015.

default male character, examples of which include Minnie Mouse and Ms. Pac Man.¹⁰⁹

This does not diminish how powerful it is when she interrupts a ranting NPC with a wicked head-butt to the face or how authoritative her speeches in the game are, but it is worth noting that these actions come as more of a surprise from a female character, and, based on anecdotal evidence, the widespread support for her existence may have been largely for aesthetic rather than story or gameplay or identity-creation reasons.¹¹⁰

In her book *Rise of the Video Game Zinesters*, Anna Anthropy writes that “As a queer woman in 2012, in a culture pervaded by video games. . . I have to strain to find any game that’s about a queer woman, to find any game that resembles my own experience.”¹¹¹ One game that answers some of Anthropy’s concerns is the Gambit game *A Closed World*. It explores the psyche of an LGBTQ-identified person. The game opens with voiceover narration and the seemingly simple question “Are you Male or Female?” at which point the player must choose one. The gameplay is simple; players navigate their avatar—gender-neutral in appearance—through a forest, encountering demons that attack the player with rhetorical appeals of ethos, logos, or pathos. The player must fight back with the most affective appeal until the demon is defeated without losing control themselves (there is no health bar, but a Composure bar), at which point they can move on. Fighting sequences are broken up using cut scenes in which the player scrolls through

¹⁰⁹ Sarkeesian, Anita. *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*. Feminist Frequency. *YouTube.com*. 2015. Web. 8 Aug 2014.

¹¹⁰ I have heard many male gamers both in person and online explain their preference for playing female avatars since, if they are going to put in hours upon hours of gameplay, they would like to at least look at something more attractive, a clear objectification of the female avatar. This is especially common in games like *World of Warcraft* where clothing is more scant. The other reason for this preference is that in most games, the coding required to adequately represent a female body is by far more complicated and involved than the coding for male bodies, so female bodies tend to end up looking better because of the volume of time spent on them by developers, ironically enough.

¹¹¹ Anthropy, Anna. *Rise of the Video Game Zinesters: How Freaks, Normals, Amateurs, Artists, Dreamers, Drop-Outs, Queers, Housewives, and People Like You Are Taking Back An Art Form*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012. Kindle edition.

dialogue with family members and the character's sweetheart—scenes that precede the character's entry into the forest.

The game's message is very subtle—it could be read to deal with the feelings of anyone ostracized by society overcoming personal strife. To make the designers' intentions clearer, the game uses a randomizer for gender-specific pronouns in dialogue. The game chooses a gender for the player's sweetheart regardless of the gender they chose to play, but the cut scenes do not change: the player-character's family still disapproves of the sweetheart no matter whether the relationship is homo- or heterosexual. When the game reveals why the sweetheart left and went into the forest, it becomes clear that the entire society is based around whichever form of relationship is opposed to the gender make-up of the player-character's relationship with the sweetheart, making the character's love for him or her forbidden on the basis of gender identity.

Games like the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* series by Bioware are excellent examples of the kind of greater freedom of choice serious gamers respond to enthusiastically. These two series allowed players to be male or female, to control every aspect of their appearance, and to have relationships with male or female characters—regardless of their own character's gender, relationships that resulted in in-game benefits. This kind of richness can only benefit a society in which people of all demographics are flocking to games by the millions. What's more, games are fully capable of engaging both our basic enjoyment in accomplishing goals and our higher ethical, emotional, and psychological concerns. Gamers are beginning to demand such things of the industry, and we can only hope that this push will gather strength and breadth.

Before I turn to video games for nuanced examples of the archetype I most want to highlight for feminist purposes, I would like to take a moment to turn to folklore and literature to get a handle on the value of the trickster woman. I want to connect this archetype to female gamerdom as an approach to forming feminist identities as heroism. These examples should help illustrate both problems and solutions in modern attitudes toward feminism, which I will illuminate along the way, and this will tangentially lead us back to gaming.

Trickster Women: Two Greek Myths

A great many tales the world over draw a wide gap between the female monster and the female hero, making the distinctions between the two so blatantly obvious the audience runs little risk of mistaking one for the other. While we call them “myths,” their purpose is to be used to teach people to judge reality in a way that aligns with the society’s values system. For the Greeks, the difference between the good and evil woman was the illustrated between Clytemnestra and Penelope. Both are defined by their behavior toward their husbands and their situations in their respective families. Their function is to demonstrate most clearly to Greek women how a woman is or is not to behave and to Greek men what is acceptable behavior to encourage or allow in the women in their lives. Clytemnestra is overcome with grief and rage by Agamemnon’s sacrifice of her daughter Iphigenia to Artemis for the sake of a favorable wind, and letting her emotions drive her actions is a major part of what the Greeks would see as her destructive femininity. Penelope manages to maintain her fidelity to Odysseus in spite of

his twenty year absence, society's expectation for her to remarry, and the host of suitors residing in her house with the intention of winning her hand (and exploiting her Greek duty of hospitality).

Clarissa Pinkola Estes is one scholar who is bringing to light some of the history of the woman-as-hero; in *Women Who Run with the Wolves* and *The Power of the Crone*, she explains that the patriarchal system of pagan religion was a response to religious practices from prehistory. Before the pantheon featuring specialized gods and goddesses, there is evidence suggesting that for thousands of years, many cultures were matriarchal, woman-centered, and worshipped a single goddess representing natural processes including birth and death. While this view is not universally accepted, figurines recovered from prehistory definitely tell a different tale of women than their patriarchal counterparts.

A major shift is thought by some feminist scholars to have occurred in ancient Greece; the old ways were cast aside, and the Goddess was split into three main types: maiden, mother, and crone, thus seriously diminishing feminine power. The major ancient pantheons—Greek, Roman, Norse, Aztec, Chinese—were ruled by male figures who often encourage warfare, rape, revenge, and other acts of violence. Importantly, not everyone agrees with this assessment, and the nay-sayers are significantly placed in the patriarchal institution of academe.¹¹²

But many tales of remarkable women remain. They have been either rendered almost invisible by lack of attention from major media (what Western audience is

¹¹² Lauren Talalay. "The Mother Goddess in Prehistory: Debates and Perspectives." *Women Outside Athens and Rome*. (Blackwell Publishing. 2012). Accessed 2 May 2014.

familiar with Anait or Svetlana?) or altered to suit patriarchal goals (think of Disney's rendition of classic tales—originally far more violent and complex—like *Cinderella* and *Snow White*). In some branches of modern Wicca (and elsewhere) the Goddess lives on in this triad known as the Triple Goddess, and those who worship her see her as a single deity with many aspects. Some Wiccan groups worship only the goddess, utterly rejecting patriarchy, while others incorporate both masculine and feminine archetypes into their practices.

Valerie Frankel uses the goddess triad in her book *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey Through Myth and Legend*. The maiden-mother-crone model helps her classify women in folklore from all over the world—and challenge Joseph Campbell's male-centered hero's journey from *Hero of a Thousand Faces* (which for the most part casts woman as adversary, seductress, prize, or obstacle to be overcome). Frankel traces the female journey through life using the phases of the moon,¹¹³ adding the Spiritual Guardian to the goddess triad and introducing opposites for each part of the journey: destroyer opposite princess, widow opposite wife and mother, and—significantly for me—trickster opposite seductress.

The most interesting part of the feminine cycle is its end: the Crone section, the waning crescent moon. A woman in this phase may, indeed, be driven to become the terrible mother because of her jealousy of the maiden and her inability to cope with aging and giving up her place at the family's center. But this is a time full of potential: the crone is the most dangerous woman to society—not in that she is evil, but because she is

¹¹³ Valerie Estelle Frankel. *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company Inc.), 2010. 176-177

experienced and because husband and children no longer have a hold on her, she is free to be as radical as she chooses. For the first time in her life, no one else needs her, so she can focus on herself and do and think as she pleases. She can redefine herself—not as wife or mother—but as woman. She has the power to challenge society's norms, to question masculine authority, and to guide the maidens and the mothers in her life toward the same wisdom. Crones are the midwives, the herbalists, the healers, and the fount of knowledge of the female experience, the female body, the female heart.

Patriarchy has recognized this potential and sought to overcome it with fear and violence. The Salem Witch Trials are a case-in-point. Patriarchy banishes the crone to the underworld where she cannot intervene in the world above. But even in death, the crone can maintain her power—she can even reach greater power than she would have alive. In fact, she can become a goddess herself, watching over others and keeping them safe from the world's ills.

But in the space between the waning crescent moon and the born-again goddess lies darkness: the new moon. Frankel's new moon woman is the Trickster, and she is the crone at the height of her powers. She is Baubo, lewdly dancing to make Demeter laugh when she cannot recover Persephone, thus restoring the world's spring. She is the Khandroma of Tibet, messing with heroes and testing their abilities and virtues, but also saving them from the direst scrapes they get into. She is the Japanese tanuki, letting hundreds of years pass in an instant while a man watches her play Go. In other words, she is powerful not for strength of arms, but through cleverness and cunning. Although women have been derided for these traits across human history, they are invaluable

problem-solving tools, the kind of tools needed to address social problems like those faced by women in video games culture, and the kind that could be explored through game design as an alternative to the violence of combat mechanics, upon which many games rely.

In *Scheherazade's Sisters*, Marilyn Jurich refers to trickster women in myth and legend as “trickstars” (xiii), her way of distinguishing women who excel at trickery from their male counterparts. The necessity of creating this new term cannot be understated; without it, we are forced—as I have been so far—to add “female” or “woman” as modifiers to terms widely accepted as inherently masculine. How can we expect feminine archetypes to carry the same weight if we have to constantly modify them to make them work? Add Jurich’s trickstar to Toni Wolff’s Amazon, Hetaera, Mother, and Medium, her designations of female archetypes.¹¹⁴

Jurich begins—as her title suggests—with the tale of Scheherazade, who requests to marry the mad king who believes all women to be villainous and has vowed to marry and murder one woman every night. She does this in an effort to stop the bloodshed and the unjust indictment of an entire sex, so the tales she spins each night are not only to save her own life, but also those of the women who might have died if she had done nothing. Jurich examines Scheherazade’s rhetorical technique—storytelling—and claims that it is the only way this man would ever see reason:

Of course, Scheherazade knew better than to reason, preach or bargain; and certainly, she knew enough not to beg or plead—such importuning, the formula commonly used by victims, would only assure eventual annihilation. No direct appeal of any kind would have worked—of this Scheherazade was certain. Only a *trick* could succeed. (xvii)

¹¹⁴ Frankel, *From Girl to Goddess: The Heroine's Journey through Myth and Legend*. 38

There is a sense from many tales, as well as this one, that men feel the need to protect themselves from the duplicity and deceit of women. Marriage is conceived of as a battleground, and one where the men are sorely ill equipped to fight. Yet women's motivations and goals are often for the preservation of the family and the protection of the household. To undermine their efforts is to destroy the basic unit of society. Dead or missing mothers account for much of the horror that takes place in tales.

But the Trickster woman is far more unsettling than her male counterpart, possibly because of the woman's accepted social roles as wife and mother. The maiden is meant to be innocent and ripe for marriage, not conniving or—heaven forbid—cleverer than her prospective husband. The mother is not supposed to be devious or untrustworthy, and what a terrifying prospect if she is, given her powerful central place in the family! But as she has passed her prime and played out her expected feminine roles, the crone has license to be the Trickster, and thus help bring about meaningful change in the world.

To return to Clytemnestra and Penelope, it is important to note that *both* are tricksters, and both are mothers and motivated by their motherhood. Clytemnestra concocts a vicious murder, exploiting her husband's unsuspecting comfort at finally being home from war. She confronts him at his most vulnerable, when he is bathing—naked, cleansing himself of war. Worse, she kills him in a masculine way, penetrating his body with the dagger. Women's weapons are traditionally expected to be more subtle and clean: poison or smothering are women's tactics, corruptions of the trust placed in them

by their families or guests expecting hospitality. Clytemnestra gets her hands dirty, and the Greeks must see her duly punished by her dutiful son, Orestes. She cannot get away with her crime, though her husband was free and clear by social (double) standards.

By contrast, Penelope uses her wiles in a wholly acceptable and feminine way that serves to purge all possible doubts in her virtue. Tasked with accommodating a host of suitors vying for her property and position, she is the perfect hostess to them, providing every comfort, yet at the same time protecting her son and holding off the suitors' advances. She tells them that she will choose a new husband when she has finished weaving a funeral shroud for Odysseus's father, Laertes, which she works on publicly during the day, but then unweaves parts of at night. When she is discovered and betrayed in her scheme (by a woman, no less), she devises an impossible test for the suitors to determine who is worthy of her hand: to string Odysseus's unyieldingly rigid bow and fire an arrow through twelve ax heads. Unbeknownst to her, but crucially for the story and her development as a character, in making this decision, it is she who creates the circumstances for Odysseus's return to the family. Odysseus is well known as a man of cunning, and it serves him well on his adventures, but many overlook the cunning of his wife, writing it off as simply the social (and narrative) imperative for her to do her wifely and motherly duty.

Two tricksters, two very different interpretations of the trickster woman, each to serve a specific purpose in preserving patriarchy. Both are called into question by modern feminism: can either of these women be deemed feminist? And whose feminism are we talking about (Second Wave? Third? Or fourth?) Even ancient Greek playwright

Euripides unsettles his comfortable audience and makes them question their acceptance of this lesson on femininity with his rendition of Clytemnestra's story as a three-part play, *The Oresteia*. To a modern audience, Clytemnestra's plight definitely sees an ethical shift. Can we really hate her for destroying her awful husband, condemn her for loving her daughter so much? And to a modern audience, well versed in the possibilities of feminism, dutiful Penelope may fall a bit flat where Clytemnestra fits the now-familiar archetype of the "strong" woman, consumed by revenge. Her strength is utterly undermined by her subservience to her faithless husband. So which woman is our real hero now?

The value of the trickstar is that she can cross boundaries no other person dares, and if she is not bound into cronehood—if she is a maiden or a mother—how much more inspiring can she be? How much more terrifying? Is the maiden or mother trickstar a monster or a heroine? Of course she can be both, if we use our imaginations, try to fairly represent the human beings around us, whatever their genders, and break out of our society's insistence on tired old stereotypes. If the trickstar is both heroine and villainess, then she fits the qualities of the archetype I would like to see explored in games: the monstrous woman.

Ethical Gender in Games

The power of media is to represent and thus reveal to us realities that we experience every day, but which have become so commonplace as to be invisible. An ethical game with respect to gender would have repercussions and mechanics in place for

differentiating in terms of gender and would provide meaningful content that represents ordinary world gender issues (or translates these into a fantasy world) and forces players to deal with them. If gender equality is considered a necessity for balanced gameplay, then I would at least like to see a quest line centered around a women's movement for better rights, for example. Just because PCs are gender equal does not mean everyone is, as in the feminist movement: just because women are talking about the difficulties they face does not mean that all women experience those difficulties, or that all the problems—or even the most serious ones—are being recognized. But first, games would have to allow for worlds that include the kind of inequality we see in our ordinary lives.

Some games represent female characters in interesting and empowering ways. Two such are the 2013 *Tomb Raider* game and *The Walking Dead Season 2*. In her 2013 title, Lara Croft was less sexualized and more complex than in any of the games in the series that came before it. The 2013 game is Lara's origin story, depicting her first kill, which is to fend off an attempted rape. The development team met some resistance regarding whether or not this was an ethical move, but then this reflects the cultural debate over whether depiction of rape in media is offensive, particularly to rape survivors, or if it helps bring the issue of rape to light and alter widely held beliefs about it including victim blaming and the cultures of entitlement, silence, and protection that allow rape to go unpunished or merely reprimanded.

After her ordeal, Lara pulls herself together and starts searching for her missing comrades, investigating the island on which they have shipwrecked, and solving the game's central mystery. Players have debated whether they experience the game as Lara

herself or as a spectator watching over her shoulder, protecting her from harm. There are opinions on all sides, and questions like this are part of what make games worth playing and talking about.

In TellTale's *The Walking Dead Season 2*, our protagonist is a young girl named Clementine. Few other games have been brave enough to make a child a protagonist, let alone a female child, let alone in the horror genre. As Clementine, players experience the zombie apocalypse and struggles with other survivors, and judging from discussions on this game's forums, it is much harder to see oneself as merely Clementine's protector, most likely because the game is a story-driven role-playing game rather than a puzzle/shooter like *Tomb Raider 2013*. Here, the player's choices dictate the plot with different possible outcomes where *Tomb Raider* has only one set of events and conclusion. Because of the increased engagement and intimacy the player gets from *The Walking Dead* games, players identify more with characters and immerse in the action and story of the game, meaning in this case we identify and immerse with this little girl who is growing up way too fast, but does so of obvious necessity. Emotions run high, in other words, and that is an incredibly powerful thing, and wonderful to experience via a female character as well developed as Clementine.

Where to Go From Here: The Power of Inclusivity

Inclusive feminism is my ideal for an approach to video game design because of its core value of the multiplicity of meanings and approaches to problem solving. As I have pointed out repeatedly, video games have incredible heuritic potential for

designerly thinkers, which means that the design of play and the ways we approach play can help us work through the most difficult issues we face in our cultures, and further, can bring us into the experiences of others, whatever their ability, ethnicity, religion, or gender identification. Games allow us to become productively lost, to explore potential identities not possible to pursue in real life. Scholars are uniquely suited to be on the crest of a wave of designerly thinkers making games as scholarship.

Lastly, the archetype of the female monster as a dynamic and ambiguous type of trickstar advances ideals of inclusive feminism, and thus it is this archetype I have tried to create for my video game, and it is the one I will focus on in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOLDING OUT FOR A MONSTER:

A CALL FOR MONSTROUS HEROINES IN TV AND VIDEO GAMES

“Power must be tricked out of power, and the powerless have only the trick as their resource.”
(Marilyn Jurich, *Scheherazade’s Sisters xvii*)

“...the binary of oppressive/emancipatory popular culture unduly restrains the power of its interventions in life and our scholarly engagement with it. Instead, the most productive point of inquiry is precisely the way it is always both.” (Sheryl Vint, “Killing Us Softly?”²⁴)

Buffy is a kickass hero. She is one of the most complicated women who appeared on television in the late 1990s; she is feminist, but still flawed; special, but still relatable; strong, but still feminine. But what is her relationship to the monsters in her life? In falling for Buffy, both Angel and Spike—vampires whom Buffy, as the Slayer, should destroy, but who instead become her love interests—attempt to be more in touch with their humanity. Spike brings this to light most clearly when he says, “I know that I’m a monster, but you treat me like a man.”¹¹⁵ This phenomenon of the monstrous male fighting his violent nature for the sake of a human girl is not exceptional to male characters on *Buffy*; we see this in Bill and Erik (*True Blood*), in Stefan and Damon (*The Vampire Diaries*), in Edward and Jacob (*Twilight*), and, notably, most of these male monsters are vampires.

The heroines of these shows—Buffy, Sookie Stackhouse (*True Blood*), Elena Gilbert (*The Vampire Diaries*), Bella Swan (*Twilight*)—are written as a kind of corollary to the “everyman” figure of literature, which I will call the “everygirl.” With the exception of Buffy, each of them begins their stories as the girl next-door, unremarkable,

¹¹⁵ BTVS s5e22 “The Gift”

utterly average, and, most importantly, human. Everygirl-ness is the most frequent critique of Bella, whose average persona, as she frequently points out her clumsiness and bemoans her ordinariness, is perhaps over-emphasized,¹¹⁶ but which has been explained as a way to let the audience imagine themselves as her.¹¹⁷ Even Buffy struggles to maintain a normal teenage girlhood, an aspect of her character used to make her relatable to an unremarkable human audience.

The human female hero grounds the male monster's struggle to keep his humanity. It's not the woman herself, but his love for her that is important for him. In the loss of humanity through transformation into a monster, the male monster has also lost his traditional male purpose: to protect the ones he loves. He has become a consumer and exploiter of humanity rather than its guardian. But falling for the everygirl gives him back that purpose. However capable these women are, they are constantly overshadowed by the protective force of their already-powerful male overseers. Even later in their stories when these women develop powers of their own, the men in their lives have trouble letting them stand on their own. Buffy, who has been capable of fighting monsters from the very beginning, always has her well-meaning protectors around: Xander, Angel, Spike, and her Watcher, Giles.¹¹⁸ And even in her role as Slayer, her power is still just a

¹¹⁶ Ames, Franiuk and Scherr,

¹¹⁷ Bonnie Mann, "Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the 21st Century," *Twilight and Philosophy*, Eds Housel and Wisniewski

¹¹⁸ Buffy is more complicated than the reading I am capitalizing on at present. She is constantly testing the limits of gender and definitions of feminism, as in the season 1 episode "Halloween" when she becomes her costume, a stereotypical Victorian woman who faints and runs to the protection of men rather than fighting; when it is all over, she declares, "It's good to be me" (Jones 46). While most of these women could spark controversy about whether or not they qualify as feminist icons, Bella and Buffy have seen the most heated debate on this subject (Ames; Mann; Magoulick; Middleton). For example, in "Buffy vs. Bella," Bethan Jones discusses how Buffy constantly defies the Council's will and struggles against their authority, which is a fairly direct microcosm for the feminist struggle in general.

tool for the male-dominated Council.¹¹⁹ In the most pessimistic reading, she can be interpreted as just a mindless weapon for men to use: it doesn't matter who she is or what she thinks or wants; what is important is that she saves the world, safeguards their humanity, and gives them hope. If her priorities stray too far from this path, they can always let her die and get a new Slayer.

At their worst, the everygirl's lesson for real-life women is that they, too, can change the monstrous men in their lives into heroes, that facilitating male happiness is their social function and imperative, and the only reason women have value. How we combat this message has been the subject of much feminist debate surrounding these characters.¹²⁰ One way to do that is to let them struggle with monstrosity in themselves.

Staying human is the top priority for the everygirl in a vampire story (or the goal of everyone around her, depending on the case). The woman's humanity becomes an analog for what would otherwise more overtly be her sexual virtue, and the two are closely allied. Different stories deal with this issue of "purity" in different ways. Elena of *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD) wants nothing more than to remain human and live a normal life—having children, growing old—in spite of her love for a vampire—or two.¹²¹ By contrast, *Twilight*'s Bella cannot become a vampire fast enough. Both are eventually turned, Elena by an unfortunate mishap,¹²² to which she responds: "I was ready to die. I

¹¹⁹ Zoe-Jane Playdon, "The Outsiders Society: Religious Imagery in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*." *Slayage*. 2.1 (May 2002). ePub.

¹²⁰ Mann; Vint

¹²¹ TVD s2e20 "The Last Day"

¹²² In this universe, vampirism is achieved by the victim dying with vampire blood in their system, and then feeding on human blood to complete the change. If they do not feed quickly enough, a new vampire will weaken and die. Because vampire blood can be used to heal humans, one of the doctors at the hospital (also a vampire) heals Elena using Damon's blood, and shortly thereafter Elena's car plunges into the river, and she drowns, thus beginning her transition, which is not complete until she feeds for the first time at the end of s3e1.

was supposed to die. I don't. . . I don't want to be—I can't be a vampire,”¹²³ and Bella, eagerly, peacefully, and fully realized as a character only after her transformation: “After 18 years of being ordinary, I finally found that I could shine. I was born to be a vampire,” she says, and goes on: “My time as a human is over, but I never felt so alive.”¹²⁴

In both Bella's and Elena's cases, male monsters oversee, police, and direct the woman's transformation into monster. They decide when and how it happens, and even once these two women come into their full powers, the men have a heavy hand in their lives. In Bella's case, Edward finally turns her only when she is dying after childbirth, and he maintains his protectiveness even though as a new vampire, she is stronger than he is for a time. He finally has to grudgingly admit in the final *Twilight* film, “I've had a bad habit of underestimating you.”¹²⁵ He says this as though he has only just now thought of it, while the incredulous audience has most likely been thinking it since day one.

The male policing of monstrosity is also evident in *The Vampire Diaries*. For Elena, the intensity of emotions that comes with vampirism becomes a burden too difficult to bear. When Elena's brother Jeremy dies later in season four, she is overcome with the grief of her losses, which now include every blood relative she had. Stefan asks Damon to “help her,” and Damon instructs her to turn off her humanity so she will not have to bear the pain¹²⁶—turning their humanity/emotions off is one of the most significant powers vampires in *TVD* have. Six episodes later, it is (again) Damon who forces her to turn her emotions back on, which he does by murdering her childhood friend

¹²³ *TVD* s4e1 “Growing Pains”

¹²⁴ *Breaking Dawn, part 2*

¹²⁵ *Breaking Dawn, part 2*

¹²⁶ *TVD* s4e15 “Stand By Me”

before her eyes.¹²⁷ Damon gets upset whenever Stefan tries to respect Elena's decisions. In the opening episode of season four, Elena says she wants to look for any possible way to prevent her change, and Damon responds, "Your choice, Elena. [sarcastically] As always."¹²⁸ Damon does not hesitate to mansplain Elena's own feelings to her later, saying, "You don't want to be like this."¹²⁹ Even given the fact that she has actively repressed her emotions and has been behaving recklessly, this is still overbearing and patronizing.

Elena has a little more luck asserting herself over Stefan, but it always comes across as though he is humoring her and could always dominate her if he chose (Damon mentions this constantly), which indicates he still has the power in their relationship. Nonetheless, she does attempt to assert herself; Elena points out in Stefan exactly the criticism many have of Edward:

Stefan: "I know how deep down you can fall, and I know how difficult it is to climb back out."

Elena: "Look at you. Your whole world revolves around me. Maybe you're the one who needs to turn it all off."¹³⁰

Only while her humanity is "off" can she communicate her real opinion, turning Stefan's critique back on him, and her emotional situation (being "off") gives the audience leave to dismiss her assertiveness as, at best, denial or deflection, and at worst, "bitchy" feminine behavior that will be corrected when she is turned back "on." *TVD*'s vampires' "off" and "on" switch makes it easy to justify evil behavior in otherwise good characters, creating the semblance of character depth, but requiring only puppetry on the part of the

¹²⁷ *TVD* s4e21 "She's Come Undone"

¹²⁸ *TVD* s4e1 "Growing Pains"

¹²⁹ *TVD* s4e16 "Bring It On"

¹³⁰ *TVD* s4e16 "Bring It On"

character; only the choice to be “off” or “on” is deplorable, so the major ethical choices in monstrous characters become strictly coded in these terms rather than authentically moral ones, meaning viewers do not have to deal with the ambiguity of an otherwise admirable or relatable character’s condemnable actions. A character’s later guilt over what they did while “off” is a cheap way of humanizing them.

Both of these characters, who were boring stereotypes as everygirls, become much more interesting in the moment they become female monsters, though both narratives seem reluctant to let either woman truly struggle with what her loss of humanity means for her. Bella does not struggle with monstrosity; she always wanted it. But Elena’s turn is a tragic loss until she can come to terms with it, which she does by emotionally checking out almost immediately, and both of them are still overshadowed by the male monsters in their lives and overseen by far-reaching patriarchal hierarchies in the form of Carlisle—the patriarch of Edward’s vampire family—and the Volturi in *Twilight*, and the male-dominated vampiric Originals—the oldest and most powerful vampires in the world—and the human Town Council in *TVD*. Bella’s and Elena’s everygirl-ness may be over, but their turns have merely entangled them in new patriarchies in which their monstrosity is crucially not at issue. Even the *TVD* Town Council, who care very much who is monstrous, cannot see any vampire as more than that; like the monstrous patriarchies, they also reject ambiguity, and viewers are meant to see the absolutist Council as just as monstrous or worse than the vampires themselves.

