GAMING WITH THE PASTS: A STUDY OF TRAUMA IN SELECT VIDEO GAMES

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GAMING WITH THE PASTS: A STUDY OF TRAUMA IN SELECT VIDEO GAMES

By

Malsawma

Department of English

Under the Supervision of Dr. Thongam Dhanajit Singh

Submitted

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in English Literature of Mizoram University, Aizawl

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
Post Box No : 190   Gram : MZU Aizawl - 796004

Dr Thongam Dhanajit Singh

Asst. Professor

Phone No.   0389 - 2330631

Mobile : 9862740230

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *Gaming with the Pasts: A Study of Trauma in Select Video Games* submitted to Mizoram University by Malsawma in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English is purely an original research work accomplished by the scholar under my direct supervision and neither the dissertation nor any part of it has so far been submitted to any educational institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I am, therefore, glad to recommend in all fairness that this dissertation be sent to the examiner(s) for an expeditious evaluation for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

Aizawl

18[Th] July 2021

(Dr Thongam Dhanajit Singh)

Supervisor

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION

I, Malsawma, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English Literature.

(MALSAWMA)

Candidate

(PROF. K.C. LALTHLAMUANI)   **(Dr. THONGAM DHANAJIT SINGH)**

Head,   Supervisor

Department of English

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DISSERTATION

ACT – Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

APA – American Psychiatric Association

BDD – Body Dysmorphic Disorder

CD – Compact Disc

CRT – Cathode Ray Tube

CSA – Child Sexual Abuse

DOS – Disk Operating System

FMS – False Memory Syndrome

IBM – International Business Machines

IGN – Imagine Games Network

LAN – Local Area Network

LCD – Liquid Crystal Display

LED – Light-emitting Diode

MIT – Massachusetts Institute of Technology

NPC – Non-player character

PC – Personal Computer

PTSD – Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

ROM – Read Only Memory

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

The genre of video games[1] has today made significant inroads in popular culture. Its impact on society and its depiction of contemporary society are well known. This has therefore called for serious academic intervention. While its technical aspects set it apart from literary narratives, it has also a narrative element in it as a significant aspect. The narrative aspect in it, apart from being a pastime activity, also carries significant literary value like any other literary genre. This aspect gives space for serious analysis by using appropriate literary theories. This dissertation analyzes the narrative aspect in four video games – *Alan Wake* (2010), *American McGee's Alice* (2000), *Alice: Madness Returns* (2011), *Silent Hill 2 (2001)*, focusing on the depiction of trauma. While the central line of research here is on trauma, to give more clarity on the genre of video games and its closeness to literature, the term video game is defined and a short historical account of its development is presented in this chapter.

The inception of the video game occurred in the middle part of the previous century so it is still a comparatively new genre in popular culture. As such, the definition of the term will require some expansion, to better illustrate the medium's capabilities as well as the features that set it apart from other narrative forms. What exactly the term "video game" means will have to be dissected first. By taking the words "video" and "game", it would seem to mean that it is similar to other types of games such as a board game or a card game, except the medium that the game is played is on video.

While there can be various characteristics of a video game, Mark J.P. Wolf has spelled out its four major elements as:

> conflict (against an opponent or circumstances), rules (determining what can and cannot be done and when), use of some player ability (such as skill, strategy, or luck), and some kind of valued outcome (such as winning vs. losing, or the attaining of the highest score or fastest time for the completing of a task) (3).

The vast genre of video games – ranging from strategy to action to puzzle-based ones – means that the way a particular game functions will be quite different from another one.

The word "video" in its strictest definition refers to "the use of an analog intensity/brightness signal displayed on a cathode ray tube (hereafter CRT), the kind of picture tube used in a television set or computer monitor, to produce raster-based (filled-area images, as opposed to wireframe ones) imagery" (Wolf 5). Although all arcade[2] and home console[3] video game systems used CRTs for their display, yet some of them produced a different form of imagery from raster that is called vector. As more advanced display screens such as liquid crystal display (hereafter LCD) and light-emitting diode (hereafter LED) came into the fray, with video games being displayed on them as well, the definition for the term became something more conceptual and less tied to a specific imaging technology. To further support this, in the modern day, older games that were displayed on CRTs have been made to run on newer display systems as well. Wolf concludes that a concise definition for the term "video game" has been blurred because the games themselves have evolved far beyond their origins as games that were played on a television screen with raster imagery.

The very first instances of what could be traced back as video games occurred in the 1950s. In 1949, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology housed the Whirlwind mainframe computer, which was the first of its kind to use a cathode ray tube as a graphic display. This cathode ray tube or CRT display was previously already being used by televisions to display pictures, and upon its implementation into the computers of the time, their size shrunk down and their ease of use increased. Following this development, in 1962, Ivan Sutherland completed his doctoral thesis at the MIT, where he developed a program that would allow for a user to create graphics on-screen with an interactive tool like a light pen in order to draw directly on the CRT screen. After this accomplishment, computers were increasingly made more accessible and thus more feasible to be owned at homes, and the invention of the microprocessor in 1971 by scientist Marcian E. Hoff made it so that "computer components could be produced more cheaply and in greater quantity" (Wolf 18). The large and bulky mainframe computers of the past were now being replaced by smaller personal computers. These

initial video games were limited in exposure to the programming community of the time. However, an electrical engineer named Nolan Bushnell transported the video game medium into a smaller coin operated unit with the help of the newly invented microprocessor technology. He named his first video game *Computer Space* (1971) and developed it with the intent of striking up a profit. It was the first arcade video game as well as a commercial success, enabling him to go on and establish his own video game company, Atari, Inc. in the following year. The company's first game was *PONG* (1972), built by Allan Alcorn, which was an arcade game that simulated the game of table tennis. The success of the coin operated versions of PONG led to the creation of a smaller home console version in 1975 which found further success, eventually becoming the "new reigning champion" of the Sears departmental store chain, outselling the previous record holder for their most profitable product, which was an Adidas sneaker (Kent 94).

The Magnavox Odyssey released by the company Magnavox in September of 1972 is the first commercial video game console. The Odyssey was the first time in history that the general population was able to take was designed as a black, white, and brown box connected by wires to two rectangular devices that acted as controllers for inputting commands to the games. Upon connecting it to a television, the Odyssey would allow players to switch between the regular television channels and the console's own channel. The system came with a total of 28 different games that came in game cards which the players could switch between to get their desired game. During the advertisement phase for the console, since the term "video game" had not yet come into use, it was advertised in its brochure as – "An electronic game simulator", "A closed circuit electronic playground", "A total play and learning experience" and "The electronic game of the future" (Willaert). The console managed to reach a total sales number of about 350,000 by 1974, and in terms of success it was "Not too shabby for an idea that took off from a few notes scribbled in New York in August of 1966" (Baer).

While the arcade games and home consoles were steadily gaining a foothold as a new addition to popular culture, the idea of a home computer was also growing in development. Computers before the 1970s were previously used almost exclusively

for business or for scientific and engineering purposes, but with the development of the microprocessor they started to be marketed towards non tech savvy users. The microprocessor has been called the "enabling technology for the personal computer" (Campbell-Kelly et al. 231) and they allowed for much more portable computers than before while also lowering the cost of production. The Apple II, the Commodore PET 2001 and the TRS-80 have been referred to as the "1977 Trinity" according to a special report included in the September 1995 issue of *Byte* Magazine. After their success in the home market, many more home computers were launched, and their large install base of video games helped spread awareness of the medium to places beyond the arcades. Companies like Apple, Commodore International, Sinclair Research, Atari and IBM emerged as the biggest names of the computer manufacturing industry. IBM also standardized computer operating systems across most home computers as well. It initially used an operating system called IBM PC DOS, co-developed by IBM and Microsoft, which in subsequent updates and revisions became the MS DOS system, the predecessor to modern day Windows operating systems. IBM had one main competitor in the form of Apple's Macintosh computer product line, a distinction which still follows to current times.

After the great leaps in technology achieved during the 1990s, it meant that consoles and personal computers were now put into equal consideration when developing video games. While personal computers were standardized, with most games running on the most popular operating system of Microsoft's latest versions of Windows, the consoles continued to compete with one another, and the sixth-generation of video game consoles began during the late 1990s, with the release of the Sega Dreamcast in 1998. The major competitors of this generation were the aforementioned Dreamcast, Sony's PlayStation 2, Nintendo's GameCube, and a new console series launched by Microsoft called the Xbox. As mentioned before, games like *Doom* had popularized the idea of playing with other people using different systems, so the main innovation of this generation of consoles was the utilization of the internet to connect users worldwide with a company's services. With video games now being widely accepted, game and console sales reached figures that were previously only seen during the golden age of video games during the 1970s and early

80s. One of the most popular video games ever developed, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004), managed "one million copies sold in nine days since release and £24m in gross revenue in just the first weekend, according to Chart-Track" (Heald). Video games were now making more profits than blockbuster films of the time like the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* series of movies. The means and cost of production for big budget games also began to rival those of Hollywood movies. *Shenmue* (1999), created by Yu Suzuki and developed by Sega AM2, was reported to have cost 70 million dollars, but at the Game Developers Conference in 2011, he clarified that it was "only $47 million", which was still much more expensive than any other video game at the time. These great expenditures and efforts undertaken by the developers of video games shows that the medium has become much larger than when it initially started. They went from being a simple pastime activity into a medium that is capable of immersing players into completely new and different worlds within the stories that they are able to tell.

