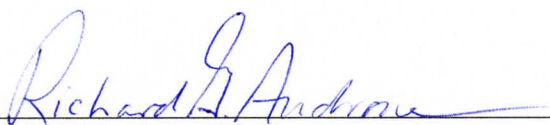# Survival Horror Meets Literary Theory
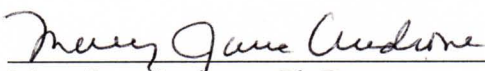
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Bachelor of Arts

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

College Honors

Departmental Distinction in English

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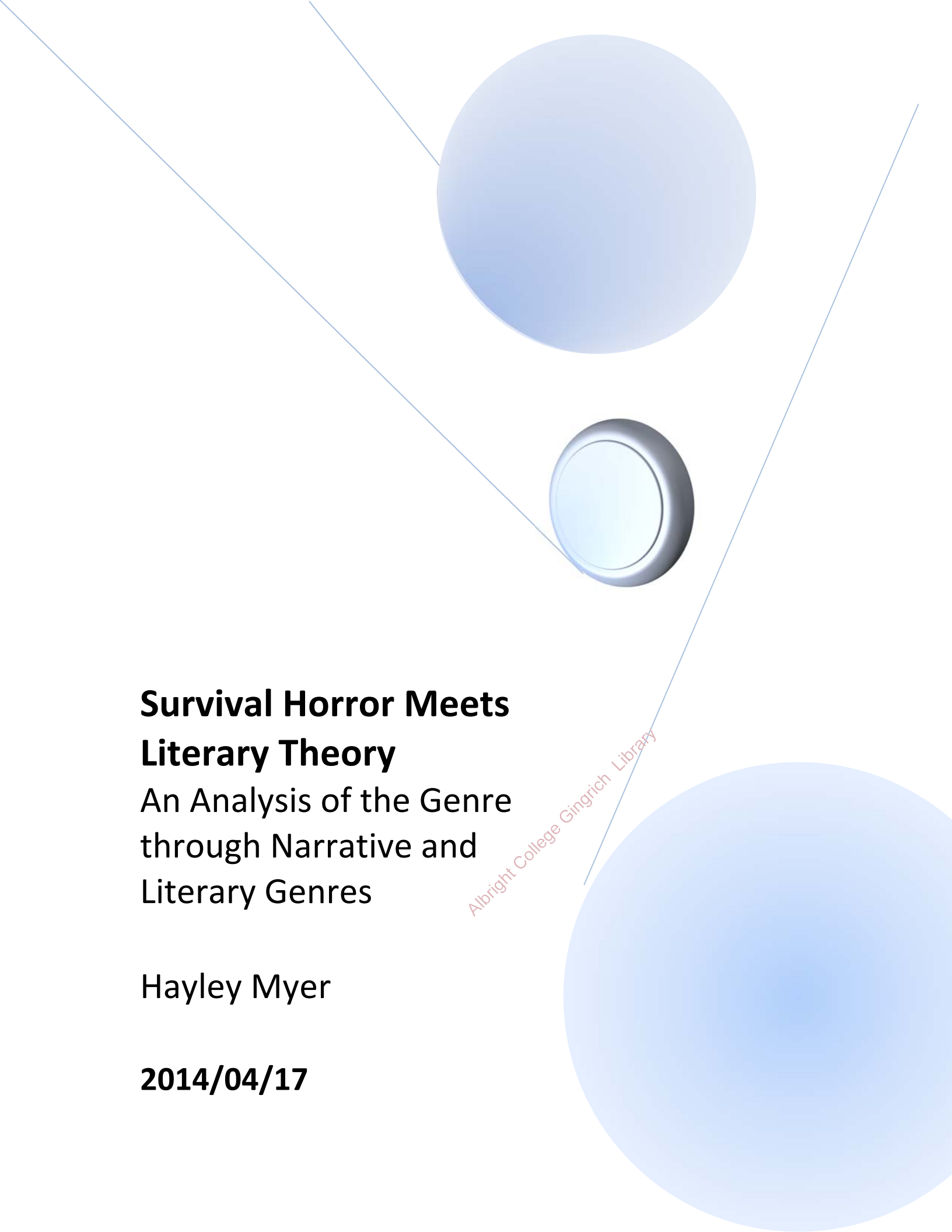Signature of Author: Date: 2014/04/15

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Survival Horror Meets Literary Theory

An Analysis of the Genre through Narrative and Literary Genres

Hayley Myer

2014/04/17

INTRODUCTION:

Over the past few decades, video games have become a growing part of popular culture, influencing the lives of millions of players, reviewers, and developers. More Americans own a video game console than ever before, and the number of players is increasing with each passing year. According to the Entertainment Software Association, half of America's households contain at least one video game system, and the industry is generating billions of dollars in sales with no sign of slowing down (Garrison). But what is keeping players entertained after decades of games? Most video game players agree that the experience of play, or gameplay, is the core reason they play games; they enjoy the feeling of experiencing, mastering and ultimately winning a game. The rapidity in which the technology develops also presents players with new experiences, stories, worlds to explore, and challenges every year. It is an exciting, fast-paced industry to be involved in and one that rewards its players with both entertainment and a sense of achievement.

Thanks to video games' growing influence on society, many scholars are beginning to examine them in an academic light, yet the approaches for studying this entertainment medium are varied. Some researchers focus on the economic factor of this recent yet very successful business, some look at the influence of particularly graphic or violent video games on children, and some choose to examine the games themselves. Those that directly examine the games do so from multiple angles, focusing on subjects such as the amount of power given to players, the choices offered within the game universe (and their impacts in terms of both story and avatar statistical development), and even the mechanics themselves, including how players increase statistics (increasing the

Strength statistic from 8 to 10), obtain objects, and otherwise interact in the video game reality. The focus is on the user interface: how players actually play the game, what buttons are required for specific moves, and the unique ways in which players can manipulate their characters and the environment in order to master the game. Yet one crucial element of the video gaming medium, while heavily touched upon by reviewers and video game players, has only recently begun to be explored seriously by both developers and academics: the stories themselves.

This is due to a number of factors, namely that, until very recently, an argument between video game scholars was being fought concerning the importance of narrative in video games. One group of video game scholars believed that the focus of playing a game was to master the motions and sequences within the confines of the game rules in order to complete challenges presented, while others argued video games were a new medium primarily being used to tell stories, with the emphasis being on the narrative told rather than the mechanics involved. This argument is no longer a concern for game players, with recent games telling such riveting stories that writers' guilds are beginning to take notice (Garrison). Most game players agree that the majority of games have some sort of narrative structure, with a story being told in the background (or foreground) of gameplay. Not all games do so, however, as most puzzle, racing, and simulation games lack narrative. For the most part, though, games involve players in one story or another in order to give context to the actions taking place.

The majority of video game stories have only been touched upon and examined by their developers, reviewers and die-hard fans of the games. The most serious analyses of the stories told highlight the symbolism of certain events or illuminate something most

players skip over when engrossed in gameplay. Academic study of these stories is available but far from mainstream; actual literary analysis of these games is even scarcer. While the field has been around for some time, video game studies are still fighting for recognition.

The primary focus of video game studies has been either on the narrative structure or the gameplay mechanics involved in the medium. In this paper, I hope to highlight the stories themselves, first by analyzing how narrative functions in video games, then showing how horror cinema and Gothic literature have influenced narrative specifically in the survival horror video game genre, both in terms of atmosphere and in terms of story. From this analysis of narrative, I will proceed by examining the borrowed structures, devices, and motifs of literary genres found in these games. By drawing comparisons between a video game's genre and what would be considered its literary genre, it is my goal for the stories told in video games to be taken seriously by the literary community as extensions of the literary field rather than as simple backdrops to video games.

GAMES EXAMINED:

Throughout this analysis, many games are referenced in order to make a wide variety of points. However, three games in particular are at the central focus of this paper: *Silent Hill 2, Resident Evil 4,* and *Amnesia: The Dark Descent.* This short section briefly will outline these three games in order for readers to get a better understanding of their stories. The remaining games referenced throughout can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this thesis and will be elaborated on when necessary.

Silent Hill 2, developed by Konami, was originally released on the Playstation 2 in 2002. The game has players taking control of James from a third-person camera perspective in the town of Silent Hill. It is stated at the very beginning of the game that James lost his wife years ago to an illness, but he has recently received a letter from her asking him to come to Silent Hill. James journeys into the foggy town, wondering what happened to his wife Mary, when he comes across many strange individuals, including a little girl named Laura and a woman who appears to be his wife's twin named Maria. James also encounters a wide variety of monsters, each symbolically representing one or more of James's inner demons. Eventually James comes to realize that *he* was in fact responsible for his wife's death, as he was unable to cope with her suffering in the hospital as well as her mood swings due to her medication and depression. The game ends with James confronting the ghost of his dead wife or Maria, the sexualized version of Mary. The game has six possible endings, which are based on players' actions taken throughout the course of the game: "Leave," where James is forgiven and leaves the town with Laura, "Maria," in which James leaves the town with Maria, possibly alluding to repeating the cycle of death, "In Water," where James is not forgiven and kills himself

out of despair, "Rebirth," during which James sails across Toluca Lake to revive Mary,

"Dog," a parody ending where James finds a dog controlling everything from a master

panel, and "UFO," another comical ending in which James is captured by UFOs and

taken away from Silent Hill. With such a range, players are in control of seeing a happy,

sad, or downright depressing ending that fits with their behavioral patterns throughout the

course of the game.