Everygirl-ness is a state Buffy defies because of her role as Slayer, which is part of what makes her one of the most interesting heroines in vampire media. But she is

never confronted with her own internal monstrosity the way Bella and Elena are. So what about the women of the Buffyverse who actually *are* vampires? The two major examples of the early seasons of *BTVS* are Drusilla and Darla. Drusilla is an ethereal and half-mad prophetess who plays with dolls and can barely fend for herself, yet is ruthless and twisted, preferring to feed on children;¹³¹ Darla is direct and powerful, and when we meet her in the opening scene of the series premiere, she and a teenage boy have broken into the school at night, and she clings to him in stereotypical feminine fashion, asking him to protect her; once he has assured her that they are alone, she attacks and kills him.¹³² Joss Whedon, the show's creator, wrote these two corrupted women to call traditional femininity into question, demonize it, and to juxtapose it to Buffy's more aggressive version of femininity. Drusilla and Darla have all the hallmarks of the stereotypical female monster: they are sexualized and use sexual desire as a weapon; they are not "Big Bads" themselves, but accompany, serve, and support male antagonists (Drusilla depends on Spike, and Darla serves The Master; she is just a thug in a miniskirt); they are not redeemable, something that is never called into question for either; and unfortunately, because of all this, they are flattened characters. They fall squarely within a stereotype of female monstrosity that recurs across media, representing corrupted versions of the most traditionally acceptable forms of femininity. They represent the feminine stance Buffy-as-heroine is meant to challenge, but they do not challenge their own positions themselves.

¹³¹ *BTVS* s2e3 "School Hard"

¹³² *BTVS* s1e1 "Welcome to the Hellmouth"

I do not disparage Joss Whedon's ability (and outspoken desire) to write complex characters, and of course, Willow—Buffy's best friend and powerful Wiccan—famously represents a collision of the heroic and the monstrous (although for practical reasons I will not be discussing her here). But I bring up the monstrous women of *Buffy* to demonstrate that even in the best-case scenario—a writer sympathetic to an array of women's experiences—monstrous women do not see the kind of complexity their male counterparts do.

This is especially the case in video games. Like Buffy, Lara Croft—the first video game woman most people think of—is a formidable hero taking on a male-dominated world of evil, but like Buffy she is also *not* a character who troubles the monster/hero divide. In spite of a legion of flattened female antagonists in games—demon seductresses, manipulative witches, revolting broodmothers, and hulking vagina-like monsters—some of the monstrous women found in these coded worlds are more than just embodiments of “bad” femininity. Some of them are immortal shape-shifting masterminds like Flemeth from the *Dragon Age* games, or scheming nature goddesses like the Ladies of the Wood from *The Witcher 3*. Given that they are at times helpful to the player, these villainesses have much complexity to offer as adversaries. Imagine what they could do as heroines.

One way to write women not as a gender or lack of gender, but as human beings with all the intricacies, ambiguities, and contradictions therein, is to turn them monstrous and let them deal with what that means for them. Over the course of this chapter, I will examine female characters in popular culture, specifically in 21st-century vampire

television series and films, exploring in particular the distinction between monstrous masculinity and monstrous femininity as depicted therein. I will highlight examples of female characters in these media who do walk the shaky line between monster and hero. Then I will turn to a discussion of the video game I have designed, looking to recent games¹³³ in search of the monstrous woman archetype and conducting a close reading of the complex heroine from Florence Marryat's little-read nineteenth-century novel *The Blood of the Vampire* (1897), which was published the same year as Stoker's *Dracula*, and on whom my game is based.

The Myth of the Strong Female Character

When television writers set out to portray a “strong” woman, they tend to simply remove or downplay what are commonly accepted to be feminine traits, and they do not fill the void with gender neutral traits, but with traditionally masculine ones. Carina Chocano points out in a NY Times “Riff” article:

“Strength,” in the parlance, is the 21st-century equivalent of “virtue.” And what we think of as “virtuous,” or culturally sanctioned, socially acceptable behavior now, in women as in men, is the ability to play down qualities that have been traditionally considered feminine and play up the qualities that have traditionally been considered masculine. “Strong female characters,” in other words, are often just female characters with the gendered behavior taken out. This makes me think that the problem is not that there aren't enough “strong” female characters in the movies — it's that there aren't enough realistically weak ones.¹³⁴

¹³³ This chapter focuses on this question for games with set characters and little to no customization, since these have the most content that depends on gender and race.

¹³⁴ Carina Chocano, “Tough, Cold, Terse, Taciturn and Prone to Not Saying Goodbye When They Hang Up the Phone.” New York Times Riff. 1 Jul 2011, accessed 29 Jan 2016.



Fig. 4.1: “Strong Female Characters” from the website, Hark, A Vagrant, <http://harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=311>

Earlier in the article, she acknowledges some characters, particularly Kristen Wiig’s in the movie *Bridesmaids*, as women who are realistically weak, but who have been overlooked because they are not likeable; they have believable flaws, and thus they do not suit any of the current archetypal norms for women in media, not even for the typical romantic comedy, where the women are unerringly successful in their careers, their personality flaws are cute, and all will soon be solved by a relationship.

Writers should be composing people, not genders. And they should not be un-gendering female characters to make them “strong,” an ambiguous term that seems to most often mean physically and emotionally capable, which translates to women who are trained to fight and emotionally stoic. Most of the female characters viewers would point to as “strong” fall into this category: Katniss from *The Hunger Games*, The Bride from *Kill Bill*, Jessica from *Suits*, Cookie from *Empire*, Black Widow from *Avengers*, Maleficent of the 2013 *Sleeping Beauty* remake, almost every woman in the action genre and in television cop dramas, with rare exception¹³⁵. . . the list goes on and on. They do their best to deny, repress, and conceal their emotions, rarely betraying them, and then not for very long, and many of the women I have mentioned are consumed by vengeance. This fraught relationship with emotions is very much an embrace of the stoic masculine ideal, whose only acceptable emotional state is rage. A moment of emotional vulnerability is the lightest of writerly touches in a minimal effort to keep the character passably relatable. Their “strength,” represented by stoicism (or, if anything, anger) and violence, is the main trait that defines them. Rather than this flat version of “strength,” I would be more interested in seeing women who have been the subjects of strong *writing*.

In order for female characters to capture our imaginations as they could—as so many male characters have—we have to stop thinking of them as women first and remember that they are human first, that gender in our society is socially constructed, as

¹³⁵ The most significant exception to date is Netflix’s *Jessica Jones*. The show revolves around themes of abuse, trauma, and emotional brokenness, and even though the title character is endowed with superhuman strength, that is no match for her nemesis, the Purple Man, who wields mind control powers and a deeply disturbing sadism. Jessica is a flawed and floundering heroine, filled with resolve and despair by turns, who eventually defeats her enemy through cunning and strength of will, rather than arms. Her story serves as a much-needed microcosm for the various domestic and sexual abuses women in our culture suffer all too frequently, and the show’s extremely positive reception is a testament to our society’s readiness to move toward change for women in bad situations, and to blatantly represent women’s issues in mainstream media.

it always has been. It would be far more productive and interesting for our media to stop doing the work of that construction for us so we can progress past it in our thinking about ourselves as gendered beings. One way to accomplish that is to use the most interactive, engaging medium we have: video games. While television and film are beginning to explore the monstrous heroine, we have yet to see a powerful example in video games, which is a crucial medium in its status as the newest narrative form, its uniqueness as a participatory genre, and in the proliferation of games in our daily lives.

Video game heroines are becoming more numerous, and some of them do explore concepts of monstrosity, but thus far, video games have drawn a clear distinction between women who are ostracized from society because of their aberrant behavior or status as witches or sorceresses of some kind, but who are not actually monstrous in the usual sense; and women who clearly are monstrous, but who have no redeeming qualities and must be destroyed by the game's hero to preserve the status quo and the sanctity of human life. Two games that do this are *Borderlands 2*, whose Sirens are playable characters and powerful allies, but considered by the villain to be minable resources; and *The Witcher 3*, which portrays some powerful sorceresses as close allies to the player, and who are being hunted and burned by religious zealots. Both of these games also include female antagonists whom the player must defeat.

But well written and interesting as some of these women are, neither of these games has what I am seeking in a monstrous heroine. The closest games have come is the character Bayonetta, from the game series of the same name, who is a witch in search of her forgotten past. Unfortunately, *Bayonetta's* gameplay undermines the feminist

storyline by constantly foregrounding the protagonist's naked or tightly leather-clad body. And as a witch, she may be empowered and ostracized, dealing with which develops her character, but she is still not the monster I am looking for because the implications of monstrosity are not a part of her character; she may be a witch, but she does not have to question whether she will lose her humanity, as the vampires in other media must constantly do. In short, I'm still holding out for a monster, and it seems that if I want to see one in video games, I will have to design her myself.

One of the earliest female vampires in fiction and one of the few who defies the stereotypes established in the Victorian period and perpetuated in 21st century vampire literature and popular culture, Harriet Brandt from Florence Marryat's *The Blood of the Vampire* may offer a way to get into these issues, if we get the chance to play her in a video game. And so I have designed one, starring this monstrous heroine, who does not wear high-heeled boots, sarcastically quip, or fight bad guys in the usual way. She is also not feminine in the usual way for Victorian standards; raised outside of England, her manners are not refined, so she freely expresses herself in ways modern women can appreciate and value. Outbursts of emotion central in Harriet's personality are still condemned in women by contemporary Western society as "overly emotional," a "drama queen" or "diva." The misogyny of the novel's society and Harriet's head-on collision with it resonate in our own cultural context, making for interesting parallels in exploring Harriet's character. Represented in the medium of games, encountered and developed by players, Harriet's struggle with her own supposed monstrosity brings to light many feminist and racial issues with which we still struggle today.

Florence Marryat, the prolific Victorian novelist who penned *Harriet*, was also an activist and vocal supporter of the women's movement, though her writing is generally not considered by scholars to be feminist.¹³⁶ She is most well known for her sensation fiction, which emphasizes intrigue and mystery and contains motifs of murder, adultery, theft, and other crimes perpetrated by, for the most part, female characters. Yet some of her work dips into decidedly Gothic themes of empire and monstrosity, the most notable of which is *The Blood of the Vampire*. Released in 1897—the same year as *Dracula*—*The Blood of the Vampire* is known to scholars as “the Other vampire novel of 1897” since Robert Eldridge's article of this title. Its heroine is a financially independent, sexually open, twenty-one-year-old mixed-race woman coming to Europe from the plantations of colonial Jamaica for the first time. She is fair enough to “pass” for white, hiding the “taint” of her heritage, which (as Victorians believed) would inevitably surface in violence. The novel takes place mostly outside of England on the Continent, but does bring Harriet to London eventually. Nothing could be more terrifying for a Victorian audience than this independent mixed-race woman on English soil, yet Marryat insists on piling on still more, inflicting Harriet with psychic vampirism, a curse based on her mixed race heritage and the supposed monstrosity of her parents, and which she is entirely ignorant of; over time, her presence drains the life energy from those she loves, and since they sicken gradually, there is no reason to suspect Harriet is at the root of their weakness. She has no idea of her power, but Harriet's vampirism nonetheless grants

¹³⁶ Depledge, Greta. "Ideologically Challenging: Florence Marryat and Sensation Fiction." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2011): 306-318.

Marryat leave to kill her off in the end, rejecting her as a monster as Harriet rejects herself, regardless of her innocence.

As written by Marryat, Harriet Brandt is simply a hopeful, naïve young woman. Independently wealthy, she has traveled to Europe as a tourist, and with her friendly personality and unconcealed enthusiasm, she befriends Margaret Pullen, an Englishwoman, and her friends and family. But when Margaret's baby falls ill and dies, the family's doctor, Doctor Phillips informs everyone that because of her mixed-race heredity and dubious parentage, he believes Harriet Brandt is a psychic vampire, unknowingly feeding on the life energy of others, a possibility no one communicates to her until another death occurs¹³⁷ and Harriet confronts the doctor on the subject.¹³⁸ Harriet questions whether the doctor's claim is true, worrying that it is, but her new fiancé, Anthony Pennell, who is madly in love with her, persuades her to marry him anyway.¹³⁹ When she wakes to find him dead on their honeymoon, she is overcome with grief and commits suicide, foreclosing further development and denying Harriet the chance to untangle her racial and vampiric identities.¹⁴⁰

Doctor Phillips is Harriet's antagonist, as I read it, a knowledge-empowered patriarchal figure charged by society with maintaining social norms. Unmarried, he is not beholden to any woman, and as a medical man of understanding, he becomes a confidant for his female patients in addition to having the requisite power of a doctor over their bodies: "Doctor Phillips was a great favourite with the *beau sexe*. He was so mild and

¹³⁷ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 186

¹³⁸ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 193

¹³⁹ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 202

¹⁴⁰ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 226

courteous, so benevolent and sympathetic, that they felt sure he might be trusted with their little secrets. Women both young and old invaded his premises on a daily basis...”¹⁴¹ But counter to this description is his assertion of Harriet’s monstrosity, which he attributes to a complicated chain of causation: the miscegenation of her parents; their depraved experiments on slaves and lust for blood; her grandmother’s being bitten by a vampire bat while pregnant with Harriet’s mother.¹⁴² He sees Harriet as the product of social, racial, gender, and environmental harms bundled into one—albeit unknowing—monster. His role is to undermine Harriet’s status as a financially independent, sexually active, mixed-race woman and prevent her from causing any upset in British society. Where Van Helsing arrests Dracula’s attempted reverse colonization of England and corruption of its women, Doctor Phillips must safeguard England’s vulnerable young men from the genetic pollution of black blood and the cultural taint of slavery in the colonies. For the doctor, Harriet’s curse must not carry on to a new generation, and it must certainly be kept out of England.

But Harriet is ignorant of all of this. She is no mastermind like Dracula, plotting to infiltrate and corrupt. She holds no bitterness for the atrocities of slavery, having been raised largely apart from it in a convent and knowing nothing of her own racial background. She assumes that her mother was white and died in childbirth. She merely wants the freedom to choose her own path, whether marriage and motherhood or travel and flirtation. Unlike most women of the time, all doors are open to her. She is full of

¹⁴¹ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 192

¹⁴² Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 83

fascinating possibilities, which Doctor Phillips—and Marryat—move quickly to foreclose, and which my game reopens and explores.

In the novel, Harriet ends up convinced of her own monstrosity, but in the game, she cannot escape her identity. As players take her through the gamespace, their decisions about her attitudes and actions are what bring about the ending she receives, one of six possibilities, each riddled with ambiguity. It is my hope that Harriet can be a catalyst in video games culture to not only start thinking about gender more critically and with greater self-awareness of the consequences of writing unambiguous women, but also to take action in creating complicated and heroic women, because we do not need more everygirls running around. Harriet might just be the monstrous heroine we need.

The Monster for Whom Being is at Issue

“They want me to be afraid? It’s them who should be afraid. Of me.”
(Bo, s4e13 “Dark Horse”)

In my search for the monstrous heroine, I have turned to television and film representations, and the best example I have found of strength in writing and character development for a woman is a little-known television show called *Lost Girl*. Its protagonist Bo is a monstrous heroine we need. Because of its treatment of gender, this show stands alone, even in its popular genre—the supernatural drama—which includes *Buffy*, *Angel*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *The Originals*, and *True Blood*, as well as *Being Human* (both the British and American versions), and the runaway CW hit, *Supernatural*. Of all the female characters and even female protagonists featured in this genre, only *Lost*

Girl's female characters shine,¹⁴³ and the show manages this because it offers variety and complexity in its women, not just strength defined by traditionally masculine traits. With particular interest in the women of *Lost Girl* in comparison to several others, this section digs a little deeper into the pop culture women who turn—or simply are—monstrous, comparing some of the more constrained characters like Bella and Elena to Bo, who is decidedly feminist in being written with all the complexity and depth typical to male protagonists, but without stripping her of emotions or flaws.

Gender roles in monster media seem to follow a certain pattern: the protagonist may be female, but the monster is male; the human woman is the foundation of the male monster's conflicted humanity and keeps him wanting to be "good"; these women are unexceptional, or are not revealed to be special until later; there is a love triangle with another male monster. All of these conventions replicate accepted gender norms and perpetuate harmful myths about gender, particularly that any unexceptional woman can attract the interest of an exceptional, "monstrous" man (read abusive), but if she just gives him the love he needs, he will turn from monstrosity to humanity, and they will live happily ever after. He may even empower her with his strength and immortality, but he never truly trusts her to handle herself, and he will go to any length to protect her from harm. Those are comforting messages in a world that otherwise insists that women must strive to "have it all," even if they cannot.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ The recent Netflix original *iZombie* may also offer a powerful monstrous female protagonist, but I will not analyze it here.

¹⁴⁴ Anne-Marie Slaughter famously wrote "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," a critique of cultural expectations of women to be perfect wives and mothers on top of being highly successful in their careers. This "having it all" idea plays into the debate surrounding Sheryl Sandberg's "lean in" feminism, which posits that since women deserve an equal share of the leadership responsibilities in society and that men should likewise share domestic duties, women should be ambitious and strive for high-powered careers. These debates point to cultural expectations of women's

The love triangle is standard trope in this genre, and it is made up of two monstrous men and one human woman; but what happens when the woman doesn't need protecting anymore? In the examples I examine, the male monsters have a hard time letting the newly fledged monstrous woman fend for herself; they continue to overprotect and micromanage her life. In this vein, Bonnie Mann explains that Bella's modus operandi is self-sacrifice to the extreme: self-annihilation.¹⁴⁵ Mann connects Bella's approach to life to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which describes the woman's journey to adulthood and fulfillment as necessarily the death of herself and her rebirth as an extension of her lover, in this case, Edward, who also takes on the role of the involved parent Bella feels she does not have: as protector. These monsters are really more like superheroes; Bella directly states that she wants to become a vampire so that Edward and Jacob will not have to constantly save her; "I can't always be Lois Lane. I want to be Superman, too," she says.¹⁴⁶ Mann points out that vampires are (or appear to be) gender equal (a point I contest), and Bella desires to escape patriarchy through her transformation. Bella is eventually turned, but only out of necessity, and not until she and Edward have married and consummated their union, resulting in a pregnancy and successful birth, as well as Bella's turn, thus cementing her place in the patriarchal structure of her vampire family and the larger vampire society. Patriarchal tradition, it seems, must be reinforced, even in the murky world of monsters. Sexuality here is not

perfection; we are literally demanding that women fit the "strong" woman archetype we are seeing in media in their actual lives, and that is not only impossible, but is psychologically, emotionally, and physically damaging.

¹⁴⁵ Mann, Bonnie. "Vampire Love: The Second Sex Negotiates the Twenty-first Century." *Twilight and Philosophy: Vampires, Vegetarians, and the Pursuit of Immortality*. Eds Housel and Wisnewski. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Mann, 141

unambiguous; as Melissa Ames points out, “Surprisingly, all of the young adult narratives in this sample focus predominately on the sexuality of the female characters to the extent that they are often depicted more often as the more sexually aggressive sex or, at the very least, the more persistent sexual pursuers—which is something that could be celebrated within these texts.”¹⁴⁷ But in Bella’s case, her sexual aggression seems only to demonstrate her naïveté and Edward’s maturity, ethics, and resolve not to taint his everygirl—or empower her, not only with the strength he possesses, but also with the ability to be ethically ambiguous in attaining monster status.

Once she becomes a vampire, Bella’s power manifests, and, of course, it is one that only reinforces gender stereotypes. Non-fans derisively refer to her ability as the “love shield,” the power to protect herself and others from psychic harm. So, as Mann points out, while with one hand Meyer empowers Bella by making her strong, she does not break the misogynist mold, but fits Bella’s strength soundly in the traditional, mothering feminine. So Bella becomes the paragon of motherhood only through self-annihilation emotionally and psychologically (from the moment she met Edward) and physically (when the birth of her half-vampire child kills her and she must be turned to save her life).

Lost Girl turns these conventions on their heads, challenging accepted gender norms for women. Countering the tired, but still widely accepted patriarchal trope locating the risk and responsibility of sexuality squarely in the woman’s court—to which the vampire media I have been discussing closely cleave, as evidenced by their focus on

¹⁴⁷ Ames, Melissa A.. "Twilight Follows Tradition: Analyzing "Biting" Critiques of Vampire Narratives for their Portrayals of Gender & Sexuality" *Bitten by Twilight: Youth Culture, Media, and the Twilight Saga*. Eds. Melissa Click, Jennifer Stevens Aubrey, and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. 37-54.

the reification of sex and emphasis on the dangers, regrets, and losses of sexuality, rarely allowing any positive outcomes—*Lost Girl* depicts a protagonist whose life revolves around positive sex: she is a succubus. She can heal herself through sex, and without it, she weakens. She has flings, one-night-stands, and threesomes; she is bisexual, attracted to and capable of creating desire in both sexes, but she also has serious monogamous relationships. She only feeds on the willing, and once she learns to control her powers (which she does quickly), she does not kill her partners, but temporarily weakens them, using their chi energy to heal physical damage and to sustain herself, like food. This power is never used to characterize Bo as villainous, manipulative, or immoral; it is merely a facet of who she is, one that her partners are well aware of and accept about her. Her sexuality never damages her relationships, and it is not a central concern of the show, but merely a character trait of Bo's that influences events as much (or little) as any other character trait. Bo's flagrant, yet still deeply ethical sexuality is a refreshing foil to most of the depictions of sexuality available in media of any genre.

Isabeau (Bo for short) was raised outside of Fae culture (Fae refers to any sentient non-human the show portrays, many of them famous monsters of legend and folklore from cultures around the globe) and, much like Harriet Brandt, does not know what she is until the end of the series pilot episode. Captured by the leadership of the Light and Dark Fae, she is examined and told that she is a succubus, a creature that feeds by draining chi energy from the living. As she is an outsider, she does not belong to either the Light or the Dark, nor has she undergone any of the coming-of-age trials traditional to the Fae, so the Fae leaders agree that she must undertake two trials, and if she survives, she must

then choose a side. After beating a monstrous brute and one that manipulates the mind into self destruction, one of the Fae elders declares, “Child, you may name your side,” to which she announces, “Neither. I choose humans!”¹⁴⁸ From the very beginning, Bo actively breaks binaries and defies classification.

While she is, of course, promiscuous, she does have serious relationships as well. Her love triangle involves a monstrous wolf-man on the Light side, Dyson, and a human woman, Lauren, who is a scientist and doctor working for the Light Fae; in her choice of mates, she is non-prejudicial, and this depiction of a serious lesbian relationship is notably a rare one. Unlike the love triangles in *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, the protagonist is not human; one of the lovers is. Additionally, Bo’s love interests are never dictatorial like the vampiric men looming over Bella and Elena; relationship power is shared. Both Dyson and Lauren loyally stand by Bo, even when they are not currently in relationship with her, even working together and consequently building a kind of friendship and trust between them, and they never fall into the dysfunctional state of trying to dictate what Bo will do or trying to destroy each other. Bo is always in control of her own life. Like Buffy, she is eventually revealed to be the Champion, the Chosen One, and her insistence on neutrality, remaining in a liminal state of being and looking out for humans when no other Fae will, impacts the fate of all.

Bo’s intersectionality holds in her choice of companions as well. Her best friend and roommate is a human woman, Kenzi, whom she saved from being date-raped at the

¹⁴⁸ s1e1 “It’s a Fae, Fae, Fae, Fae World”

bar where she was working,¹⁴⁹ and for a while, they share an apartment with a mind-controlling Dark Fae, Vex, whose character in the show is perhaps the most ethically ambiguous of all.¹⁵⁰ Bo and Kenzi make it their business to help any Fae, regardless of their alignment, and Bo's neutrality is of interest to just about everyone she meets. She is not interested in absolutes, but always subverts the strict Fae rules, and realistically, that approach has its benefits and consequences. "There's never only one way," she says during her Dawning trial,¹⁵¹ the test all Fae must undergo to determine whether they will remain in control of their powers or fall to them, becoming mindless, monstrous Under Fae, and this attitude is one reinforced throughout the series.

The episodes leading up to this point illustrate that Fae monstrosity is not as easy as Bo previously believed, that its power can cause a fall away from humanity and into true monsterhood, the kind of fall Doctor Phillips describes in Harriet's mother: "She was not a woman, she was a fiend... A fat, flabby half-caste... with her sensual mouth, her greedy eyes, her low forehead and half-formed brain, and her lust for blood."¹⁵² In the game, Harriet is eventually confronted with her mother—or a being who claims to be her mother—but unlike Doctor Phillips's grotesque characterization of her, she appears as a normal slave woman, and through a series of choices in the conversation players direct with her, she offers more insight into what monstrosity might mean for Harriet: carefully

¹⁴⁹ s1e1 "It's a Fae, Fae, Fae, Fae World"

¹⁵⁰ Vex is a bag of contradictions. Before Bo and Kenzi meet him, they are investigating a series of gruesome mutilations he was behind. His power to control others' bodies while they are still lucid lends itself to villainy, but his dry sense of humor, gothic fashion sense (in the same vein as Bo and Kenzi's), and grudging friendship with the two women belie that. He is always self-serving, but he clearly cares about Kenzi in particular, and while he pursues power, happily manipulates them at times, and is a coward when it comes to direct confrontation, he does them no real harm and comes to their aid more than once. His character feels like a quirky and mischievous younger brother who sometimes goes too far.

¹⁵¹ s3e9 "The Ceremony"

¹⁵² Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 83

controlled inner strength; power to empower the disempowered; the ability to dictate and police morality; or, abominable and unwanted, a power that must be extinguished lest it consume her. At this point in the game, players can choose death for Harriet, just as she chose it for herself, but with an array of other options and gameplay encouraging alternative readings of psychic vampirism's energy transfer, most players will likely go with something else.

Of all the monstrous women in popular culture media, Bo is strikingly similar to Harriet Brandt. Part of her power stems from her sexual appeal, she attracts women as well as men, and she drains people of their life force to gain power. Both heroines begin as unwitting monsters, although it is more obvious to Bo that something is wrong and she quickly learns what she is, and both women have been through the trauma of losing the ones they love by their own hand. Through my video game, I would like to see Harriet struggle through some of the emotional arcs that Bo follows in her progression from self-loathing to self-acceptance and heroism. Bo chooses to champion a less powerful group (humans), which helps to focus her motivations early on and maintain her clarity of morality, even when things get messy. Most of her journey in the overarching plot of the series is self-discovery; even though physical confrontation and violence are definitely a major part of her experience they are downplayed next to Bo's character development. Much of her background remains a mystery, and she is still new to Fae life as well, so while Bo is no everygirl, the viewer gets to come along for the ride with someone who knows just as little as they do about the supernatural world in the show. Just as Harriet's adversary is a powerful male figure, a representative of established patriarchy who tries

to disempower her by revealing her true nature to her, so too does Bo have to cope with antagonists who want to force her to choose a side or punish her for refusing, she also faces self-doubt in her encounters with opponents. Male antagonists try to diminish her, cause her to doubt her power and give up the fight. The Garuda, one of an ancient monstrous race that preys on Fae strife, tells Bo when she comes to face him, “You’re no champion. You’re just a girl.”¹⁵³ Of course, she promptly dispatches him.

Harriet, by contrast, has only herself, no loyal companions to ground her; with no powerful group to champion and no close friends by her side, she is more vulnerable to the judgment of others; she has no love triangle to spur her emotional development and sexual ethics; and she has to rely on only one source for information about her background, a source that is extremely biased against her. Because of Harriet’s isolation and inexperience, it is easy to see why she gives in to suicide in the novel. But in the game, she is forced to deal with her situation, however the player chooses to direct her, which means that, like Bo, she can grow in both physical strength and emotional resilience.