The potential for storytelling in video games was perhaps first seen in the text adventure game called *Colossal Cave Adventure* developed by Will Crowther between the years of 1975 and 1977. The gamers are brought into the world of a caver in such a way that they are traversing an unknown cave. It was completely text based, having no graphics, instead it allowed for interaction from the players by typing in simple commands such as 'e' to direct their character to go east. Crowther was a computer programmer, caver and rock climber, whose previous work included being part of the team that created ARPANET, the forerunner to the internet. He combined his love of caving with his experience as a programmer to create the game. In 1975, he completed the first version of it, titled *ADVENT,* and his daughters Sandy and Laura "were among the first to experience it-if not the very first-because it was written for them by their father, Will Crowther" (Montfort Loc 1500). With the help of Don Woods, a graduate student at Stanford University, Will Crowther's cave adventure game was expanded upon in 1977, now featuring supernatural elements. The source code for this updated game was distributed among the computer enthusiasts of the time. The game would go on to fuel the adventure game genre, leading to the creation of later games like *King's Quest* (1984) which "proved stories had a place in games instead of just on attract

screens and tucked away in the manual" (Cobbett). The adventure game would continue to grow in popularity, and *Mystery House* (1980) was released by On-Line Systems, developed by the husband and wife team of Ken and Roberta Williams. Inspired by *Colossal Cave Adventure*, the couple developed the game upon finding that the market for adventure games was quite scarce. In the game, the players are put into an abandoned Victorian mansion where they meet with other seven other characters, and they must solve the mysterious deaths that begin occurring during the events of the game. The addition the game made of using graphical scenes to portray what was happening instead of the traditional text display proved to be a great step forward for the genre, as the game sold over 10,000 copies priced at 24.95 dollars per copy. The simple line drawings of *Mystery House* were sufficient enough to increase the quality of the experience for many users, and it went on to sell 80,000 copies (DeMaria 139).

In the year 1983, Cinematronics released *Dragon's Lair,* an adventure game which attempted a wildly different presentation from the other games available at the time. It utilized a LaserDisc for storage, allowing "animated cartoon graphics that looked like something out of a Walt Disney cartoon" (Kent 224). The visual style of the game was reminiscent of Disney cartoons as it was created by Don Bluth, who was an animator who had worked at the company prior to the development of the game. The presentation of the story of the game was the focus instead of skill-based controls like in most arcade games. The story follows the adventures of a knight named Dirk who is on a quest to rescue Princess Daphne from an evil castle populated by all manner of hazards. The manner in which the game functioned was that it would play animated scenes from the LaserDisc that depicted Dirk's progress through the castle, and whenever an obstacle presented itself, the player had to input some kind of command on the controller to overcome that obstacle. However, this meant that the game was largely scripted and would play out the same each time it was played, leading to a lack of replayability. Despite this, the game was a success mostly due to the new technology being used, and was able to sell more than 16,000 machines in 1983. The success of the arcade version meant that various home console and computer

versions were also developed, and for the parent company Cinematronics it resulted in an additional $2 million in profits.

The newer computers during the 1990s were beginning to rival the video game consoles in performance, and this meant that computers at home were able to handle audio and produce output similar to television, all at a reasonable price. In order to showcase the new technologies available at the time, there arose three "killer applications" that were to compete with the massively successful console industry (Kent 456). These three applications were – *Myst* (1993), *The 7th Guest* (1993) and *Doom* (1993).

The graphic adventure games previously popularized on PCs by titles like *Colossal Cave Adventure* and *Mystery House* continued to see technological advancements, a landmark of which was the aforementioned game *Myst*. It was created by the brothers Rand and Robyn Miller, under the name of their development studio called Cyan Studios. The idea for the game was a "surrealistic adventure with elaborate puzzles" (Kent 456), it was quite different from the popular games at the time like *Super Mario Brothers* (1985) or *Sonic the Hedgehog* (1991), which favored twitchy reflex based gameplay over more thoughtful means of progression. To showcase the capabilities of the new CD-ROM format, the game was going to be vast in scope, so it was funded with the help of the companies Sunsoft and Broderbund. The game was initially released for Apple's Macintosh system, before being ported to various other platforms, including Microsoft Windows, as well as the Sega Saturn and PlayStation. The game did not present a challenge in the traditional sense that there would be a game over if they failed at a particular task. The player is placed into the role of an unnamed person who finds a book titled "Myst", and they are transported to a mystical island of the same name upon reading the book. The goal of the game is simply to explore the island and to figure out a way to return to their own world. Very little exposition is provided, with the story of the game being tasked to the player to piece together by finding clues across the island.

In the same year that *Myst* was released for sale, *The 7th Guest* was also released by Trilobyte and published by Virgin Interactive. Similar to *Myst*, it was also a means

of showcasing the capabilities of the new CD-ROM storage system. The game shared similarities with *Myst* in that they were both adventure games with a focus on exploration and solving puzzles. The increased storage capacity of the CD-ROM meant that the developers could include live action video clips that would play out instead of 3D models, similar to what *Dragon's Lair* had done years before. The game tells the tale of a man named "Ego" who awakens in a deserted mansion that once belonged to a thief and murderer named Henry Stauf. As he explores the mansion, he comes across visions of events that happen in the past and it is up to the player to help him piece together what has happened to leave the mansion in its abandoned state. It was intended by the developers Rob Landeros and Graeme Devine, to be more than just a puzzle game, and they "coined the phrase "Hyper Movie" to describe the medium in which we work" (344). Thus, video games began to delve into an area that focused on narrative and were becoming more similar to movies in the way they showcased their stories.

The third of the "killer apps" that helped PCs compete with consoles in the video game market was *Doom*, developed by id Software and released in December 10, 1993. Unlike the other two games *Myst* and *The 7th Guest,* both of which featured slower paced and thoughtful exploration adventures, *Doom* was a first-person shooter in which players took on the role of a futuristic soldier who had to fight for his survival against demons in the space setting of Mars. This first-person perspective simply means that the player experiences the visuals of the game through the eyes of the protagonist, it was seen before in games like *Maze War* (1974), and id's own game *Wolfenstein 3D* (1992), but *Doom* had popularized it to such an extent that the term "Doom clone" was used to refer to games using this perspective for many years to come. id also popularized the "shareware" model of product distribution – allowing consumers to download the first section of the game for free or order it by mail, and if it performed up to their expectations, they could purchase the complete game by contacting the publisher. The game also showcased the possibility of multiple people playing the same game at once, where if one or more computers were connected through LAN cables, then players owning copies of *Doom* could play together. It was not the first game capable of multiplayer in this way, but it was the one that popularized

it. Despite all the technological achievements the game accomplished, it did not further the potential for storytelling in videogames in any meaningful way, in fact, John Carmack, the developer of the graphics engine the game runs on, was famously quoted as saying that "Story in a game, is like a story in a porn movie; it's expected to be there, but it's not that important" (105). So, while there were indeed video games where a gripping narrative was the primary intention like *Myst* and *The 7ᵗʰ Guest*, there was still an audience for simple and fun games like *Doom*.

Popular games like the previously mentioned *Shenmue* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* began further pushing the capabilities of the medium of video games during the late 90s and early 2000s. *Shenmue* in particular featured a simulated virtual world where the NPCs would behave as close to real life as possible at the time – shopkeepers would open and close their shops, buses would run according to a schedule, the characters would all have their own schedule in accordance with the in-game clock. The game was designed to simulate real world events for the main character Ryo Hazuki to live out as he investigated clues related to the murder of his father. While other games would only portray the more interesting or exciting scenes in a character's story, players in *Shenmue* would have to be with Ryo through most of his day-to-day activities – they would have to control him as he earns money through part time jobs, buys food, questions people about his father's murder, and does other activities throughout the game. The game's creator Yu Suzuki iterated that his goal for the game was focused on three keywords – "leisurely", "fully" and "gently", and he wanted a game experience that was the opposite of the brief arcade games that he had previously worked on, opting instead for "a game that didn't have that kind of time limit" (Corriea).

In the video games that are to be dealt with in this study, their narrative structures are very much similar to what can be found in traditional modes of storytelling such as books and movies, with the exception being that there must be some interaction from the player in order to progress the narrative. The input by the player character will be determining the outcome of the various scenarios that are presented in these games, and depending upon the game, there can be a variety of options or paths available to be taken. And while some games will always have a preset

definitive outcome for the narrative to follow, others allow for diverging storylines and endings for the players.