Released originally in 2005 by Capcom, *Resident Evil 4* is a shooter game that

follows Leon Kennedy from a third-person camera perspective. Leon is sent on a mission

to obtain Ashley, the President's daughter, from a group of terrorists stationed in a small

Spanish village. Leon, who survived the zombie outbreak in Raccoon City several years

prior to the game's action, soon discovers that a new breed of zombies, known as

Ganados, inhabits the village. Players assume the role of Leon and fight through hordes

of zombies and horrifying monsters in order to save Ashley. This is further complicated

when both are infected with the zombie virus, slowly turning them into mindless

creatures. Players eventually manage to save Ashley and remove the virus before killing

the leader of the cult of terrorists, thus bringing an end to the Ganado threat. Unlike *Silent

Hill 2*, *Resident Evil 4* has only one possible ending.

Amnesia: The Dark Descent is a horror game developed by Frictional Games that

takes on the first-person camera perspective of a man named Daniel. Released in 2010,

the game is set in the 1800s and follows Daniel as he wakes up in Brennenburg Castle,

remembering nothing of who he is or why he is there. Players control Daniel and work to

uncover his scattered journal entries as they descend into the castle with the intent of

killing the owner, the Baron Alexander Brennenburg. Players are told from the beginning

that the Baron needs to be killed in order to stop an otherworldly darkness from consuming everything. As players descend through the many lower areas of the castle, including a dungeon, a wine cellar, and a pump station, they are stripped of the ability to attack and defend themselves and are chased both by wandering monsters and by a supernatural darkness that threatens to destroy all in its path. Players learn more about Daniel as they collect journal entries that cover his archeological digs in Africa, a supernatural orb he obtained, and the various experiments he and the Baron performed together, which led to the torture and death of many innocent villagers. In the end, players decide whether to let Daniel die in the darkness or kill the Baron, allowing Daniel to live. A third option involves the assistance of the alchemist Agrippa in which Daniel dies but is reborn, while a fourth, hidden ending can be found if players remain in the jail cell late in the game, allowing the darkness to kill them rather than choosing to escape.

NARRATIVE IN VIDEO GAMES

A young girl wakes up in a dungeon. Remembering the brutal car crash she has just experienced, she finds herself alone in a dirty, terrifying prison cell. She manages to escape and enters the adjacent, giant, Victorian manor, hoping to find out where she is. Provided a change of clothes by a mysterious maid, she is soon hunted down by the gardener of the manor, a brute of a man who continuously calls her "dollie" and seems to view her as a walking toy rather than as a human being. With the help of a lone dog named Hewie, she protects herself from the inhabitants of the manor, who chase her with the intent of killing her, while solving the puzzles of the manor in order to escape. After fully exploring the castle and defeating her stalkers, she comes to learn the truth of her family and her alchemical inheritance before leaving the manor unharmed with her new pet, Hewie, who has helped and protected her throughout her journey.

Sound like a bizarre, new horror novel? It is not. In fact, it is the *story* of a video game from 2005 titled *Haunting Ground*.

The argument concerning the importance of narrative in video games is perhaps as old as the (relatively new) field of video game studies. Many scholars believed that games should be analyzed primarily by how players interact in the world of the video game, what actions are available, and the rules of the game. These scholars, known as ludologists, do not suggest that narrative is absent in video games but argue that video games should be examined primarily for their mechanics, which include the rules of the game, who facilitates the rules, and what are the winning conditions of the game (Björk and Holopainen 413, 419). Those on the opposing side of this argument were simply known as narratologists. Instead of believing video games to be in their own specific

field, narratologists saw video games as an extension of cinema and literature. Video

games are a new frontier for telling stories, and they emphasized how narrative structures

a game player's experience in the video game universe. The argument was a heavily-

debated topic, with harsh words coming from both sides. One scholar in particular, a

ludologist named Eskelinen, condemned narratologists at a conference when he said, "If I

throw a ball at you, I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories"

(qtd. in Simons).

From this debate came a wide variety of frameworks, ideas, and analyses for

studying video games. Ludologists, feeling that the narratology camp was trying to

undermine the importance of the mechanics of a game, tried to define their own field with

their own terminology. Studies heavily involved the function of rules in the game, as

rules "dictate the flow of the game" and therefore are at the crux of how a game functions

(Björk and Holopainen 416). These rules can be as simple as "a player cannot walk

through walls" or as complex as "after beating the boss [an enemy players must defeat in

order to progress] in the next room, players will be granted a sword, but only if they

defeated the boss without using health potions." For ludologists, games are viewed as a

sequence of goals, with the completion of one goal leading the player towards a larger,

more challenging goal. Players complete actions along the lines of the rules which, in

video games, are facilitated by the game system itself; the game will not allow players to

walk through walls, and it will grant the player the sword if the player manages to defeat

the boss without using health items. In order to better immerse players into the game

world, a variety of tools are provided to the player, which are termed "resources." These

can range from money to health items to ammunition, dependent entirely on the type of

game being played (Björk and Holopainen 416-430). As one can see, such a framework heavily undermines narrative, as the focus is on how players maneuver through the game's rules and ultimately beat the game, not the story behind the rules and set goals.

For every scholar claiming that the ludology approach is right, there is another scholar who looks at video gaming as an extension of the literary tradition, focusing primarily on narrative structures found in video games. Chandler, in an essay in *Final Fantasy and Philosophy*, noted that video games are very similar to Roland Barthes's post-modern theory of writerly texts "because players take an active role in producing the game's narrative through their personal gaming experiences" (6). Much like the theory that writers provide readers with signs, which the reader then interprets through his or her own set of signs and signifiers, video games provide players with a series of tasks to complete, places to go, and events to witness, which they then interpret through their particular way of playing the game. Henry Jenkins likens game designers to "narrative architects," as players experience narrative within the preset confines of the game world. In this way, players associate with particular objects depending on how they play the game as well as their interpretation of the narrative (Chandler 6-8). An example of this is in *Silent Hill 2*, where a player can either choose to dote on or ignore Maria, which then changes the outcome of the game. Players interpret Maria differently depending on their choices and actions taken in relation to her as they move throughout the town of Silent Hill, which then influences the way in which the narrative is finished.

It took many years and a lot of arguing on both sides, but it seems that game mechanics and narrative are finally coming together, with each seen as playing a significant role in the experience of playing a video game. The mechanics of the game are

still crucial factors and must never be forgotten, or else the entire medium is lost. As Ken McAllister notes in his book *Game Work: Language, Power, and Computer Game Culture*, "Other media are to be understood or appreciated by their audiences, whereas computer games are to be won" (59). The rules under which the narration proceeds as well as the player's mastery of gameplay mechanics (how to move, fight, and heal, how to collect resources, and how to win the game) are what drive the narrative forward. If a player does not move the character forward, the narrative remains stuck, so understanding the mechanics involved in playing the game is crucial to understanding how narrative flows.

Narrative does have its place in a video game, however, in that it gives the players a context for performing the necessary actions for completing a goal. Whether it be through a video in which players simply watch what is taking place between the avatar and his surroundings (known as a "cutscene"), through dialogue, or through written material scattered throughout the game, which can be picked up, read, and collected by game players, narrative is said to occur in what Jenkins titles "localized incidents," or "micronarratives." These moments inform the player of what is taking place concerning the story at that particular moment in the game and help the player piece together what is occurring throughout the overall action (Bogost 69). Parallel to the notion that a game is a series of goals, with the completion of one goal leading to a new goal, each micronarrative incident helps illuminate what is happening and gives the player more insight into the world which the player is inhabiting. With each micronarrative encountered, the picture becomes clearer, and by the end of the game, the narrative should be complete, with the player fully comprehending the story being told as well as

the actions that are required to solve the conflict. This generally assumes the game will be played in a linear fashion, with the focus being on understanding the story rather than adventuring and completing missions outside the main quest line (71). Some games even separate segments of gameplay into chapters or episodes, highlighting how narrative influences the flow of the game, as each episode focuses on a new problem to be addressed, new enemies to fight, new equipment to buy, and new places to explore.

Narrative works very differently in video games, as might be expected, than in the literary and cinematic traditions it tends to hail from. Part of this is due to the writing process itself. While writing a novel is an individual task, and writing a script or screenplay is a small group process, writing a video game story is a task given to a significant group of people. As a writer for the video game *Assassin's Creed III Liberation*, Jill Murray remarked that the stories told in video games "are therefore driven by the relationships that exist between designers and other people on the team" rather than from a single person's imagination (Parkin 2014). Interaction is another crucial difference that impacts the writing process. Because players are responsible for driving the game forward, writers have little control over how the narrative is interpreted. A fellow writer of Jill Murray, Chris Avellone remarked that "game-writing is far more compartmentalized," covering incidents, item descriptions, and individual dialogue options rather than an overarching story a novelist might write (Parkin 2014). This further highlights Jenkins's "micronarrative" theory, as narrative, even for the writers, occurs at particular moments rather than being a constant sequence of narrative events.

Because the purpose of video games is for players to be entertained and eventually win, video games give and take from a variety of sources in order to make the

best experience for video game players, not simply to write the best story to be told.

Survival horror games, the central focus of this analysis, primarily are concerned with

scaring the player. Therefore, anything that breaks immersion, a state in which players

forget their surroundings and are sucked into the game's universe, is seen as something

not worth pursuing, for breaking immersion results in a break of the tension and fear felt

by the player. Because of this, narrative cues are usually presented in a way that does not

break the flow of playing the game. They are instead scattered throughout the game's

universe and found in all sorts of documents, including "newspaper articles, lab reports,

photographs, diaries, audio cassettes, painted portraits, and computer logs" (Kirkland 67).