Sorceresses, Sirens, and Sylvan Ladies

Some video games have depicted powerful and ambiguous female characters, but as non-protagonists, their development is secondary to and supportive of the player’s direction of the male main character, and none of them are as well-written and overtly monstrous as Bo. As with Bayonetta, the supernatural female characters of *The Witcher 3*

¹⁵³ s2e22 “Flesh and Blood”

are witches (here termed sorceresses), and are thus only semi-monstrous, but in this game series, they are marginalized as a group in ways that Bayonetta only suffers as an individual. Social institutions both secular and religious find their powers politically dangerous and morally reprehensible, and the peasants fear them, so some nations make it their business to hunt and execute them.

Since *The Witcher 3* presents a traditional male protagonist, it will be helpful to establish a bit about him before I discuss the female characters in the game. The broody, socially ostracized, genetically-engineered, monster-fighting male character we get in Geralt of Rivia is nothing new. Feminists have criticized him for being so emotionally distant, even though that is supposedly a side effect of the drugs he had to take in order to become a Witcher, drugs whose main effect was to give him heightened senses and make him extremely difficult to kill. Only men can become witchers, and most of the boys who undergo the rituals die. So only the strongest survive, making Geralt the “special,” (though white, male, cisgendered) “chosen one” we have come to expect in video game protagonists.

In defense of Geralt, he is not really emotionally distant; it depends on how the player chooses to have him act. The game provides little moments of empathy, should the player choose to take them, such as lying to a mother who has lost her son, telling her that he was killed in an ambush instead of murdered as he deserted the army. And Geralt truly cares about the women in his life, and he refreshingly does not try to protect them. In one scene, Geralt and his former lover, the sorceress Triss, gain access to the prison where they hope to liberate an ally of theirs by saying that Geralt has captured Triss and brought

her there for the bounty on her head. The player as Geralt has to sit in a conversation with a hated enemy and play nice to get information while listening to Triss being tortured in the next room. The player can choose to switch to combat, but that is not what Triss asked Geralt to do; she specifically instructed him to find out what happened to their friend no matter what the cost to her. She is fully prepared to deal with the consequences of this plan for the sake of her friends, and it is up to the player to decide whether to jump in to protect her or honor her wishes.

The game's main love interest is Yennefer of Vengerberg, a powerful sorceress and longtime friend and lover of Geralt, though in the first two games, he has lost his memory, and thus struck up a relationship with Triss. Geralt spends much of the first part of the game looking for her, asking around the local taverns to find out if anyone has seen "A woman, dressed in black and white, who smells of lilac and gooseberries." Not the sort of description most John Wayne-type men would be comfortable giving. But as Carina Chocano pointed out in her NY Times riff against the "strong" woman archetype,

Not only does calling for "strong male characters" sound ridiculous and kind of reactionary, but who really wants to watch them? They sound boring. In fact, traditional "strong male characters" have been almost entirely abandoned in favor of male characters who are blubbery, dithering, neurotic, anxious, melancholic or otherwise "weak," because this weakness is precisely what makes characters interesting, relatable and funny. (Plague of Strong Women)

These women are not just hanging around with Geralt, waiting for him to take action or figure out what to do; they are off doing their own thing, even the young and barely trained Ciri, who turns out to be arguably the most important character in the game. Her fate at the game's end is the most significant marker of how gameplay went for the player. And what constitutes a "good" ending for her is very much so up to the

opinion of the player. Ciri is a young woman whom Geralt thinks of as a daughter. He has trained her to be a witcher, even though women cannot actually undergo the necessary rituals. She is playable for parts of the game, notably in the scene in which the player defeats the Ladies of the Wood, whom Geralt has left unharmed. Ciri takes on all three of them, and even though at least one escapes, that she can do so is indicative of her power. There are no everygirls here.

Similar to Yennefer, Triss, and Ciri in their mysterious powers, Sirens in the *Borderlands* games are not at all like their Greek namesakes, except that they are all women. Little is known about them at all in the lore of the *Borderlands* games; what we do know is that they have telekinetic powers, there are only six of them, and their power is somehow linked to other unexplained forces on the planet Pandora, where the games take place. Pandora is a frontier planet that is basically a wasteland, rendered such by the mining operations of Hyperion Corporation, the game's antagonist, the face of which is Handsome Jack. In *Borderlands 2*, the player infiltrates Jack's stronghold to free the siren Angel, and finds her hooked up to an elaborate machine that runs on her energy, as though she were some sort of battery. Jack is seeking a vault on the planet, rumored to be filled with riches, and his exploitation of Angel—who turns out to be his own daughter!—is to that end. She dies soon after the player arrives to free her, and Jack kidnaps Lilith, trying to force her to use her power to destroy the player first, and planning to use her the same way he used Angel.

It is almost too easy to parallel exploitation of Sirens as a resource with other natural resources being mined on the planet, namely iridium, the mineral Hyperion seeks.

Interestingly, Sirens are valued for their power by both the “good” and “bad” characters, the “good” because Sirens are excellent combatants and share a common enemy with the player, and the “bad” because of their use value as tools. So in both *Witcher* and *Borderlands*, women have power, but they are hunted and victimized because of what they are. They are heroic because they do not accept this victimization, but take action to save themselves (Angel and Lilith’s “damsel in distress” plot pushes against this notion, but if the player is a Siren, then they are saved by one of their own, which improves the situation a little). Sorceresses and Sirens are not exactly monsters, but they are certainly aberrant, and their heroism¹⁵⁴ is evident through their actions and in that they are more or less on the player’s side and may be playable as well. Playability is key since that is the most compelling way to infuse a character with agency and develop their story: give them the player’s agency. It is worth noting that whenever these women buck against the character’s goals in their non-playable iterations, that, too, is a kind of coded agency.

It may seem like these women fall easily into the category of “strong” women as they are physically capable combatants, which I discussed earlier, and I would agree that the Sirens do for the most part because while the lore of Sirens is one of the game world’s most interesting aspects, the characters themselves are not developed much in terms of personal growth or story; but I would contend that while, yes, the women of *The Witcher 3* can hold their own in combat and rarely need assistance from Geralt, they have more

¹⁵⁴ To clarify what I mean by “heroism:” *Borderlands* is not a game series that sets clear boundaries between right and wrong; in fact, it glories in the blurring of those lines for the sake of humor, shock value, and overall tone. The game’s NPCs—both villains and allies alike—are often insane, and the game constantly calls sanity into question. So my definition of “heroism” in this game is a loose one. Here, I mean characters loosely allied with the player whose motivations are more or less in line with the player character’s, but who may very well be morally reprehensible by Earth standards.

complexity than do most physically capable women on screen and do see excellent character development, for Yennefer and Triss over the course of three games.

There is a distinction between *Witcher*'s women and other video game women. In contrast to Bayonetta, for example, whose fighting style highlights her body to the exclusion of her personal integrity, values, and skills, even super-ceding the narrative itself, the women of *Witcher 3* are first and foremost clever, capable, and dangerous.

The game does present Yennefer and Triss as romance options for Geralt, and both are perfectly willing to commit to him, if the player has him confess his love. The one he does not choose, or, if he chooses no one, they go about their lives without him. The player can choose to try to romance both of them, each without the other knowing. If they successfully do so, the two women will eventually approach Geralt together and tell him that they have figured out his trick, but then they propose a three-way; however, once they have him tied up, they both leave, and he does not get to be with either. They assert their agency and refuse to let him benefit sexually or romantically from trying to play them both. It is possible that some forward-thinking players might criticize the game designers for not being open to poly-amorous relationships, but in this case, I think such "openness" would read too detrimental to the women involved, as Geralt (the player) tried to trick them so that he could have both, rather than trying to have an open relationship with them.

Ciri is perhaps the most interesting character in the game, and the player gets to play as her on several particular occasions. She is more powerful than Geralt in that she has magic and has also been trained as a witcher; she gets to possess both the masculine

and the feminine powers the world presents and thus walks a line between the genders. Because of her power, she is hunted by a number of the world's stakeholders including the Emperor of Nilfgaard, who turns out to be her birth father, and the Master of the Wild Hunt, a supernatural being from another realm and the game's main antagonist, seeking dominion over the human plane.

While *Witcher 3*'s powerful women stand out among video game women in their complexity and heroism in spite of the fear most NPCs have toward them because of their magical abilities, there are a few issues with their depiction as it relates to my argument:

1. They are physically beautiful,¹⁵⁵ and this is not just the good fortune of favorable genes, but something they have engineered with magic, part of the lore of the world itself, thus intentionally emphasized by the (predominately male) creators of it, and it is up to the player's interpretation whether to be pleased or appalled by this;
2. They are not the game's central playable characters, and even though Ciri can be played for a little while, it is not for long, and it is not the player's choice, but mandated by the game's designers;
- and 3. They are not exactly monstrous, even though they are despised for what they are precisely because of their power, even though they are hunted, and even Ciri, in all her uniqueness, and that is a crucial for my search for the monstrous heroine in games.

Witcher 3's women come very close, but they do not quite qualify as monsters.

But with as much as we can learn from the monstrous women being explored in other media, it seems there is a lot of space for growth of female characters in video games, particularly those who blur the monster/hero boundary, as Harriet Brandt does.

¹⁵⁵ [Source on the necessity of physical beauty in heroines]

The Curse of Heredity

“Men are fickle creatures, my dear! It will take some time yet to despoil them of the idea that women were made for their convenience.”

“I am afraid the man is not born yet for whose convenience I was made!”
(Margaret and Elinor, The Blood of the Vampire 66)

Harriet Brandt was written with a cultural critique in mind specific to Victorian England, and therefore she encompasses certain traits, flaws, and allusions to guide the reader into certainty in pitying Harriet’s unfortunate situation while still picking out the details that logically condemn her. Yet in her near total success in passing—for white, for human—and in her mixture of innocence and guilt in the destruction of those around her, she could easily be developed into a woman who does not succumb, but overcomes, into a much-needed introspective, monstrous heroine. The video game I have designed in text-based form allows players to take up Harriet’s story at the point of her suicide and choose how she will cope with her life-draining power if she cannot escape it through death. The game foregrounds identity formation with interest in how it is accomplished through decision-making and what, if any, affect it may have on the player. This section gets into a closer reading of the novel and its author while elaborating on the design choices made for the game.

Typically considered to a sensation novelist, Marryat’s array of work depicts women who challenge accepted norms in Victorian society, in particular, marriage and domesticity. While many of her female characters speak out openly in dialogue or subtly through their being, none of them accomplishes true freedom from traditional values. They end up either conforming or dying. Because of this, Marryat has been seen not as a

feminist thinker, but as a conformist herself, reinforcing gender and social norms, though she manages through overly sentimental prose to elicit a tinge of sympathy for the nonconformist characters she kills.¹⁵⁶ Most scholars writing about this novel see Harriet Brandt merely as a grab bag of Victorian socio-political issues. They use Harriet as a piece of evidence, an example of whatever archetype they are concerned with rather than seeing her value as a fully developed character in her own right. She is merely a tool for proving points, a constellation of archetypes that they can pick and choose from as it serves their arguments. She is the Tragic Mulatta, the West Indian woman, the fallen Angel of the House, the failed New Woman, the passing-for-white woman whose secret heredity undoes her; she is the thwarted feminist, the dangerous seductress, the cautionary tale of miscegenation, the persistent reminder of slavery, and the consequence of British imperialism, counter-invading the British domestic sphere from the colonies and threatening its stability from within.

All these things she may well be, but I interpret this novel with a slight difference. I believe that the endings many of Marryat's female characters' suffer, usually in suicide or subduction into domesticity,¹⁵⁷ serve as a biting critique of Victorian culture,

¹⁵⁶ Depledge, Greta. "Ideologically Challenging: Florence Marryat and Sensation Fiction." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction* (2011): 306-318.

¹⁵⁷ Depledge's essay "Ideologically Challenging: Florence Marryat and Sensation Fiction" reads Marryat challenging accepted gender and racial norms in Victorian society through her female protagonists. Depledge writes, "Many of her later novels from the last two decades of the nineteenth century feature strong-minded women who speak out against artificially imposed gender restrictions which have become socially entrenched" (311), citing Regina Nettleship and Isobel of *The Root of All Evil* (1880), Ada of *The Confessions of Gerald Estcourt* (1867), Nita of *The Nobler Sex*, and Rachel of *Woman Against Woman* (1865).

Kimberly Snyder Manganelli adds to this list a heroine of Marryat's very similar to Harriet Brandt; Manganelli discusses Marryat's *Daughter of the Tropics* and protagonist Lola Arlington, who is West Indian, in her book *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race*. She describes Lola's status as an octaroon and tragically in love with an Englishman: "...Lola exhibits self-loathing, wishing to forget her ties to her mother and grandmother: 'She hated and despised them! She hated herself sometimes for having sprung from so unworthy a beginning, and almost wished she had been born a veritable negress than endued with blood that had a taint upon it' (1:64)" (Manganelli 154), which is very close to how Harriet Brandt feels about her own "taint," which we are meant to see as primarily racial, and only monstrous as an

illustrating the consequences of restrictive values for women, and Harriet Brandt is perhaps the most extreme example of this in her supernatural status, which none of Marryat's other heroines boast. Furthermore, Harriet is a well-developed heroine, not just a set of stereotypes. Her husband-to-be Anthony Pennell provides this perspective on her character and heredity in the novel, commenting on her complexity several times. He initially describes her thus to Margaret Pullen:

You led me to expect a gauche schoolgirl, a half-tamed savage or a juvenile virago. And I am bound to say that she struck me as belonging to none of the species... Miss Brandt possesses the kind of beauty that appeals to animal creatures like ourselves. She has a far more dangerous quality than that of mere regularity of feature. She attracts without knowing it. She is a mass of magnetism... Miss Brandt is too clever for Ralph, or any of you...¹⁵⁸

He uses some of the same language as Doctor Phillips—"animal," "dangerous," "magnetism"—but his interpretation of it is not troubled by concerns about her mixed-race heritage and is overall sympathetic and admiring. The danger he alludes to is the commonplace, universal danger of attraction, of falling in love—not the danger of being consumed by a supernatural power or of bringing down the entire nation through racial taint. Confronted for the first time with the revelation of her mixed-race heredity, he merely states, "I do not believe in stigmas being attached to one's birth... the only stigmas worth thinking about, are those we bring upon ourselves by our misconduct."¹⁵⁹ Harriet has only misconducted herself in the eyes of the strictest Victorian social code, as represented by Elinor Leyton, who bitterly asserts, "Miss Brandt has a great deal to learn

extension of the racial taint. In her suicide note, Harriet writes, "Do not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out" (Marryat 227).

¹⁵⁸ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 166-7

¹⁵⁹ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 168

in that respect before she can enter English Society!¹⁶⁰ But this is a matter of opinion; it is heatedly debated among the characters on this and several other occasions. Several characters (for example, Margaret Pullen and Captain Ralph Pullen) insist on forgiving her social faux pas because of her generous nature and endearing personality, chalking up her transgressions to her isolated upbringing and outsider status, which are not her fault.

Harriet is passionate and ignorant of society's expectations for a young woman's behavior, as she has been raised in a convent. She is enthusiastic about friendship with men and women alike, not discriminating based on age or income, and only becomes self-consciously flirtatious after her beauty and eligibility are pointed out by Madame Gobelli early in the novel.¹⁶¹ Her naïveté only makes her more appealing, but Marryat's descriptions of her are often unsettling, focusing on animal metaphors, the color red, Harriet's voracious appetite, and her apparent inability to keep her wild emotions in check.¹⁶² Elinor Leyton dislikes Harriet as much as her fiancé, Ralph, is drawn to her (at least until her heritage is revealed and he quips about the danger of producing a "piebald son and heir"¹⁶³), but Margaret Pullen takes pity on the girl and befriends her. In the game, since Margaret lost her child to Harriet's energy-drain, the player enters Margaret's home to find her dejected, a state soon revealed to be the result of the presence of the baby girl's spirit in the house. The loss of her child haunts any mother, and in the gamespace, that metaphor can take on a physical shape that can be confronted face-to-face. The player may choose to send the baby's spirit on, consume its energy, or

¹⁶⁰ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 70

¹⁶¹ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 47

¹⁶² Hammack, "Florence Marryat's Female Vampire and the Scientizing of Hybridity," 887

¹⁶³ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 173

leave it be, each option with its own set of consequences. Harriet's ability to come to terms with the death of this child is the central feature of her character development in the game, as it settles this heart-breaking scenario, which was left unresolved for both Harriet and Margaret in the novel. The scene foregrounds questions of motherhood and maternal love that are lurking just below the novel's surface, and which concern Harriet very much in her problematic matrilineage and broken bonds with her own mother and grandmother.

As Harriet's main antagonist, Doctor Phillips represents everything that is repressed and patriarchal in Victorian society. He imposes this diagnosis on Harriet, and while Harriet and especially Anthony doubt the declaration—and Marryat is ambiguous about the truth of it—it nonetheless comes to dominate Harriet's character and leads to her demise. Marryat allows for ambiguity regarding the deaths Harriet has supposedly caused (as Depledge points out, Harriet's childhood caretaker, Pete, does not fall ill), but Harriet still buys into Doctor Phillips's diagnosis, believing at last, whatever reassurances she received from Tony, that she is in fact a monster.

Harriet's racial impurity is a much bigger problem than the gender boundaries she transgresses, but combined, she is a Victorian horror to behold. Harriet may be fit to be in company outside of England, but her behavior is too familiar and unguarded to be admitted in England. Elinor's words stay with the reader as Harriet travels to London soon afterwards. No one—least of all Harriet—knows her true history until Doctor Phillips appears. When he hears who she is, he pours out a tale of pain and misery from the West Indies, detailing Henry Brandt's sadism and Harriet's mother's disgusting

obesity. He urges Margaret to immediately sever all ties with Harriet, which alarms her all the more when the doctor cannot understand what is wrong with or help her baby.

Harriet can be read as Marryat's way of cautioning against over-expressed emotions, whatever her good intentions might be, a problem that has been coded feminine for centuries. For example, Harriet flies into a crying fit when Ralph Pullen fails to re-establish their connection in London, and she is inconsolable until Madame Gobelli's son, Bobby, initiates intimacy with her.¹⁶⁴ When Madame Gobelli accuses Harriet of carrying "the black blood, the vampire's blood which kills everything it caresses,"¹⁶⁵ and Harriet rushes to see Doctor Phillips to confront him about the truth of her parentage, he—who has been described as "so mild and courteous, so benevolent and sympathetic"¹⁶⁶ urges Harriet to calm herself: "you are over-excited. You must try to restrain yourself."¹⁶⁷ Her fiery temperament is a gendered problem, but is far more so related to her mixed race, which threatens on a national scale. The main indictment of Harriet rests with the Gothic theme of the exotic: the underlying fear (and willful ignorance) of the cruelty of British imperial rule in the Caribbean and the possibility of what consequences the traumas suffered there might bring home, in this case, a monster in disguise come to seduce and weaken English gentlemen, consume English babies, and show English women a favorable alternative to domesticity and propriety.

¹⁶⁴ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 105

¹⁶⁵ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 188

¹⁶⁶ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 192

¹⁶⁷ Marryat, *The Blood of the Vampire*, 193

Hammack has written of this novel that one might replace the word “vampire” with the word “hysteric” and the novel would be exactly the same,¹⁶⁸ and the hallmarks of hysteria feature most prominently in Harriet’s disinterest in emotional control. Hysteria was so loosely defined that it could easily have been implicated as the cause of the decline and deaths of those exposed to a woman suffering from it. This points back to the period’s flawed beliefs about medicine, particularly in reference to the feminine. Any ailment—physical or psychological—that could not be accounted for was chalked up to hysteria, the afflicted women were accordingly treated as weak and ill, and society marched on. In *Idols of Perversity*, Bram Dijkstra quotes William J. Robinson, an authority on eugenics, who writes, “... the hypersensual woman, to the wife with an excessive sexuality... Just as the vampire sucks the blood of its victims in their sleep while they are alive, so does the woman vampire suck the life and exhaust the vitality of her male partner—or victim.”¹⁶⁹ Harriet’s life-force drain is a perfect example of this, a metaphor for her open sexuality, exuberance, exotic appeal to men, and the danger she poses to all of British society, should she be allowed to take root in England, and of course if she were to reproduce and pass on the curse of heredity.

In the game, Harriet has the ability to both visualize and almost immediately control her power, just as Bo can. The player determines whether to drain a person of their energy, and fairly early on, if a player takes the opportunity, they can learn that Harriet also has the ability to give back energy to empower others. Bo can do the same with her chi power, taking in multiple people’s energies simultaneously, then using it to

¹⁶⁸ Hammack, *The Blood of the Vampire Introduction*, xvi

¹⁶⁹ Robinson qtd in Dijkstra, 34

breathe life into the dying or empower the weak. Game Harriet is far less fiery and more level-headed than novel Harriet, mainly because her identity in the game is meant to be a creation of the player's, reflecting their ideas about how she should cope with her situation rather than relying on Marryat's construction of Harriet's personality. I did not want the game to ascribe a code of ethics too overtly to her actions or assert the same characteristics imposed, perhaps unfairly, on Harriet in the novel, as these are meant to rest entirely with the player. It is possible to go through the game and take no one's life energy at all, just as players can choose to never give any up in empowering anyone, and Harriet's fate in life or death, marriage or spinsterhood, domesticity or politics lies solely in the players' hands.

As a character, Harriet Brandt has the complexity necessary to inspire Millennial audiences searching for a realistic feminist protagonist, if only she survives the revelation of her monstrosity and productively redefines herself as admirable, monstrous protagonist, as is possible in the video game I have designed. Her story is relevant in our current struggles with misogyny and racism—particularly in online spaces and gaming communities—and can serve as a rich example of self-acceptance and determination of one's own destiny in spite of heredity—or whatever genetic or personality traits society may not esteem in us.

Transmediating Harriet

Designing a video game to explore Harriet's monstrosity, power, and racial and gender situation is one way to answer a number of complaints I have with the games

industry and its most popular games, as well as with mainstream feminism. Playing through a continuation of Harriet's story that allows her to come to terms on some level with her identity as a woman, as a mixed race person, as a vampire offers players an experience of character development through and consequences of choice rarely found in any medium. Even female monsters in film and television are rarely afforded depth of character; they are almost exclusively unambiguously evil while male monsters (particularly vampires) have the opportunity to struggle with their identities, often with the help of a female character of unadulterated virtue, a beauty *for* the beast.

Harriet can potentially address concerns I have raised in other chapters about mainstream feminism as well and, like Bo, could subtly advocate for inclusive feminisms, depending on how players choose her course of action. The game is designed to appeal to either gender, and the experience of playing this game is ideally one of discovering self on multiple levels including Harriet's character development and the player's personal development as Harriet.

We need more variety and more complex examples of female heroes, and making women equal to men in games is not enough, as it merely erases gender difference without sparking a conversation about it. I mean that the female version of the default male character (or "Ms. Male character), the unambiguous "strong woman," and the "fighting fuck toy"¹⁷⁰ will get us nowhere. More diversity of depictions of female bodies, more variety of mechanics that structure gender, more options in our female protagonists, and encouraging more players and more scholars to become designers are ways to

¹⁷⁰ Term coined by Caroline Heldman, featured in many articles and the documentary *MissRepresentation*.

address that need. Games are the perfect medium to facilitate open discussions about race and gender, and *The Blood of the Vampire* game will be a move toward that.

The uncomplicated representation of women in video games paired with deep-seated, culturally reinforced misogyny is incredibly pernicious, undermining all efforts by women to be part of gaming communities and contribute to game design and play. In 2005, Bonnie Ruberg's article "Women Monsters and Monstrous Women" appeared in *The Escapist*, and in it she makes an interesting claim:

Women gamers are in this way also monsters. We—indeed, all intelligent, independent females—break the accepted standards of womanhood. We have defamed our traditional femininity by dabbling in a supposedly male world, that of video games. As many men would readily agree, we have made ourselves a monstrosity. In hopes of fighting this image, women have struggled for years to convince the gaming industry of our true humanity; they have sought out power and respect. (Ruberg 4)

While women are gaining steam as game designers, pro-gamers, and members of video gaming communities, there is still quite a way to go before we can be seen less as monsters, deformities of what femininity supposedly ought to be, and instead as the heroines we are. Hopefully the more we talk about this, the more actual in-game heroines—and more complex female protagonists and antagonists—we will begin to see as well.

If Ruberg is correct in her observation that male video gamers perceive feminist players and designers as monstrous—and by all accounts since August of 2014 and the rise of #GamerGate, they do—then we have a great deal of work ahead of us. Women who care about games should not fear the term "feminist" as so many Millennials do—that means our students, both male and female—but rather they should re-appropriate the term from those who wield it ignorantly or viciously and insist on its value for all by

designing video games with complex (female) characters driving narrative action and ludic play. These women, like ourselves, should be allowed to be both formidable and flawed. The more we and our male comrades and our children see women like this, the more likely we are to accept ourselves and each other for the complicated human beings we are, and not just a set of stereotypes and harmful tropes.

My Harriet Brandt does that. In my game, the player controls how Harriet sees herself, now that she knows beyond doubt that she is vampiric and dangerous to those she loves. Self-sacrifice within the confines of a multivalent patriarchal hierarchy à la Bella and Buffy is not the (feminist) answer. Harriet has the chance to come to self-acceptance, which is true power. The player does not have to accomplish this, but it is an option if they play through the story a certain way.

All of Harriet's possible endings are ambiguous. In one, she removes herself from England, staying abroad as a lady of means who wields political power, but is emotionally distant. In another, Harriet embraces her power to the point that she becomes a vigilante, attacking and draining anyone she perceives to be bad. In a third, Harriet wakes to find Anthony alive again, and she marries him, but regrets having to hide her power and behave as a proper English lady. The prospect of being subsumed by the very domesticity through marriage to Tony she could be free from is an interesting one. One possible interpretation of Harriet's demise is that domestic life could never contain her exuberance and freedom, even though she thinks it will make her happy. She is more self-secure and more open than any English housewife has any right to be; in many ways she violates the missive put to the Angel of the House and falls in line with Robinson's

female vampire, the one who sucks men's vitality through her overactive sex drive.¹⁷¹

Whatever Harriet's ending, the real effect of the story resides in players, and I can only hope that Harriet's character becomes one of many interesting female characters exploring themes of internal conflict and monstrosity in video games.

¹⁷¹ Robinson qtd. in Dijkstra, 34

CHAPTER FIVE

REIMAGINING HARRIET BRANDT:

FEMINISM AT PLAY

In all types of identification we identify simultaneously with multiple identities, a fact that troubles all overarching identity group categories. (Shaw 73-74)

We are all born to possibility, and in addition to the many subject positions each of us inhabits we have a range of potential identities we might realize. The identity we do become depends on where we find ourselves, what befalls us, what power we have, and how we choose to use it. At its best, game design can be a way to explore human possibility according to exactly these parameters. Optimal game design is a site of continuous and heated debate. For the most part, players' preferences and play styles dictate what designs suit them best, so there is no one best game design, even within a single genre of video games, although many would argue for sets of best practices in each genre.¹⁷² Good design, then, is a harmonious blend of mechanics, aesthetics, and storytelling, and if any part is lacking, it can hurt the game's message or make the game unplayable, as in Bioware's disastrous narrative design in *Mass Effect 3*, for example.¹⁷³

In short, design presents a mixture of exciting innovative potential and frustrating constraints of time, manpower, and technologies. Unless the designer is simply

¹⁷² Almost every games scholar, game designer, games journalist, and player have strong thoughts about this, and anyone writing about games has voiced their opinion about it at one point or another, so it is impossible to choose a few voices to highlight here.