When talking of narrative in a video game, it would usually refer to depicting characters interacting with each other in the form of a "cutscene" – scenes that are typically non interactive and play out like a typical scene from a movie, only requiring the player to watch them. These cutscenes are used to tell story in a more traditional way as opposed to storytelling within the gameplay sections themselves. The video game *Maniac Mansion* (1987), created by Ron Gilbert, is "widely credited with the creation of the "cutscene" concept" (Buecheler). In the game, scenes that were out of the control of the player would often be shown, and the player could only view the scene which would add exposition to the story. The advancement of the narrative does not entirely occur within the cutscenes only, for instance, characters may say lines of dialogue during gameplay sections that further develop the story, or some events may happen when the player is in control and not just watching a readymade cutscene. The usage of cutscenes in video games for storytelling has been met with the common criticism in that it"simply belongs to another medium" (Holmes Loc 1411). Some noted film directors such as Steven Spielberg and Guillermo del Toro have even spoken on the matter. Del Toro, who is an avid gamer himself, stated in a podcast interview that "When we come to a cinematic piece, I jump it. I go 'I'm not watching a movie', f*** you'. I want a game" (Ken Levine 04:59). He did not approve of taking control and interactivity away from the player, he wanted games to not just show and tell him a story, he wanted to interact with the story that was present in games.

Steven Spielberg, who has had experience with games as well, being the creator of the *Medal of Honor* franchise, shared similar sentiments with del Toro. In a panel held at the University of Southern California in 2013, he said that "You watch, and you get kind of involved with what the story is, and you hate the bad guy because he murders people in an airport and stuff like that, and then all of a sudden it's time to take the controller. And the second you get the controller something turns off in the heart. And it becomes a sport." For him, the main obstacle that prevented the players from fully developing an empathic relationship with the on-screen characters was the controller, stating his belief that "We're never going to be totally immersive as long as

we're looking at a square. Whether it's a movie screen or a computer screen, we gotta get rid of that. We got to put the player inside the experience, where no matter where you look you're surrounded by a three-dimensional world. And that's the future." Spielberg gave the example of how a game about saving babies from being thrown off a burning building began with the idea of creating an empathic experience so that the player would want to save the helpless baby, but as players played more of the game they would grow into a state where they "stopped looking at the baby as a human being and they started looking at the baby as a score… So, they were looking at the numbers they were racking up, and the baby became parenthetical to the calculation in scoring more points than your friends and being able to brag about it at school the next day."

However, cutscenes do not always fully take away the ability to influence the story in a game, as can be seen in the idea of the "quick time event". *Shenmue*'s creator Yu Suzuki coined term "quick time event", which is an event that takes place where the player is prompted to press a button indicated on screen in order to respond to the action that was happening in a cutscene. For instance, a ruffian is about to land a punch on Ryo during a cutscene where the two of them are talking, a button will appear on screen for the player to press, if they succeed, Ryo will dodge the punch and the game will continue, if he fails however, he will be knocked out and the player will have to retry the event from an earlier point. However, failure in some quick time events in other games does not always result in having the player fail the entire sequence, in fact, sometimes it may lead to a diverging narrative. For example, in the game *Detroit: Become Human* (2018) which features a non-linear storyline, if the player fails to input a quick time event in a cutscene where the player character is about to be shot, the game would not revert to a previous point and have the player retry, rather, the story would continue and acknowledge that the player was injured. Quick time events are differentiated somewhat from the gameplay present in games like *Dragon's Lair,* since the only gameplay present in that game was pushing a button when prompted while watching the animations play out. *Shenmue* featured the ability for the player to walk around, to fight enemies and to perform chores, and the quick time events came into play only when the player was locked into watching a cutscene. Depending on the direction of the game, the narrative choices can vary significantly, while there are

games like *The Elder Scrolls* series that ask of the player to create their own virtual avatar who will then be thrust into the virtual world, there are other games where the narrative is not tailored to the player's whims. The games included in this study do not attempt to make the story personally crafted for the player, instead, they tell the story of pre-established characters who are not meant to be representations of the player.

With the development of new technologies in video games, their developers began to look beyond just the gameplay aspect of them. New games were developed which showcased serious portrayals of thematics such as racism, trauma and war. The video games selected as primary texts for this research are part of this newer generation that focus on narrative instead of relying simply on how the game is played. The common theme among these primary video games is trauma and how the afflicted characters struggle to cope with it. The gameplay aspect of these game narratives comes into play with how trauma is depicted visually. The trauma of the characters becomes projected into a physical form and they have to confront it in both a physical as well as mental sense. Relief from their trauma is able to be achieved through self-introspection as well as recovering the memories that have been lost by these characters. The primary texts to be covered in this dissertation are the video games *Alan Wake, American McGee's Alice, Alice: Madness Returns* and *Silent Hill 2.*

In *Alan Wake*, the titular character is depicted to be a struggling novelist who is suffering from writer's block. His wife Alice Wake convinces him to take a trip to the scenic town of Bright Falls so that his condition would improve. However, the story takes a turn when Alice falls from the balcony of their lake cabin and she appears to have drowned. As Alan tries to rescue her by diving into the lake himself, the game suddenly cuts to a scene that takes place in an entirely different location. In this scene, Alan wakes up inside of a crashed car in the wilderness surrounding the town and he is unable to remember the events that led up to this moment. As he starts making his way back to the town from the woods, bizarre events start to occur, such as ghostly apparitions threatening his well-being. Over the due course of the game, Alan is able to recover his memories and the cause of his trauma. There is an entity called the Dark Presence that is trying to manipulate him into serving its own ends. It is revelead that Alan has a special ability to be able to turn anything he writes from being fiction into

reality. This ability of his is the reason why the Dark Presence wants to have him as its servant, so that it could become all powerful. However in the ending of the game, Alan is able to overcome the darkness that haunts him both physically as well as mentally.

In *American McGee's Alice,* the premise for the game is taken from Lewis Carroll's novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). The narrative is centered around the continued adventures of the same Alice Liddell from Carroll's novels, so it serves as an unofficial sequel of sorts. In this alternate telling of the story of Alice, her entire family perishes in a house fire leaving her the sole survivor. As a result, she becomes emotionally traumatized and is admitted to undergo years of treatment in Rutledge Asylum. The Wonderland of Alice that has been depicted in the original novels serves as a shelter for the girl when she has to cope with her trauma. Unfortunately, this fanciful world has also become fractured and disfigured because it serves as a reflection of her own mind which has now become traumatized. It is described by her within the game as "a once-glorious garden now steeped in dark decay" (*American McGee's Alice*). Within this now broken Wonderland, it is revealed that The Queen of Hearts has now become its tyrannical ruler. She also becomes a symbolic representation of Alice's trauma within her mind and she has to be defeated by the player. After she has been conquered, Alice's Wonderland begins healing from the destruction it had been subjected to under the Queen's rule. This also results in the recovery from trauma for Alice in the real world, and she becomes healthy enough in order to be discharged from the Asylum in the ending of the game.

In the sequel to *American McGee's Alice*, titled *Alice: Madness Returns,* Alice is now 19 years of age. She continues to be haunted by the memory of the house fire, but she now resides in an orphanage that is run by a psychiatrist named Dr. Angus Bumby. This doctor uses hypnotherapy in order to help the orphans of his institution recover from the traumatic memories of their past. Once again, Alice enters the Wonderland in her mind only to find it has been taken over by a new being called the Dollmaker. During the course of the game, Alice begins to piece together fragments of her memory from the night of the fire that killed her family. Interacting with the

residents of her Wonderland shows her the truth of the memories she has repressed as a result of her trauma. She is able to remember the cause of the fire as well as why she continues to carry a deep feeling of guilty. It is shown that Dr. Bumby is responsible for setting fire to the house in addition to committing sexual assault on Alice's solder sister Lizzie. Armed with this newly recovered memory, Alice confronts the doctor at the Moorgate train station. He freely admits that it was indeed him who had started the fire, and he had also raped Alice's older sister beforehand. He is aware that no one would accept Alice's version of the events that took place on the night of the fire since their social standings were so far apart. Bumby is a wealthy and respected member of society while Alice is only a poor orphan with a fractured mind. As a result, Alice is able to gather enough resolve within her to push Bumby onto the train tracks where he is then run over by a train. As she leaves the station, something strange happens to her as she sees that her Wonderland has now manifested into reality. The town of London around Alice is shown to possess elements of both Wonderland and the real world. Whether or not this combination of reality and her imaginary world is symbolic of her newly developed hope in life is not shown explicitly. But it can be surmised that Alice's mental state has significantly improved in the ending of this game.

In *Silent Hill* 2, the protagonist is a man named James Sunderland. The story begins with his visit to the resort town of Silent Hill. This town holds many memories for him as it was the favorite place of his now deceased wife Mary Sunderland. The reason for his revisit to the town is because he has received a letter from his wife beckoning him to return. Upon his arrival to the town, he finds that it is strangely deserted and devoid of human life. During his exploration of the town, he encounters only four other individuals, they are Maria, Angela Orosco, Eddie Dombrowski and Laura. Bizarre events begin to occur in the town, such as grotesque monsters that chase James, and him beginning to remember parts of his unconscious memories. It is eventually revealed that James has euthanized his wife by suffocating her with a pillow after she was diagnosed with a terminal illness. This causes such a traumatic event within his mind that he has kept that memory repressed up until the point in the game where he is able to recover that memory. The game can end in one of six possible endings depending upon the actions taken by the player during their control of the

character of James. He can either choose to commit suicide for the murder of his wife, continue to live in denial of his trauma, or find a renewed hope and reason for living despite his trauma.