Even the spaces themselves can tell what is happening; in *Dead Space 2*, bloody signs are

posted on the walls, their victims writing messages to loved ones or pleas for life, as

televisions replay the State of Emergency address by the station's commanding officer.

Players learn of what has happened by reading and interpreting these signs in the context

of what they are currently experiencing as they fight their way through the enemies and

complete the necessary puzzles to progress.

Alongside these literary devices (as players read these tools more often than not)

are cinematic elements that help shape the story. Camera angles highlight significant

places to visit or items to collect and read, perhaps zooming in on a particular door or

moving as the player walks around a set of resources. Cutscenes, which are movies

players watch their avatars interact in, often focus on dialogue being spoken between the

avatar and a Non-Playable Character, or NPC, who is best thought of as a supporting

actor or actress. Players, for the most part, cannot participate in these cinematic moments,

and even in advanced story-telling games like *Mass Effect*, they can only do so within a

series of preset conditions; players can only choose for their character to say A, B, or C and cannot move the character during the cinematic episode. As such, these scenes "locate gameplay within a certain narrative frame," but they do so in a cinematic way rather than a literary way (Kirkland 66-71). As players move their avatar in the video game spaces, they come across these bits of information and cinematic cues and are able to stitch together the chronology of what has happened, forming the entire narrative from the pieces they have collected along the way in a manner that makes the game appealing to play.

Ultimately, this issue between ludology and narratology has been continuously fought not perhaps because of the scholars, but in fact because of the wide variety of video game players. Some players play games in order to obtain all the achievements, find the best weapons and armor, and reach the maximum statistical level. These players are concerned with mastering play mechanics; they do not care for the storyline but rather how they can manipulate the rules of the game and achieve the most success within the confines of the game's universe. On the other hand, some game players enjoy games for their stories, choosing to play at a more relaxed pace and focusing on the dialogue and cutscenes rather than worrying over showing up their neighbor in gameplay superiority. Then there is the simple fact that not all games have narrative to begin with. Even narratologists understand that narrative is not found in all games. Yet the average role-playing game, where players assume the role of an avatar and move that avatar in the video game environment, is becoming more and more invested in story-telling and narration, and it seems that the gaming community is rewarding games with intense and interesting stories with record sales. The success of games like *Bioshock: Infinite* and *The*

Last of US have primarily been attributed to the stories told, forcing emotional reactions from game players and winning Best of Awards, including Best Narrative Awards (UBM Tech 2014). All these elements make for not only a variety of games but a variety of game players, each with their own expectations and goals for what they desire from the game.

The average video game lies somewhere in the middle of the debate, with mastery of gameplay mechanics, such as increasing the avatar's numerical statistics, finding new weapons, and exploring new areas, running parallel to mastery of the storyline, with players picking up narrative clues, seeing the necessary film clips and dialogues, and encountering new people who provide information. This parallel is not always equal; players may choose to spend hours fighting enemies in order to increase their character's statistics before advancing with the story, or they may rush through the story without picking up a majority of the resources scattered throughout the game universe. No matter the particular focus of the game player or gaming session, narrative is nevertheless still present. It is merely the player's choice on how significant the story becomes to the player.

The way in which narrative is presented to players may sound to literary scholars like a unique and new way of telling stories, particularly due to the interactive nature of the medium. It may be best to consider the game player as the reader turning the pages of a novel. Game players cannot necessarily move outside the confines of the game in terms of creating the story much as readers cannot change the plot of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, yet they move it forward, much like the reader who has to read the first chapter in order to get to the second chapter. The similarities become clear when the

specific narrative cues are examined, particularly in the survival horror genre of video games. Survival horror games borrow from a wide range of Gothic literary and horror sources in order to convey the story being told. Their distinction in a particular genre in the video game market is heavily dependent on the narrative, and the connections between literary analysis and video game story-telling are evident when the narrative as well as the way in which they are presented is examined.

THE SURVIVAL HORROR GENRE

Genre has always been a very fluid topic; it is hard to determine in literature, cinema, and music what the definitions of a particular genre are and what fits into that genre. Genre is primarily used to separate individual items from each other, the most obvious in literature including romance, tragedy, and comedy. Each of these genres has sub-genres, and each of the sub-genres can be further broken up into even smaller genres, with each genre serving to further separate the individual item (in this case, the story) from other stories.

Unsurprisingly, genre works similarly in video games.

For video games, two major categorizations exist: the hardware, or platform, on which the game is played, and the genre used to market the game. The former is determined by what hardware systems the game is available on. Some games are exclusive for a specific console; they can only be played on the computer, or perhaps the company wishes to have the games be exclusive to the Playstation 3. For instance, *The Last of Us*, one of the most popular video games released in 2013 and winner of several awards, is only available on the Playstation 3.This is very different from other mediums of entertainment. Movies are not usually defined by the hardware on which they are released; it makes no difference if a film is released for Blu-Ray or DVD, except for a bit of quality difference (the exception to this is movies that require 3D glasses). Literature worries even less about this issue. Whether a book is viewed on a Nook or in a hardcover format, the book is still treated the same, with no changes made to the story.

Video games are different. A game released on a computer will have different controls than a game released on the Playstation, meaning players will have to master

different sequences in order to beat the game. For games released on different consoles, there are oftentimes separate reviews, as a game that works well on a computer is not always guaranteed to work well (or at all) on a television console. The content is generally the same, but with the mechanics required to play the game being crucial, the mechanics are different on each console, thus changing the way in which players react in the video game reality. Extra content which players can download from online stores in order to enhance or extend their games can also depend on the platform, meaning certain players might be barred from experiencing extra episodes in a particular game. Lastly, this is important due to the fact that most game players only own one or two game platforms. Therefore, if a game is released solely for Xbox360, and a video game player only has the Playstation 3, he or she is cut off from playing that game and experiencing that story. The system a game is released on determines not only the mechanics players must learn to master in order to function in the game world but also the market for that game and what is available to the player to enhance their game.

The latter categorization of video games, the genre the game is marketed under, falls more in line with literary genres, for it consists of a series of broad yet vague terms, including Action, Strategy, and Role-Playing. Each one is used to categorize a wide variety of games underneath its ambiguous umbrella. All games in which the player assumes the first-person camera angle perspective of an avatar, carries guns and shoots enemies is known as a First-Person Shooter (or FPS), no matter the story or atmosphere of the game. What is interesting to note is that these genres were not originally formatted by the game developers but rather by the journalists responsible for rating the games (Björk and Holopainen 412). These genres have become a staple of the video gaming

community, but the definitions for them and games that fall under their umbrellas are by

no means set in stone and are, in fact, often argued over by fans and reviewers alike.

Players of *Resident Evil 4*, for instance, still argue if the game is at heart an action or

horror game despite nearly a decade having passed since its initial release (Drake 2012).

Though it is marketed as a survival horror video game, there are those who view it

otherwise up to the present.

Because genres are imprecise in their definitions, many games fall into several

different genres, much as in literature. Video game genres tend to overlap, creating

hundreds if not thousands of various genres and subgenres (Björk and Holopainen 412).

The reasons for this are the same as the reasons for the many genres and sub-genres of

literature; writers, or in this case developers, wish to create something new. Game

developers work with cutting-edge technology and are constantly under the pressure to

create something unique. This is not only seen in the mechanics of a game, with players

learning new forms of play and new combinations of buttons, but also in the atmosphere

and stories told. Rather than shying away from blending genres, video game developers

seem intent on combining as many unique elements as possible in the hopes of making an

exciting and immersive new experience for players. This is seen in the survival horror

genre both in mechanics (whether players can fight enemies or must hide) and the

emotions elicited from game players in terms of story. Takayoshi Sato, one of the leading

artists for the Silent Hill 2 Team, noted that "elements like a romantic story, love, human

emotion…can be part of horror," and blending those elements was important when

developing the story of *Silent Hill 2* (IGN, May). It was not enough to simply take from

the horror genre; elements of the romance genre, even aspects of love stories, were

necessary to make the game a new and exciting experience beyond the typical horror game.

To better distinguish genre in video games, a handful of components need to be examined. First and foremost is the gameplay mechanics. A game that has players solving 3D puzzles, such as *Ilomilo*, would never be considered an action game because there is no fighting involved. On the other hand, both *F.E.A.R.* and *Halo* are considered first-person shooters despite the immense differences in atmosphere simply because both games have players fighting enemies with guns from a first-person camera perspective. The mechanics and user interface (how the player interacts with the game), in essence, put the game in its most basic genre, which is typically the same genre used in marketing the game. Players of first-person shooter games know they might like both *F.E.A.R.* and *Halo* because of their very similar gameplay mechanics and interface design even though the differences in narrative are profound.

For much the same reason, survival horror games are considered a sub-genre of the action video game genre. If players wish to find survival horror games online or in stores, more often than not they have to search for them under the action genre. From a gameplay perspective, this is because survival horror games amount to very difficult action games. The purpose of the game is to fight and survive encounters with enemies while solving various in-game puzzles, ranging from locating keys to finding one's way out of a maze, and making progress towards the completion of the game. Along the way, players come across relatively weak enemies as well as more powerful enemies termed "bosses," and it is the player's job to survive these encounters on their way towards the "final boss," the enemy who needs to be defeated in order to resolve the conflict. Ewan

Kirkland goes even further, saying that most survival horror games are simply detective

games, with players working to stitch together what happened as they survive (75). On

paper, this is not very different from action games that have players fighting enemies,

which become more and more difficult as players progress, with the goal being to kill the

strongest enemy found at the end of the game.