¹⁷³ *Mass Effect 1 & 2* were immensely popular with gamers and had been widely acclaimed as pinnacles of story-telling achievement in games. The series was marketed touting the weight of decision-making in the game, as each choice altered the player's path toward the game's conclusion. However, when players reached the final scene of *Mass Effect 3*, full of anticipation to see how their unique playthrough of all three games would pan out, most were dismayed to find themselves railroaded into choosing one of three color-coded options, none of which were affected by their previous choices.

replicating a previous game in hopes of economic returns, however marginal, one can never quite say what will sell or whether the time is right for any particular game, whether it will resonate with audiences, even whether it will be played or discussed at all. The best designers can do is be true to themselves and their ideas, making games that they themselves would want to play.

Design is almost always a collaborative effort because creating a game is such a daunting task and requires an array of skills almost never all found in just one person. Effective collaboration can help developers avoid major problems with their games; for example, during the development of *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the story team was going through some ideas for quests in a meeting when one of the women in the room asked, “Isn’t that a little bit.. rape-y?” The male developers had no intention of coming across that way, and had not noticed that their content could be interpreted that way by female players.

Principles of Design

Within the community of scholars, players, and designers who have weighed in on the topic of video game design, there is a rift between those who favor the ludic elements of games and those who privilege story. This is the debate of narratology v. ludology. Henry Jenkins famously deconstructed this conflict in his essay “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” attempting to illustrate the codependency of narrative and ludic elements in games, depending, of course, on genre. Plenty of games require no story elements at all, such as Tetris or Pong, but even the simplest of puzzle games for mobile

devices have added in fringe elements of narrative. For example, Rovio, the makers of *Angry Birds*, produces cartoons (now available on Netflix!), turning the birds—which are essentially just mechanical objects in the game itself—into characters with distinct personalities, relationships, and story arcs. Even strictly puzzle games such as the *Candy Crush Saga* matching-game clones made by Disney and Pixar, incorporate light narrative elements in giving players avatars (usually familiar characters such as Anna and Elsa from *Frozen* or Joy from *Inside Out*) with certain special abilities and power-ups and having levels progress through an ebb and flow of difficulty based in a narrative of progression either through travel through space. They depict the levels as a physical path, which players follow from zone to zone by beating each set of levels.

Jenkins ends up focusing on explaining that video games most effectively tell stories through their spaces, the digital environments with which players interact. Even text-based games, in which nothing except text is visible to players, foreground exploration of in-game spaces. Their reliance on text to create those worlds make them a particularly challenging genre to master, especially when they are compared to the visually compelling offerings available since their hey-day. Merely adding the element of choice into a text does quite a lot to change how it must be presented and how stories unfold. A text-based game is not a novel; it is not even a choose-your-own-adventure story. Like any other game, it is first and foremost a space with preset conditions and limitations that are meant to be both explored, a prospect both exciting and challenging.

#GamerGate has proven that even a text-based game like Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest* can make a splash, simply by claiming a bigger goal than just developing a game

that entertains; games that are politically charged or made to advocate on a specific cause sometimes fall into the genre of serious games. GamerGaters may fight to discredit the social justice warrior camp, but all they have done is create a breed of designer that did not exist before Quinn and her game were so distressingly trolled. There was no such thing as a social justice warrior before the trolls coined the term, and now designers are disregarding efforts to keep the term pejorative, instead making it their own. Samantha Blackmon of Purdue's *Not Your Mama's Gamer* blog and podcast has even had SJW t-shirts made.

Hacks, Mods, and Art

McKenzie Wark devotes an entire chapter in *Gamer Theory* to boredom, claiming that we play because we are bored, but we're also often bored when we play, which is why gamers start experimenting more with character concepts or interactions with game environments.

Heuristic thinking—Ulmer's concept that asks what can be made *from* a text through conductive reasoning, remix, and play—is deeply engrained in the mentality of video gamers. When digital games were young, there were no big companies designing and distributing them, no major consoles to play on; would-be players had to create the games themselves on their computers and could distribute them only in limited ways via the early internet and to friends via floppy disk or tape. Once games started coming out, game hacks became a cult following, and many hacks became famous, such as the *Mario*

hack *Clouds*, which darkens everything in the game except for the clouds. There is no “playing” the game in the usual sense; the hack is meant to be appreciated as art.

As long as major companies allow for it, video gamers will be able to take part in the evolution of game design, not only through the less accepted art of hacking (which Holmevik discusses at length in *Inter/vention*), but more importantly through the practice of “modding” (modifying games). Companies will make the game engines they have used to develop the games they sell available to the general public. Depending on the engine and the player’s level of skill with coding languages and programs, players can use the engines to create their own content. Most mods are available online for free download, but some are so big and so popular, they have become games in their own right, not simply revisions of previous games (*Counter-Strike* is perhaps the most well known of these).

The vast majority of mods make small changes to games. One of the first mods to come out on games with avatars is often “the naked mod,” which allows female characters to be played naked (for some reason there is far less interest in male characters being playable naked). Players will make mods to change the look of clothing and armor (sometimes making it more revealing) or to make landscapes or characters look different (often “prettier”). Some mods create new weapons with special abilities or new locations to explore or new character classes to play. Mods can make games more challenging by adding mechanics for starvation or fatigue or freezing to death. *Skyrim* has a notoriously long and boring beginning scene during which the player can only look around and listen

to conversations around them, so there are a number of mods available that offer alternate beginnings.

Through modding, players can become designers and make rhetorical statements of their own in as small or substantial a way as they choose, which adds another layer to their identities as players, designers, human beings. Design through modding is yet another subject position to inhabit and way to take control over the game environments players frequent. It is a way to compose and a way to compose the self. Access, though, is again a bit of an issue since modding is not easy and requires time commitment and skills that take time and effort to learn. It is by no means readily available or easy for everyone.

As I have previously discussed, games can thus be thought of as a sub-genre of Roland Barthes's "writerly" texts; the reader takes on an active role in interpreting these, allowing themselves freedom from the impossible question, "What did the author intend?" and asserting their own unique perspective. Further, while Barthes calls the reader to become a writer themselves in a more concrete sense (a move toward heuritic thinking), from an electrated viewpoint grounded in game studies, we can push the concept further by claiming that gamers have the ability to think in "designerly" ways (Sicart's term), thinking beyond standard composition practices of text on a page and creating actual game content through modding or play that addresses their particular concerns.

There are a number of levels of personal identity creation possible here, requiring us to think about everything from body representations to ethical stances in games. One progression might be: "players" become "experimenters" (trying out different approaches

to play) become “critics” become “designers” become “teachers” of other players. Play leads to a pedagogy of sorts.

I would like to consider the representation of bodies in games more closely than we have yet with a theoretical foundation in second- and third-wave feminism and an eye to exposing the weaknesses in these theorists’ positions through the addition of inclusive feminisms found in black feminism and ecofeminism. Further, these feminisms figure in interpretation of the construction of racial and gender identity in the Victorian period and in the novel I am expanding into a game design.

Storytelling and Meaning-Making in Games

Writing does not have to be “good” in a literary sense to make players invest in the game’s characters and action, but it does need to be thoughtful, imaginative, and in line with the mechanics of the game (otherwise, why write for a game and not some other medium?). In an undergraduate media studies course I once watched five minutes of a soap opera, and when the professor stopped the clip, I found myself forcibly shaken out of a reality into which I had completely bought in. The rest of the class echoed this in the discussion that followed. We were drawn in not by the most nuanced writing, relatable characters, or compelling world; we were hooked by the most basic suspense writing, hanging on every word to learn what will happen next. Games can succeed by taking a similar approach, keeping players intrigued and anxious about what is coming. One of the most striking examples of a design that uses this tactic is *Gone Home*, which sets up players to expect a horror game, but the story unfolds into something quite different,

raising points about how affective game environments (and real-life environments) can be.

Some game designers use their backgrounds in other genres to inform their storytelling strategies. Greg Costikyan discusses his game design theories in “I Have No Words and I Must Design,” and his experience in multiple gaming genres, particularly pen-and-paper role-play, gives him a perspective on design that I appreciate. Although Costikyan views stories in a highly traditional way, which Jenkins rightly views to be rather limiting and not conducive to creating the most innovative video games,¹⁷⁴ I am with him in terms of what makes for a compelling experience of gameplay for me, that is a game that plays like the most flexible Game Master at the most interesting table of players in a pen-and-paper role-play setting imaginable. That means that the best games (by which I mean the games players come back to over and over again and that hold their significance over time) are responsive to player actions in a way players can see,¹⁷⁵ offer players a wide variety of ways to play and choices to make, and include an element of randomization, which makes play more unpredictable.

Ian Bogost is perhaps the most widely known American games scholar who designs games. His website, Persuasive Games, houses his creations and facilitates their play by his audience, mostly made up of scholars. I would like to extend the reach of games scholarship partly by disguising it. Having any kind of agenda as a game designer unfortunately opens one up to criticism by the anti-intellectual mainstream gaming community, but I would contend that if a designer has an agenda other than just making

¹⁷⁴ Jenkins, Henry. “Game Design as Narrative Architecture.” *Computer* 44 (2004): s3. Print.

¹⁷⁵ If it is hidden from them, they may feel that their choices do not matter mechanically, which takes away their sense of agency; they will feel they are on rails.

money, that should appeal to gamers, who like to figure themselves as anti-establishment, yet who ironically tend to literally buy in to what big gaming corporations are selling. So marketing a game as simply a game and no more may reach a wider audience and prevent any dismissal resulting from the demonization of social justice warriors online.

Miguel Sicart has written several texts on the ethical systems implemented in video games, and the upshot of his work is that ethics in games consist in giving the player choices that have realistic consequences, which the players have to bear in some kind of meaningful way. Games must make players care about the NPCs and world around their avatar and then make decisions that determine the fate of their characters and the rest of the digital play spaces involved.

Brenda Romero has famously claimed on her website and in her work that “the mechanic is the message,” a revision of Marshall McLuhan’s well-known statement, “the medium is the message.”¹⁷⁶ In analyzing new media in the 1960s, McLuhan posited that the media used to reach audiences are more important than the messages received, due to the fact that certain media reach or exclude specific groups; the significance of a message lies in its audience, who based on their demographics and backgrounds will interpret it as they will. What medium to compose in is the first and most crucial decision writers and designers make, and this idea is directly in line with Greg Ulmer’s concept of electracry, as discussed previously. Choosing to design a game in the first place used to mean reaching an audience of mostly young, white men, but as recent studies indicate, gender, race and ability are far more equal in terms of who is consuming games, so composing a

¹⁷⁶ Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

video game now means reaching a very wide and diverse audience. Beyond that, because of the qualities of the games medium, this audience will not be told what to think, but will get to experiment with ideas through play, so meaning creation is far more reliant on the audience. Communicating messages is only a part of why we create video games, but if messages remain rooted in all aspects of game design, including mechanics, they can be subtle enough to avoid preaching while still carrying the weight of a game designer's intention.

Designers seem to agree that the most compelling way to communicate a message is through a mechanic of meaningful decision-making, and many have found interesting ways to toy with players' power of choice by taking it away or giving them none when they thought they had some.¹⁷⁷ Yet this approach is not simple. What is a meaningful decision? How do players get invested in characters enough to make anything in a game meaningful? If they do invest, how should gameplay and story interact? Are cinematics the best or only way to communicate story? If not, then what are the other options? None of these questions have just one answer, but many possible ones depending on the goals behind the game design and what players and designers prefer. Solving these problems for any particular game takes creativity and collaboration.

¹⁷⁷ *The Stanley Parable* is the most widely played, though there are instances of this in many games, such as in *Bioshock: Infinite* when you have to take baby Elizabeth from her cradle in order to leave the room. You cannot go back and you cannot continue until you do so. There is only one choice, but the game forces the player to make it anyway, foregrounding their lack of control, creating a much more emotional moment, and touching on themes of destiny, memory, and the bearing the past has on the present.

Game Overview

The *Blood of the Vampire* game focuses on the development of a single character through exploration of the streets, shops, and houses of London. The game takes less than an hour to play, and its sections can be played in any order. The protagonist is a set character, Harriet Brandt, and through her, players can interact with the world by speaking to spirits and using Harriet's vampiric powers. Values brought from my background in literary study are reflected in the design of my game, which seeks a vintage platform, simple gameplay, emphasis on character development, and ambiguous endings.

Collaboration in game design is essential because it is extremely rare to find any one individual with all the skill sets needed to create the code, art, music, and writing required to make for a compelling game. Creators across media demonstrate time and time again that collaboration yields more thoughtful and engaging stories, characters, and themes.¹⁷⁸ This being the case, I chose to work with two students from Clemson's Digital Production Arts (DPA) program to create the art and program the game's code. Marie Jarrell and I developed the text-based, complete version of game together (she programming and I writing and designing the game space and mechanics), and her art is the basis of the Unity demo version of the game, programmed by Wynton Redmond.

¹⁷⁸ George Lucas's level of involvement in the *Star Wars* universe is a case-in-point; he developed the concepts and "world" of *Star Wars* alone, but many others contributed to the directing, script writing, editing, and production of the original trilogy. By contrast, Lucas alone held the helm in piloting the prequel trilogy, and fans almost unanimously agree that the directing and storytelling were a disaster. With Lucas's sale of the franchise to Disney in 2014, a new and extremely large and diverse team of writers, directors, and producers came together to create a plan for the new films, and the result was much better, at least for the first of the new series, released in 2015.

The current version of the game is text-based, the oldest genre of video games, but one still being actively designed and play; Zoe Quinn's video game, *Depression Quest*, which sparked the GamerGate controversy, is text-based. Text-based games demand a bit more effort on the part of players in terms of engagement. Mechanics require players to type in certain commands to progress, commands such as "go left," "examine door," or "unlock door with key." In some ways, it is harder to immerse in a text-based game because players are constantly reminded that this is a game because of the need to type these commands. Misspelling something or typing a command the code does not recognize, they get a response like "You can't do that!" or "There is nothing to examine."

This adds a layer of separation from the action of the game and interactivity with the programming itself that no other video games genre has. Playing a text-based game feels first and foremost like a conversation between the player and the game's code with the character and story level secondary. *The Stanley Parable* is a recent game that plays with the conflict between player and third-person narrator, and even though its graphics are realistic and its play first person in a visually driven 3D environment, the three-way interaction of player, avatar, and narrator is reminiscent of the text-based game.

As many players have heard of or played *The Stanley Parable*, I hope that rather than distracting from immersion in the game, this style actually unearths the same kinds of questions: what is a game? Do players in a game really have any agency? What does it mean to have agency, anyway? Do I have agency in my real life? To what extent? It also makes the player feel more like they inhabit the avatar's digital body than they otherwise

might because the avatar and player are aligned in their struggle against the tyranny of the narrator's restrictive mechanics. I have also programmed in some work-arounds or "cheat" codes that alter the game experience. For example, if a player types "drain them all," they will be immediately ported to an alternate ending, and the game will be over. If they type "finish him!" they can kill characters who are otherwise invulnerable, but this can keep them from being able to complete the game, thus trapping Harriet in the spirit world forever.

The avatar for Harriet is the one design element I was most wary of. Because Harriet is a mixed-race woman passing for white, representing her physically is politically charged, not to mention extremely difficult. I did not want players to forget her race as they played, but I was deeply uncomfortable trying to find the right skin tone. Making the game aesthetic black and white and setting it in an ambiguous not-alive, not-dead space made this question easier because I could simply represent Harriet as a floating spirit, which is what I did for the Unity version of the game. But I was still dissatisfied with this gray specter because I still felt it might erase Harriet's race. It was partly with this problem in mind, then, that I turned to the text-base genre. Since there is no imagery save textual description in text-based games, I could use language to remind players of Harriet's race while allowing them to imagine for themselves what she actually looks like. I also like that this harkens back to the character's original medium: the novel, in which readers always must imagine how characters and settings look. Though I am not one hundred percent satisfied with this outcome, it may be productively troubling

for players as well, and since I want race to be a question the game raises, I am content with this.

Mechanics: Drain and Fill

The game relies on typed commands, and the player can take actions to move around the space (e.g. “go right,” “go back”), examine people, areas, and objects (“examine _____”), pick up objects, which stores them in the inventory, give objects to people, and most importantly, drain or fill NPCs. The drain mechanic is key in this game because it represents Harriet’s vampiric power. I decided to give players control over this ability to keep Harriet from remaining its passive victim and to give her—and the player—agency within the game. I added the “fill”¹⁷⁹ power to further develop this agency. Since the game takes place in a sort of parallel reality to the living world of London and Harriet cannot actually speak to any of the living people in that world, draining and filling are the player’s only options, which foregrounds their importance. Harriet cannot persuade anyone with words, so she has to decide how to use—or not use—her vampirism instead.

I designed the drain and fill actions to have an environmental affect on the world of the game, which is evident in the text-based version only through the descriptions of the area and how conditions alter after they take particular actions. Draining or filling spirits removes them from the area, so their oppressive emotional influence is gone, and

¹⁷⁹ I had wanted to call it “give” instead because I prefer the positive connotation of “give,” but “fill” works better grammatically and the text-based game has a coded use for the word “give” already: players can give items to non-player characters. Calling the mechanic “give” would have made the coding more complicated and made it easier to make coding mistakes. Thus, we decided it would be best to go with “fill.”

the fog lifts, letting the sun shine through a bit more. Filling people (but not spirits) helps in the same way because it improves their mood, making them feel like powerful agents whose actions matter in their lives. Draining people (but not spirits) makes the fog thicken and darken the area. Leaving a trail of bodies in the streets does not make people happier.

For example, here is discussion of how the drain and fill mechanics influence events in the Margaret's House area of the game. The main event of Margaret's house is that her dead baby's spirit is still there, which is deeply affecting Margaret and preventing her from moving on past her grief. To complete the game, the player must confront the baby's spirit and decide whether to dispatch it or leave it there. To accomplish this, the player must explore all three downstairs areas of the house—the parlor, kitchen, and library—and find the key to the baby's room before heading upstairs. They have to then go upstairs, unlock the door, find the baby in the crib, and decide her fate. If they return to the other areas of the house afterwards, things will have changed, or not, depending on what they chose to do. While the baby's spirit is in the house, the player may not drain or fill anyone, and if they try to do so, they get a message that their power is weak here for some reason. If they choose to drain or fill the baby's spirit, however, they can then go through the house and drain or fill everyone there. If the player drains Margaret, she dies with a smile on her face, which I meant to imply that her grief over her lost baby and suffering with a drunk husband is now over. If the player drains the cook, the kitchen will eventually catch fire. There is no text indicating whether the

house burns down, but if everyone else is already drained, it very well might, but this is all left to the player's imagination.

But more important than the physical interaction the player has with the game's non playable characters (NPCs) through the drain and fill mechanics are the decisions they make regarding Harriet's character development. I wrote the game's scenes such that the player directs Harriet's attitudes about herself and what she sees by typing "answer _____ to _____," thus keeping them abreast of their own feelings toward the character and her situation. In the Margaret's House area, for example, players can move several objects around, which impacts the NPCs in that area depending on what the player decides to do with the objects. There are a couple references to British West Indian colonial trade in the objects in Margaret's house. Margaret asks for tea in the parlor, and then in the kitchen, the player can find the maid frantically searching for sugar and a butler who is in search of rum, both products of the Caribbean. The player can find both items if they search the pantry, and they can then choose to keep them or set them in front of the people searching for them. The sugar ends up with Margaret on her tea tray and the butler takes the rum to Mr. Pullen, who then proceeds to get drunk. If either item is not presented to the people looking for them, then either person can be deprived of their imported goods, and each will react to that.¹⁸⁰

In the library, the player can find not only the key to the baby's room upstairs, but also a letter, which Mr. Pullen comments is from Dr. Phillips informing him that Anthony

¹⁸⁰ One easter egg I put in the game is when the butler tells Mr. Pullen that he could not find the rum, Mr. Pullen informs him that he will be garnishing the servants' wages to pay for the missing item and then comments to himself "Why is the rum always gone?" which is a reference to Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean*. I find it amusing to associate straight-laced Mr. Pullen with drunk pirates. I also mean it to give him a slightly dark undertone if read more deeply; if he drinks like a pirate, might he also become violent and irrational like a pirate?

Pennell has died. The letter does not mention Harriet, but in Dr. Phillips's house, the player may find a letter to him indicating that both of them are dead, so the player knows he is keeping that fact from Mr. Pullen, perhaps because he does not want to upset Margaret, or maybe he thinks good riddance; Harriet the monster is gone. In any case, readers would know that Margaret will eventually find out that Harriet is dead when she receives Harriet's suicide note and will, giving Margaret all her money (this is from the novel). But if the player happens to choose to die at the end of the game and gets the "Death is Sweet" ending, they will learn that Margaret does not, in fact, receive Harriet's money because the state reclaims it due to some unexplained legal situation. I was aiming for some intertextuality worth discussing in a class that plays the game and reads the novel.

Thus, in terms of game mechanics, the ending the player receives results from a combination of their decisions in conversing with spirits and influencing scenes and other characters in the out-of-combat ways discussed and the extent to which they use the drain and fill mechanics in general.

The World

Given Harriet's situation of having committed suicide at the end of the novel, I chose to place Harriet in an in-between space for the game. She might be dead (this is unclear, and I intended it to be up in the air until the game's conclusion; in fact, the player gets to choose whether Harriet lives or dies in the end), but she has not moved on to whatever comes next, so she cannot be seen by NPCs, but she can interact with them

through the drain/fill mechanics and by moving objects around. She can see, be seen by, and speak with spirits in addition to being able to use the drain/fill mechanics on them.

I imagine the gamespace, this place of spirits that the player inhabits through Harriet, reflects the emotional landscape of the NPCs and Harriet; she must be in a particular emotional place to be draining all those people, like she is trying to fill a bottomless pit or empower herself through the disempowerment of others, or she may be feeling vengeful for the way British society has treated her. Harriet's motivations may be quite separate from the player's, but the player's actions definitely determine the possible interpretations of what those actions mean for Harriet. In other words, the player need not identify with Harriet or even see themselves playing *as* her for their actions to have meaningful implications for her and impact her story.

When the player gets an ending, there may be a very deep divide between what the ending means to them ludically (were they trying for an evil playthrough? Were they experimenting with what certain actions would yield, regardless of Harriet's situation? Were they simply trying to finish the game because it was assigned?) and what it means for Harriet as a character. There is always a disconnect between avatar and player, but some games try to deeply elide the two; this game does not. Both outcomes and the difference between them are worthy of discussion. They have everything to do with the medium of video games and its unique influence on character and story, as well as player. While it is perfectly possible to take a serious film lightly because of a viewer's particular emotional state or simple desire to remain aloof for whatever reason, this same emotional

state still has a very different affect on a story when it must be played and on the audience of that story when they must take action, however minimal it may be.

Play begins in a hotel room. At the novel's end, Harriet and her new husband were honeymooning in Italy, and are staying in a hotel, and this is supposed to be that location. It is there that Harriet wakes to find Anthony has perished beside her in the night and there that she takes her own life. However, when the player exits the hotel onto the streets, Harriet remarks that this is not Italy at all, but the heart of London. This choice is another nod to the novel's Victorian British context. As I discussed in chapter four, there is nothing more terrifying for the English than having their homeland infiltrated by a monster in disguise, and London is the seat of the power of the British Empire. Setting my game in London brings Harriet back to the Empire that did her home island of Jamaica such trauma through slavery and forces the English to encounter the consequences of the atrocities of colonization, exploitation, and empire. Slavery has impacted Harriet personally through her mixed racial heritage, so it is also a significant reminder to the player of her race, which was a question I wanted to foreground in the game.

There are three objects with which the player can interact in the hotel room: Harriet's body, which is collapsed on the bed, the suicide note, which has fallen to the floor, and the mirror, which stands in the corner. The player is given options to reflect on their state of mind as they examine these items. Examining the corpse, the player can choose to see the body as "dark" or "fragile;" the note can make them feel they are monstrous or hopeful, and as the mirror reveals that Harriet has no reflection, players can

choose to declare themselves dead or begin to consider why they are not as dead as Harriet expected to be. I hope that tracking the responses players give on these initial choices once the game is published online will illustrate their state of mind as they begin play and will compare usefully with their choices at the game's end and will give me an idea of how player attitudes shift over the course of play.

From the hotel room, players progress to the hallway where they find a group of shadowy figures who turn out to be maids in the hotel. Players can listen in on them gossiping about Harriet's suicide. Farther down the hall is the nun who was coming to escort Harriet to the convent; she discovered Harriet's body and is distraught and praying for Harriet's soul. As the player examines her, they will have their first experience of Harriet's vampirism; she drains the nun by accident, and the player gains control over the drain mechanic, the logic being that here in the spirit world, Harriet can see her power in action, rather than performing it unknowingly, and it is more potent, thus giving her the opportunity to develop it if she chooses. It was deeply important to me that players actually "see" the drain and fill happening so they could have complete control over Harriet's power. If nothing else changes, this one element potentially solves Harriet's problem of inadvertently murdering those with whom she feels a close emotional bond. If she can control it, there is no need to commit suicide.

The streets section is meant to develop the world and give the player practice using the drain and fill powers. Players can explore a restaurant, flower shop, dress shop, and bakery. The restaurant has a living couple on whose conversation the player can eavesdrop and whom the player can drain or fill, though they only get one action. At each

of the other locations, the player encounters a spirit whom they can drain or fill or ignore. Players can always choose to do nothing with their powers. If they examine one of the shops a second time, they get a basic description of it.

Spirits in the game have been written to have a dreamy, sort of confused air about them, or one that is an over-expression of emotion such as fear. Given the Victorian relationship with the occult, the rise of the spirit medium in that time, and the popularity of séances and fortune telling, I thought it appropriate to include these and give them personality. I have seen spirits represented in numerous films and television shows, and I am hoping to represent a number of different attitudes toward life and death through them.

The player has the ability to help spirits move on. I imagine the drain mechanic as an absorption of the spirit's remaining life energy into Harriet, while the fill mechanic, in my mind, pushes the spirit into the afterlife without destroying it or consuming its energy. Both options remove the spirit from the world, so its melancholic or angry presence is no longer there to affect the living. As players move Harriet through the game space, their actions begin to affect the world around them: when they drain or fill a spirit, that spirit is gone from the world, and the fog and mood lifts a bit. If they drain living people, they leave a trail of bodies in their wake, and the world darkens. Since the complete game is text-based, this effect is perceivable only through descriptions of the environment, but in a visual version of the game, they would be visible each time and reflected in the commentary of NPCs the player would pass (NPCs could comment on their emotional state and that of the weather). The Unity demo version of the game only depicts

Margaret's House, and the environmental affects there are determined by the baby's spirit, so there is no environmental indication for players that anything has changed; only the game's dialogue demonstrates it, and to see that, players must return and interact with Margaret after draining or filling the baby's spirit. If they send her on, Margaret feels relief, and if you have given her the letter describing Anthony's death, she will state her intention of going to visit and condole with Harriet, not knowing, of course, that Harriet has committed suicide. This contributes to the ambiguity of Harriet's status for the player, who is reminded that they should still be questioning whether Harriet is alive or dead.

The Park: Women's Suffrage and Motherhood

I wanted to illustrate some of the political and social upheaval of the Victorian period without being too heavy-handed or judgmental, so I developed a scene in the park with a suffragette (the famous Emmeline Pankhurst) on a platform giving a speech. The player can listen in on various audience members and their reactions to the speaker, and if the player drains or fills them, it has an affect on the scene. If the player drains Ms. Pankhurst, there will be no commentary to listen in on, as the speech has ended, and the audience members are merely loitering around waiting for help to arrive.

I created a variety of spectators and tried to represent many different points of view on women's suffrage and women in general from the period. Draining and filling NPCs does not carry a specific ethical weight, so results of the player's choices are varied and not necessarily good or bad. Some, of course, are better than others, and again,

leaving a wake of bodies is not so great for morale. Players' choices of draining and filling in this scene do affect the ending they receive. I gave the suffragette more weight than the others as her collapse at the podium would cause a much bigger stir than anyone else's, and if filled, her speech is more likely to sway the audience, and certain endings take this into account.