In the four video games selected as primary texts, the protagonists become traumatized as a result of violent events in their lives which they cannot coherently recall. They have lost part of their identity and can only reconstruct their true selves after coping with the memories that they have lost because of their trauma. In connection to trauma and lost memories, Ian Hacking has proposed the term memoro-politics, which is an amalgamation of the concept of the soul and Michel Foucault's biopower. The terms soul and identity were previously used to be synonymous with the moral and the political but Hacking has made memory stand out. The Freudian idea that "people are shaped in central ways by what they have forgotten" (Antze Lambek 65) is the one of the core concepts for memoro-politics. The power of memory is the central idea upon which memoro-politics stands. Ian Hacking has referred to Sigmund Freud as the father of the idea of "Therapy by the recall of forgotten memory of real abuse" (40), but although his psychotherapy involved the recollection of memories, it did not linger on the revisiting of traumatic memories exclusively. Trauma is an important point for Ian Hacking's theory since traumatized individuals who are segregated from the rest of normal society by the state are the main subjects of his memoro-politics.

On the concept of memory, George W. Crile writes that there are two avenues for pain – dumb pain, which is the unwanted sensations that sensate organisms will instinctively attempt to avoid; and the knowledge that grants fear of the events that will lead to said dumb pain. To describe this conception of pain in human beings Allan Young has noted that "fear is constituted from two things : a bodily state and a memory" (90). So, there are two types of experiences that define the memory of fear, they are pain that is experienced personally in life as well as the instincts that have been inherited after many years of evolution. Young notes that a similar observation has been made by both Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Spencer had attempted to find the cause for fear in organisms, and the result was that it came from instincts, which began as individual experiences, but over time they are repeated again and again, and

as a result, a "trace evolves into a permanent neural pathway" (Young 92). This instinct or "conscious memory" will continue remaining with an individual long after it has initially occurred. However the memory of this pain or fear is not always clear, but, "at the moment of remembrance and reenactment, it collapses time, fusing the ancestral past and the experienced present" (Young 92). These aspects of trauma which include the memory of fear and pain will be examined in the research.

The protagonist of each of the primary texts is a victim of trauma who is suffering from the effects of it long after the initial event has passed. They are defined by the mark that their traumas have left on them. As a result of their minds becoming damaged from their own respective traumas, the video games centered around them build a narrative that allows for players to explore a fantastical world that symbolizes their afflictions. The common way of coping with their trauma is the recollection of their repressed and forgotten memories. After locating the source of their trauma, the characters have to possess enough willpower to not be overwhelmed by it. Only then are they able to triumph over the damage that their pasts has caused them. This engagement with their pasts is akin to the act of playing a game with their pasts, a game which they do not want to play but cannot avoid playing as it affects their lives in the present. As their traumatic pasts appear and disappear in their present lives, it looks like a game of hide and seek between the protagonists and their pasts.

This research will utilize trauma theory in order to analyze the traumatized characters from the chosen video games. Particular focus is given to the repressed memories of these characters and how they are recalled in order to find a resolution to their trauma. Ian Hacking has written about the power of repressed memories, saying that "instead of the remembering that affected us, it was the forgotten" (76). Thus, it is these repressed memories that exude the strongest influence upon the construction of identity for traumatized characters, even though they are not aware of it since it resides in their unconscious mind. The relationship between the forgotten memories and how they influence the identity of the traumatized characters such as Alan Wake in *Alan Wake*, Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* and *Alice: Madness Returns*, James Sunderland and Angela Orosco in *Silent Hill 2*, is analyzed within this study.

The characters afflicted with trauma in the aforementioned video games all have a different response to it. This comes about as a result of their differing backgrounds, while a character like James is a middle-aged husband who had led a mostly comfortable life up until the point of origin of his trauma, there are other characters like Angela Orosco, a young adult woman who had been abused and mistreated most of her life. Thus, the pasts that these characters recollect when their trauma takes hold are quite different, and so are their responses to it.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The second chapter describes how trauma is a recurring theme in video games, giving examples of their historical context. It also provides a general account of the portrayal of trauma and traumatized characters in various video games over the years. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework of the research. The third chapter focuses on the trauma experienced by different characters in the primary texts on the basis of their age and their gender. The fourth chapter deals with the function of memory in how individuals are able to define their place in society. This chapter also takes a look at how individuals suffering from trauma are othered within the framework of Ian Hacking's concept of memoro-politics. The fifth chapter presents a brief summary of the findings of the research while also giving a discussion on the scope of further research on other aspects of the selected texts.

NOTES

[1]There is no standard convention (of MLA or APA) for citing video games and as such, the method for citing films and television series has been used for citing video games in this research proposal.

[2]Arcades are coin-operated machines that are used to play video games. They were placed in public places and people had to insert coins in order to play for a limited amount of time

[3]Consoles are the dominant system on which video games are played in the modern day. They are portable electronic devices which allowed for people to own them individually, unlike the arcade machines which came prior to them

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CHAPTER 2

TRAUMA AND VIDEO GAMES

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Trauma and Video Games

Trauma has been frequently a characterizing feature of characters in video games that enables a more sympathetic narrative. Since the challenge for narrative focused video games is to provide incentive for the player to care about the characters they see on screen, many developers have taken to showcasing wounded individuals who have undergone traumatic experiences that helped shape their characters. Some of the most popular video game narratives such as *Planescape: Torment* (1999), *Max Payne* (2001), *The Walking Dead* (2012), and *The Last of Us* (2013) have all used traumatic experiences of their game characters as a focal point of the story. The word trauma is defined by *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* as "a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury." It is taken from Τραύμα, which is the Greek word for wound, and while it was initially used to refer only to physical injuries, the word has come to be used to refer to emotional wounds as well later.

Within the field of trauma studies, a common concept that arises is the power that memory holds over individuals. Sigmund Freud is credited with establishing many of the concepts as well as guidelines for psychoanalysis. On the topic of traumatic memories and why they are so significant in determining the characteristics and identity of a person, he writes:

> There is in general no guarantee of the correctness of our memory; and yet we yield to the compulsion to attach belief to its data far more often than is objectively justified. (519)

Hence, even though it may be an illogical action, memories tend to be held in high regard by people. This can be seen in the video game characters analyzed in this study such as Angela Orosco in *Silent Hill 2*, who adamantly believes in her false memories of her loving mother.

The popularity of trauma as an important aspect of various forms of narrative in contemporary studies can be traced back to the 1980s. This was a time when a great deal of attention was aimed at those suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(hereafter PTSD), and how to treat it. American soldiers who had served in the Vietnam War had witnessed horrific events during their time of service, and they returned home unable to live normal, healthy lives. Tracing the historical background of trauma studies, Anne Whitehead in her introduction to *Trauma Fiction,* writes*:*

> The origin of contemporary trauma studies can usefully be dated to 1980, when post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first included in the diagnostic canon of the medical and psychiatric professions. The formal recognition of PTSD was the result of sustained political campaigning by Vietnam veterans, who organised agitation groups against the continuation of the war. (4)

Further, as observed by Cathy Caruth, it was in the year 1980 that "the American Psychiatric Association finally officially acknowledged the long-recognized but frequently ignored phenomenon under the title 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD)" (3). This was brought about by the sheer amount of Vietnam War veterans who had suffered from the symptom. According to a study on PTSD among Vietnam war veterans by Daniel S. Weiss, et al, approximately 830, 000 of the total 1.7 million suffered from this disorder.

The victims of a traumatic event often have their memories somewhat shifted and blurred as a result. This is classified by the American Psychiatric Association (hereafter APA) in their manual as a form of defense mechanism, which are defined as "automatic psychological processes that protect the individual against anxiety and from the awareness of internal or external dangers or stressors. Individuals are often unaware of these processes as they operate" (807). Repression is further defined by them as a defense mechanism in which, "The individual deals with emotional conflict or internal or external stressors by expelling disturbing wishes, thoughts, or experiences from conscious awareness. The feeling component may remain conscious, detached from its associated ideas" (813).