There are two elements that make survival horror games unique among action

games: the lack of control players feel and the macabre stories told. These are important

to survival horror games thanks to the goal of the genre. For action developers, the goal is

to make a game be exciting and entertaining as players fight off hordes of enemies. Yet

the goal of the horror genre, be it in literature, film, or video games, is to frighten

audiences, with the audience member "playing at frightening himself" (Perron 3). Players

of action games expect waves of fighting, adrenaline rushes, explosions, and, at the end

of the day, victory. Players of survival horror, on the other hand, seek the thrills gained

from confronting their fears; Niedenthal describes survival horror games as a new mode

through which to explore "the depths of fear, terror, and the sublime," none of which

action game players are particularly interested in (unless, of course, they are also fans of

the survival horror genre) (168). Survival horror developers not only have to make a

video game but a *scary* video game. Players expect to have sweaty palms, be shaking in

their seats, and utter the occasional gasp of shock as enemies jump out, surprise, and

overwhelm them.

To keep players in a constant state of worry takes a proper balance, for a very

crucial relationship has to be established between the player and the game. In action

games, players know that they are equipped to handle anything thrown their way, even if

it takes a bit of strategizing. The game facilitates enough resources and provides enough clues for players to understand their objective and be able to fight their way through. In survival horror games, players are made to feel vulnerable, weak, and unable to cope with the enemies and obstacles placed before them. This is because there is a power imbalance where the agents of evil are more powerful than the agents of truth and justice (Rouse III 23). This idea of inversion comes straight from Gothic fiction, which is obsessed with the inversion of roles, particularly roles of power, where those that submit are oftentimes portrayed as being stronger than those in control (Davenport-Hines 139, 149). Players take control of avatars they believe are the agents of truth but are therefore weaker because of it since the side of truth is weaker than the side of darkness.

In terms of playing the game, players are made to feel inferior primarily through the limitations placed on them. Players are limited in terms of what they can do, whom they can talk with, and how they can interact with the world. They might only be able to use certain items as weapons, or perhaps they cannot use weapons at all. Many doors are locked, and the few places players have access to are dangerous. Health potions appear to be scattered haphazardly, making the use of life-saving resources an extremely stressful event. All these gameplay mechanics make the world feel claustrophobic to the player, as limits are heavily enforced by the game system. Players, for instance, can never leave the town of Silent Hill and cannot even access the majority of places found within the town when playing *Silent Hill 2*. Therefore, players are powerless against the game system, creating a feeling of tension or unease (Kirkland 64, 74). And while players are still at the mercy of the facilitating system in action games, survival horror games stress that

constricted state of being by not only limiting movement but also the availability of useful items and abilities, making the process of playing the game even more stressful.

The challenges must be great in survival horror games, but it is worthwhile to note that they cannot be impossible. Players might be on the edge of their seats, but they have to believe that the challenge is indeed possible. In studying the enjoyment of an activity, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi studied the emotions felt towards an activity in relation to the challenge of the activity vs. the participant's skills. As people become better skilled at a certain activity, the challenge for that activity has to increase in order for the person to keep enjoying the activity. The goal of this study was to determine the state of "flow," where a participant's skills were equal to the challenge, creating the most enjoyable state of being when performing an activity. It was determined that, if the participant is highly skilled but the challenge presented by the activity is minimal, the person may become bored or downright apathetic towards the activity. When a person has too few skills for something extremely challenging, he or she will become worried and anxious (Csikszentmihalyi 31). It is the last grouping that survival horror video game players subject themselves to, for the challenge is great, and the game facilitates a situation that makes players feel they have too few skills and resources even if they have previous experience in playing horror games.

The game, however, cannot be too overwhelming for players. If the challenge is nigh impossible, players will feel frustration, and frustration breaks immersion, which then breaks the fear felt by players. Therefore, survival horror games have the task of providing just enough information and support to make the challenge seem possible while still keeping players on the edge of their seats for fear of what is around the corner. In a

study completed to determine what scared both casual players (those who play video games fewer than several hours a week) and dedicated game players, Joel Windels discovered that repeated failures meant that players were forced to repeat several scary scenes, with each repetition losing some of its initial frightening edge. Eventually frustration would overshadow the fear, and players would no longer be frightened (Windels 2014). In fact, in a study performed by deltaDNA, it was found game players quit games 45% of the time because of an imbalance in difficulty (Robinson 2014). While players are searching for a challenge, they are also looking for a scare, and the challenge cannot be so overwhelming as to diminish the fear factor involved.

Developers did not simply dream up entirely new ways of creating fear and tension for the purpose of scaring game players; they heavily borrowed devices and scare tactics from a variety of fields. The atmosphere, stories, and even certain mechanics of gameplay that distinguish survival horror games from their action counterparts are taken primarily from two distinct sources: horror cinema and Gothic literature. Both have played vital roles in the ways developers create the tension, fear, and horror that are crucial to the survival horror genre. Developers are quick to point out the movies and novels that influenced them the most in the development of their games. Takayoshi Sato of the Silent Hill 2 Team noted that some of the team's biggest influences were "movies like Adrian Lyne's *Jacob's Ladder*, and movies from David Lynch. Of course, Hitchcock, David Fincher, and David Cronenberg, too" (IGN August).

Perhaps the most basic similarity between horror fiction and survival horror video games is the reactions pulled from audiences. Watching a horror movie and playing a survival horror game are inherently physically-stimulating activities; players expect to

physically react to them, shivering in their seats, feeling their hands become sweaty, and even gasping and screaming when enemies appear (Perron 122-125). Audiences become victims of the plot just as much as the protagonists, as they feel for the protagonists, jump when the enemies appear, and cry when their heroes perish. Players of survival horror games seek out that thrill, which Edmund Burke notes in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* is, in fact, a beautiful thing because of the distance between the scene and the audience (Davenport-Hines 85, 149). The controller and video gaming platform create enough distance so that players know their physical bodies are safe; they get the thrill of fear without the dangers involved.

The biggest horror cinematic impact on video games is the way in which video game developers create tension and fear through camera angles and lighting. Obscurity is a very important element to the horror genre, and the ways in which players remain in the dark, both mentally in terms of story and physically in that their avatar is moving around in dark spaces, have been derived heavily from horror cinema. Camera angles play a significant role in keeping players unaware of their surroundings (Niedenthal 174). For games like *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* and *F.E.A.R.,* players are seeing the world through a first-person perspective, meaning they can only see what is directly in front of them. If they want to know if something is chasing after them, they literally have to move their avatar around and face the fear head-on. In third-person games, where players see a certain radius around their avatar, darkness is often used to keep enemies, objects, and other elements hidden, although *Silent Hill 2* notably uses fog for the same purpose (176). Several games, including *Fatal Frame* and the *Silent Hill* series, even employ fixed camera angles, where players have no control over the camera and therefore can only see

what the game is presenting to them in that particular moment. One camera angle might show the front of a house, but once players enter the house, the camera switches to an overhead view, showing players the vastness of the main foyer.

This lack of control increases the sense of powerlessness players feel in their environments and controls what they see. In Windels's findings on horror game players, one significant discovery was that a potent atmosphere created a significant amount of tension in players. Distorting camera angles engage players, even if nothing is happening, because there is a constant feeling of a nearby threat. The threat of an enemy is found to be scarier than the enemy itself, and camera angles which hide more than they reveal can heighten this emotional response (Windels 2014). If players cannot see around the corner, they do not know if an enemy is lurking in hiding or if it is safe to move forward, yet they have to turn the corner nevertheless. Just as these camera angles, when used in horror cinema, engage viewers and draw them into the fictional world, these same camera angles, when used in video games, help to heighten the tension and fear felt by players, thus increasing the engagement between the player and the game universe.

If the first element crucial to a survival horror game is the fear felt by players due to a seeming lack of control, the second element is the macabre settings and stories. Survival horror games are much darker, gorier, and psychologically disturbing than action games. Rather than pitting players against aliens, bandits, or supernatural enemies, players are pitted against psychologically and physically gruesome beasts, including zombies, deformed animals, and bloody mannequins. These enemies are encountered fewer times than the average foes in action games, never allowing players to become familiar with them in order to keep the tension high. Gore by itself generally is

unsatisfying, but when gore is combined with narrative or other factors, it can be surprisingly scary for players (Windels 2014). The environments and enemies, therefore, are darker and sinister than an action game in order to be not only a challenge but a disturbing challenge that most players would rather avoid.

The stories themselves often tackle disturbing and difficult subject matters, forcing players to look at taboo subjects as they virtually confront their own mortality. The *Silent Hill* franchise deals with a Christian ritual gone wrong, with people having to face their sins such as murder, sexual abuse, and abortion, while the game series *The Suffering* has players confronting enemies that depict the various forms of the death penalty (Rouse III 15). The issues are much more personal, and therefore much scarier, to the player, than in any other genre of video games. Yet this heightened sense of fear helps immerse the players into the game. Because the story tackles taboo subjects, it is guaranteed that players who are playing to experience the story (rather than emphasizing mastery of mechanics) will have emotional reactions as well as strong opinions concerning what is taking place. This, then, heightens the connection players feel towards the characters, environments, and overall story.

Many of the characteristics found in survival horror video games, both in mechanics and in narrative, hail from Gothic literature. Deception and illusion, often created through camera angles but also created with sound effects, and a feeling of helplessness are both at the crux of the Gothic literary genre and one of the primary focuses of survival horror games (Davenport-Hines 139, 160). These sensations can come in a variety of forms, from players turning the corner only to find a monster staring them in the eye to learning that the character whom they have controlled from the beginning is

actually a murderer. Players cannot take anything for granted in survival horror games; allies can become foes, darkness might be hiding a deadly enemy, and places that look tranquil may actually serve as traps.