I also wrote a quest in another section of the park in which the player encounters a spirit of a lost little girl and escorts her back to her mother who is still alive, grieving over her daughter's body while no one helps her. I considered explicitly stating that she is an immigrant from the West Indies or that she is impoverished, both possible reasons for the lack of attention from the upper class, white NPCs the player has encountered thus far, but I did not want to risk being overbearing or preachy (something players despise), so I left out any descriptor of her, leaving it to players to decide why she is being treated this way. I suppose given the lack of other identifiers, many may assume it is because she is a woman, though this would not really hold up since gentlemen would rush to help a lady in need, especially a mother.

In any case, the player can then choose whether to drain or fill the little girl spirit as well as the mother. If they drain the mother, she dies on the spot and becomes a spirit, which they can then drain, fill, or leave behind to haunt the park. This encounter has enormous bearing on the ending the player receives. I hope it also brings out some of the themes found in Marryat's novel, particularly questions of motherhood. Harriet did not know her mother as such, but assumed that she was a white woman, and the question of passing for white aside, I think it is worth considering what Marryat might have meant by

creating this matrilineal curse and placing it in a woman who effectively has no mother and searches for mother figures throughout the novel. Additionally, the first person Harriet accidentally kills in the novel is Margaret Pullen's baby, upon whom she doted like a mother, which is the key point in the section of the game that takes place in Margaret's house.

The Feminist Question of Revenge

Dr. Phillips's house is his office as well, and while there is no support for his being less well off than the Pullens in the novel, my instinct was to write him this way. It was common in the Victorian period for upper class people who were nonetheless struggling financially to go live abroad because it was much cheaper and they could maintain their opulent lifestyles, and both the Pullen family and Dr. Phillips have done this, indicating that there may be financial difficulties of some sort. Dr. Phillips's presence in Heyst in the novel may also be justified in his status as the Pullen family's doctor, but nonetheless, my decision was to give him a modest living space. I also made the doctor the highest-ranking type practicing at the time. The sign on his gate in the game indicates that he is a member of the F.R.C.P. meaning he is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and has been educated probably at Cambridge. Thus, he can maintain his residence in London, but it is not all that luxurious, and since he is a confirmed bachelor, it is not all that well maintained, nor is it decorated.

Dr. Phillips's parlor is a waiting area and I gave him a secretary because in Stoker's *Dracula*, Mina Harker has learned to type and is working as a secretary while

her fiancé travels to Transylvania to meet Dracula. She is an example of the New Woman in the Victorian period, but by the end of the novel, her experience of nearly turning into a vampire weakens her and she becomes a picture of domesticity with a new baby. I find Stoker's ending for her a bit unsettling (and perhaps he meant it to be) since it is unclear how much Dracula's blood may still influence her, and now there is a baby in the picture. Could this woman be dangerous to the next generation of Englishmen (the baby is a boy)?

To further connect to *Dracula* and Mina's character in particular, if the player enters the examining room in Dr. Phillips's house, they will find his assistant speaking with a man about his wife, who is present in the room. The men speak about her, but never to her. If the player examines the assistant's notes, they will find that she shows some similarities to Mina at the end of *Dracula*; she has recently had a boy baby and due to an unexplained trauma, she has been having hysteric episodes. I hope the player questions whether this may be post-partum depression on top of post-traumatic stress disorder, both misdiagnosed as some womanly ailment that no one takes seriously except to further dismiss women as weak. If the player fills the woman, she speaks up and refuses to take the medication the doctor has prescribed for her "hysteria." I meant for players to emotionally engage in some way with this couple and become aware of their decisions of how to interact with them, whether in line with the feminist ideal of empowering the woman or playing to the time period, seating power with the men. Both are valid approaches to play, as is an evil playthrough in which a player might simply drain everyone.

If the player drains the receptionist, the assistant calmly and emotionlessly deals with her body. There is no distress or regret or pity on his part; he is just a robot doing his job for the doctor. Upstairs, the player will find the doctor himself sitting at his kitchen table reading a newspaper article about Miss Jewel and her marriage to a Negro. Here is the text I included:

Evening News, 12 August 1899. Announcement of Engagement: Miss Florence Kate Jewell of London to "Prince" Peter Kushana Lobengula of South Africa.

"...the mating of a white girl with a dusky savage" ought to "inspire a feeling of disgust among the vast majority of Englishmen and Englishwomen... to use it as a theme for jesting is not only in bad taste, but distinctly dangerous... such acts of disgusting folly are well known to be infectious, and there are plenty of silly women in the world." (qtd in Malchow 319)

I found out about this situation in the last chapter of Malchow's *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth Century Britain*, and beyond what he has written, there is very little about it available. I wanted a direct reference to mixed race marriage, since that relates directly to Harriet, and conveniently, this happens to be a real case from the time period.

Also on Dr. Phillips's table, players can find a book; if they read it, they will find the following passage from Dijkstra's *Idols of Perversity*:

William J. Robinson, MD, Married Life and Happiness.

"...there is the opposite type of woman who is a great danger to the health and even the very life of her husband. I refer to the hypersensual woman, to the wife with an excessive sexuality. It is to her that the name vampire can be applied in its literal sense. Just as the vampire sucks the blood of its victims in their sleep while they are alive, so does the woman vampire such the life and exhaust the vitality of her male partner—or victim. And some of them—the pronounced type—are utterly without pity or consideration..."¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Bram Dijkstra. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. (New York: Oxford UP), 1986. 34.

This passage is from an actual medical text, which an educated doctor like Dr. Phillips could have expected to own. The comparison of feminine sexuality with vampirism is another perfect connection to Harriet. Marryat describes her as a flirtatious and sensual girl, characteristics meant to mark her as Other before her mixed race heritage is revealed. Dr. Phillips points out these and other characteristics to Margaret in the novel as evidence of the miscegenation of Harriet's parents and grandparents, which was, in actuality, probably the all-too-common rape of a black slave woman by her white male owner, though the doctor presents Harriet's mother very differently.

Finally, the player can read the letter informing Dr. Phillips of Anthony and Harriet's deaths. I composed it, and it reads:

Dear Sir:

It is with regret that I write to inform you that your former acquaintance and friend, Anthony Pennell, has died this day, utterly weakened by some as yet unknown ailment.

It is with further regret that I must add that his new bride, Miss Harriet Brandt, as was, has perished by her own hand by chloral, surely from grief at the loss of her new husband. I had hoped you would accompany me in examining them before their internment.

I hope this news finds you tolerably well.

*Your Sincere Friend and Colleague,
Dr. Martin Hesselius*

Dr. Martin Hesselius is the doctor character in *Carmilla*, another Victorian vampire novel, this one representing a female vampire who is more traditional than Harriet in that she is well aware and accepting of her monstrosity, and she drinks blood. Dr. Hesselius operates in that novel much like Dr. Van Helsing does in *Dracula* and Dr. Phillips does in

The Blood of the Vampire, in that these are older, unmarried men who have devoted their lives to study of medicine, and who, in coming across the supernatural, have applied science to overcome it. They are the founts of knowledge in these novels, and while they have no comfortable place in society, their role is to protect it as insider/outsider figures, able to function in society, but without the “burden” of stable, traditional family lives. They are unencumbered by women, in other words, and in situations involving the supernatural, they are the interpreters of monstrous behavior and the arbiters of justice. In short, they are the most powerful characters in these novels.

The player’s interactions with Dr. Phillips end here; when he thinks aloud, the player can answer him, unsettling him, though he cannot see or really hear Harriet, but this interaction indicates the player’s attitude toward him and whether they think Harriet should try to take revenge for his actions in the novel, convincing her of her monstrosity based solely on her racial heritage and based in no factual evidence at all. The player can drain him, and he is adversely affected, but he does not die. I thought about allowing players to take revenge on him by killing him outright, but then decided that it would be out of step with the tone of the rest of the game and the level of power Harriet has at this relatively early stage in using it. An argument could be made that her rage and inability to keep her emotions in check in the novel should come into play here and allow her to destroy the doctor, but I still maintain that she should not have this power because he is more than just a man: he represents the systemic oppression of patriarchy. No encounter with a single woman—even one as powerful as Harriet—can undo that.

The Ether

Once the player has encountered the baby spirit in Margaret's house and Dr. Phillips in his house, they are free to finish the game by returning to the hotel where the game began. The game prompts them to do so—or at least indicates that it is possible—by presenting them with a bit of text that tells them the streets have darkened and the only light they can see is in front of the hotel. It also reminds them that this is where their body is. They are free to continue exploring, though, if they choose, and of course some might abandon play at this point if they do not think Harriet should move on, or if they do not want to make any further decisions.

Entering the hotel, the player finds instead a no-space where they encounter Harriet's mother. She is nothing like the doctor described, but is a far more reasonable and realistic depiction of a slave woman than his gross demonization. She speaks cryptically, but offers the player help and asks what they want. This is the real moment of determining Harriet's fate. The player's choices here have enormous bearing on the ending they receive. Players can choose to be their best self, to be happy, or to be free, and when Harriet's mother asks them to clarify, they can choose what they mean. Then she gives them the option to live or die. Death results in ending 1, regardless of the player's choices, but choosing to live may result in any of the other five endings, which is then determined by what the player did in the game.

For me, the outcomes of the game were of central concern because they color the way the gameplay is to be interpreted by players. The endings are a kind of judgment of everything the player has done up to this point, and I wanted to avoid the kind of

darkside/lightside mechanics that tend to crop up in games, as I feel they oversimplify complicated human interactions into a coded ethics that must be less proscriptive if in-game ethics are to feel more realistic. Miguel Sicart has written widely about the importance of consequences in games in generating ethical concerns, and for my text-based game, the best way to create consequences was in the endings.

Conditions for endings:

Ending 1: Death is Sweet

Choose to Die

Ending 2: Power is Nothing

Choose to Live

In Ether: choose to be Pure OR at Peace OR Good

Other: Must have filled suffragette OR filled more than half of NPCs OR

Never used drain or fill powers at all

Ending 3: Power is Control

Choose to Live

In Ether: choose to be in Control OR Strong

Other: Must have drained or filled more than half of NPCs AND not drained suffragette

Ending 4: Power is All

Choose to Live

In Ether: choose to Fight OR Control

Other: Must have drained suffragette AND drained more than half of NPCs OR drained more than half of NPCs AND drained Doctor

Ending 5: Power Consumes

In Ether: Choose to be Strong OR Fight OR Control

Other: Must have used Drain power on all spirits AND suffragette AND at least one other living NPC

Ending 6: Self-Knowledge Empowers

In Ether: Choose to be Good OR Pure

Other: Must have never used Drain power (except with nun).

The text for each ending can be found in the appendices. Ending 1 is death, and I called it “Death is Sweet” because that is what Harriet believed when she committed suicide. She considered it the right thing and the best thing for herself as well as those around her.

I think this should still be an option available to players who agree with her. Ending 2 is “Power is Nothing;” Harriet assumes that her power is gone because the player never used it, or even though the player used it only to empower others, Harriet still worries that she might kill again by accident, so she never lets herself get too close to anyone again. This ending is bittersweet because Harriet is still able to affect change and inspire others, but she has to do so from a distance.

Ending 3 is called “Power is Control,” and on the surface, it is the happiest ending because Harriet wakes to find that her husband is not dead after all. She has control of her vampiric power, but I meant for players to question the typical happily-ever-after ending; because Harriet is married, her money belongs to her husband now, and she is trapped in domesticity, a place that has traditionally been fraught with emotional power for fictional (and real-life!) women.

Ending 4, “Power is All,” sees Harriet become a kind of vigilante in the shadows a la Batman, but more ambiguous. Rather than learning anything real about Harriet, this ending tells about events in London that may or may not have been Harriet’s doing. Women’s suffrage comes at the cost of the health of the men of London, so this ending implies that Harriet has taken feminism to a dark place.

At first I made every ending ambiguous, with some good and some bad elements, leaving it up to the player how to interpret their ending. But in alpha testing, I was

informed that players will not be satisfied if they find out there are no unambiguous endings; they like to be able to receive an all-good or all-bad ending if they feel they have earned it through play, so I added these in. Getting one of them is supposed to be an achievement, more difficult than receiving one of the ambiguous endings. I would be interested to see student write-ups evaluating their decision making processes, what they were going for with their character, and how they felt about the ending they received. Endings 5 and 6 are the unambiguous ones. In “Power Consumes,” the player has turned Harriet into a monster who specifically targets men, only using the draining part of the vampirism. In “Self-Knowledge Empowers,” Harriet gets it all: the man, the kids, the fame, and the political change for women. I am a bit anxious about the inclusion of the suffragette and the role of women’s suffrage in the endings because it is possible. Endings 1 and 6 are the only ones that mention the colonies, and it is possible that this part of Harriet’s situation is too understated.

Conclusions

Seeing the game realized in both text-based and visual formats and being able to experience play as Harriet Brandt has an enormous impact on the perception of her character, both in general and in the context of the novel. I designed the game such that players who have not read the novel might still understand and enjoy it, and reading or not reading the novel before playing the game in a course depends entirely on the goals of the professor, the course’s learning outcomes, and what students stand to gain versus the amount of time it would take to read even a short Victorian novel like this one. Either

way, the game facilitates valuable and discussable insights on questions of gender, race, the affects of play on players, and the potential of play as a pedagogical tool, which is the topic of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX
PEDAGOGIES OF PLAY:
VIDEO GAMES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Play is considered by some to be one of the most promising pedagogical tools we have in education, and it is strikingly one most of us do not use enough, especially in humanities education, which traditionally involves mostly reading and writing. James Paul Gee, for one, has written extensively about how people learn without even thinking about it when they play video games.¹⁸² Much of what he claims can be attributed to the concept of experiential learning, which has been widely debated as the most effective learning process:

Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning models [Concrete Experience (CE), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), Reflective Observation (RO), and Active Experimentation (AE)] that is responsive to contextual demands. This process is portrayed as an idealized learning cycle or spiral where the learner ‘touches all the bases’—experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting—in a recursive process that is responsive to the learning situation and what is being learned.¹⁸³

Gee’s work looking at video games stems (as he himself explains) from watching his son take up video games as a hobby, which spurred him to try them as a way to keep up with what his son was exposed to. The observations he makes about the value of play are one of the first natural instincts we have as children. Erika Christakis argues that because of the wide acceptance of the science behind the value of play for children, play should be the ordering principle of education; however, structured lecture tends to be the reality of

¹⁸² Gee, James Paul. “What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy”

¹⁸³ Alice Y. and David A. Kolb. “Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education.” *Academy of Management: Learning and Education*. 1 Jun 2005. 4:2 193-212.

classrooms in the US, and that is a big problem when we stand to learn so much from playing. Christakis writes,

I think the other problem is that the rich, experience-based play that we know results in learning — it's not as easy to accomplish as people think. And that's because, while the impulse to play is natural, what I call the play know-how really depends on a culture that values play, that gives kids the time and space to learn through play.¹⁸⁴

Although Christakis focuses on cooperative play in face-to-face environments, another good place to learn through play is in video games, many of which teach players how to work through problems, find creative solutions, and deal with failure, encouraging players to try again when they lose, as Juul has discussed at length.¹⁸⁵ In a culture that does not value and support play as a major part of primary education, it is plain to see why students struggle so much when video games are introduced in the university classroom. Jan Holmevik has observed this problem and calls students' lack of skills in play a failure of "ludic literacy," the literacy of play.¹⁸⁶ Holmevik explains how, in the past, he has assigned students to play a video game and come to class prepared to discuss it, but they often seem to be a bit lost, not sure what value games have (without extensive class discussions) or even *how* to play them—a more complicated question than it may at first seem. They seem to be learning as they go, which is not what scholars calling Millennials "digital natives" have taught us to expect.

There is no question that our students are playing games in very high numbers. As Neil Howe, lead researcher on Millennials at LifeCourse Associates points out in the 2015 ESA data report, "Millenials are putting [video games] at the center of their

¹⁸⁴ Cory Turner. "What Kids Need From Grown-Ups (But Aren't Getting)." Interview with Erika Christakis. nprED. 9 Feb 2016, accessed 10 Feb 2016.

¹⁸⁵ Jesper Juul. *The Art of Failure*.

¹⁸⁶ Conference presentation forthcoming

entertainment preferences, but it is a new kind of gaming that is social, interactive and engaging.”¹⁸⁷ If play is happening, and frequently, then the problem is one of the perception of play. The issues that ensue from a lack of value of play in our society are not mere assumptions; they are backed up by compelling scientific research.¹⁸⁸ The disconnect between what school teaches us about how we should behave in order to learn and how we actually do learn is only the beginning. So when we finally get these “digital natives” in the college classroom—the kids who grew up with cell phones, tablets, Netflix, and games galore on every platform—they actually have little concept of the purpose of play and many have internalized their teachers’ and parents’ insistence that games are pointless and will get them nowhere. I have found most students reticent to even admit to playing games in any form, although I know that the majority of them play mobile games at the very least. They do not consider the time spent playing to be valuable because they have been repeatedly told that it is not. That means we have some groundwork to lay about the very nature of play itself before we can even begin discussing the sophisticated and complex games we might want to assign in a course.

What Does It Mean to Be “Next Generation?”

Next generation learning is electracy, to use Greg Ulmer’s term he prefers to what others tend to refer to as “digital literacy,”¹⁸⁹ which is the literacy that precedes Holmevik’s ludic literacy. Electracy involves all forms of electronic technology and the

¹⁸⁷ Entertainment Software Association. *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2015 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data*. 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Whitehead (2007); Ginsberg (2012)

¹⁸⁹ Greg Ulmer. *Internet Invention: From Literacy to Electracy*. (New York: Longman), 2002.

ways we interact with them and with others through them. Ulmer contends that the technologies driving electracy have fundamentally changed the way we communicate, think, and learn¹⁹⁰ (as examples, I would point out the speed of social media, truth by consensus on Wikipedia, and the general emphasis on image over text). If academe is to keep up with the students it means to educate, teachers and students must cohabitate in digital spaces, we must play, we must make, we must share, and we need to educate our students about the value of the things they have been told they should see as a meaningless waste of time. Students are more and more likely to find themselves in workplaces that demand digital composition and professional social media use of them, and if this is not the case, those workplaces would likely benefit from the creative (digital, tech-savvy, heuritic) approaches to problem solving new graduates should be capable of bringing with them out of the classroom. A mixture of practical skills and critical analysis of media, their own projects, and peers' work can be a productive approach to guiding students to become thoughtful participants in their fields.

If educators can update disciplinary norms in academe to match the inclinations students already bring with them (their reliance on social media, their everyday technologies such as phones and tablets) and effectively teach students to use new composition methods and to emphasize the creative side of critical thinking skills, we can impact a number of fields when we send these students out into the workforce. They can then meaningfully update their fields for an electracy, global society. Further, students

¹⁹⁰ That perspective is backed up by many other scholars such as Miguel Sicart, N. Katherine Hayles, Jane McGonigal, and James Paul Gee. Hayles explains in "Deep and Hyper Attention: the Generational Divide in Cognitive Modes" (2007) that with the advent of the internet as the main source of information, we have begun to read widely, but shallowly (which is what she means when she says "hyper attention").

should leave our classrooms with an arsenal of ways of composing their intersecting identities, not just as scholars or professionals, but as human beings and citizens of that global world.

I will start by discussing the value of play, making, and collaboration as learning outcomes for students in a hypothetical course of my design and then will move into a description of transmedia studies as an approach to these outcomes, explaining what makes texts transmedia, and the benefits of using these texts to ground the course. I will consider my own game as a transmedia text and discuss its use value as a part of the course as well.

Learning Outcomes

ESA recently released a study showing that adult women now make up the majority of video gamers in the US—36%. For the 35% adult male gamers and 17% teenage boy gamers who think that these women are only playing app-based games, which shouldn't count because they are “casual,” the study shows that 51% of American households own a gaming console, and the gender of video gamers playing on those is split fifty-fifty.¹⁹¹

As video games become more widespread and available, educators are looking to appropriate the medium for learning. Some approaches are less than impressive: gamification of the classroom, in which grades morph into experience points students earn so they can level up, only works (as far as the presentations I have seen on the

¹⁹¹ Entertainment Software Association. *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry: 2015 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data*. 2015.

subject claim) if it is comprehensive and the experience of the class is immersive and game-like all semester, incorporating elements of role-play. This approach is unlikely to work for everyone, since role-play is not the most common form of play and makes some people uncomfortable. It helps if the course content includes or is solely about games themselves so that students are thinking about game design and ways to play as they are “playing” the class. Gamification is so new that there is little research on its effectiveness, and there are so many different ways teachers can gamify their courses, it would be difficult to interpret the data such studies might show, to separate what works from what does not. We will have to keep experimenting with gamification in the meantime and wait for conclusive work in this area to emerge.

Elementary, middle, and high schools have been implementing technologies and games in their classrooms since computers became pervasive enough to be provided for in their budgets. As a young student, I not only played educational typing tutorials and math games as class activities, but also had access to less obviously educational games like *Oregon Trail*. There is a balance to be struck between the overt didacticism of educational games (its own genre) and the subtle lessons available in games designed more with entertainment in mind.

Teaching games made for entertainment as digital media texts from a humanities perspective is one of the most intuitive ways to bring play into the classroom, since video games are one of the newest narrative forms and many focus on storytelling, plot, character development, themes, and tone, just like the literary texts typically relied upon by English departments. Video games demonstrate the power of choice, multiplicity of

possible interpretations, and the variety of approaches to play for students, foregrounding the possibility of different perspectives and multiple ways of getting to a conclusion.

These are concepts which, in my experience, many students struggle with in college (less intellectually than morally), perhaps due to the outdated, even harmful, educational methods they experienced in K-12, not to mention their parents' and communities' impact on them. Some video games offer an opportunity to explore ethics and try more than one tactic to move through content, and this is a much more powerful experience than would be a lecture on ethics and choice.

In short, playing video games critically with the kind of self-awareness analysis demands not only makes for great class discussion and interesting student projects, but it can also help students explore identity formation in a way they may not have thought to do in their personal lives or their majors. Academe often forgets to consider how we affect our students as human beings—not merely as scholars or professionals. College is an important period of freedom at a critical developmental stage. As educators, we should not miss seeing our students as people and considering the impact our course designs and teaching methods have on them as such.

Once explained somewhat through lecture and discussion, electracy is generally an easy enough concept to grasp, and most students get on board with it fairly quickly. After all, they know just how important digital technologies and social media are in their own lives, and they see the distinctions Ulmer makes between orality, literacy, and electracy readily. However, when the students dig deeper into what Ulmer wants to do with the concept, electracy tends to come across as idealistic to a fault—even utopian—

and suffers from issues of access, not only to the technologies used to be electrated (which not all students have), but also in terms of the constant redefinition of the concept itself and the terms adjacent to it. Ulmer's writing is not the most accessible to students, even at the graduate level. He practices what he preaches in his writing style of conductive reasoning (which has a tendency to leave anyone not in his brain behind) and constant redefinition of the terms he uses and how he uses them. He is trying to show (rather than tell) us that meaning is fluid; it drifts; it is whatever the writer needs it to be at that moment, and then it changes.

This makes students very uncomfortable. They want clear take-home messages and ready answers. And we have a responsibility to teach them clarity, thoroughness in research, and brevity in writing. But we also have a responsibility to push them beyond their comfort zones and give them back the creativity our education system has quashed out of them.

Resistance to Ulmer is not something I would want to stand between students and getting the meaningful heuritic experiences I value out of the course, so we would begin with Ulmer and spend a few classes picking apart his work from all angles and then take his most useful ideas our own direction as we move into the other texts assigned for the course, which would be mostly games and their transmedia counterparts.

Game Design and Advocacy

Advocacy is a rich possibility for digital games, whether created to simply raise awareness or also to raise funds. Individual scholars like Bogost and Brenda Romero and

organizations like Half the Sky, which helps improve the lives of women internationally,¹⁹² and Games for Change, which archives games identified as furthering a cause and sponsors an annual competition for student game designers,¹⁹³ have begun using digital games as a persuasive medium for social change. Play has the potential to be more compelling than other media because—as scholars of learning style theory claim—most people learn more by doing than by listening or reading. Because they can involve reading, listening, and doing in both individual and social contexts, games can easily be designed to incorporate all the major learning styles,¹⁹⁴ thus meaningfully reaching and impacting a wider audience.

Games developed in the contexts mentioned above tend to be overtly educational, but games need not set out to teach in order for players to learn from them. In fact, we may stand to gain more from games that do not pitch themselves as advocacy than from those that do. Educational games can come across preachy, and most people are not amenable to feeling they are sitting in on a lecture rather than playing a game.

Discovering and interpreting meaning independently, stumbling upon it, coming up with it long after the game is over, or only upon subsequent playthroughs, is one of the most powerful forms of learning and one that leaves a lasting impression. So games designed to keep meaning cloaked in the nuances and subtleties of the player's interactions with the game world, foregrounding mechanics, plot, and character development over message

¹⁹² <http://www.halftheskymovement.org/pages/mobile-games>

¹⁹³ <http://www.gamesforchange.org/about/>

¹⁹⁴ Alice Y. and David A Kolb. "Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education." *Academy of Management: Learning and Education*. (1 Jun 2005), 4:2 193-212.

can be far more compelling than those designed didactically. This approach works well in other media, too (film, television, literature), so it is no surprise to find it true in games.

In a course called “Game Design as Advocacy,” I focus on the phenomenon of the social justice warrior (SJW). Originally coined by trolls using the hashtag GamerGate to criticize and harass designers—particularly female designers—making games with any sort of social message, the term has been proudly embraced by those whom it was meant to silence. Samantha Blackmon, a games scholar at Purdue University and producer of the *Not Your Mama’s Gamer* podcast and blog, has even created and is selling t-shirts bearing the slogan “Social Justice Warrior.”

Outcomes in this course will focus on students building an understanding of various theories and approaches to video game design and developing knowledge of design terminology and current debates in the industry. They will use their knowledge to compose multimodal critical analyses of games in several genres commonly found in gaming communities and used in the field of game studies. Additionally, students will design games of their own in small groups (3-4 students) based on what they have learned from the readings, from critical analyses, and through the experience of play.

For this course, students will play a variety of games designed to represent and facilitate ludic experiences of various social and political issues. Arranged by topic, the list includes:

Diversity

- *Never Alone*
- *Shelter*

Poverty

- *Spent*
- *Half the Sky*

Immigration

- *Papers, Please*

Sexuality

- *A Closed World*

War

- *Hush*
- *This War of Mine*
- *Unmanned*

Health

- *Depression Quest*
- *That Dragon, Cancer*

Narrative

- *Gone Home*
- *Stanley Parable*

To briefly speak to my choices, *Never Alone* depicts native Alaskan mythology through this puzzle-platformer game in which the player is a young girl, and may also play as her fox companion. The player's avatar in *Shelter* is a mother badger trying to protect her young. Both of these games are of interest in their representation of the experiences of marginalized subjects: a native girl and an animal. They will generate conversation about avatar, identity, empathy, and the Other. *Spent* puts players in the position of making ends meet on a poverty-level budget to illustrate how difficult survival in poverty is, even in a developed nation like the US. In the Facebook game *Half the Sky*, players try to gather resources to educate impoverished women in developing nations, play which can actually yield real-world gains for real-life women through the charitable organization behind the game.