Dori Laub, a survivor of the Holocaust himself, has written about how his memories of the time spent in the German concentration camps has been somewhat shifted and might not be accurate to the truth of what occurred. He writes:

> …these are the memories of an adult. Curiously enough, the events are remembered and seem to have been experienced in a way that was far beyond

the normal capacity for recall in a young child of my age. It is as though this process of witnessing was of an event that happened on another level, and was not part of the mainstream of the conscious life of a little boy. Rather, these memories are like discrete islands of precocious thinking, and feel almost like the remembrances of another child, removed, yet connected to me in a complex way. (62)

He further notes that after listening to many testimonies of other Holocaust survivors, that they needed to tell their stories in order to survive what lay ahead of them in the future. They needed to tell their stories so that they could relieve themselves even if only a little, from the overwhelming burden that had been heaped upon them by the Nazis. He gives instances of a survivor so attached to the family she lost in the Holocaust, that she could not give her new children that she bore the proper love and attention they required from her. She was still living in her past world which was so abruptly destroyed by the Nazis, and decided that her new family could not serve as substitutes for that which she lost. She only regarded them with "deep dis-appointment as unempathic strangers because of the "otherness" she senses in them, because of their refusal to substitute for, and completely fit into, the world of parents, brothers, and children that was so abruptly destroyed" (63). In other words, she chose to live her story out in her real life, imprisoned in that time in history when all that was familiar to her came crashing down around her.

Ian Hacking, explaining the relationship between the traumatized individual and his/her past, writes that the reason for forgotten memories having so much power and control on traumatized individuals is because of "the very fact that something is forgotten makes it a secret that works on us" (45). He mentions the nineteenth century term "railway spine", nowadays referred to as whiplash injury, and how there arose a case of multiple people claiming to have developed post-traumatic symptoms as a result of railroad accidents, but without any obvious evidence of injuries. It was an early example of how the definition of trauma evolved, thereby including not only physical harm but also mental harm. This can be observed in the characters like James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2,* Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* and Alan Wake in *Alan Wake* who are all possessed by some deep-rooted memories that are forgotten, yet impedes their progress in the present day. In this condition they are unable to trace

the source of their trauma and are forced to struggle through numerous amounts of obstacles caused by their repressed memories before finally reaching the truth.

Thus the idea that forgotten memories are able to define the personalities and identities of individuals has been proposed by Hacking. Using Michel Foucault's concepts of bio-politics and anatomo-politics as a base to build upon, he comes up with the term memoro-politics. Hacking describes the place of this new politics with reference to Foucault's own politics as:

> …what is memoro-politics a politics of? I prefer to say a memoro-politics of the human soul….The soul stands for whatever strange mix of things is, at some time, imaged as inner….The soul has been a way of internalizing the social order, of putting into myself those very virtues that enable my society to survive. (35)

Bio-politics seeks to maintain control over the population. In order to achieve this, biopower depends upon classifying and grouping together certain kinds of people. This grouping together and generalization of the population results in some of the more subtle characteristics of individuals failing to be noticed. Hacking gives the example of traumatized individuals who do not meet the standards of society, and who have become differentiated as a result. Such individuals are termed as the Other, and they are generally ostracized as can be seen in the narratives of the traumatized characters depicted in the primary texts of this study.

Michelle Balaev talks of the idea of trauma being shaped as an unrepresentable event by early scholars. However, this unrepresentable concept continued to evolve over time. Cathy Caruth's description of trauma is a double wound:

> …what seems to be suggested by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is that the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that, like Tancred's first infliction of a mortal wound on the disguised Clorinda in the duel, is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor.

> Just as Tancred does not hear the voice of Clorinda until the second wounding, so trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. (3-4)

The repetition of the origin of trauma is what defines it. In the instance of the tale of Tancred, he unknowingly kills the woman he loves, Clorinda in a duel. He does not recognize his beloved until she has been mortally wounded and it is too late to save her. He is prevented from committing suicide and following her to the grave by Peter the Hermit, and he seemingly finds solace. However, Tancred's trauma is revisited when he hears Clorinda's voice coming from the woods and he starts seeing other hallucinations, prompting him to flee from the place in fear. The severity of the effect that trauma had on Tancred was so great that the noble and duty-bound soldier could not follow through with the orders he received from his superior to harvest the wood from the forest, but is instead left fleeing in fear. The traumatic event in the past is repeatedly lived by Tancred in the present. This is what Caruth calls double wound.

As noted by Anne Whitehead, there is a close relationship between traumas and particular locations that are stored within an individual's memory. She explains the weakness of the human mind to understand the real event in the past from the present location as a belated witness. Since we cannot revisit our past physically, understanding an event in the past is only a matter of conjecture evoked by places, sounds, images, people, etc. Thus, Whitehead writes:

> The traumas of the recent past profoundly challenge our ability to position ourselves in relation to them or to find our bearings. The question of positioning that landscape evokes can be regarded as crucial within the current discourse of trauma, for all efforts to confront and remember the past must be preceded by a consideration of the perspective from which we, as belated witnesses, view the event. (48)

The pleasant landscapes of the present day where events like Holocaust took place in the past cannot be easily linked to a normal pleasant location because a memory of the

events that took place there will destroy the meaning of being a pleasant location. This memory is crucial in the location of the source of trauma in an individual. Calling upon the works of Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth, Anne Whitehead further writes that in a traumatic incident, "The event is not experienced as it occurs, but is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time" (12). This lingering darkness in the traumatized individual becomes a sort of haunting, which will continue to possess the person and lurk around every corner bombarding them with repetitions of the experience, and returning to the place of trauma every now and then.

Explaining the ways how an individual confronts trauma in literary narratives, Michelle Balaev states that the "defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world" (150). Similar to how trauma has been depicted in trauma novels, the same can be said for its depiction in the realm of video games as well. The recurring theme in the video games to be analyzed is the resolution of trauma by confronting it, which is often depicted in the form of supernatural projections and exploration of the mental psyche of the traumatized individuals. This depiction of trauma goes along with the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (hereafter ACT) which states: "It is important to reaffirm for clients and therapists alike that there is no secret formula that delivers happiness in any consistent way. The objective is to be present with what life gives us at any given point in time and to more (sic) toward valued behavior" (Hayes, Steven C., et al 240). Thus, instead of avoiding confrontation with the cause of affliction, traumatized individuals will be able to find resolution by facing the cause of their traumas. The central idea of ACT is that anything external cannot free a traumatized individual from his or her sufferings. Things like looks, loving parents, terrific children, financial security, a caring spouse, are not enough to heal their affliction. Thus, confronting trauma is the only option left to overcome it.

It has been a generally accepted conception in the mental health community that psychological problems should be treated much as one would treat a physical illness by attempting to remove it from oneself through the use of modern medicine.

Being healthy and free from all infirmities – be it of the mind or the body, is the best desired form of human beings. But from the perspective of ACT, the natural state of humans is not always completely free of the demons that haunt them. The suffering that humans go through actually results from completely normal psychological processes, and they are not abnormalities in any way. However, this is not to say that those suffering from trauma are not abnormal, since traumatic injuries and experiences are quite out of the norm, but even with such extreme cases of mental trauma, the underlying model of ACT is that every individual, including the traumatized ones, is a human being having all essential human characteristics:

> No matter how many voices a person hears or panic attacks he or she experiences, that individual is a thinking, feeling, remembering human being. How a person responds to, say, a hallucination may be more critical to healthy functioning than the hallucination itself, and from an ACT perspective that response is dominantly determined by normal psychological processes. (Hayes, Steven C., et al 11)

The ACT has six core principles that are required for the development of psychological flexibility– "Defusion", "Acceptance", "Contact with the Present Moment", the "Observing Self", "Values", and "Committed Action". These six principles and their utilitization in the video games examined in this study are explained in the following paragraphs.

"Defusion" means the act of learning how to perceive threatening thoughts and memories. These threats are defused into concepts that are less threatening than what the traumatized individual initially believes. In the games included in this study, these threatening cognitions are presented as otherworldly apparitions, but they can be faced down and brought to heel once the characters can find the necessary strength to overcome them. Mental fortitude grants the video game characters the ability to lessen the threats posed by the ghosts of their trauma. On the player's side as well, this would mean the ability to fight against these threats in a gameplay sense, such as being given weapons to combat the enemies that appear. One example of this is the Clicker in *Alan*

Wake, which is a cut-off light switch that the titular character used to get rid of his fear of the dark.

This "Defusion" of the threatening cognitions leads to the second principle of "Acceptance". Since the threat that they pose has been brought down to less significant levels at this point, there is no excessive reaction to them if and when they should ever return. This principle entails making room for unpleasant emotions and experiences within one's own mind; to be able to permit these heavy emotions to come and go without great stress towards the victim. An instance of this acceptance can be seen in the character of James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* when he accepts the fact that he had committed an immoral deed, yet resolves to continuing to live with it. While he is initially reluctant to accept his deeds, he is able to defuse the memory of his past due to his mental strength.

The third principle described as "Contact with the Present Moment" means simply to live in the present. It entails being fully aware of what is happening to oneself during whatever activity is being performed in the present. This results in the thought of the traumatic memory being moved to a less relevant position, while focus is brought to a more positive aspect of the present. This focus on the present is necessary to find the strength of will to be able to live with past traumas. As evident in the case of the titular character in the game *Alan Wake*, he is able to focus on his present task of saving his wife while not allowing the past trauma of being manipulated take priority within his thoughts.