Decay is another equally important element of survival horror, much as it is in Gothic fiction; enemies are dead or dying, disturbing creatures, and players encounter these foes in dilapidated castles, rusty, run-down industrialized zones, and abandoned towns (Davenport-Hines 3-4). This leads, in part, to the extensive use of outdated relics and materials found in survival horror games. Dozens of survival horror games, for instance, have protagonists keeping a written journal, something nostalgic and smelling of Matthew Lewis, Edgar Allan Poe or Bram Stoker (Kirkland 66-67). This sense of decay means that there is a lack of impact between the player and his environment, for the environment is old, withered, and ultimately stuck in the past. If players examine their surroundings, it tends to produce the deadpan response of "nothing strange here" or "nothing out of the ordinary back here" appearing in text at the bottom of the screen, even if that area has blood stains, scattered documents, and destroyed furniture. Whatever caused the initial chaos is gone, leaving behind a mess players are forced to find their way through (Kirkland 71). Players cannot stop what has already happened simply *because* it has already happened. They are working in an environment that has become decayed due to inactivity, destruction, and death, and their impact on the environments in such a game is extremely limited.

Along with the sense of powerlessness that comes with setting events in the past is the sense of confusion in the forms of labyrinths, mazes, and puzzles. Gothic literature is brimming with mazes, both mental and physical, and survival horror games are equally

packed. *Resident Evil 4* utilizes a hedge maze found within the old, Spanish castle, while

Silent Hill 2 has players moving around an underground labyrinth with the help of a

disjointed map that only reveals places players have already visited. Pyramid Head, an

invincible enemy that can kill players with a single hit, will randomly appear in various

parts of the labyrinth, making exploration of the area that much more difficult and that

much scarier for players. These mazes and puzzles serve a variety of purposes, including

breaking up the monotony of traveling, giving the player a rest from fighting, and forcing

them to backtrack in order to find new resources, doors, and objects of interest

(Niedenthal 174-175). Yet these mazes also work to further immerse the player.

Windels's findings prove that atmosphere and the threat of an enemy engage survival

horror video game players much more than constant, straightforward struggling (Windels

2014). Mazes, especially ones which utilize distorted camera angles, create a very tense

environment that sucks players into the game world, increasing immersion and therefore

increasing their connection with the characters, setting, and story.

  All these influences imported from Gothic literature and horror cinema are what

distinguish the survival horror genre from the action genre. Rather than making players

feel powerful, providing them necessary information and resources as they encounter

increasingly difficult foes, survival horror games keep players in a constant state of

tension by keeping them at a disadvantage. Resources and information are limited, and

camera angles, narrative cues, and environments borrowed from the horror genre of other

entertainment mediums work to make players feel powerless in a claustrophobic

environment while increasing their sense of immersion in the video game universe. The

taboo subjects touched upon, gore and blood shown, and necessity to elicit fear from

audiences in order to be considered successful combine with gameplay mechanics that undermine a player's ability to deal with enemies in order to create the survival horror genre.

These next sections will take the analysis of these macabre stories one step further by analyzing them under the light of literary genre theories. Survival horror games blend many elements from various genres, and, in terms of literary genre, two stand out. The layout of story, the symbolism involved, and the emotions required of the genre cause the survival horror genre stories to fall somewhere between romance and tragedy. The properties in these games' stories will be separated by these two genres, highlighting the specific elements each genre has contributed to the stories told through survival horror video games.

LITERARY GENRE: ROMANCE

In literary circles, romance covers a wide range of topics and stories. It can focus on a quest, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, or a love tale like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Over the centuries, various forms of the romance genre have come and gone, as have the theories describing and detailing the necessary elements of the romantic adventure. It might seem strange to think that the stories told in survival horror video games have anything to do with this particular genre, but the devices used are surprisingly similar, if given different names in each field.

For this analysis, I am using Northrop Frye's theory of romance. In his analytical work *The Anatomy of Criticism,* Northrop Frye developed a cyclical form for the genres, showing an overlap between the various literary genres and highlighting the properties of each. A formalist and Aristotelian, Frye logically outlined what he felt was involved in the romance genre, beginning with the simple observation that every romance tale is, in one form or another, an "adventure" or "quest." The quest follows a protagonist or group of protagonists who are set against a definite antagonist, with everything happening being "focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy" (Frye 186-187). Similarities with this simple concept and video game stories should appear right away; the player (protagonist) is sent on a quest or adventure against a definite antagonist or series of antagonists, and all the events which the player encounters assist him or her in some way to defeat the antagonist.

But the similarities do not stop there in terms of the basics of a story. For Northrop Frye, there are four major stages of a romance plot, with three being essential and one being optional. The first crucial stage is the establishment of the overarching

conflict, or action, of the plot. The action can involve multiple smaller conflicts or confrontations, known as agons, but these all relate to the overarching action taking place. The second, which Frye terms as *pathos*, occurs with the struggle and possible death of the protagonist and/or the antagonist. This is when the hero and the antagonist come together to do battle to determine the fate of the conflict. The third essential stage primarily concerns the protagonist, for it deals with his reappearance and recognition as the hero of the quest and is known as *anagnorisis*. After the antagonist is defeated, the hero is rewarded for his valiant efforts, usually in the form of a bride, riches, or glory. Frye's optional fourth stage, *sparagmos*, occurs between the second and third essential stages and involves the disappearance of the hero after the foe has been vanquished but before the protagonist's reappearance. These four stages, according to Frye, are what constitute the typical romance tale (192-193).

For video game players and ludologists both, this outline of plot should sound resoundingly similar to the basics of storytelling in video games. As noted above, Björk and Holopainen see games as a series of goals, with one goal leading to a more challenging goal until the main goal is completed (416-430). In literature, one agon leads to the next agon until the overarching action is completed. These ideas are identical, with players dealing with minor agons in order to become better immersed in the fictional reality as well as to develop a bond with the characters involved. After solving all the minor agons, game players reach the final stages, complete the overarching quest (or goal), and manage to complete the game.

The other essential stages have their own vocabulary in video gaming circles. For literary critics, the second necessary stage expounded on is the moment when the

protagonist and antagonist collide and one or both dies. For Frye, this is the moment of pathos, yet for game players, this is known as the "final boss fight." Players have, no doubt, dealt with dozens if not hundreds of enemies to get to the end of the game where the final boss awaits, but it is only with the destruction of the final boss that the final goal, or overarching action, can be completed. Once the final boss is defeated, the recognition of the hero, Frye's third essential stage, occurs in the form of the final cutscene, where players watch as their avatars enact the final scene and either die a hero or escape, the conflict having now been resolved. Avatars are not the only ones, however, who are recognized; players are also recognized for their deeds at the end of the game, for achievements are granted, scores are given, and special items are unlocked, allowing players to gain a reputation in the video gaming community for their ability to beat the game. Frye's fourth optional stage is found in a few games, with the protagonist disappearing for some time in the final cutscene before reappearing, but those are the exception rather than the norm.

Let us take *Silent Hill 2* to highlight the similarities between Frye's essential stages of romance and Björk and Holopainen's theory of video games being a series of goals for the player to complete. In the latter theory, players arrive at Silent Hill to discover whether or not Mary, James's presumably dead wife, is still alive. They are told that they need to go to the park along Toluca Lake, and, by exploring the initial area of Silent Hill and finding various clues, they learn they must first go through a series of apartment complexes before making their way to the park. Once they arrive at the park, players meet Maria, who then tells them they have to find Laura, a little girl who knew Mary while she was in the hospital. Laura runs off to the hospital, which is inhabited by

even stronger enemies than the apartments, requiring James to find new weapons and items. Their journey to find Laura takes them through the hospital to an underground labyrinth, which is filled with puzzles and hidden items. Upon completing the labyrinth, players journey across the lake, make it to the Lakeside Hotel where Mary is said to be waiting, and, after a bit more puzzle-solving, manage to finally find the ghost of Mary, who players must then defeat in order to finally escape the confines of Silent Hill.

Looking at the game in this manner clearly defines the various goals laid out and how players manage to complete these goals. To get to Point A, players must do actions X, Y, and Z. This can be broken even further down from the overarching plot points. Again, taking *Silent Hill* 2 as an example, players, in order to get to Toluca Lake, need to find a key to the apartment, get through the apartment, and survive an encounter with Pyramid Head. Only then can they reach the park. Upon reaching Point A (the lake), they are then told to go to Point B (in this case, the hospital), and so on and so on, until the final goal, in this case the act of finding Mary, is accomplished.

Now let us take a look at this same story through Frye's essential stages of romance. The action stated at the very beginning is that James must find his wife, Mary. He first believes he can find her at the park next to Toluca Lake. On his way there, he encounters a variety of characters, both enemies and allies, in the town as well as in the apartment complexes. Since players are taking control of James and only James, everything they encounter is judged in relation to how it impacts James. Upon arriving at Toluca Lake, a major agon occurs in which he sees Maria, Mary's doppelganger. From this encounter, he learns more of Laura and searches her out, moving from the bowling alley to the hospital to the labyrinth in an attempt at finding her, all the while avoiding

conflict with the wandering monsters of the town. Finally, after all these minor encounters, he reaches the final pathos, the final encounter, in the form of Mary's ghost, whom he defeats. The story, based on the player's actions, is completed, and the final cutscene revealing the anagnorisis is revealed. Players are rewarded with an ending that coincides with their style of playing the game, bringing all their previous minor agons into context.