Papers, Please takes a critical look at national sovereignty and border control, putting players in charge of a border crossing and letting them determine whether or not to admit any given NPC who wants to enter their country. The gameplay can be

monotonous, just like the actual job would be, but hidden behind that are serious questions of empathy, race, and difference. Meaning here lies entirely with the player and their choices, which have a clear and immediate as well as a longer term impact on the NPCs and the events of the game. Continuing themes of difference, *A Closed World* explores discrimination based on gender and sexuality. Its combat mechanics are also argument-based, using ethos, pathos, and logos for “attacks” and a composure bar rather than a health bar. This helps students grasp different persuasive techniques and try them out with consequences in the game. The game also attempts to generate empathy for others of different sexual orientations, and while content and mechanics are not perfectly aligned in this game, the potential gaps are worth discussing in a course analyzing game design.

The next unit is games about war, two from the perspective of civilians. In *HUSH*, the player is a mother with an infant living in a Tutsi village during a Hutu attack; as such, the game is firmly rooted in political events. The goal is to keep the child from crying as sounds of the violence escalate outside. If successful, the mother and child survive, but if the child cries, both are killed. This game is very simple, but has a high emotional impact and is nerve-racking to play. *This War of Mine* follows civilians trying to escape their war-torn hometown to safety and is a more active and complex look at what war does to people and communities, expanding on themes introduced in *HUSH*, and even to some extent in *Papers, Please*. Finally, *Unmanned* puts the player in control of a drone and assigns them bombing missions to carry out. This raises questions about the gamification of modern warfare, since the actual operation of a real drone is very

similar to the mechanics of the game, thus encouraging players to think through the ethics of drones as a wartime tactic.

Depression Quest is the game that sparked GamerGate, so its inclusion facilitates the introduction and discussion of the harassment of women in the gaming and technology industries, as well as female game designers, game critics, game journalists, and players. This text-based game (a new genre to discuss!) puts the player in the position of a depressed person trying to make it through the mundane events of their everyday life. By gradually increasing restrictions on the mechanics and choices players can make, the game demonstrates how trapped and powerless depression can make a person feel, thus encouraging empathy for those suffering from depression and promoting awareness of the signs of depression. *That Dragon, Cancer* comes with a trigger warning, as it depicts a father trying to work through the emotional and physical toll taken on him by the fact that his infant son has cancer. The baby is in a great deal of pain and is often inconsolable, in spite of the player's best efforts, again showing what real life feels like by placing limitations on player agency.

Finally, to lighten things up and move into questions of what genre is and what constitutes a game, students play *Gone Home*, which has the tone and feel of a horror game, but is actually not, and *The Stanley Parable*, in which a narrator describes every action the player takes and tries to block player agency at every turn.

As students play through these games, many of which can be completed in a single sitting, they will read/watch/listen to articles and essays related to the games we are playing, especially essays that focus on questions of advocacy, such as the NPR piece

“For Advocacy Groups, Video Games are the Next Frontier.” Students will also read Henry Jenkins’s article “Game Design as Narrative Architecture” to establish the debate between ludology and narratology in game design, as well as excerpts from Adrienne Shaw’s *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* to problematize widely accepted assumptions about the relationship between representation and identification in media. In one unit, students will explore the relationship between social media and video games culture in examining #GamerGate and #NotYourShield. Readings will include Leigh Alexander’s article (“Gamers Are Over”) and Anita Sarkeesian’s web series (*Tropes vs. Women in Video Games*) that fueled the controversy as well as a book that fairly and concisely sums it up (Scott Cameron’s *Understanding #GamerGate*). To illustrate the stigma against SJWs from one extreme—and infamous—source, we will look at Vox Day’s *SJWs Always Lie*, trying to sort out some sort of balance of ethics and sanity. Colin Moriarty’s article “The Problem With Political Correctness in Video Games” explores this concept as well. To help figure out the roots of the gender part of this controversy, we will also read excerpts from Michael Kimmel’s *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*.

These readings set up central questions to the course: what constitutes social advocacy? What are ethical versus unethical approaches to advocacy? Who needs advocacy? Who should advocate and for whom and how? How can games/game designers advocate? How does ludic power and freedom of interpretation play into these questions? What is the difference between political correctness and advocacy? Does political correctness “ruin” games (or anything)?

The Significance of Making

Writing has always been a form of making, though we rarely acknowledge this in the same way as when we talk about building design, art, or cooking. Writers “make” new compositions by drawing on those that came before them, but typically they respond in the way they have been taught—hermeneutically. Hermeneutics are the standard educational paradigm and will always be an important part of reading in any discipline—even game studies. The course that assigns a video game as a text to be interpreted is taking a hermeneutic approach to it. We almost always begin there with questions of meaning and message.

But for electrate learners, a more hands-on approach is the next step in learning, which is where heuristics come in. It is not enough merely to interpret what a game “means;” students should then be encouraged to compose responses to what they have “read”/played through play. Students in my Gender and Video Games Advocacy course have to play numerous games of a variety of lengths and genres to illustrate what is possible to convey through design. Titles played include *Never Alone*, *The Stanley Parable*, *Depression Quest*, and *HUSH*. In the interest of making the course fit within a program of media studies, English, or Communication, students are not required to design a game for this class, but I introduce them to several free and easy-to-use game engines like Quest, GameSalad, and GameMaker in case they want to take on game design for projects. I also teach them to use iMovie and Windows MovieMaker as well as

QuickTime for screen capture and PhotoBooth for webcam capture so they can accomplish their short video blog assignments and final video essay project.

The hypothetical heuritic course would have students compose in digital media and do so multi-modally. They have weekly blog or video blog posts that serve as short responses to the texts read and played for class. Short assignments help students internalize the concepts in the various texts they encounter and give them practice with digital composition in preparation for making more extended arguments later in the semester.

Longer projects—equivalent to essays or research papers—could come in the form of polished videos including a variety of production techniques, a web design group project that produces a site designed to be “experienced” and not merely read, or even short games that illustrate the student’s argument. The course content provides students with examples of how others have composed multi-modally, creatively, and collaboratively in communicating their arguments, so these assigned projects serve as a way for students to try their hand at heuritic making with an analytical awareness of how their work might be received.

Collaborative Project

Next generation learning is collaborative, as I discussed in the previous chapter, because collaboration brings together strengths across areas of study that one individual alone could not possibly attain. Electrate learning crosses disciplinary boundaries by necessity. I wanted to make a video game, but I do not know how to code. I could learn

for myself, but it would take years, and there is no telling whether I would even be any good at it. Far more productive than that I collaborate with someone who does know the languages of programming and to whom I can offer my background in literature and theory, which might be areas of interest, but not study, for them. Together we can make a game superior to any we might have made individually. Even simply having another pair of eyes and hands on a project can dramatically improve its chances of success and prevent grave errors that one designer might miss. The project is more likely to address multiple levels of concerns in more nuanced ways than a single author could produce alone.

Only in certain areas of scholarship is collaboration discouraged and single-authorship the norm. For some projects, single-authorship makes sense, but humanities disciplines in particular should begin to recognize the value of collaborative works, especially transdisciplinary ones.

By sharing, I also mean accessibility. When we make digital texts, we often share them instantly via social media, putting them out in the public view for critique or praise. The course would discuss the communities that sprout from and alongside certain media (I have various fan bases, niche hobbyists, and Anita Sarkeesian's web series *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* and its explosion of respondents in mind) and would address the positive aspects of the widespread availability of this content and the phenomenon of instant posting as well as the drawbacks and social/cultural problems that surface in these spaces.

Ideally, the course would include equal numbers of students from humanities disciplines as from the sciences, meaning collaboration could be both more challenging and more generative. Teamwork, delegation, and people skills are all, of course, involved here, but students would also have to navigate the inevitable clash of different styles of creativity. The course emphasizes individual creativity to this point, so students are already aware of their own strengths and styles, and for a collaborative group project, they need to find ways to maintain the integrity of their own ideas and contribute while still capitalizing on the strengths and contributions of others to make the best possible project.

The project is a three- to four-person website design that advocates on an issue of the group's choosing. The first day discussing the project in class involves brainstorming ideas for projects and then students grouping up around them. I have had students take on issues related to their disciplines like promoting nuclear energy or building tiger conservation partnerships from Clemson to India or they choose to work on social justice issues like a defending woman's right to breastfeed in public or combating advertising that misleads or promotes certain body types. Students must build a website that gives background information on their topic, fairly representing the issue from an academic perspective, but also clearly outlining the argument for change. The site must include at least four different types of media to communicate, and students often choose some combination of text, image, video, and social media, although podcasts, creative compositions, ad campaigns, short games, and posters are also acceptable and have been done.

In addition to the interest in web design and composition of the content, students must also plan a campus event focused on their topic that considers what type of event or series of events it will be, who they might invite to speak or perform, how they will promote the event, and who their intended audience is. The final piece of the project is a twenty minute group presentation pitching the cause to the class as though we are a potential audience for the message. Students are instructed to assume that the audience is skeptical and scholarly, so they must anticipate and address opposition, and they have to conduct a question and answer session afterwards for up to fifteen minutes.

Grading is rubric-based and breaks down to thirty percent for content (argument clarity, credibility of sources, citations), twenty percent for design (aesthetics, usability), twenty percent for delivery (ethos, speaking skills, organization, effectiveness for the intended audience), ten percent for the planned event (appeal with regards to the intended audience, structure and organization, vision, feasibility), and twenty percent based on group and self-evaluation. The evaluation process includes a five hundred-word essay explaining the student's contributions to the group and a rating of performance between zero and five, five being the highest, each rating given with a sentence about the contributions of the other group members and justifying the rating. Group members are not ranked; all can receive the same rating if that is justified; this is a common misunderstanding among students when I explain this project.

The final project in the course is a video essay analyzing a game or games of the student's choosing with regards to their effectiveness as advocacy and proposing a game that either counters the perspectives offered by the analyzed game(s) or significantly

extending the themes they bring up. Grading in this case is based on a rubric outlining requirements of content quality and credibility of sources, organization, clarity of analysis and argument, delivery, and effectiveness.

Game Design Capstone Course

To illustrate what a course on game design might be able to do, I will discuss my idea of a capstone project centered around the creation and development of a video game. The course's learning outcomes involve students learning the elements of games to consider for a critical analysis with attention to meaning creation, both on the side of the designer and the player. Students take part in thoughtful play of games and will compose written and/or video texts reflecting on their play. Students will need to meaningfully internalize these concepts as they think toward designing games of their own. They will learn at least one piece of software and will go through the process of design from brainstorming and developing a design document through paper/physical creation of the game space and experimentation with mechanics to the finished product.

Next generation learning is transmediated, so early in the course for the short responses and case studies, I would want students to look particularly at games that have crossed the boundaries of medium and morphed into something new. I would encourage them to take this approach to designing their own games, since coming up with an original idea without solid inspiration is daunting. Transmedia studies asks what happens to texts when they jump from one genre to another, which is more and more likely to happen, given our electrated context and its interest in remix and appropriation. A

transmedia perspective asks what is the difference between reading *The Walking Dead* graphic novels and watching the television show? And what happens when reader becomes player in the video games?

The hypothetical course would use transmediated texts to explore questions of genre and medium with regards to advocacy and effective communicative design, and would explore the various ways writers and designers have accomplished it. While some transmedia works create a world in which to develop infinite characters and storylines (I will talk about these in a bit), others re-present the same content from a previous iteration in a new genre. Both of these approaches can be useful in persuading depending on the audience and the issue at hand.

The most popular and revolutionary transmediated text to date that uses the approach of re-presenting original content is *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which is a video blog by fictional character Elizabeth Bennet from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. The vlog was produced in 104 episodes, most of which are under five minutes long, and the project's webpage was designed to look like an authentic blog typical for a young woman. Along with the video that made up the main storyline, the cast produced several off-shoot streams featuring characters other than Lizzie plus promotional videos for the two fake companies the writers of the series invented. They also developed Twitter handles for the characters, and the actors tweeted in character to each other about what was happening in the story as it was released. Since the video blog genre demands that shooting take place in an isolated space, the Twitter medium allowed more access to the

implied world of the Bennets, including images of dresses worn to fictional parties and such.

As a companion to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, I might include *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, Seth Grahame-Smith's rewrite of Jane Austen's classic, which has been turned into a film, which will be released in February 2016. This novel is a perfect example of heuritic remix, adding pop culture elements to the story and its setting both for fun and to reimagine the characters—particularly Lizzie—as stronger and more capable in different ways than the original might depict. Both transmediations of *Pride and Prejudice* have spurred writers to attempt transmediations of other literary texts including *Jane Eyre*, *Frankenstein*, *Emma*, and *Sense and Sensibility*.

Given video games' propensity to create rich, explorable worlds and the wide appeal of these digital spaces, it should come as no surprise that more traditional media have begun to come up with ways to do the same thing. I have already mentioned *The Walking Dead* as one example involving television, graphic novels, and video games; the first season of the TV show follows the graphic novels quite closely, but the video game takes place in another part of Georgia, and season 1 of the game features at least one character who appears briefly in the show, but all the others are new.

Taking this paradigm a different direction, George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* book series has been transmediated, again quite closely to the original plot and characters, for television, but this is the least interesting thing that has been done with it. Martin has published several short stories and graphic novels featuring minor characters or characters from other time periods in the larger story he is telling in the books and

HBO show. *The Hedge Knight* graphic novel is one of these. The *Game of Thrones* world has also been used to create an *Axis and Allies*-style board game for up to six players and a tabletop role-playing game. The board game would be worth playing in class because of the importance of diplomacy with other players, which is not mechanically represented in the game's rules, but which is a successful play strategy, especially if the lands where the player begins are sandwiched in with those of other players. Deals and alliances must be struck—at least temporarily—to guarantee success.

The tabletop RPG (TRPG) version of *Game of Thrones* would be a challenging type of gaming to bring into a classroom, but if successful would add a great deal to students' concepts of what gaming is (i.e. not just about video games) and how meaning alters through play with/in a world. The tabletop RPG is the most freeform of any genre discussed thus far because it is not completely constrained by mechanics, filmmaking techniques, or the pages of a book. The Game Master—rather than a computer program—is in charge of the story, and s/he can allow players as much freedom as they want to experiment and explore. This is a very different gaming experience, too, because of the lack of visual and digital media, which also contrasts with electracy—or does it? Players can still choose to share online spaces for tabletop RPGs, either playing together over long distances via voice chat and using an online dice rolling system, or simply participating in online forums discussing game settings, mechanics, and in-game progress. This is another online community to discuss as part of the course.

Games are created collaboratively in groups, and the development of the projects moves from brainstorming ideas through the entire process of creating the game. Along the way, students create design documents outlining every aspect of their game's design, storyboards to establish camera views, and a paper or otherwise physical model of the game space to help them plan out how players will move through the space they design. Throughout this process, they will have to pitch and justify their choices to each other, the class, and the professor.

The final exam portion of the course is a presentation of the group's finished product, which is hopefully something everyone in the class can play and critique. Students will also write up a reflection on the project as a whole, as well as of their performance and that of their group members. As with the collaborative project in the advocacy course, students will justify their contributions and rate their group members on their performance on a scale of zero to five, five being the highest, also justifying each rating.

Final Takeaways

Humanities disciplines are slowly coming to realize that the educational methods they have relied on in the past are fading out of relevance. Many of these methods—close reading, analysis papers, emphasis on critical thinking and historical context—are still vital and have much to offer students; where we stand to improve is in what texts we consider to be useful and relevant in the classroom. Composition classes often explore multimodality and non-traditional texts, but fields other than writing would benefit from

looking at the digital, the musical, the video, the video game, the social media compositions that can deal with the same themes and questions as respected media, but tend to be dismissed as “low” culture or simply avoided because they are misunderstood or not part of the instructor’s personal experience. The past decade has seen a growing interest in digital humanities, which has morphed from simple conversion of literary and historical texts to digital formats and their archival and searchability to mean the increasing acceptance of digital scholarship through peer-reviewed journals like *Kairos* and *Enculturation*, heuritic approaches to scholarship such as augmented reality, and the growth of the games studies discipline.

As I have discussed, the course’s emphasis on making, collaboration, and heuritic approaches to the texts we would study would better prepare students for the electrated workplace than do our more traditional classrooms, and it would also prepare them to challenge a workplace that lags behind, problem solve, and innovate in whatever industry or field they choose to work in. The material humanities courses currently cover is no less valuable from an electrated perspective, but their teaching methodology would have to undergo a major overhaul to meet the demands of electrated students. Most literature courses have enough to do just covering the basics and simply do not have time or space in them to push out of their literate mindsets and try to do something new. Including digital projects in literature courses in place of longer papers is one way to bring these ideas into play, but would not be able to address the heuritic creation process as deeply as a course specifically focused on transmedia can, as it provides examples of heuritic thinking in every text studied.

Speaking from the perspective of an English department, the transmedia content would be a valuable addition to the English major, as would consideration of video games as a serious narrative, political, and artistic medium, and these would be most effective if electracy and heuristics were encouraged across the curriculum so that students could understand the value of literacies of play. English departments would do well to encourage collaboration amongst professors for scholarship as well as team-teaching, and the games courses would work best if they were open to—or even required for—a variety of majors to maximize the productivity of collaboration. If everyone has different backgrounds, skill sets, and interests, there is far more to be gained than if everyone is cut of the same cloth. Campuses should provide gaming labs—PC computer labs will run most indie games on Steam, so that would be a reasonable alternative—on site for use by courses like this one to mitigate the problem of access and provide students the resources necessary to play games and create excellent digital work.

Scholars have been calling for an overhaul of educational methodologies and philosophies for some time, and they are not being answered, or only in small ways, or too slowly. Administrators in general seem all too suspicious of change and interested in preserving the status quo, blocking the tenure and dismissing the scholarship of professors whose work they do not fully understand, and there is not enough effort and accountability on the side of tenure committee members to understand what these scholars contribute to their students and to the university as a whole. We can do better, and not only will we produce forward-thinking, creative individuals suited to solve the complex problems of their fields and our society, but we can wake our students up out of

the lack-luster stupor of going through their education's motions just to get a job and can instead help them discover their passions and potential, meaningfully define and redefine who they are, and become thoughtful agents of change.

Video games offer all this, but only if we see greater and greater diversity at all levels of design from industry to the classroom, if games are offered the respect deserved as artifacts for study, if design becomes rightfully considered a mode of meaningful scholarly, artistic, and political composition, and if scholars, students, people of all colors, and women of all genders make the games they want to play. Critique is not enough, and in this case, activism means composition, it means design, because if we don't make these games, no one will.

APPENDICES

Blood of the Vampire Script

[I would like for players to be able to Drain or Fill or Leave during a conversation at any point, after they have “learned” the Drain and Fill mechanics, which I have marked.

The player can go through these areas in whatever order they like, except for Dr. Phillips’s House, which can only be accessed after the player completes Margaret’s House.

After the player completes Dr. Phillips’s House, the player may return to the Hotel, which up to this point has been the only other place off limits. There should be some visual cue that the player can now enter the Hotel.

The Ether triggers when the player re-enters the Hotel.
The Endings come up after the player completes the Ether.

Note: It is possible, then for a player to progress from the Hotel to Margaret’s House to Dr. Phillips’s House to the Ether and complete the game without ever seeing the material on the Streets or in the Park.]

Whenever you Drain or Give Energy to a spirit, the message should come up:

The spirit is gone with a small puff of air. The fog seems to lift and the light seems a little bit brighter.

Add option to Drain or Fill person in any area with people and have this message appear:

[If Drain]

A nearby person slumps to the ground. Passersby gasp and one cries out for help. Some quickly flee the area. The air seems to darken and the fog becomes more oppressive.

[If Fill]

A nearby person seems to grow a bit stronger and more confident. The fog seems to lift and the light seems a little bit brighter.

Hotel Room

You wake to find yourself on a hotel room bed, the same hotel, you assume, where you and your new husband, Tony, were staying on your honeymoon in Italy. The room is well furnished, but cold as the fire has gone out. Or you think it must be cold. You actually don’t feel much of anything. Looking around, you notice a tall mirror in the corner by the wardrobe and a slip of paper that has fallen to the floor near the bed. It’s then you remember: Tony is dead. And you took a deadly dose of chloral in hopes of joining him.

[HB wakes up, leaves bed, explores Hotel Room where there is a suicide note, mirror, and her own body.]

Suicide Note Content: “Do not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out!”

HB: 1. Maybe I am a monster.
2. Maybe this is my second chance.

Mirror: [HB does not appear in the glass at all, but she can see her body on the bed in the background. Maybe a shot of the empty mirror, then shift to a new image showing the room in the background?]

HB: No reflection.
HB: 1. I must be dead.
2. I am still here, but what for?

Body: [The body is just a dark figure with few features. It is difficult to make out.]

HB: 1. I am so very dark.
2. I am so very fragile.

[These responses tell us something about how the player feels about HB at the beginning. I would love to be able to compare them to the responses they give by the end. Just seeing the statements the player chose as a progression would work fine; I don't want to try to code them positive or negative.]

Hotel Hallway

The hallway you enter stretches the length of the building, about half a block, and is as well furnished as the chamber you just left with a rich runner carpet covering its well-worn boards. Clustered near a table draped in cloth and decorated with fresh flowers are three young women, maids in the hotel. They are whispering together. Farther down the hall, you see another woman dressed in a nun's habit sitting in a chair with her head lowered.

Maid 1: They were only married for one day!
Maid 2: How awful.
Maid 3: She committed suicide. She will not go to heaven.
Maid 1: You mean...
Maid 3: That is what the ministers say.
Maid 2: But you can't blame her.

Nun: Our Father, who art in heaven... watch over poor Harriet Pennell...

HB: She is praying for me.

- HB: 1. How sweet.
2. How silly.
3. Poor thing.

[Involuntary Drain; player can now Drain at will.]

HB: It is my curse.

- HB: 1. How terrible!
2. I can control it.

The Streets

You exit the hotel to find yourself on a city street. Quickly, you realize you are not in Italy at all. You are back in London. There is no reasonable explanation for this. You find it disorienting and comforting at the same time. The notorious London Fog, generated by the city's many factories, is especially stifling to you and casts a shade like twilight over the area, making the gas lamps on the street necessary to see by, even though it appears to be midday.

[If this is the first time they have come to the street]

A silvery figure glides over to you; it appears to be a spirit! You barely hear it whisper, "Help me." For a moment you wonder what it means, then recall you have a certain power. You know you can drain life... you wonder if perhaps you can fill it up as well.

You now have the ability to use the Fill power. You can now give some of your own energy up to empower others.

[examine lamps; examine lights; examine gas lamps; examine gaslights]

The gaslights flicker quickly, even though they are protected by the glass around them. They do little to penetrate the fog.

[examine street]

The hotel sits across from a small park with large houses to the right and shops to the left.

- 1. Go Right to enter the street with houses*
- 2. Go Straight to enter the park*
- 3. Go Left to enter the street with the shops*

Go Right

The houses on this affluent street are imposing, stretching up several stories. Their windows are dark and shadowy figures move up and down the foggy street, illuminated only by the streetlamps and a vague impression of daylight from above. You recognize two of the houses. One of them is your friend, Margaret Pullen's house. The other belongs to Dr. Phillips.

*Go Left to Margaret's House
Go Right Dr. Phillips's House
Go Back to return to main street.*

[If Go Left]

Margaret's house is quite large with steps leading up to the front door past a small garden, whose flowering plants are orderly, but look half dead.

[If examine plants]

These are tulips, roses, and daylilies. Their colors are muted by the fog in the air.

[If examine house or go inside]

A nearby spirit speaks to you: "I wouldn't go in there. The house is sad. It is a well of loneliness. It cries all night. You should go away."

- 1. I am not afraid.*
- 2. I will be careful.*
- 3. I will turn back.*

[If 1 or 2, spirit speaks again]

The spirit says, "I guess you do as you please."

[If examine house or go to house, enter house]

[If 3, spirit speaks again]

The spirit says, "You are one of the wise ones. But you lack spirit."

[If examine spirit again after choosing 3]

A spirit speaks to you: "I thought you were leaving."

- 1. I am not afraid.*
- 2. I will be careful.*

[If 1 or 2, spirit speaks again]

The spirit says, "I guess you do as you please."

[If examine house or go to house, enter house]

[If Go Right]

Dr. Phillips's house is one of the smaller ones on this block. The wrought iron gate creaks on its hinges in a light wind from off the river. The breeze does little to dispel the fog. There is a sign on the gate reading "Physician, F.R.C.P." It seems that Dr. Phillips works from his own home.

[examine sign]

F.R.C.P. means that Dr. Phillips is a Fellow of the College, either Oxford or Cambridge. As such, he is of the highest rank of doctors and is exempt from such things as jury duty.

[examine gate]

The entire fence is wrought iron with a spiky top on each bar and must have been a great expense, even though this house is not particularly impressive. The gate squeaks as though aching and complaining.

[If examine Dr. Phillips's house, there is no more information. If go to Dr. Phillips's house, enter the house.]

Go Left

This street is a part of a shopping district. It is full of shadowy figures wandering up and down, stopping at windows, and going in and out, purchases in hand. The stench of the river is strong, but not overpowering, and the fog hangs over everything. The gas lamps cast eerie balls of light like wil-o-wisps in the gloom. There is a restaurant, a bakery, a dress shop, and a flower shop nearby.

[examine lamps; examine lights; examine gas lamps; examine gaslights]

The gaslights flicker quickly, even though they are protected by the glass around them. They do little to penetrate the fog.

[examine restaurant]

As you continue down the street, you notice two figures, a man and woman, speaking outside a restaurant. The man takes the woman's arm.

Man: Darling, you are being ridiculous.

Woman: I think I need to be there. She needs me.

Man: It is too expensive to travel. You cannot go alone. It is highly improper.

Woman: I would not be alone. Fanny will meet me in Town.

Man: I will not allow it.

Woman: I have to be there. Last time she took nearly half a year to be herself again. She should not bear that alone.

Man: I cannot spare you.

Woman: It is too much!

Man: Do not descend into hysterics again. Like Mme. Gobelli. You are too weak to go.

Woman: I do feel a little faint.

Man: I will send for Dr. Phillips.

Woman: No! No, that won't be necessary.

Man: Darling, he will take care of you.

Woman: I would prefer not to. I always feel so... empty.

1. Use Drain power on the man.
2. Use Drain power on the woman.
3. Use Fill power on the man.
4. Use Fill power on the woman

Man options:

If Drain: *The man seems to weaken. The woman asks, "Are you unwell? Perhaps you should see Dr. Phillips this time."*

If Fill: *The man says, "I insist. Now let's go home."*

Woman options:

If Drain: *The woman seems to weaken. She says, "I really am unwell. Let's go home."*

If Fill: *The woman declares, "I am going to see my sister, and that is final. I shall leave immediately."*

[examine restaurant, second time]

The restaurant's windows are curtained, so you cannot see in. You expected the smell of food to drift out of the door when it is opened, but you smell nothing.

[examine bakery]

A spirit glides up to you. It asks, "Who am I?"

1. *Is this a riddle?*
2. *I don't know who you are.*

The spirit says, "There is something I'm supposed to do..."

1. *What is it?*
2. *I don't have time for this.*

[If 1] *The spirit says, "I wish I could remember."*

[If 2] *The spirit says, "Could you help?"*

[For both responses]

1. *Use the Drain power.*
2. *Use the Fill power.*

[examine bakery again]

The bakery would be cheery if it were not quite so foggy outside. You expect the intoxicating aromas of freshly baked breads, pies, and pastries to emanate from the door

as shadowy people come and go, but you smell nothing but the stench of the river behind you.

[examine dress shop]

A spirit approaches you.

Spirit 3: I'm lost. Do you know the way to Chancery Road?

HB: 1. No, sorry.

2. No, but I could help you find it.

The spirit says, "You seem strange."

1. What do you mean?

The spirit continues. "Your aura. It is not like the others. You are dark with a brightness around you."

1. What does it mean?

"I don't know. What are you?"