The fourth principle of ACT, "The Observing Self", is explained by Dr Russell as "accessing a transcendent sense of self; a continuity of consciousness that is unchanging, ever-present, and impervious to harm. From this perspective, it is possible to experience directly that you are not your thoughts, feelings, memories, urges, sensations, images, roles, or physical body" (7). In the video games, the traumatic experiences of the characters are depicted in supernatural ways, such as the town of Silent Hill creating an alternate world where a person's fears and insecurities come to life as monstrous creatures. It is up to the characters to come to recognize that these

monsters are projections of themselves and that they can be defeated with enough mental fortitude.

"Values" is the fifth principle, which consists of setting a goal to work towards for the traumatized individual. It means attempting to find out what kind of better person the individual wants to become after moving on from their traumatized past self. An example of this can be seen in one of the possible endings of *Silent Hill 2*, where James comes to the realization that his deceased wife is not the only thing he valued in life. He has his own wellbeing to consider, as well as that of the girl Laura who he had met in the town. Instead of resigning himself to death to be with his wife, he chooses to leave the town to take care of the girl, building a new life together.

The sixth principle "Committed Action", as described by Dr Russell includes "setting goals, guided by your values, and taking effective action to achieve them" (7). This commitment to achieving freedom from being burdened by past traumas can be seen in the video game characters who are able to succeed in their goals, such as Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* and James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2*. Dr Russell sums up the main goal of ACT as "no longer about getting rid of bad feelings or getting over old trauma. Instead it is about creating a rich, full and meaningful life" (8).

Despite the principles of ACT being relatively straightforward and simple, a question can be raised as to its effectiveness. A resolution to this query can be drawn from the following observation made in the treatment of the mentally ill Bertha Pappenheim, who was recorded under the pseudonym Anna O.:

> We observed many times that fear of a memory, as in this case, inhibits its emergence, and that it has to be forced out by either the doctor or the patient. (Breuer Ch II 1)

Traumatized individuals are less than willing to confront the source of their traumas, so even something as simple as the guidelines of ACT can prove to be a difficult thing to achieve for them. This struggle to overcome trauma and the power the past holds over them can be seen depicted in the various video games that are examined in this study. Building upon this finding by Breuer, Sigmund Freud further states that:

> I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident. Perhaps they are more concerned with not thinking of it. (7)

Breuer also observed that the patient had refused to drink water despite being thirsty, and would rely on fruit and melons to quench her thirst. After this continued for six weeks, she was put under hypnosis by him in order to coax the reason for her refusal to drink. Eventually she grumbled about witnessing a disliked lady companion's dog that was drinking out of a glass of water, and thus she refused to drink from a glass anymore after that. After venting her frustrations under hypnosis, she was able to drink water from the glass without any hesitation, after which her reluctance disappeared completely. The case of Anna O. was deemed as being related to:

> …specific psychological traumas, where memories of unpleasant experiences had been split off from her consciousness and subsequently become pathogenic. Recalling the traumatic experience (and attendant emotions) with the aid of hypnosis appeared to remove the symptoms. (Boag 3)

Thus, the recollection of repressed traumatic memories is considered as a positive aspect according to Boag and Breuer. It is also depicted in the same manner within the games analyzed in this study. But this recollection cannot be achieved without a struggle that comes beforehand, as well as an understanding that trauma can only be overcome with a strong will. The memories need not be completely exorcized from the victims' minds, as they are a part of them and this fact must be accepted and absorbed in order to help them heal.

As stated previously, video games have often utilized trauma as a central element to create compelling and empathetic narratives that draw the players in it. In the fantasy video game *Planescape: Torment* (1999), developed by Black Isle Entertainment, the plot centres around the journey of the protagonist named the Nameless One. He attains immortality in order to make amends for the numerous crimes that he has committed during his lifetime. However, the weight of his crimes proves too much to bear for him so he erases the memory of them from his mind. As described previously, this is a defense mechanism enacted by the mind in order to stave off traumatic symptoms. In the ending of the game, he once again recovers his

forgotten memories and makes a new resolution to truly make amends for his sins. The game was highly praised for its ability to draw in players with its quality of writing as opposed to being praised for just how fun the game was to play. As written by Seth Schiesel in a review of the game for the New York Times in the year 2000, "The game's level of detail and its emotional impact have prompted some players to cast about for literary peers." The depiction of the Nameless One as a broken and traumatized hero ran contrary to the prevailing tendency of games that depicted their heroes as stalwart "do-gooders" who never chose any morally ambiguous paths. His redemption story keeps in line with the theme of acceptance and confrontation of the cause of trauma as detailed in ACT.

In a similar vein to *Planescape: Torment,* the game series *Max Payne* (2001-2012)*,* developed by Remedy Entertainment, also follows the exploits of a traumatized protagonist. The games star Max Payne, who is a detective serving in the New York Police Department whose life comes crashing down after his wife and daughter are murdered in a home invasion by a group of thugs. Throughout the events of the first game, Max occasionally experiences nightmares of his wife and child. This is a symptom of PTSD, where the source of trauma is continuously relived by the afflicted individual. As the series continues, Max encounters more traumatic experiences– the death of his family in the first game is followed by the death of his lover Mona Sax in the second game. And further, he also fails to protect the lives of the Branco family which he works for in the third game. The series has been received positively by audiences for its portrayal of the character of Max as a troubled individual. In reviewing the third game for the *IGN* website, Daniel Krupa noted that:

> Max Payne has suffered beyond reasonable limits. (It's all in the name.) Nine years have passed since the last game in the series, yet little has changed for its long-suffering protagonist, who remains deeply traumatised by the death of his wife and child. 'Trauma' is the key word – in Greek, it means 'wound', and Max is someone who has never let his fully heal. To move on would be to forget – a betrayal of those he loved – and so instead he chooses to wallow in the past and the pain, with the help of brown liquor and white pills.

This description of the character of Max highlights how he lives his life according to the principles of ACT. At the end of the final entry in the series, *Max Payne 3* (2012), it can be surmised that Max is no longer hung up on his past traumas, as noted by the fact that the narration of his dark past does not occur in the final scene. The final line before the end credits start to play is a weather forecast, "Boy it's dark in some places, but it's sunny everywhere else" (*Max Payne 3*). This line is symbolic of the endurance of Max as he has been afflicted with tremendous losses and wounds that may never heal, but he chooses to continue living on despite everything. There will always be dark places in his life, but the rest of it will be able to overpower the negative emotions that he harbours deep within himself.

In recent years, Telltale Games *The Walking Dead* (2012-present) series of games, have found substantial praise for their attention to detail and ability to craft an empathetic relationship between the in game characters and the player controlling them. The first game in 2012 succeeded in capturing the hearts of millions of people who experienced playing it on its narrative alone. *The Scotland Herald* had an article praising the game: "This game is about emotion, character, storyline; it's themes are love, betrayal, courage, self-doubt, honour and trust – it is as close as gaming has come to the novel or the movie" (Mackay). The protagonist of the first game of *The Walking Dead* is Lee Everett, who is unlike the super-powered action hero that headlines most other games. He is a very down-to-earth individual who is not impregnable, but in fact carries a heavy psychological burden with him. Having been convicted for the murder of his wife's paramour, he is not someone with a clean heroic image, but nonetheless has both redeeming and negative traits. Instead of the over-the-top antics and action scenes that most popular games are known for, the *Walking Dead* opts to tell a story relatively rooted in reality, except for the viral outbreak that has turned most of the world's population into flesh-eating walking corpses. Lee's source of trauma is the murder he committed in the past which continues to haunt him during the present. Despite being traumatized over the horrible act he committed, Lee is able to find the resolve to continue enduring. This comes in the form of Clementine, a young girl he takes care of.

In addition to Lee Everett, the eight-year-old girl Clementine is also regarded as one of the central reasons for the game's ability to strike a resonance with most

players. Lee adopts the role of caretaker to the young girl who has been separated from her parents. During the events of the game, Lee has to make various decisions in order to protect her from the many hazards thrown at them. Kimberly Wallace of *Game Informer* writes that "Clementine isn't just a collection of polygons on a television screen. She's broken through the barrier, securing a place in the hearts of many – a feat most video game characters never accomplish." This endearing girl is the source of newfound value for Lee after the trauma he suffers from what he has done in the past.

Clementine herself is no stranger to traumatic experiences, as she loses both of her parents and her caretaker Lee to the zombie virus. However, due to the strong mental lessons taught to her by Lee, she is able to avoid falling to trauma. In the third episode of the fourth season of the *Walking Dead* games, she explains the concept of dealing with trauma to a young boy named Alvin Jr. The player can have Clementine respond in three possible ways on how to resolve trauma:

> It doesn't work like that. It's too deep down inside you. It never goes away. But you can resist it, just like anger.

> You sock it right in the mouth…What I'm saying is that, like everything else in the world, you can fight it.

> It's really, really hard to do by yourself. A lot of people can't without some help. (*The Walking Dead: The Final Season*)

Hence, it can be seen that both Lee and Clementine's responses to dealing with trauma are in line with the ACT method of dealing with trauma. Since these traumatic memories cannot simply be cured or removed by a remedy, one must learn to accept that fact and continue to live on despite it by finding new goals to strive for.