In both layouts, there is a series of events which lead up to an ultimate event that was defined at the beginning as being the main action, or goal, of the protagonist (in video games' case, the player). Players go on an adventure, completing a series of goals, or, in Frye's terminology, coming in contact with a series of agons, in order to reach the ultimate goal, which in survival horror games always takes the form of a fight with the ultimate antagonist. After completing the goal, or action, players and avatars are recognized as heroes in both the game world and the video gaming community. The layout of the game for a ludologist, therefore, is almost identical to the layout of a romance story for a writer or literary scholar, just with different terminology being used for the different fields.

Frye's theory of romance extends beyond the organization of the story. For Frye, romances utilize enemies that are symbolic of everything that stands against society. While the hero wishes to preserve life, light, warmth, and truth, enemies represent their counterparts, elements of winter, death, confusion, and sterility. In effect, the hero symbolizes all that makes society flourish, while enemies represent all that could destroy the fabric of existence. When the protagonist defeats the antagonist, the protagonist

stands for "victory of fertility over the waste land" (Frye 187, 193). For Frye, victory over enemies is symbolic of victory over all that which threatens the hero's reality.

Enemies in survival horror games take on the same meanings as antagonists in Frye's romance theory. The most basic of enemies, the zombie, represents death and helplessness against not only biological threats but the threat of death in general. But many survival horror games go even further in their symbolism and representation of enemies in order to make truly horrifying monsters. *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* has players hiding from demented humanoids with steel knives for claws and deformed faces, and it is presumed these figures were former guards under Baron Alexander who went mad from his experiments. *Silent Hill 2*'s enemies go one step further, not representing society's fears but the avatar James's fears and, more specifically, his psychological state of mind. Pyramid Head, the iconic enemy of the game, symbolizes James's anger and sexual frustration during Mary's confinement in the hospital. Pyramid Head kills Maria, Mary's doppelganger, three times, revealing James's most destructive nature and alluding to the ending in which James learns he killed Mary in the hospital. Enemies, therefore, are not just creatures and beings whom players mow down with the power of advanced weaponry, as they would be seen in an action game; they are beings that disturb the very fabric of society and must be avoided or defeated in order to return the world to normalcy.

In both literature and video games, there are characters whom audiences see interacting with the main character but who are not necessarily followed. They are not enemies in the sense of the monsters roaming, but they impact the protagonist's journey in one form or another. In literature, these characters are known as minor characters; in

video games, they are given the name NPCs, or Non-Playable Characters. In romance literature, minor characters are distinguished primarily in relation to the protagonist; they are either for or against the quest (Frye 195). Amoral characters in romance literature are few and far between, and if they are presented as amoral and apathetic in the beginning, by the end, it is revealed they work for or at least favor one side over the other. Those that remain amoral, according to Frye, "suggest spirits of nature," standing as beings which do not enter the conflict but merely watch from afar (195).

Non-Playable Characters work in much the same way in video games with romantic literary tendencies, survival horror games included. People with whom the avatar comes in contact either support him along the way or work in some way to block his path. In *Resident Evil 4*, it is apparent right away that Luis Sera, a cop from Madrid, will assist Leon on his journey, while Ada Wang, though appearing amoral at first, comes to Leon's aid several times during his exploration of the Spanish village. Even the merchant is technically assisting Leon during his journey, for the merchant, though never assisting in combat, sells the player weapons and upgrades which help players (and Leon) defeat enemies as they become more difficult to tackle.

This does not mean that characters' alliances are set in stone, and indeed, in survival horror games, there are often one or two characters who switch alliances. This alludes back to the Gothic's obsession with deception and illusion; characters with whom the player has developed a level of trust turn out to be evil, corrupt, or malignant (Davenport-Hines 160). This further diminishes the power players feel they have in the game universe, for it reveals they cannot even control the relationships they have with other characters. Yet this is not always intentional on the NPC's part; an ally can turn out

of an episode of madness as easily as he or she can from rational greed or political sway. Eddy, an NPC found in *Silent Hill 2*, is first seen by players throwing up in the apartment complex, shocked at what is happening in the town but otherwise appearing harmless. By the end of the game, however, Eddy goes mad, and players learn his version of Silent Hill, the town he sees as he wanders the lonely streets, constantly reminds him of the bullying and abuse he took from the kids in school. No longer able to comprehend morality, Eddy feels everyone who judges him should be killed, as it does not matter how pretty, intelligent, or successful one is in life. Everyone and everything, in the end, is equalized in death, and he seeks this equalization. When Eddy goes mad, James is forced to defend himself against Eddy, moving Eddy in players' minds from being a relatively amoral protagonist to a powerful antagonist and thus impeding the quest. Players want to save as many people as possible, but factors outside their control oftentimes take away this ability, diminishing the sense of power players have in their environment.

As one can see, the stories told in survival horror video games take a great many elements, literary devices, and tools from the romantic genre for the purpose of telling a story. The layout of a video game heavily follows the layout of a romantic plot according to Northrop Frye's theory of romance. The similarities between the romance genre and survival horror stories run even deeper thanks to the major influences of the Gothic romantic literary movement on the stories, including the importance of enemy symbolism, deception, and the inversion of power. In effect, survival horror games are set up in much the same way that romance tales are organized, and the enemies, labyrinths, puzzles, mazes, and symbolism that serve to distract or destroy the protagonist take on similar meanings.

As in literature, however, video game stories can fall into more than one literary genre. For survival horror games, it is not enough to have these basic functions and elements. There need to be several more qualities to make them not action games, but scary, intense, and visceral experiences for players, where players seek answers in a macabre universe. These qualities are not found in the romance genre, but in the tragic genre of literature.

LITERARY GENRE: TRAGEDY

The genre of literature about which the most has been written is tragedy. Believed to go all the way back to Aristotle by some scholars, including Frye, the theory of tragedy has changed relatively little, with its focus being on an imitation of life that depicts the downfall of characters. There is a focus on one primary event rather than a series of large-scale events as well as a focus on the emotional responses from the audience. It is the emotions required of the audience's reaction as well as the detailed analysis of one specific plot found in tragedies that the survival horror stories borrow from tragedy.

In his theory of tragedy, Aristotle highlights perhaps the most important element of tragedy: imitation. Tragedy focuses on "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" ("Poetics"). Tragedies must imitate key moments in life in order for the characters to be appealing to audiences, for in tragedies, audiences must feel both pity and terror concerning the protagonist's well-being. The action is the most important element of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, with the typical plot involving a complication, an unraveling, and a denouement, in that order and in a way that imitates a serious event of life. Reversals, which are defined as changes of conditions from what is expected to what is not expected, allow for the main protagonist to move from being ignorant to being knowledgeable. Tragedies are unique, however, from other genres, as they mainly follow one "line" of action, or one specific conflict, rather than many. Because of this, tragedies are confined in terms of time, as most tragedies follow "a single circuit of the sun" ("Poetics"). Unlike the romance genre, which has no time limit, tragedies require this limitation in order to focus at a microscopic level on the particular action that is taking place.

While survival horror games do indeed take the basic structure of a romance plot for narrative structure, the structure overlaps at significant points with tragedy in order to create a very similar, linear experience. Tragedies usually only have one specific line of action, and Kirkland agrees, stating, "if survival horror games are engines for telling stories…there is really only one story that can be told, albeit with different endings" (74). Players are told in the opening cutscene what the avatar's (and their) goal is that must be completed. Once that goal is completed, the game is over. This is very different from many role-playing and action games, where there are multiple actions taking place.

Let us compare two games to better define this difference. *Final Fantasy* games, a very popular role-playing game series where players take control of anywhere from six to twelve characters in order to save the world, often have players completing several major actions. *Final Fantasy VIII* first has players fighting against Galbadia, only to change course and fight against Sorceress Edea. After defeating Edea, players are told the real threat is Sorceress Ultimecia, who exists in a future realm, so the new action focuses on getting players into the future. On top of all that is the main protagonist Squall's personal struggle to trust others, especially when he begins to fall in love with anti-Galbadian activist and future Sorceress Rinoa. Players are also made aware of a man named Laguna and his duty years ago in the Galbadian army, which he eventually abandons in order to marry his love Raine and take care of his step-daughter Ellone, who is later captured by enemy Esthar forces. All these elements combine to form the story of the game, but the story is comprised of many actions; players have to learn most of the events relating to the Esthar-Galbadian war, the role Sorceresses have played on the world's history, the role the mercenary schools have played, and Squall's relationship to not only all these

political elements but also his own friends and companions in order to master the ultimate

narrative of saving the world from the evil Sorceresses.

Survival horror games work in much more confined spaces. Each game focuses

on a specific goal with each minor agon, or confrontation, pushing towards the

completion of that goal. *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* tells players right from the

beginning that the goal is to kill Baron Alexander. As players learn of the darkness

following Daniel, hide from the various enemies while solving puzzles, and meet a

scientist named Agrippa, they continue moving in order to kill the Baron. All previous

events detailed in the scattered journal entries, rather than running parallel to the events

taking place, are directly in relation to Daniel's desire to kill the Baron and reveal a direct

chronology. Once players reach the end, they are then able to choose whether Daniel or

the Baron should be killed, dependent on who they feel is more responsible for the death

and destruction caused by their experiments. Once that decision is made, the action is

completed, and the game comes to its conclusion. There are no other actions that need to

be solved because the initial goal of the game has been completed.

Because of this confinement of action, survival horror games also take the tragic

idea of confinement concerning time. Almost all survival horror games begin in the late

afternoon or at dusk. As players progress, time passes, and enemies become much

stronger, indicating a connection between the strength of enemies and the darkness

encroaching on the player. For romances, once the action is completed, players come out

into light and morning, indicating the dawn of a new day and a restoration to normal.