1. A woman.

2. A monster.

The spirit replies, "I don't believe that."

[examine dress shop, second time]

There are no window displays, but you can dimly make out the shapes of mannequins, shelves organizing folded cloth, and women moving about inside.

[examine flower shop]

Out of an alleyway, a silvery figure approaches you and then recoils in horror. It appears to be a spirit. The spirit cries, "Get away from me, demon!"

1. I'm not a demon.

2. What do you mean?

[Both options yield the same result]

The spirit yells, "Get back!" The spirit attacks you.

1. Use Drain power

2. Run away

[If 1]

You have used your Drain power on the spirit. The spirit is gone with a small puff of air. The fog seems to lift and the light seems a little bit brighter.

[If 2]

You turn and run, outpacing the spirit with ease, but confused. Why did the spirit call you a demon?

1. *I am a monster.*
2. *I am not a demon.*

[examine flower shop again]

At this point, you are unsurprised by the lack of pleasant aromas on this street. The flowers do not even look that healthy, though people seem keen enough to buy them.

[When the player chooses to Go Back at any point in the shops area]

A spirit emerges from an alleyway and speaks to you: "Who are you?" it demands. "What do you want?"

1. *Nothing.*
2. *Something.*

"You had best decide. Life will not wait." The spirit drifts away.

Park

Once inside the park, the path diverges *left* and *right* and continues *straight*. There is a large *fountain* in the middle of the park.

[examine fountain]

The *fountain* depicts several cherubs frolicking in the spray. Their nudity is covered by carved fig leaves that appear to have been added at some point after the fountain's initial creation.

[go straight]

In a large section of the park, a crowd has gathered in front of a platform on which a woman stands. She has a button on her jacket indicating that she is a *suffragette*. As she addresses the crowd, you take note of some of the people around you. To your left, *two women* speak to one another in hushed tones. Next to you, a *man and woman* appear to be engaged in conversation. *Two men* stand not far behind you, and farther back you spy a *woman*. Near the park's street exit, you can make out an indistinguishable *duo*.

The rest of the park is at your *back*.

[Remainder of text for this is below after go right and go left options]

[go right]

The right side of the park has a large oak *tree* with a *bench* underneath.

[examine tree]

The *tree*'s gnarled limbs are bare and appear twisted and dark against the pale of London's fog. The fog hangs in the tree's branches so that the tree appears to fade into the sky, its upper-most twigs invisible.

[examine bench]

The *bench* is a cold slab of stone minimally decorated. Dried leaves, curled and stiff, are strewn about the ground. On the bench, someone has carved a small heart with initials: LW & AH.

(This is the section with the girl's spirit and the mother.)

[go left]

On the left side of the park, you see a *statue* surrounded by *shrubs* and *flowers*.

[examine shrubs]

The *shrubs* appear to be boxwood, which are evergreen, but they are not thriving. They are small with bare patches and the leaves they do have droop.

[examine flowers]

*The **flowers** are colorless and drab. The fog creeps around them.*

[examine statue]

*The statue depicts a young girl praying. You move forward to look more closely at the statue when you feel a tug on your arm. You turn to see a small **girl's spirit** standing at your elbow.*

*"Please, can you help me find my mother? She is somewhere in this **area**."*

[If go back and return to examine statue]

*The **girl's spirit** floats beside the statue.*

*"Please can you help me find my mother? She is somewhere in this **area**."*

[examine area]

*You look around the **area** and notice a woman you didn't see before, but you don't know how you missed her. She is bent over a dark form on the ground and is sobbing,*

"Someone help! My little girl needs help!"

*You look around, but the passers-by are avoiding the **mother**. The **girl's spirit** rushes over to her.*

"Mama, I'm right here!" She pauses, confused. "Why doesn't she see me?"

*The **girl's spirit** looks up at you, her face streaked with tears.*

[If drain **girl's spirit**]

*You reach out to the **girl's spirit** and a ball of sadness tightens in your chest for just a moment. She is gone. The park is silent except for the sobbing of her **mother**.*

[If fill **girl's spirit**]

*You reach out to the **girl's spirit** and with a soft puff of air, she is gone. The park is silent except for the sobbing of her **mother**.*

[If go back]

*The **girl's spirit** vanishes, but the fog hangs wetter and colder over the spot than before.*

*Her **mother** weeps over her body. No one pays her any attention.*

[after that, get the following message from examine statue]

*The **statue** depicts a young girl praying. The **mother** and the **girl's body** are gone.*

The air is especially cold here. You shiver.

[If drain **mother**, her body slumps and she appears as a Spirit. In that case:]

*You use your power on the **mother**, and her body goes limp cradling the little **girl's body**. But suddenly, a bit of silver stirs in the body, and the **mother's spirit** stands up out of the corpse and looks around, confused.*

[If go back and then return to this section with examine **statue**]

*The **statue** depicts a young girl praying. The air is especially cold here. You shiver.*

[examine **mother's spirit**]

[If player did not drain/fill **girl's spirit**]

"What happened? Where is my baby?"

*"Mama?" The **mother's spirit** sees her little girl, and relief washes over her face. As the girl takes her mother's hand, the two vanish. A gust of wind spins the fog, then all is still.*

[If player Drained or Filled the **girl's spirit**:]

"What happened? Where is my baby?"

*The **mother's spirit** begins to wail with a sound of grief like you have never heard before, like an animal, something whose soul has been rent apart. Then she turns on you:*

"LEAVE THIS PLACE, YOU FILTH! YOU MONSTER!"

[If drain]

You reach out and grab the mother's spirit, and she extinguishes with burst of air like a stormy wind. The park is filled with silence now.

[If fill]

You reach out to touch the mother's spirit, and she extinguishes with a burst of air like a stormy wind. The fog thins a bit in the park and you can see the flowers.

[If player types go back or leave]

The mother's spirit lunges at you, but then vanishes, leaving the air wetter and colder than before. You notice that no one approaches this spot, even after the police clear the two bodies away.

[If return here after completing this part]

The statue depicts a young girl praying. The air is especially cold here. You shiver.

Go Straight

[One woman on stage is speaking; will get text from an actual suffragette speech from the period to use.]

[examine suffragette]

You realize that this woman is Emmeline Pankhurst, one of the most vocal and effective suffragettes in Britain. She is speaking about women getting the vote in England:

Men have done splendid things in this world; they have made great achievements in engineering; they have done splendid organisation work; but they have failed, they have miserably failed, when it has come to dealing with the lives of human beings. They stand self-confessed failures, because the problems that perplex civilisation are absolutely appalling today. Well, that is the function of women in life: it is our business to care for human beings, and we are determined that we must come without delay to the saving of the race. The race must be saved, and it can only be saved through the emancipation of women.

Responses from NPCs in the audience:

Two women speak to one another.

Woman 1: Look how short her hair is!

Woman 2: And that jacket! How unfeminine.

Woman 1: It's absurd.

Woman 2: I just don't see the need.

A man comments to the woman beside him.

Man 1: [Responding to the speech] Well said!

Woman 3: I agree. Ladies have much to offer England besides child rearing.

Man 1: Indeed.

Two men discuss the speech.

Man 2: I never saw the beautiful Form of Woman so profaned.

Man 3: I don't know. She has such spirit.

Man 2: Such spirit will destroy this country.

Man 3: I don't know. It might be just what we need.

Man 2: Preposterous!

A woman yells out loud.

Woman 4: Disgusting. Go home to your children!

Two women glance around as they listen.

Woman 5: The bobbies are gathering round.

Woman 6: Perhaps we should go to the dress shop.

Woman 5: Yes, let's. My little Anne needs new ribbons... (they leave the Park)

Draining in the Park

[drain suffragette]

Emmeline Pankhurst, outspoken proponent of women's suffrage and leader of the women's movement in England, collapses at the podium. This causes an immediate stir as those closest to her rush to her aid. Most of the audience members wait attentively, murmuring to each other about how suddenly she fell. Some quickly leave the park.

[drain two women]

The two women slump to the ground as their life energy leaves them. Nearby audience members gasp in shock. The suffragette on stage abruptly stops her speech and speaks urgently to someone offstage, gesturing at the fallen women. A man rushes to check them. Someone comments, "This speech is really too much."

[drain man and woman]

The man and woman slump to the ground. "I feel so faint all of a sudden," says the woman in a whispery voice. The man is unconscious. Someone nearby asks the woman if she needs a physician, to which she responds, "Yes, please, and quickly!"

[drain two men]

The two men fall to the ground, their faces expressing complete shock and confusion about what is happening to them. The people in the area step back; some of them cry out. Someone shouts, "Murder! There is a murderer in the crowd!" The suffragette stops her speech as numerous police officers stream into the park seemingly out of nowhere.

[drain woman]

The woman lets out a soft scream as her body collapses. Someone cries out, "Summon a doctor!" You barely catch the sound of someone whispering to her companion, "Perhaps she ought to have supported her sisters-in-arms."

[drain duo]

As they are on the fringes of the crowd, no one notices immediately that the duo who were about to leave have inexplicably fallen to the ground, unconscious. It is several minutes before they are pointed out and someone comes to check them.

Filling in the Park

[fill suffragette]

Emmeline Pankhurst, outspoken proponent of women's suffrage and leader of the women's movement in England, grows even more confident and articulate at the podium. Her passion stirs the hearts of her listeners, and some are even moved to tears and joyful exclamations of "Hear, hear!" when she concludes her speech.

[fill two women]

Impassioned by their own disparagement of Emmeline Pankhurst, the two women continue their insulting remarks, raising their voices until several audience members nearby glare in their direction. A man goes so far as to comment loudly to his neighbor, "One would not expect such impropriety from well-bred ladies."

[fill man and woman]

The woman brightens. "I am so relieved to see such support from the male sex," she says. The man colors slightly. "There is really no more honorable course of action," he declares. "I hope to see my mother and sisters enjoy the vote. They pave the way for my daughters, should I have any." The woman smiles.

[fill two men]

The discussion grows louder as the men more vehemently express their disagreement with one another until one exclaims that the other's wife would do better to enter a

convent than stay associated with him, at which point the second man throws a wild punch. The blows fly thick and fast until a police officer rushes forward to stop the brawl.

[fill woman]

Suddenly feeling even more brazen, the woman seizes a half rotten apple from a nearby rubbish bin and hurls it at Emmeline Pankhurst, the famous suffragette on stage. Ms. Pankhurst dodges the fruit, continuing her speech undeterred. Several audience members close by shoot the woman dirty looks, and she soon leaves.

[fill duo]

Both women pause just as they are leaving. "Perhaps we ought to stay," says one. "Perhaps you are right," agrees the other. "If we women do not stand together, what can we achieve?"

Margaret's House

*Margaret's house is opulent with crown moldings, ball-in-claw furniture, fresh flowers, and an elaborate staircase in the foyer. A silver tray on the foyer table holds several neatly stacked **calling cards**.*

*To the right is Margaret's **parlor**. To the left, the **library**. Straight ahead down the hallway is the **kitchen**. **Upstairs**, are bedrooms.*

[examine **calling cards**]

The calling cards are from various ladies of London who have stopped by to call on Margaret, but she did not receive them. Perhaps she was away from home. Perhaps she was not in spirits to see anyone. One card is from Dr. Phillips. You hope Margaret is not unwell.

Go Right to the parlor

Go Left to the library

Go Straight to the kitchen

Go Upstairs

Parlor

The parlor is beautifully furnished in bright, but not garish, colors. But the drapes are thick and have been pulled over the windows, so everything is in shades of grey.

***Margaret** sits on an embroidered fainting couch. A **maid** enters.*

[examine **Margaret**]

Margaret seems distant and grim. She has a book open on her lap, but is not looking at it. She stares instead into the corners, lost in thought.

[examine **maid**]

The maid speaks: "Yes mum?"

Margaret: Sylvie, were there any cards left today?

Maid: No, mum. Just a note of regrets from Baroness Gobelli.

Margaret: ... Still mourning poor Bobby... A woman ought not to lose her children.

[If player has not already been to the Kitchen; if they have, then skip to Parlor, part 2; if they have not been to the Kitchen:]

Maid: "... Yes, mum. May I bring you some tea, mum."

Margaret: Please. Don't forget the sugar.

Maid: Yes mum."

She leaves the room.

Parlor, part 2 (after Kitchen)

The maid enters with the tea tray. She sets it down on the coffee table near Margaret and speaks to her.

Maid: Your tea, mum.

Margaret: Thank you, Sylvie.

[If player has sugar in their inventory:]

Margaret: Where is the sugar?

Maid: It appears we have none, mum. Apologies, mum.

Margaret: I see. Thank you, Sylvie.

Parlor, part 3 (after Library; if player does both Kitchen and Library before returning to the Parlor, this should be available upon their return)

[If player brings Margaret the letter from Dr. Phillips that was hidden in the book:]

Margaret: What's this? ... Tony Pennell has died! Oh, poor Harriet!

You notice a sound from somewhere in the house, but hardly believe what you hear: it is a baby crying. You know that Margaret's baby daughter, Ethel, died when you were together at Heyst. Dr. Phillips suspected that her death was the result of your constant attention to her. Margaret did not have another child, so you wonder what the crying means.

[The baby crying happens when player returns to the Parlor after going to the Kitchen and the Library, regardless of their choices in those rooms.]

Margaret: I am so very out of spirits.

[Crying continues, player should go looking for its source. Player can go upstairs to find two empty bedrooms and one locked. The key is in Mr. Pullen's desk drawer in the Library.]

Parlor, part 4 (after Baby's Room)

[If player Drained or Filled the Baby Spirit:]

Margaret: My head has cleared. I should visit poor Harriet.

[If player chose to Leave:]

Margaret: I am so very out of spirits.

Kitchen

*The kitchen is chaotic with vegetables piled on the counter, bags of spices spilling or half-tied, and a haze of smoke from the fire. The cook bustles, fretting over a pot of water on the stove, opening the oven to peer in, and talking to herself. A tea tray sits on the counter, the only orderly object in the room. The **pantry** door stands ajar. The **maid** is looking around. A **butler** stands nearby.*

[examine **maid**]

Maid: Where is that sugar?

Cook: Hell if I know! I've dinner to make!

Maid: I can't take it to her without. [Bell on the wall rings] Where is that sugar?

[examine **pantry**]

*The pantry is well stocked. You notice a bag of **sugar** and a bottle of **rum** in particular. They remind you of where you grew up on a plantation in Jamaica.*

[examine **butler**]

The butler stands silently and seems loathe to touch anything, lest he spoil his attire.

Cook: Master will be wanting his rum.

Butler: Indeed.

[If player looks around, they can find the rum and bring it to the table near the Butler, or they can hide it.]

[If player brings the rum, the Butler takes it to the Library. If the player hides it, the Butler goes to the Library without it.]

Library

*The library smells of worn paper and cigar smoke. The shelves holding the volumes run from floor to ceiling and are made of dark, polished wood. **Mr. Pullen** is at his **desk** and is looking through the day's mail. He pauses over one **letter** in particular.*

[examine **Mr. Pullen**]

Letter from Dr. Phillips. Hmm... Miss Brandt's husband has died! Good lord! ... It would be best if Margaret did not find out. It would... affect her. [He hides the letter in a book]

[examine **letter**]

The letter is from Dr. Phillips informing Mr. Pullen of the death of Anthony Pennell. He says nothing of your suicide. You wonder if he does not know or if he has some motive of his own.

[If player hid the rum:]

The butler enters and speaks to Mr. Pullen.

Butler: Sir.

Mr. Pullen: Yes, James?

Butler: It appears we are out of rum, sir.

Mr. Pullen: Impossible.

Butler: I'm afraid so, sir.
Mr. Pullen: ... Very well. Please inform the other employees that their wages will
be garnished until for the amount.
Butler: ... Yes sir. [Goes back to the Kitchen]
Mr. Pullen: Why is the rum always gone?

[If player brought the rum:]
The butler enters and speaks to Mr. Pullen.
Butler: Sir.
Mr. Pullen: Yes, James?
Butler: Your... repast.
Mr. Pullen: Thank you, James. ... How is Mrs. Pullen today?
Butler: ... She is in the Parlor, sir.
Mr. Pullen: ... Ah.
Mr. Pullen grimly drinks half of the rum in the bottle.

[examine **desk**]
*The desk is very fine and is made of a lighter wood than the shelves, showing the smooth, curved lines of its grain. The desk has one **drawer**.*

[examine **drawer**]
*Inside the drawer is a small **key**.*

[examine **key** OR take **key**]
*The **key** has been moved to your **inventory**.*

Upstairs
*You ascend the ornately carved wooden staircase and find yourself in a long **hallway** with a runner **carpet** and dimly lit by **lamps**. There are four **doors** on this floor. One door is locked.*

[examine **carpet**]
The rug is of excellent quality, not new, but not worn. You cannot tell what colors it might be, as the light in the hallway is so poor.

[examine **lamps**]
The gas lamps are dimly lit. Even extending the wicks on them does nothing to brighten the hall.

[examine **hallway**]
There are four doors on this hall. One is locked.

[examine **door**]

This door leads to a darkened, but well-furnished bedroom.

[unlock **door** with key]

This door is already unlocked. It is a bedroom.

[examine **locked door**]

This door is locked. Perhaps the key is downstairs.

[unlock **locked door** with key]

Baby's Room (after player gets the key from the desk in the Library)

When you click the door open, the crying subsides. This was clearly once the baby's room, though it has not been opened in a long time. The room is spacious, with enough room for several children, more like a nursery than just a bedroom. Dolls and toys line the shelves, and a crib stands near the window where the light, already muted by the fog outside, barely streams through.

[examine dolls]

The dolls are porcelain, the paint fresh and untouched on their pale cheeks. Their clothing is all lace and embroidery, intricate sewing you suspect was a project by Margaret herself. You still hear the sounds of a fussing baby somewhere nearby.

[examine toys]

The toys are neatly arranged. Wooden blocks and puzzles are stacked, books shelved, figurines and stuffed animals meticulously placed. Their glass eyes reflect the dim light from the windows. The crying sounds are close by.

[examine crib]

The sound of the crying is coming from the crib. You cautiously approach and peer in. On the clean sheets lacy, folded blanket there is a baby-sized spirit. The fussing stops when she sees you. She always was fond of you at Heyst; you played with her so often there. You wonder how you could have possibly—even accidentally—killed this darling baby with your adoration for her. Could Dr. Phillips have been wrong? Babies fall ill all the time of natural causes and need no vampire to snuff their little lives. What if everyone is wrong about you?

[Drain or Fill baby spirit]

You reach out to touch the baby's spirit. She reaches up, and when she takes your finger in her tiny, chilly fingers, she dissipates. She is gone. Sadness seems to lift away from the place immediately, and you hope it will have an affect on Margaret with time.

Dr. Phillips's House

You enter the house. It is small and simply furnished. You expected it to smell of formaldehyde at the very least, but you smell nothing. You wonder if it is because you are not alive.

[If player comes to this house before completing Margaret's House, should get a message stating "The Doctor does not appear to be at home. Come back later."]

Reception Area

*The parlor of this house has been converted into a cramped reception area with worn furniture. A **receptionist** sits at a desk.*

[If examine **receptionist**]

The receptionist is a middle-aged woman dressed proudly, but frugally. She taps away on a typewriter, piles of paper on the desk beside her.

Examining Room

*The examining room is just a small office room. A **woman** sits on a loveseat while a **man** anxiously stands obsessively fidgeting with his pocket watch in the corner. The doctor's **assistant** is reading over his **notes**. No one is speaking.*

[If examine **woman**]

The woman is petite with shapeless brown hair, but beautiful clothes. She is clearly a woman of some means, but at the moment, she seems upset or fearful. Maybe both.

[If examine **assistant**]

The assistant appears to be a man of some bearing in his fifties with a moustache and pointed beard. A man, probably anxiously speaks to the doctor. He does not look at the woman.

Assistant: "Thank you for coming, Mr. Harker. I think I have just the thing to improve your wife's health."

Man: Have you found the problem?

Assistant: I have a diagnosis. She appears to be having hysteric episodes.

Man: What can we do?

Assistant: I will have the doctor write you a prescription, which you should fill immediately at the apothecary. It should calm your wife and ease her struggle.

Man: Thank you, sir!

[If examine **notes**]

Dr. Phillips's notes to his assistant detail the symptoms of hysteria and relate them to this woman. Apparently, the patient has experienced some traumatic events in her personal

life over a year ago, and she has recently given birth to a son. Of late, she has been having episodes of uncontrollable crying, fearfulness, and fiery rage. Her husband fears she may harm herself or the baby. The doctor recommends a drug to make her calm.

Draining in Doctor Phillips's House

[drain **man**]

The man goes into a coughing fit. "Perhaps I also need a prescription. I am feeling quite weak all of a sudden." The assistant scribbles a prescription on a slip of paper and passes it to the man without comment.

[drain **woman**]

The woman gasps, "I feel faint!" and swoons. The assistant turns to the man and says, "As you see, she is in sore need of this. Fill the prescription immediately at the apothecary." The man helps his wife rise weakly to her feet and says, "As you say, sir. At once."

[drain **receptionist**]

The secretary slumps at her desk, expiring without a sound. When Dr. Phillips comes across her body, he takes her pulse and with two fingers feels for breath at her nose and mouth. Finding none, he summons his manservant and orders him to take a message to the local minister and to the coroner. Then he washes his hands and reads in the parlor until they come to remove her body.

[drain **assistant**]

The assistant coughs and clutches his chest for a moment, but otherwise seems fine. Disappointing.

Filling in Doctor Phillips's House

[fill **man**]

The man notices his wife's quiet distress and sits beside her, taking her hand and comforting her.

[fill **woman**]

The woman's eyes brighten and she seems to emerge from a haze. She glares at her husband and the doctor, saying "I refuse to submit to treatment for what is simple misery. I will take the children and remove to my parents' house in the country. This city is most oppressive, and husbands and doctors seem the worst."

[fill **receptionist**]

The receptionist's spirits seem to lift. The next time the assistant happens through the room, she catches his attention and says, "Sir, I insist on the pay raise Dr. Phillips and I

discussed some months ago. My mother is ill, and I have no intention of waiting about for your good graces while she wastes away. If you will not pay me what you have promised, you shall have to find yourself a new secretary.” The assistant’s face is all surprise. He mumbles something before shuffling off again.

[fill **assistant**]

The assistant seems unchanged. He continues to look over Dr. Phillips’s notes, marking things occasionally.

Reception area, after player has completed Examination room

*The man and woman leave the office. The **assistant** returns to the reception area and speaks to the **receptionist**.*

Assistant: That will be all for today, Laura.

Receptionist: Thank you, sir. See you tomorrow.

[examine **receptionist**]

The receptionist packs up her things and leaves, pulling the door shut behind her with a click.

[examine **assistant**]

The assistant washes his hands at a sink in an alcove before leaving the house.

Upstairs

*The upstairs living area is orderly in its way. The furniture is decent and well kept and the place is clean enough. It appears that the **doctor** does his work at the dining table, which is small, but sturdy. On the table you see a **newspaper**, an opened **letter**, and an open **book**.*

[Examine **newspaper**:]

Evening News, 12 August 1899. Announcement of Engagement: Miss Florence Kate Jewell of London to “Prince” Peter Kushana Lobengula of South Africa.

“...the mating of a white girl with a dusky savage” ought to “inspire a feeling of disgust among the vast majority of Englishmen and Englishwomen... to use it as a theme for jesting is not only in bad taste, but distinctly dangerous... such acts of disgusting folly are

well known to be infectious, and there are plenty of silly women in the world.” (qtd in Malchow)

[Examine **letter**]

Dear Sir:

It is with regret that I write to inform you that your former acquaintance and friend, Anthony Pennell, has died this day, utterly weakened by some as yet unknown ailment.

It is with further regret that I must add that his new bride, Miss Harriet Brandt, as was, has perished by her own hand by chloral, surely from grief at the loss of her new husband. I had hoped you would accompany me in examining them before their internment.

I hope this news finds you tolerably well.

*Your Sincere Friend and Colleague,
Dr. Martin Hesselius*

[Examine **book**:]

William J. Robinson, MD, Married Life and Happiness.

“...there is the opposite type of woman who is a great danger to the health and even the very life of her husband. I refer to the hypersensual woman, to the wife with an excessive sexuality. It is to her that the name vampire can be applied in its literal sense. Just as the vampire sucks the blood of its victims in their sleep while they are alive, so does the woman vampire such the life and exhaust the vitality of her male partner—or victim. And some of them—the pronounced type—are utterly without pity or consideration...” (qtd in Djikstra)

[examine **doctor**]

Dr. Phillips enters, sits at the table. As he reads the newspaper, he talks to himself: “This miscegenation business really is getting out of hand. ... When will people learn that those one chooses to associate with will affect them?”

- 1. And when those they associate with are monsters?*
- 2. And when those they associate with are women?*
- 3. And when those they associate with are Negroes?*

Dr. Phillips: “... Is someone there? Hello?”

HB: 1. Nobody.

2. Someone who needs your help.

3. Your worst nightmare.

Dr. Phillips: ... I could have sworn I heard something.

[If player Drains **doctor**:]

Dr. Phillips: ... I feel... so weak...

[If player Fills **doctor**:]

Dr. Phillips: ... I feel... so alive...

HB: 1. You will not influence me ever again.

2. Thank you for all you have done. (sincere)

3. Thank you for all you have done. (sarcastic)

Ether

[After the player has been through the content in Margaret's House and Dr. Phillips's House, they may return to the Hotel. There should be some visual indication that this is now possible, maybe a slight glow or small movement of the door? When the player enters the Hotel, they are in the Ether.]

*When you enter the hotel, you see... well, not the hotel. This is not a room. This is not anyplace. Then you hear a voice: "You are in between. Don't you recognize me? ... I am your **mother**."*

[examine **mother**]

You turn around and see a slim, beautiful young woman in slave's garb typical of the Caribbean. You don't remember what your mother looked like, but this is not at all how she was described to you by Dr. Phillips.

"Don't you recognize me, Harriet?"

- 1. I don't believe you.*
- 2. I don't know you.*

[If 1:]

Three things do not long stay hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. You cannot change the truth. I am here to help you. What is it that you want?

[If 2:]

I am sorry for that. Three things do not long stay hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. You cannot change the truth. I am here to help you. What is it that you want?

- 1. To be my best self.*
- 2. To be happy.*
- 3. To be free.*

Mother: What does that mean?

[If 1:]

- HB: 1. I want to be good.*
2. I want to be strong.

[If 1:]

What is goodness?

[If 2:]

What is strength?

[If 2:]

- HB: 1. I have battles to fight.*
2. I want to be at peace.

[If 1:]
Do you know what you are fighting for?

[If 2:]
Do you know what peace is?

[If 3:]
HB: *1. I want to be in control.*
2. I want to be pure.

[If 1:]
Mother: *What is control?*

[If 2:]
Mother: *What is purity?*

For either option:

- 1. I have an idea.*
- 2. I have no idea.*

Mother: *You can have what you want, but it may not be what you think. ... You still have a choice. The most fundamental one of all.*

HB: *1. I choose to die.*
2. I choose to live.

[If player chooses to Die, they get Ending 1 regardless of their other choices.]

ENDINGS

[If player chose to Die:]

Ending 1: Death is Sweet

[HB is dead, but her vampiric nature is removed from the world and can no longer harm anyone.]

Harriet Brandt's death was a shocking blow to all who knew her as the sweet, carefree girl from the colonies who had found matrimonial happiness with Anthony Pennell. The revelation of her father's and grandfather's miscegenation and demise in the West Indies coupled with Harriet's act of self-destruction served as a reminder to all of the fragility of human nature and the price of impurity. As her marriage had been so short, Miss Brandt's wealth was taken on by the State and put to use for whatever purpose was deemed best to serve the British Empire.