In a similar vein to Telltale Games *The Walking Dead* series, California-based studio Naughty Dog released *The Last of Us* in 2013. This game focuses on the father-daughter like relationship of an older man named Joel Miller and a teenage girl named Ellie, set in a post-apocalyptic world. Like *The Walking Dead* was able to accomplish a year prior, *The Last of Us* also garnered significant praise for its story-telling prowess as well as world-building aspects such as the visuals and sounds. Various gaming publications such as *Eurogamer*, *IGN* and *Edge* have placed it as one of the most well received video games of all time.

During the events of the game, Joel is shown losing his daughter Sarah after the world is ravaged by an outbreak of a fungus called Cordyceps. He becomes deeply traumatized, unable to form attachments to people out of fear of losing them as she did his daughter. However, twenty years after this incident, he is charged with smuggling a girl named Ellie into the hands of a rebel militia group named the Fireflies. The two of them form a bond, and Joel comes to find new values for living. He starts to shed his gruff and detached demeanour and warms up to the girl who reminds him of his daughter. It is later revealed that Ellie is immune to the fungus, and the Fireflies plan to extract a cure from her brain. Joel commits to safeguarding Ellie's safety above all other matters, so he massacres the Fireflies who try to stop him and rescues her from their clutches. Cade Onder, writing for *GameZone* magazine, attempts a dissection of the character of Joel from the game, and in writing about the nature of his relationship with Ellie, he states that:

> Ellie acts as his muse and remedy to his trauma. Joel tries to keep her away as she tries to pry into his heart and brain, often causing anger or annoyance. Despite being at odds, Ellie's youthful and optimistic world view (which could be a bit ignorant) opens his eyes. As the two grow closer, he vows to not fail her the way he failed his own flesh and blood 20 years prior. (Onder)

Joel's trauma being that he is unable to form attachments to other people after losing his daughter in the tragic incident from the prologue of the game. He is aloof and standoffish following Sarah's death, only showing affection towards his smuggling partner Tess. After Tess also passes away after being infected, Joel pins his hopes on Ellie who begins to remind him of his own daughter. Despite Ellie volunteering herself for the surgery which could have possibly come up with a cure, Joel could not let her go as then he himself would also have nothing to keep living on for. In the ending scene to the game, in trying to convince her that her life has worth and that she should continue living, he tells her, "No matter what, you keep finding something to live for" (*The Last of Us*). This is an extreme depiction of the principles of ACT which state that one must take committed action in order to achieve their values in life. Joel's newfound value was Ellie, and he was willing to do anything to keep her alive, even murder.

These aforementioned games hold true to the principle of ACT that the "goal of healthy living is not so much to feel good as to feel good. It is psychologically healthy to have unpleasant thoughts and feelings as well as pleasant ones, and doing so gives us full access to the richness of our unique personal histories" (23). The characters depicted in them have all gone through one sort of traumatic experience or another. For instance, Joel from *The Last of Us* lost his daughter Sara, becoming emotionally withdrawn and distant from the rest of humanity, only doing whatever is necessary to survive. His meeting with Ellie, who reminds him of his deceased daughter, brings him back to the real world, and he stops being a stoic man with no cares in the world. He has found the "values" that are necessary to accept one's own pain and suffering, and the "committed action" he takes to safeguard his new reason for living is choosing Ellie's wellbeing over the rest of humanity. He willingly commits mass murder to save Ellie, accepting to live with the memory of his horrific actions. He is thus able to stand against the trauma since he has found value in the life of Ellie.

Similarly, The Nameless One in *Planescape: Torment* had committed many atrocities on many people in his life. This is the cause of his trauma. But upon remembering his actions, not only does he choose to keep them within him, he had also found new "values" to strive for with his remaining life. Lee Everett from *The Walking Dead* is given new purpose in the post-apocalyptic world in the form of Clementine, and his newfound drive for survival pushed him onward to be even willing to sacrifice himself for the girl's wellbeing. This lesson of survival was imparted on her and she continued to live her life in memory of Lee. The titular character in the *Max Payne* series loses every single person who was ever close to him. As a result, he develops a propensity to drown his trauma in booze and painkillers. However, at the end of the final game, he undergoes a significant change. He is no longer the trigger-happy, drug-addict, alcoholic cop who let his temper get the better of himself in previous games. He becomes more reserved and calmer, and has accepted the demons that he harbours within himself from his years of trauma.

Thus, from these aforementioned video games, it can be seen that some of the most popular and well-regarded games with regards to storytelling over the years have dealt with trauma as an important theme. Despite these various characters all coming

from vastly different backgrounds, they are all the victims of trauma in one way or the other. The confrontation and overcoming of said trauma through mental fortitude and character development plays a central part in the narrative of many games. This acceptance of past traumas by the video game characters follows the principles of ACT used by psychotherapists to treat various mental afflictions in real life. As succinctly put by Dr Russell Harris, "If I had to summarise ACT on a t-shirt, it would read: 'Embrace your demons, and follow your heart" (8).

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CHAPTER 3
AGE, GENDER AND TRAUMA

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Age, Gender and Trauma

Trauma can have a variety of effects depending on the makeup of the individual that it latches on to. The various characters in the games selected for the study are all from different backgrounds, and the sources of their afflictions also. For instance, James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* and Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* are very different characters – one is a middle-aged man while the other is a teenage girl. Yet they both underwent traumatic experiences that inhibit them from experiencing full and healthy lives. This chapter analyzes such characters who have undergone traumatic experiences and examine how they deal with the problems that arise from it. While analyzing such characters, the aspects of age and gender will be focused to understand the dynamics of age, gender and trauma.

The video games included in this study – *Alan Wake*, *American McGee's Alice*, *Alice: Madness Returns* and *Silent Hill 2* all take place in the third person perspective[1]. Video games that fall under this category are viewed from behind or above the player avatar, as opposed to the first person perspective[2] where the scenes are from the viewpoint of the player character's own eyes. These games have been chosen because of the similar themes that they share with one another, particularly that of trauma and repressed memories.

In *Alan Wake*, developed by Remedy Entertainment, the main character Alan Wake in a novelist who suffers from writer's block. His wife Alice Wake convinces him to undertake a retreat to the small mountain town of Bright Falls in the hopes that it would help alleviate the stress the couple had. Alan storms out of their cabin after the two have argument, but then he hears a scream coming from Alice and rushes back inside. However, all he sees upon returning is that the railing of the balcony has been broken, and he assumes that his wife has fallen into the lake around their cabin. After he dives into the lake to save her, the screen is cut to black. This event of his wife's drowning is the source of trauma for Alan within the story. Alan is shown to have lost his memories of the incident surrounding his wife's death. The desire to recover his memories is what drives the character to find answers despite the many hinderances that are put in front of him.

In creating the world and characters of *Alan Wake*, the main writer Sam Lake told *Ars Technica* website that the main inspirations were the writings of Stephen King and David Lynch's acclaimed *Twin Peaks* television series. He describes the main character as "this very successful writer who has problems and trouble in his life. And this internal trouble in his life kind of explodes out of him in a supernatural way to create this nightmare scenario of fiction coming true, and forces of darkness awakening in this small town environment" (00:03:43). Alan was written to be quite different from the characteristics that were present in most action game protagonists. He was initially envisioned by Lake to be "more of a victim, but along the way he grew stronger, more active; he got some attitude, and clear flaws. That makes a character interesting" (Lake). Lake wanted to move away from the archetype of the well-prepared and professional hero for the character of Alan, so instead he is "a fish out of water, somebody who is not ready for this in any way, and who has to struggle and find their way through this" (00:15:47).

The impetus of the story is the supernatural ability bestowed upon Alan by the mystical Cauldron Lake: the ability to write a fiction and turn it into reality. The supernatural entity known as the Dark Presence or Barbara Jagger covets this ability and manipulates Alan into serving its bidding. It accomplishes this through the abduction of Alan's wife Alice after she falls into the lake. Alan is willing to do anything for his wife, which is reinforced by the line he says upon realizing that his wife is in the clutches of the Dark Presence: "Jagger had Alice, and so she had me" (*Alan Wake*). Distraught over the apparent death of his wife, Alan is easily swayed to the Dark Presence's side. The Dark Presence informs him that he is responsible for his wife's death, but he would be able to bring her back to life by writing a fiction as she instructed. However, the Dark Presence instead tricks Alan into writing a fiction called "Departure" that only makes her more powerful. After witnessing his wife's apparent death, Alan would have frequent recurring nightmares and visions of the moment thereafter. This reaction falls in line with the traumatic stressor requirements for PTSD that were laid down in the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which states that:

> The essential feature of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is the development of
> characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor

involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. (463)

Alan had witnessed an event involving death of another person, and not just any person, the death of his wife. Repeatedly reliving the moment of trauma in his nightmares – the moment of his wife's drowning; as well as being unable to recall important specific details about the traumatic experience – what he was doing during the missing week, are both symptoms of PTSD according to the APA. This traumatic disorder can occur at any age, so long as the stressor is of an extreme and life-threatening nature. In addition, Alan's form of amnesia as a result of his trauma is defined as Continuous Amnesia, which is "the inability to recall events subsequent to a specific time up to and including the present" (APA 520).