Rather than coming out into a literal light, tragedies often have characters coming to the

truth, yet this spells out their doom rather than illuminating a new beginning. *Resident*

Evil 4, Silent Hill 2, and *F.E.A.R.* all utilize this movement of time, with *Resident Evil 4* being perhaps the most specific in terms of time. Leon (and players) arrives in the afternoon to the village, but after being infected with the virus, Leon passes out for nearly six hours, waking up in the evening. He then moves through the castle and research labs throughout the course of the night. Once he rescues Ashley and kills the leader of the Los Illuminados, he and Ashley ride a boat out into the ocean, where, in the distance, players can see a rising sun. A full night has passed, and the conflict has been corrected. For a more tragic version of this confinement of time, *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* has players descending to the bottommost pit of the castle, where the reversal happens, and players learn they have been in control of a murderer this whole game. This illumination of truth may very well turn players against Daniel, forcing them to sacrifice him rather than the Baron to the darkness.

Survival horror games may take the outline of romantic tales, but they confine themselves to the restriction of the number of agons followed as well as the restriction of time imposed on tragedy. Survival horror games and tragedy, however, have another very important connection that is absent in romance tales: the required reaction of audiences. According to Aristotle, the action in a tragedy must force audiences to feel fear and pity for the main and ultimately doomed protagonist. It may be aroused by supernatural elements, but the fear must come from a psychological, inner struggle that the protagonist is experiencing and which audiences can relate to on a macabre level. As Aristotle notes, "for pity, unmerited misfortune is best; for fear, misfortune of men who are similar to us" ("Poetics"). The best tragedy for Aristotle is one in which these fates are bestowed on a good man who, through hubris, brings himself down ("Poetics"). Audiences feel pity and

fear because these characters are so similar to those whom they know, and this emotional reaction is pivotal to the experience of a tragedy.

Survival horror games work in very similar ways. A survival horror game that is not scary is automatically considered an action game, for rather than making players feel vulnerable, the lack of fear gives players the strength to charge head-first into combat (Windels 2014). A survival horror game is therefore often judged, much like any form of horror entertainment, by how terrifying an experience it is to players. For a game to be scary, players must first and foremost be immersed in the game, which requires the careful balance mentioned above in terms of fear and frustration. If players become too frustrated, immersion is broken, as they are focused more on their own suffering than their avatar's struggle. A truly scary game makes players forget about the world around them and sucks them into a terrifying world that they feel they cannot escape. Because players assimilate the avatar's reality, the avatar, as Aristotle puts it, becomes "similar to us," and players fear for the misfortune that threatens the protagonist ("Poetics").

In order to immerse players into the game, an identification process takes place with the main protagonist. Players, by controlling the main protagonist, assimilate into his or her situation, taking responsibility for the avatar's actions and bearing the weight of the consequences (Chandler 11). It quickly becomes not Leon shooting the zombies, but players shooting the zombies, as it is players who are controlling the actions taken by the avatar. From this, a sort of mimicry ensues. The more players become immersed in the game, the more terrified they become; players who jump, sweat, and scream at enemies are the ones most immersed in the gaming experience. Players react in these manners despite the separation of the virtual world from the real world via technology

thanks to affective mimicry, the act of mimicking other's emotions unconsciously. When an enemy jumps out to attack Leon, players, not Leon, jump because players have assimilated Leon's situation. If it were a novel, a play or movie, Leon would be the one jumping in shock. But because players are responsible for the actions and choices made, it is players who jump at the sight of an enemy, for it is players who now have to cope with the enemy (Ekman and Lankoski 189). This reveals how important immersion is to horror; if players are not immersed, they are not assimilating the avatar's situation and therefore cannot feel the emotions required of tragedy for the characters involved.

Once players are immersed in the game, developers use a variety of tools in order to frighten players. Much of these have already been briefly touched on, from feelings of obscurity to the lack of control players feel over what is happening in terms of the narrative. But there are other elements specific to the survival horror genre to create fear. Almost every survival horror game utilizes the "jump scare," where something sudden happens, causing the player to jump in his or her seat. These are seen as being rather cheap, yet thanks to the immersive factor, they are still effective in video games. Players walking down a hallway might suddenly be pounced on by a previously-unseen enemy, or a sudden flashback will momentarily startle them. These "jump scares" keep players on edge, for players learn to be expectant at all times, which then keeps them in a state of unease and tension. Jump scares make the environment seem constantly dangerous, for players do not know when something may attack them.

What is interesting is that many action games utilize similar "jump scare" tactics but are not considered survival horror games. This is possible thanks to the strength of the enemies in relation to the protagonist; much like in tragedies, the evil side is made to be

much stronger than the side of good and justice. Players and protagonists are weaker than enemies, and death in survival horror games is often made to be as violent and graphic as possible, causing the act of dying to be a very stressful event. Dying in an action game like *Halo* or an role-playing game like *Final Fantasy VIII* might be frustrating for a few seconds, but players can easily pick up from their previous save point or checkpoint and move on. The Game Over screen is relatively downplayed, if there even is a Game Over screen, and players are rarely molested or mutilated upon their avatar's death. They simply pick themselves back up, start at the closest checkpoint, and try again.

Survival horror is different. Enemies attack players with chainsaws, axes, knives, claws, and anything visceral they can get their hands on. When they attack protagonists, blood is shown, and death is a violent event that players are forced to witness. *Resident Evil 4* became widely known thanks to the violent death shown players of the chainsaw maniac literally sawing off Leon's head, his headless corpse falling to the ground. *Silent Hill 2* has players' controllers vibrate depending on their health bar, with death being accompanied by a pulsing piece of technology in the players' hands. *Haunting Ground* may have some of the most bizarre death scenes; if killed by the maid Daniella, players hear Daniella laughing maniacally as she cuts into Fiona, the avatar, and pulls out her uterus, the phrase "Acta est Fabula" appearing in blood on screen. Death is made very physical, and little is left to the imagination (Perron 129-130). Because players assimilate their avatars' situation, such a violent death is shocking to players, making them extremely fearful of the enemies and their capability of destroying the avatar.

Other elements that frighten players relate heavily to the Gothic devices taken from literature, namely the sense of claustrophobia and lack of control protagonists feel

in such stories. Again, players are assimilating their avatar's situation, so it is not the avatar feeling the claustrophobia and lack of control, but the player. Survival horror games are known for utilizing limiting devices that would simply not be accepted in other video game genres, with players having no choice but to work around these limits (Rouse III 18). *Silent Hill 2* has nearly all the doors found equipped with broken locks, keeping players from accessing those rooms, as well as giant, plaster screens and broken roads limiting where players can go in the town. Most games also do not allow players to use weapons, or at least weapons of considerable strength. *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*, for instance, has players moving boulders, wooden structures, boxes, and crates, but for some reason, Daniel is never able to pick up a weapon and defend himself against the wandering guards. In any action or role-playing game, avatars are equipped to handle these situations, but in survival horror games, these limitations are not only accepted but expected.

In the end, survival horror games, much like tragedy, create tension by threatening the protagonist with misfortune. Players and protagonists alike are made to feel they have little control over the situation they are placed in. Players assimilate a character whom they feel is worth following, but the pressures of violent death, the tense environments, and the possibility of hidden agendas surrounding the protagonist can work to strain the player. Avatars are created to be harbingers of peace, yet their desire to do good puts players in the position of serving the same purpose in a world strongly equipped against them. Thanks to the assimilation process, avatars wander without much worry while players shiver in their seats at any hint of a possible threat.

Aristotle stated that fear is an extremely important reaction from audiences, but fear was not the only emotion noted. For a true tragedy, both fear *and pity* are required from audiences. The fear comes from the protagonist feeling threatened by misfortune, but pity is felt when the misfortune has already befallen the person, usually happening to someone who did not deserve the misfortune ("Poetics"). Many survival horror game developers agree that it is not just horror which makes a survival horror game; Takayoshi Sato remarked that, in the development of *Silent Hill 2*, "Obviously we want to scare the player, but we'd also like it if the player were to cry at some of the more emotional scenes" (IGN August).

Players tend to empathize with their avatars thanks to the assimilation process. Players, upon taking the responsibility of actions and consequences of those actions, feel responsibility for the safety of their avatar. Therefore, whenever the avatar is vulnerable to danger, players become not only scared of the danger but sympathetic towards the avatar going into danger (Perron 134-135). This is felt beyond the main avatar, as well; players might feel concerned over other Non-Playable Characters who are risking their lives to face danger or who have misfortune fall on them. Angela Orosco of *Silent Hill 2* serves as a perfect example, for players learn of her unfortunate molestation, rape and suicide, making them pity her situation and perhaps even go so far as to want to protect her. Players want to try and save as many characters as possible, and whenever misfortune befalls another, they feel the weight of the loss on their shoulders.

Players are not required to empathize with every character, and indeed, there are some characters players are made to feel apathetic towards. This is mainly established by the character's relation to the avatar; much like in a romance, where all characters are

judged in relation to the hero, in a video game, all non-playable characters are judged in relation to the avatar (Frye 195). This is important, for it directly impacts whether players feel the fear and pity necessary for a tragedy. If the character is antagonistic towards the avatar, players will clearly dislike and feel unsympathetic towards the person. Players are told right from the beginning of *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* that Baron Alexander is a terrible man who deserves death, and even after learning of the atrocities Daniel took part in, some players may still feel it is the Baron's fault and therefore continue to feel unsympathetic towards him. If a character starts as an ally but later turns antagonistic, players might feel a bit of pity for him, but the sympathy they feel for their avatar is much higher. When Eddy turns on players in *Silent Hill 2*, for instance, players may feel sorry, understanding that Eddy has simply gone mad having faced his demons in the town, yet they still care for James's safety and health first and foremost, and so they kill Eddy out of a sense of survival.