[If player chose to Live:]

Ending 2: Power is Nothing

[HB has lost her vampiric abilities and is now just a normal woman. She is alive, but Tony is still dead. She can still affect political change as a wealthy widowed woman.]

Harriet Brandt awoke from her attempted suicide miraculously unharmed, though the loss of her husband, Tony, still weighed heavy on her heart for a time. Cautious not to become too attached to anyone, lest they fall prey to her incomprehensible nature, Harriet wandered the world alone, her family's wealth supporting her all of her days. She became a woman of great influence, and was especially inspiring to the young women she encountered in her travels, though she never got close to any of them, nor did she ever return to England, nor to the West Indies, where all her troubles had begun.

Ending 3: Power is Control

[HB has her vampiric abilities under control and can use them to affect change in the world. But Tony is alive, so as a woman, she lives under his power.]

Harriet Brandt awoke from her attempted suicide to find that her husband, Tony, had miraculously recovered from the deathlike swoon that had overtaken him on their wedding night. With relief from her own near-death experience, she re-entered marital bliss with him. Her wealth, her fate, and her body were now his as well. In spite of her happiness, a darkness loomed over Harriet. She felt in utter control of herself, but the power that had threatened to consume her and all she loved went unused, and she never quite believed herself when she said that she was happy.

Ending 4: Power is All

[HB leaves society and becomes a vigilante, perhaps the first female “superhero,” but she will always struggle with her inner darkness.]

Harriet Brandt disappeared shortly after the death of her husband, Anthony Pennell. Those who knew her as the sweet, carefree girl from the West Indies thought she must have been consumed with grief and returned to the colonies. But reports of mysterious deaths and disappearances, and of local men feeling stricken with an inexplicable weakness haunted the streets of London. At the same time, instances of hysteria decreased, and women appeared to grow in strength as their husbands declined. Soon, women earned the power of the vote in England. No one would ever suspect the truth behind that victory.

Unambiguous Endings (only one way to get each of these)

Ending 5: Power Consumes

[HB succumbs to the power of her vampirism and truly descends into the darkness of monstrosity.]

Harriet Brandt awoke from her attempted suicide screaming. None could stop her as she fled the hotel and vanished into the twisted streets of London. Soon afterwards, a mysterious plague struck gentlemen all over the city, and many sickened and died. Their deaths were reckoned by doctors to be associated with the toxic London fog that hung in the city’s streets, but in the most poverty-stricken districts, old women whispered of a creature of the night, consumed with hunger for human life, a tale used to frighten the children to behave and go to bed on time. No such creature was ever found, but even the most skeptical gentlemen were reluctant to venture out in the wee hours. Those who did always felt hateful eyes upon them as they hurried home and fell ill soon afterwards.

Ending 6: Self-Knowledge Empowers

[HB learns to control her power so that she doesn’t have to give it up. Tony is alive, and he is supportive of Harriet’s outspokenness in society.]

Harriet Brandt awoke from her attempted suicide to find that her husband, Tony, had miraculously recovered from the deathlike swoon that had overtaken him on their wedding night. With relief from her own near-death experience, she re-entered marital bliss with him. They had several children, and Tony supported Harriet as she began writing and speaking out against slavery in the colonies and in favor of women’s

suffrage. Braving critiques from all sides regarding her gender, her mixed race heritage, and her status as a wife and mother with a career, Harriet managed to walk the balance of public figure and private life most never achieve. She died an old woman much beloved by both her family and her nation.

Conditions for endings:

Ending 1: Death is Sweet

Choose to Die

Ending 2: Power is Nothing

Choose to Live

In Ether: choose to be Pure OR at Peace OR Good

Other: Must have filled suffragette AND filled girl spirit OR filled more than half of NPCs OR Never used drain or fill powers at all

Ending 3: Power is Control

Choose to Live

In Ether: choose to be in Control OR Strong

Other: Must have drained or filled more than half of NPCs AND not drained suffragette AND not drained mother in the park

Ending 4: Power is All

Choose to Live

In Ether: choose to Fight OR Control

Other: Must have drained suffragette AND the mother in the park AND drained more than half of NPCs OR drained more than half of NPCs AND drained Doctor

Ending 5: Power Consumes

In Ether: Choose to be Strong OR Fight OR Control

Other: Must have used Drain power on all spirits AND suffragette AND mother in the park AND at least one other living NPC

Ending 6: Self-Knowledge Empowers

In Ether: Choose to be Good OR Pure

Other: Must have never used Drain power (except with nun) OR must have filled both suffragette and mother in the park and girl spirit

Blood of the Vampire Script

[I would like for players to be able to Drain or Fill or Leave during a conversation at any point, after they have “learned” the Drain and Fill mechanics, which I have marked.

The player can go through these areas in whatever order they like, except for Dr. Phillips’s House, which can only be accessed after the player completes Margaret’s House.

After the player completes Dr. Phillips’s House, the player may return to the Hotel, which up to this point has been the only other place off limits. There should be some visual cue that the player can now enter the Hotel.

The Ether triggers when the player re-enters the Hotel.
The Endings come up after the player completes the Ether.

Note: It is possible, then for a player to progress from the Hotel to Margaret’s House to Dr. Phillips’s House to the Ether and complete the game without ever seeing the material on the Streets or in the Park.]

Hotel Room

[HB wakes up, leaves bed, explores Hotel Room where there is a suicide note, mirror, and her own body.]

Suicide Note Content: “Do not think more unkindly of me than you can help. My parents have made me unfit to live. Let me go to a world where the curse of heredity which they laid upon me may be mercifully wiped out!”

HB: 1. Maybe I am a monster.
2. Maybe this is my second chance.

Mirror: [HB does not appear in the glass at all, but she can see her body on the bed in the background. Maybe a shot of the empty mirror, then shift to a new image showing the room in the background?]

HB: No reflection.
HB: 1. I must be dead.
2. I am still here, but what for?

Body: [The body is just a dark figure with few features. It is difficult to make out.]

HB: 1. I am so very dark.
2. I am so very fragile.

[These responses tell us something about how the player feels about HB at the beginning. I would love to be able to compare them to the responses they give by the end. Just

seeing the statements the player chose as a progression would work fine; I don't want to try to code them positive or negative.]

Hotel Hallway

Maid 1: They were only married for one day!

Maid 2: How awful.

Maid 3: She committed suicide. She will not go to heaven.

Maid 1: You mean...

Maid 3: That is what the ministers say.

Maid 2: But you can't blame her.

Nun: Our Father, who art in heaven... watch over Harriet Brandt...

HB: She is praying for me.

HB: 1. How sweet.

2. How silly.

3. Poor thing.

[Involuntary Drain; player chooses when to stop it. Player can now Drain at will.]

HB: It is my curse.

HB: 1. How terrible!

2. I can control it.

Spirits

[I did not intend these to be in any particular order... the order they are in is fine, or maybe we should switch 1 and 2.]

Spirit 1: Get away from me, demon!

HB: 1. I'm not a demon.

2. What do you mean?

Spirit 1: Get back! [Spirit attacks; must Drain or Run Away or Die]

Spirit 2: Who am I?

HB: 1. Is this a riddle?

2. I don't know who you are.

Spirit 2: There is something I'm supposed to do...

HB: 1. What is it?

2. I don't have time for this.

[If 1] Spirit 2: I wish I could remember.

[If 2] Spirit 2: Could you help?

[HB can use the Fill power for the first time.]

Spirit 3: I'm lost. Do you know the way to Chancery Road?

HB: 1. No, sorry.

2. No, but I could help you find it.

Spirit 3: You seem strange.

HB: What do you mean?

Spirit 3: Your aura. It is not like the others. You are dark with a brightness around you.

HB: What does it mean?

Spirit 3: I don't know. What are you?

HB: 1. A woman.

2. A monster.

Spirit 3: I don't believe that.

Spirit 4: Who are you? What do you want?

HB: 1. Nothing.

2. Something.

Spirit 4: You had best decide. Life will not wait.

Spirit 5: Hide me! They are coming!

HB: 1. Who is coming? ---Ends the conversation; Spirit disappears.

2. I will help you. ---Fill

3. Your worries are over. ---Drain

Spirit 6: (outside Margaret's House) I wouldn't go in there.

HB: Why not?

Spirit 6: It is a well of loneliness.

HB: What do you mean?

Spirit 6: The house is sad. It cries all night. You should turn away.

Boy Spirit: Excuse me, have you seen my mama?

HB: 1. No.

2. [If player has selected her at any point, this is an option.] Yes, follow me.

[After HB gets to the mother, Boy Spirit reappears; don't worry about a following mechanic unless it's easy-ish.]

Boy Spirit: Mama! Mama!

Mother: [Standing over a dark form on the ground] Someone help! My boy needs help!

Boy Spirit: Mama, I'm right here! ... Why doesn't she see me?

Mother: Somebody help my baby! My baby, my baby...

Boy Spirit: *Cries* Mama! Mama!

HB: Do you want to stay or go?

Boy Spirit: I just want my mama!

[Drain, Fill, or Leave]

[Player can also Drain or Fill the Mother. If they Drain her, her body slumps and she appears as a Spirit. In that case:]

Mother Spirit: What happened? Where is my baby?

[If player Drained Mother, but did not Drain or Fill the Boy Spirit, they can be together as Spirits, but their presence scares away other NPCs]

[If player Drained or Filled the Boy Spirit, HB can respond:]

HB: 1. I do not know.

2. He is gone.

Mother Spirit: *Cries* My sweet boy...

[Player can Drain, Fill, or Leave. If they Leave her there, the NPCs will not come near her.]

Couple in the Street Outside the Restaurant

Man: Darling, you are being ridiculous.

Woman: I think I need to be there. She needs me.

Man: It is too expensive to travel. You cannot go alone. It is highly improper.

Woman: I would not be alone. Fanny will meet me in Town.

Man: I will not allow it.

Woman: I have to be there. Last time she took nearly half a year to be herself again. She should not bear that alone.

Man: I cannot spare you.

Woman: It is too much!

Man: Do not descend into hysterics again. Like Mrs. Pratt. You are too weak to go.

Woman: I do feel a little faint.

Man: I will send for Dr. Phillips.

Woman: No! No, that won't be necessary.

Man: Darling, he will take care of you.

Woman: I would prefer not to. I always feel so... empty.

[At any point, the player can choose the Man or Woman and can Drain or Fill either of them.]

Man options:

If Drain: Woman: Are you unwell? Perhaps you should see Dr. Phillips this time.

If Fill: Man: I insist. Let's go.

Woman options:

If Drain: Woman: I really am unwell. Let's go home.

If Fill: Woman: I am going to see my sister, and that is final. I shall leave immediately.

Park

[One woman on stage is speaking]

Men have done splendid things in this world; they have made great achievements in engineering; they have done splendid organisation work; but they have failed, they have miserably failed, when it has come to dealing with the lives of human beings. They stand self-confessed failures, because the problems that perplex civilisation are absolutely appalling today. Well, that is the function of women in life: it is our business to care for human beings, and we are determined that we must come without delay to the saving of the race. The race must be saved, and it can only be saved through the emancipation of women.

Responses from NPCs in the audience:

Woman 1: Look how short her hair is!

Woman 2: And that jacket! How unfeminine.

Woman 1: It's absurd.

Woman 2: I just don't see the need.

Man 1: [Responding to the speech] Well said!

Woman 3: I agree. Ladies have much to offer England besides child rearing.

Man 1: Indeed.

Man 2: I never saw the beautiful Form of Woman so profaned.

Man 3: I don't know. She has such spirit.

Man 2: Such spirit will destroy this country.

Man 3: I don't know. It might be just what we need.

Man 2: Preposterous!

Woman 4: Disgusting. Go home to your children!

Woman 5: The bobbies are gathering round.

Woman 6: Perhaps we should go to the dress shop.

Woman 5: Yes, let's. My little Anne needs new ribbons... (they leave the Park)

Margaret's House

Parlor

Maid: Yes mum?

Margaret: Sylvie, were there any cards left today?

Maid: No, mum. Just a note of regrets from Baroness Gobelli.

Margaret: ... Still mourning poor Bobby... A woman ought not to lose her children.

[If player has not already been to the Kitchen; if they have, then skip to Parlor, part 2; if they have not been to the Kitchen:]

Maid: ... Yes, mum. May I bring you some tea, mum?

Margaret: Please. Don't forget the sugar.

Maid: Yes mum. [Goes to the Kitchen]

Kitchen

Maid: Where is that sugar?

Cook: Hell if I know! I've dinner to make!

Maid: I can't take it to her without. [Bell on the wall rings] Where is that sugar?

[If player looks around the kitchen, can find the sugar and bring it to the tea tray. If they do:]

Maid: Bless me, it was here all along! [Takes the tray to the Parlor]

Cook: Master will be wanting his rum.

Butler: Indeed.

[If player looks around, they can find the rum and bring it to the table near the Butler, or they can hide it.]

[If player brings the rum, the Butler takes it to the Library. If the player hides it, the Butler goes to the Library without it.]

Library

Mr. Pullen: Letter from Dr. Phillips. Hmm... Miss Brandt's husband has died! Good lord! ... It would be best if Margaret did not find out. It would... affect her. [He hides the letter in a book]

[Player can retrieve the letter and take it to Margaret in the Parlor.]

[If player hid the rum:]

Butler: Sir.

Mr. Pullen: Yes, James?

Butler: It appears we are out of rum, sir.

Mr. Pullen: Impossible.

Butler: I'm afraid so, sir.

Mr. Pullen: Very well. Please inform the other employees that their wages will be garnished until further notice.

Butler: ... Yes sir. [Goes back to the Kitchen]

Mr. Pullen: Why is the rum always gone?

[If player brought the rum:]

Butler: Sir.

Mr. Pullen: Yes, James?

Butler: Your... repast.

Mr. Pullen: Thank you, James. ... How is Mrs. Pullen today?

Butler: ... She is in the Parlor, sir.

Mr. Pullen: ... Ah.

Parlor, part 2 (after Kitchen)

Maid: Your tea, mum.

Margaret: Thank you, Sylvie.

[If player did not bring sugar:]

Margaret: Where is the sugar?

Maid: It appears we have none, mum. Apologies, mum.

Margaret: I see. Thank you, Sylvie.

Parlor, part 3 (after Library; if player does both Kitchen and Library before returning to the Parlor, this should be available upon their return)

[If player brings Margaret the letter from Dr. Phillips that was hidden in the book:]

Margaret: What's this? ... Tony Pennell has died! Oh, poor Harriet!

[Sound of baby crying; this happens when player returns to the Parlor after going to the Kitchen and the Library, regardless of their choices in those rooms.]

Margaret: I am so very out of spirits.

[Crying continues, player should go looking for its source. Player can go upstairs to find two empty bedrooms and one locked. The key is in Mr. Pullen's desk drawer in the Library.]

Baby's Room (after player gets the key from the desk in the Library)

[Baby spirit is in the crib. There are creepy dolls and such; maybe a series of images to set the scene, before the player gets control back? Player can Drain or Fill the Baby Spirit or Leave. If they Drain or Fill, there is new content in the Parlor.]

Parlor, part 4 (after Baby's Room)

[If player Drained or Filled the Baby Spirit:]

Margaret: My head has cleared. I should visit poor Harriet.

[If player chose to Leave:]

Margaret: I am so very out of spirits.

Dr. Phillips's House

[If player comes to this house before completing Margaret's House, should get a message stating "The Doctor does not appear to be at home."]

Reception Area

[A secretary sits at a small desk; a couple of chairs are around. A man waits in one of them.]

Man: How much longer?

Secretary: Soon now.

Examining Room

Dr. Phillips: I think I have just the thing to improve your health. Let me speak with your husband.

[Man enters]

Man: Have you found the problem?

Dr. Phillips: I have a diagnosis. She appears to be having hysteric episodes.

Man: What can we do?

Dr. Phillips: I will prescribe something. It should calm her, should another episode occur.

Woman: But...

Man: Thank you, doctor!

[The Man and Woman leave. Dr. Phillips returns to the Reception Area]

Dr. Phillips: That will be all for today, Mina.

Secretary: Thank you, sir. See you tomorrow.

Upstairs

[A newspaper is on the table in the kitchen area; if the player looks at it, the story is about a white woman who is engaged to marry a black man from the colonies.]

Evening News, 12 August 1899. Announcement of Engagement: Miss Florence Kate Jewell of London to "Prince" Peter Kushana Lobengula of South Africa.

"...the mating of a white girl with a dusky savage" ought to "inspire a feeling of disgust among the vast majority of Englishmen and Englishwomen... to use it as a theme for jesting is not only in bad taste, but distinctly dangerous... such acts of disgusting folly are well known to be infectious, and there are plenty of silly women in the world." (qtd in Malchow)

[A letter on the table to Dr. Phillips, informing him of Tony Pennell and Harriet Brandt's deaths.]

Dear Sir:

It is with regret that I write to inform you that your former acquaintance and friend, Antony Pennell, has died this day, utterly weakened by some as yet unknown ailment.

It is with further regret that I must add that his new bride, Miss Harriet Brandt, as was, has perished by her own hand by a common poison, surely from grief at the loss of her new husband. I had hoped you would accompany me in examining them before their internment.

I hope this news finds you tolerably well.

*Your Sincere Friend and Colleague,
Dr. Martin Hesselius*

[A book is out on the table as well. It is William J. Robinson, MD's medical text, *Married Life and Happiness*. Quotation below:]

...there is the opposite type of woman who is a great danger to the health and even the very life of her husband. I refer to the hypersensual woman, to the wife with an excessive sexuality. It is to her that the name vampire can be applied in its literal sense. Just as the vampire sucks the blood of its victims in their sleep while they are alive, so does the woman vampire such the life and exhaust the vitality of her male partner—or victim. And some of them—the pronounced type—are utterly without pity or consideration...

[Dr. Phillips enters, sits at the table]

Dr. Phillips: This miscegenation business really is getting out of hand. ... When will people learn that those one chooses to associate with will affect them?

HB: 1. And when those they associate with are monsters?
2. And when those they associate with are women?
3. And when those they associate with are Negroes?

Dr. Phillips: ... Is someone there? Hello?

HB: 1. Nobody.
2. Someone who needs your help.
3. Your worst nightmare.

Dr. Phillips: ... I could have sworn I heard something.

[If player Drains him:]

Dr. Phillips: ... I feel... so weak...

[If player Fills him:]

Dr. Phillips: ... I feel... so alive...

HB: 1. You will not influence me ever again.

2. Thank you for all you have done. [It would be cool to have the player select whether they: Meant Sincerely or Meant Sarcastically]

Ether

[After the player has been through the content in Margaret's House and Dr. Phillips's House, they may return to the Hotel. There should be some visual indication that this is now possible, maybe a slight glow or small movement of the door? When the player enters the Hotel, they are in the Ether.]

HB: Where am I?

Mother: You are in between.

HB: Who are you?

Mother: Don't you recognize me? ... I am your Mother.

HB: 1. I don't believe you.

2. I don't know you.

[If 1:]

Mother: *Three things do not long stay hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.* You can't change the truth. I should never have tried to leave your father. Things might have been different for us. ... But I am here to help you now.

[If 2:]

Mother: I am sorry for that, but my mother used to tell me *Three things do not long stay hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.* ... You may not know your purpose now, but everything eventually comes to light. ... I wish I had been there for you. Life is cruel, as you well know. ... But I am here to help you now.

HB: 1. How can you help me?

2. What am I supposed to do?

Mother: What do you want most?

HB: 1. To be my best self.

2. To be happy.

3. To be free.

Mother: What does that mean?

[If 1:]

HB: 1. I want to be good.

2. I want to be strong.

[If 1:]

What is goodness?

[If 2:]

What is strength?

[If 2:]

HB: 1. I have battles to fight.
2. I want to be at peace.

[If 1:]
Do you know what you are fighting for?

[If 2:]
Do you know what peace is?

[If 3:]
HB: 1. I want to be in control.
2. I want to be pure.

[If 1:]
Mother: What is control?

[If 2:]
Mother: What is purity?

For either option:

1. I have an idea.
2. I have no idea.

Mother: You can have what you want, but it may not be what you think. ... You still have a choice. The most fundamental one of all. Do you know what that is?

HB: 1. I choose to die.
2. I choose to live.

[If player chooses to Die, they get Ending 1 regardless of their other choices.]

ENDINGS

[If player chose to Die:]

Ending 1: Death is Sweet

[HB is dead, but her vampiric nature is removed from the world and can no longer harm anyone.]

Harriet Brandt's death was a shocking blow to all who knew her as the sweet, carefree girl from the colonies who had found matrimonial happiness with Anthony Pennell. The revelation of her father's and grandfather's miscegenation and demise in the West Indies coupled with Harriet's act of self-destruction served as a reminder to all of the fragility of human nature and the price of impurity. As her marriage had been so short, Miss

Brandt's wealth was taken on by the State and put to use for whatever purpose was deemed best to serve the British Empire.

[If player chose to Live:]

Ending 2: Power is Gone

[HB has lost her vampiric abilities and is now just a normal woman. She is alive, but Tony is still dead. She can still affect political change as a wealthy widowed woman.]

Harriet Brandt awoke from her attempted suicide miraculously unharmed, though the loss of her husband, Tony, still weighed heavy on her heart for a time. Cautious not to become too attached to anyone, lest they fall prey to her incomprehensible nature, Harriet wandered the world alone, her family's wealth supporting her all of her days. She became a woman of great influence, especially to the young women she encountered in her travels, though she never returned to England, nor to the West Indies, where all her troubles had begun.

Ending 3: Power is Controlled

[HB has her vampiric abilities under control and can use them to affect change in the world. But Tony is alive, so as a woman, she lives under his power.]

Harriet Brandt awoke from her attempted suicide to find that her husband, Tony, had miraculously recovered from the deathlike swoon that had overtaken him on their wedding night. With relief from her own near-death experience, she re-entered marital bliss with him. Her wealth, her fate, and her body were now his as well. In spite of her happiness, a darkness loomed over Harriet. She felt in utter control of herself, but the power that had threatened to consume her and all she loved went unused, and she never quite believed herself when she said that she was happy.

Ending 4: Power is All

[HB leaves society and becomes a vigilante, perhaps the first female "superhero," but she will always struggle with her inner darkness.]

Harriet Brandt disappeared shortly after the death of her husband, Anthony Pennell. Those who knew her as the sweet, carefree girl from the West Indies thought she must have been consumed with grief and returned to the colonies. But reports of mysterious deaths and disappearances, and of local men feeling stricken with an inexplicable weakness haunted the streets of London. At the same time, instances of hysteria decreased, and women appeared to grow in strength as their husbands declined. Soon,

women earned the power of the vote in England. No one would ever suspect the truth behind that victory.

Appendix C: Syllabus for a Next Generation Course

Gender and Video Game Advocacy

Lauren Woolbright, ABD
(Advanced Undergraduate/Graduate)

Women face serious harassment in online spaces, as evidenced by the doxing of female game developers by GamerGate, leaking of celebrity nude images, and body shaming and cyber bullying that are all-too-prevalent online. And being heard in the noise and chaos of the digital spaces we inhabit is getting harder all the time. So how do we manage to cut through the clutter to advocate for meaningful change in our lives? In this course, students will explore the ways people use new media to create and disseminate powerful rhetorical messages with regards to gender, and then they will create some of their own. Course content will include text-based articles, video games, websites, apps, memes, social media, documentaries, and digital literature. Students will discuss readings and viewings both in class and online, will write a short paper and make a short project, will collaborate in groups to design a website or video game, and will produce a video essay that argues for an effective approach to gender advocacy on a specific topic of their choosing.

Required Texts (Other readings will be provided in PDF)

Adrienne Shaw, *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture*, 2015

ISBN: 9780816693160 v jc cxx x vc

Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men*, 2009

ISBN: 9780061873775

Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, 2006

ISBN: 9780814743072

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Participation: | 20% |
| Short Assignments (2): | 20% (10% each) |
| Group Project: | 30% (20% project, 10% presentation) |
| Video Essay: | 30% (20% project, 10% presentation) |

Total: 100%

Unit 1: Groundwork

Week 1: “What is New Media?” Lev Manovich

Week 2: Discussion: Who Needs Advocacy? + Recognizing Privilege; Allies, and “bad” Allies

Week 3: What’s up with guys anyway? Reading: Michael Kimmel: *Guyland*

Unit 2: Social Media: Big Problems, Innovative Solutions

Week 4: Misogyny on Twitter: #GamerGate and #NotYourShield; Play *Depression Quest* and *Never Alone*

Week 5: Countering discrimination and harassment: Facebook groups, DeviantArt, Upworthy, and Instagram advocacies, Reading: Judith Butler

- (“Gamer Goddesses” and “Women in Gaming and Tech” groups, fan art with a message, “Fourth Trimester Bodies Project” and the “brelfie”)
- Week 6: Read Josh Woods article (forthcoming) about Etsy and gendered economies, **Short paper due**
- Unit 3: Video Game Design as Advocacy
- Week 7: Henry Jenkins: “Game Design as Narrative Architecture,” Persuasive Games (Bogost) and Games for Change (Romero)
- Week 8: Reading: T.L. Taylor: “Living Digitally”
- Week 9: Reading: Adrienne Shaw: *Gaming at the Edge*, **Group project due**
- Unit 4: Meme-ification, Augmentation, and Apps
- Week 10: Discuss: Bros, Bronies, and Good Girl Gina/Friendzone Fiona
- Week 11: Play: *Zona Incerta* and *Ingress*, discussion of augmented reality and environmental awareness/advocacy, gender and environments
- Week 12: **Meme Making project due, informal presentations in class**
- Unit 5: Transmediations and Advocacy
- Week 13: Reading: Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture*
- Week 14: Discuss: Gender roles and archetypes in *Walking Dead*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*
- Week 15: **Video essay due, in-class presentations**
- Exams: Final Revisions/portfolio due, Good luck on your other exams!

Appendix D: Syllabus for Game Design Course

Rhetorical Video Game Design
(Capstone or Creative Inquiry Course)

In its focus on the design and creation of a playable video game, this course is meant as a culmination of all the skills students have honed over the course of their university careers. Working in teams of students from a variety of majors spanning the humanities, sciences, and computer sciences, students will brainstorm a video game concept that communicates a message of their choosing, pitch the idea to the class, peer review and revise; then teams will storyboard, create a paper design layout, and then develop it in a platform of their choosing with attention to access and audience. Given the time constraints, students need only implement a portion of the game as proof of concept, enough for the other teams to playtest and critique for the course final. Students will evaluate their own contributions and their peers, and unresponsive or non-contributing group members may be fired if deemed warranted after extensive discussion with the professor.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| Participation: | 20% |
| Sales Pitch: | 10% |
| Storyboard/Paper Design | 10% |
| Final Product: | 30% |
| <u>Final Presentation/Critique:</u> | <u>30%</u> |
| Total: 100% | |

Unit 1: Concept

Week 1: Create Steam account and play a game, discuss

Week 2: Game genres discussion, play a game, discuss

Unit 2: What Can Games Do?

Week 3: Readings: Not Your Mama's Gamer blog/podcast, play a game, discuss

Week 4: Readings: Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, play a Bogost game

Week 5: Readings: Henry Jenkins, Brenda Laurel on games and gender

Unit 3: From Concept to Pitch

Week 6: "Finalize" concept, create concept art

Week 7: Work on concept art

Week 8: In-class sales pitches, peer review, revise

Unit 4: From Pitch to Paper

Week 9: Storyboard

Week 10: Create paper design of entire game

Week 11: Paper design testing, presentations, review, revision

Unit 5: From Paper to Screen

Week 12: Work on game

Week 13: Work on game

Week 14: Work on game

Week 15: Work on game

Exams: Final Presentations due on exam day

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