Players will feel sympathy primarily for their avatar, whose situation they are assimilating, yet it must be established that the avatar is a good person. Players will oftentimes refuse to play games if they feel the main character is unlikeable or his goal is undesirable. It is not enough to keep the avatar in good health; players must also feel his goal is worth pursuing. If misfortunate befalls a character that players feel little for, then there is no pity to be found, and players want to feel pity and sympathize with the protagonist whom they are following.

A tragedy requires the inevitable downfall of the protagonist, and survival horror game developers take this greatly into consideration by creating a variety of resolutions or denouements to the narrative, some being much happier than others. Survival horror

games are notorious for having bittersweet if not outright tragic endings, moving players

to tears as they learn the truth of their protagonist and his or her situation, often leading to

the protagonist's demise. While action games promise players, with enough time and

effort, will come out victorious in a glorious battle, survival horror games cannot make

that same promise. When more than one ending is provided, there is generally a "canon"

ending, the ending that players should aim for, but the other endings work in a variety of

ways. They not only provide players different conclusions to the narrative, but having

multiple endings increases the replay value of a game; if players know they must replay a

game multiple times to experience everything the game has to offer, it feels they are

getting more for their money.

There are some survival horror games that do, indeed, have positive endings.

Resident Evil 4 has players safely rescuing Ashley after blowing up the Los Illuminados's

base, putting an end to the zombie crisis in the small Spanish town. The horror games that

do have these sorts of endings are few and far between, however, and if the conflict is

resolved, there are usually a few loose ends left, indicating that the crisis it not entirely

over. The promise of sequels in the *Resident Evil* franchise means that zombies, in some

shape or form, will keep coming back thanks to the various bio-pharmaceutical

corporations running the world. The positive endings found in the *Silent Hill* franchise

have players leaving the town, having dealt with their avatar's inner demons, but this

does not necessarily mean the avatars are good people or that the issues are themselves

resolved. *Silent Hill 2*'s best ending, simply known as "Leave," has James leaving the

town, having been forgiven by Mary's ghost and seeking redemption by leaving with

Laura, presumably to adopt and take care of her as Mary wished. Yet that does not

change the fact that James killed his wife, that he lied to himself about his crimes, or that

he has a past history of violence and sexual aggression. He may have been forgiven,

fulfilling the requirements of a romance ending, but players no longer view him as a

completely likeable, guilt-free individual.

It is the bittersweet and negative endings available to players that truly make a

survival horror game a tragedy. Even with loose ends, horror games with positive endings

ultimately turn out to be romances; the hero has defeated the primary antagonist and

restored order to the world. It is the negative endings, therefore, that cause a video game

to be considered a tragedy, for it means the protagonist has failed in some way and has

fallen victim to the truth and his surroundings. The majority of *Silent Hill* endings have

this occurring in some form of another, with the endings to *Amnesia: The Dark Descent*

following suit. Depending on the player's choices and actions throughout the game, an

ending will be either be determined for them automatically, or a series of choices will

become available for them to pursue, ultimately giving players the choice of a romance or

tragic ending. The variety of endings does not mean that the narrative is never finished.

The Silent Hill 2 Team, in describing how the endings would function, stated, "we

prepared a couple of different types of endings, but they're all "real" endings – each

ending will give you a complete story" (IGN May). This, then, affects players' emotional

responses to the narrative and characters who players have come to love (or hate) during

their journey.

Let us take some of the negative endings found in video games to show how this

affects player's reactions. In *Silent Hill 2*, the worst ending available is unlocked if

players examine a knife they gain from Angela. It is assumed that Angela was going to

commit suicide with this knife, and while it is automatically placed in the player's inventory, the player is never told he or she has to examine the knife. If they do so, the ending "In Water" is unlocked, which has James feeling such guilt over his murder of Mary that he drowns himself in Toluca Lake. Mary's letter is read as bubbles slowly rise from the bottom of the lake, indicating he has drowned himself due to his inability to handle the truth. *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* has Daniel facing off against Baron Alexander at the very end of the game, yet this is also after players learn that Daniel has brutally tortured and slaughtered innocent men, women, and children at the behest of the Baron. Players can choose to let the darkness kill Daniel, feeling that he does not deserve to be saved, or continue to kill the Baron, believing Daniel acted out of his best interests to stop the darkness which threatened to consume all, even if it led to the death of many.

Both these endings require a reversal on the player's part, something which Aristotle says is crucial to the tragedy. Players go from sympathizing with an avatar whom they know little about to feeling little for his death. This requires that players invest enough time into the game to learn the avatar's real face but also to feel connected enough with the story to see it through to the end. Players could easily put the controller down after James watches the tape showing him murder Mary, but instead, they move him all the way to the end, facing off with Mary before watching their particular ending unfold. Players may no longer sympathize with James, but they nevertheless want to beat the game and complete the narrative, and so they push on. Once they beat Mary and see James drown himself, the narrative is complete, and a tragedy is finished; players have invested enough time and effort to desire to see the story end despite knowing James's true self.

Survival horror games may have many parallels to the romance literary genre, but the emotions required, the microscopic focus on one specific action, and the often tragic and bitter endings all hail from the realm of tragedy. Survival horror games have to scare players as well as make them feel sympathetic to the characters involved, even going so far as to move players to tears. Rather than having a series of actions taking place, survival horror games focus on one specific action, viewing it in a very direct and detailed manner. Lastly, survival horror games, unlike action games, do not promise a good ending. Many endings have characters dying, and the large payoff expected for all one's hard work and effort is not guaranteed. Players of survival horror games have to look at the journey more often than the ending as being the reward, and in the end, they often have the choice between a romantic ending and a tragic one. Their choices, actions, and deeds are given context by the ending they determine, and ultimately, the player is responsible for the genre the game most falls under.

CONCLUSION:

Video games, since their infiltration into popular culture, have been on the fringes of academic study. Over the past decade, many scholars have come to the fore to study the sociological, economic, and physical effects of video games on society as well as the ways in which video games function and are played. Video games have been broken down to their most basic components, and the argument on whether video games tell complete and structured narratives has long since been debated into the ground.

Literary scholarship concerning video game narrative and stories is starting to appear but still relatively new. With narrative present and strong in a wide range of video games, it is nevertheless no surprise that video games are categorized by genre not in terms of the story told, as in literature, but in terms of the mechanics involved due to the importance of the user interface and mechanics needed in order to win the game. Yet the narrative told does have an impact on the genre, for action games and survival horror games have many similarities in terms of gameplay mechanics, yet there are two genres for reasons of macabre story-telling and inversion of power, both trademarks hailing from Gothic literature and horror cinema.

By further examining the stories specifically told in survival horror video games, it becomes apparent how extensive an impact the literary tradition perhaps unconsciously has on video game stories. Survival horror games take many elements from the romantic tradition; the structure of the action unfolding, the final boss fight, and the ultimate resolution come straight from Northrop Frye's theory of romance. All characters are judged in relation to the main protagonist and his or her quest. Enemies symbolically represent all that can destroy society, from infertility to violence to death, and the

protagonist's victory over these elements is victory over the darkness and destruction that threatens society.

These stories can overlap literary genres much in the same way that game mechanics can overlap video game genres, and in this case, survival horror games contain elements of both the romance genre and tragic genre. Survival horror games, like tragic stories, focus primarily on one single action, which involves the protagonist moving from ignorance to knowledge, damning himself in the process. Both require audiences to feel fear and pity concerning the main protagonist in order to be considered successful; this is completed by making sure players immerse and assimilate themselves into the avatar's situation. If a game has multiple endings, players have the ultimate say as to which literary genre the game falls under, for their actions and decisions determine the ending, whether or not the hero comes out alive or dead. Each ending puts the player's actions into a particular context, and a player who makes many poor and tragic decisions will no doubt see their efforts come to a tragic conclusion.

This process can by no means be completed with every video game, for not every video game has a story to tell. Yet the number of games telling serious stories that grab the player's attention is growing steadily with each year, and as the technology becomes more advanced, players are offered new ways in which to shape the story to their own personal experience. These are the stories that the younger generations are remembering, studying, and experiencing, and it may be good to start seriously considering them in light of the literary tradition, for the influences these theories have on video game stories and narrative are much deeper than perhaps first imagined.

APPENDIX I

TITLE	DEVELOPER	PRODUCER	DATE OF RELEASE	SYSTEM
Amnesia: The Dark Descent	Frictional Games	Frictional Games	2010	PC
Bioshock: Infinite	Irrational Games	2K Games	2013	PC, Xbox360, PS3
Dead Space 2	Visceral Games	EA	2011	PC, Xbox360, PS3
F.E.A.R.	Monolith Productions	Vivendi Universal	2005	PC, Xbox360, PS3
Final Fantasy VIII	Squaresoft	Square EA	1999	PS1
Forbidden Siren	Project Siren	Sony	2003	PS2
Halo	Bungie	Microsoft Studios	2001	Xbox
Haunting Ground	Capcom	Capcom	2005	PS2
Heavy Rain	Quantic Dream	Sony Computer Entertainment	2010	PS3
Ilomilo	Southend Interactive	Microsoft	2010	Xbox360
Last of Us	Naughty Dog	Sony Computer Entertainment	2013	PS3
Mass Effect	Bioware	Microsoft Game Studios	2007	PC, Xbox360
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Capcom	2005	Gamecube, PS2
Silent Hill 2	Konami	Konami	2001	PS2

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