As Alan tries to piece together the events of the past week that he is missing, he continues to have nightmares about his wife, as well as hearing her voice from time to time. He is unsure of what has happened to her, he only knows that "something terrible had happened to Alice" (*Alan Wake*). While this traumatic event continues to haunt Alan throughout the game, it also pushes him onward to find the truth around the circumstances that occurred on that night in the cabin. There is also another character similar to Alan who shares this same trauma – Thomas Zane. Unlike Alan who is able to overcome his mental trauma as well as the physical threat of the Dark Presence, Thomas is unable to do so. He is depicted as the predecessor to Alan, as both of them are writers, and both of their wives have been taken hostage by the Dark Presence. The main difference being that while Alan is able to defeat the darkness and rescue his wife, Thomas failed to do so and acts as a guide to the protagonist instead.

The safety of their female counterparts are the goals for both Alan and Thomas. As such, these women are portrayed as damsels in distress, which is consistent with what Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have noted in their writings. They state that, "The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel" (20). As such, Alice Wake is portrayed in such a way that she is the divine blessing that keeps

her husband Alan from falling into despair. She exists to provide comfort for her husband in a world filled with ghostly threats and fears. Despite having multiple obstacles thrown his way, Alan does not give up because the thought of saving his wife takes precedence in his mind.

On the opposite end of this depiction of females as angels, there also exists the tendency of male writers to depict females as monsters. This monstrous depiction of the female is described as:

> …threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy and thus represents both the author's power to allay "his" anxieties by calling their source bad names (witch, bitch, fiend, monster) and, simultaneously, the mysterious power of the character who refuses to stay in her textually ordained "place" and thus generates a story that "gets away" from its author. (Gilbert and Gubar 28)

This monstrous depiction of the female can be seen in the character of Barbara Jagger after she has been taken by the Dark Presence. Her visage takes on a ghastly appearance, and she becomes the main threat that the protagonist Alan has to conquer in order to get his prize— his angelic wife. The monstrous female also comes into possession of powers of her own which threaten the powers of the main male character as well. Jagger refuses to be quiet and docile and the powers she commands are great enough to be a threat not only to Alan, but to the entire town of Bright Falls as well.

After Alan recovers his memories and comes to the realization that he has been manipulated by the Dark Presence into writing a manuscript for her benefit, he disobeys her and writes a different one. This recovery of his life from trauma takes place earlier than expected because of his mental fortitude of a mature adult. This is a marked difference from his wife Alice who is still unable to recover from her fear of the dark as an adult. It suggests that his wife's gendered life could not fight trauma as effectively as her "masculine" husband could. Here the role of gender in dealing with trauma in life is at display.

During the course of the narrative of *Alan Wake*, the protagonist is eventually able to remember everything that has happened with the aid of his friends and some of the townspeople. He is able to remember that his wife is not actually dead, but being held prisoner in another world by the Dark Presence. Since the traumatic stressors that

previously caused his PTSD has now been proven to be false, this new found information invokes a renewed vigour in Alan to push onward for his wife and for finding his own redemption. This newfound mental strength in Alan is also depicted in physical form as the Clicker, the cut-off light switch that was a cherished artifact for him ever since his childhood. "The Clicker" is depicted in the game as a powerful weapon which is used to destroy the encroaching darkness that threatens to consume the town of Bright Falls. Speaking to *Edge* magazine, Sam Lake described the item as feeling like "the perfect symbol…In Alan Wake's world, the monsters that your imagination conjures up in the dark come true, but they are still destroyed when the lights are turned on. Darkness equals madness and terror, nightmares and death; light equals sanity and safety" (Lake). In the game, an infant Alan's fears of the dark are described by Thomas Zane as:

> Alan, seven years old, would fight sleep to the bitter end. When he did sleep, he soon woke up, with nightmares fresh in his mind. One evening, his mother sitting by his bed offered him an old light switch. She called it the Clicker, and flicking the switch would turn on a magical light that would drive the beasts away. To imbue the talisman with all possible power, she added that it had been given to her by Alan's father. Alan never knew him, and anything of his took on mythical proportions in his mind. With the Clicker firmly in his hand, Alan finally slept like a baby. (*Alan Wake*)

Age is a focal point here. For Alan to overcome the fear of the dark as a child, a sympathetic hand from his mother was required. This is suggestive of the emotional relationship that children require to have with their loved ones. But as they grow up, this emotional dependency decreases and the requirement for human intellect increases. With regards to infantile fears such as fear of the dark, Sigmund Freud has written that:

> Concerning the factors of silence, solitude and darkness, we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of that infantile morbid anxiety from which the majority of human beings have never become quite free. (20)

Hence, there exists some people who never find resolution for their infantile fears even during their adulthood, such as Alan's wife Alice. Whereas Alan himself is armed with great mental fortitude ever since conquering his fear of the dark as a child, he is much

more capable than Alice of facing the dark spirits that populate the town of Bright Falls.

This mental strength and maturity of Alan can also be seen during the final events of the game. While typing out the final pages for his manuscript, Alan says that "There's light and there's darkness, cause and effect. There's guilt and there's atonement, but the scales always need to balance. Everything has a price" (*Alan Wake*). Alan undergoes a transformation from someone who is afraid of the dark to someone who can go into the dark and fight. Not only does he triumph over the Dark Presence, he also shows that he is willing to pay the price for the wrongs he has done. While under the Dark Presence's thrall, he had written various fictional events into reality, with some of these resulting in the death of the townspeople of Bright Falls. Thus, he chooses to remain behind in the other world while allowing his wife Alice to return to reality.

Silent Hill 2 was developed by Konami, with Masashi Tsuboyama serving as the director of the project. In the game, the player controls a man named James Sunderland. He is on a visit to the resort town of Silent Hill, which is a very dear place for him and his wife, Mary Sunderland. His wife had died from a terminal disease before the events of the game, yet James receives a letter from her that calls him to return to the town. When he arrives, the town is somehow deserted and there is no human life to be seen, apart from four other individuals that are encountered by James– Maria, Angela Orosco, Eddie Dombrowski and Laura. Maria is a mysterious stranger who looks identical to James' deceased wife, this leaves him stumped and mystified upon their first meeting. Angela and Eddie are similar to James in that all three of them suffer from trauma that is made manifest in physical form by the supernatural capabilities of the town. Finally, Laura is a young girl who is the only one unaffected by the monsters and supernatural events in the town.

The game was well received by both critics and fans alike for the emotional depth and resonance it elicited in players. Noted game critic Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw has said in his review of the game that its strong point is not intuitive gameplay, but rather in its story and atmosphere. Regarding the symbolism of the game and its depiction of the feminine looking monsters, he states that:

Silent Hill 2 is very good at telling a story without words. Everything is drenched in symbolism. The basic monsters are all suspiciously effeminate with the exception of Pyramid Head…It's a fascinating voyage of pain and despair that leaves you emotionally drained and satisfied" (00:03:30).

The town of Silent Hill is a supernatural location that brings to life the deepest and darkest parts of the people who visit it. In the case of James, it results in the manifestation of monsters that pursue and threaten his well-being as long as he is within the town. It can be inferred from the other characters present in the town that the monsters are able to be perceived only by those with a dark past, such as James, Angela and Eddie. Laura, who is just a young child who has not undergone any traumatizing experiences and does not have any feelings of guilt or repressed emotions, does not see the monsters at all. The strange powers of the town are never given any definitive explanation, but the game gives some context to his by stating that the location has always been inhabited by spirits in "the trees, rocks and water around them" (*Silent Hill 2).*

The source of trauma for James is eventually revealed during the events of the game. James suffocates his wife Mary with a pillow after she becomes terminally ill because he is unable to handle the constant verbal abuse she would subject him to. Unable to handle the guilt he acquired from this act of murder, he has kept that memory repressed the entire time. This is a defense mechanism that can be seen in traumatized individuals so as to keep the source of their trauma away from awareness. This reinforces the Freudian idea that traumatized individuals are not all willing to confront their traumas, instead they have to be coaxed into doing it. The resolution of James' story in the ending can have six different variants depending upon the decisions that the player makes during the course of the game. These endings depict what kind of mental state he possesses at that point, with some endings showing him recovering from his trauma while other endings depict him succumbing to his affliction.

Silent Hill 2 is a deeply symbolic video game. Most of the locations and plot points are attached to the mental status of the people who visit the town. The town transports its inhabitants into another realm which exists parallel to reality. This alternate reality is defined by the dense fog that pervades across whatever the eye can

see, and is fittingly called the Fog World. Although this other world takes on the appearance of what the town looks like in real life, it is also twisted and transformed according to the mental state of the people who are staying in town. For troubled individuals like the main characters in the game, the Fog World further transforms into another world called the Otherworld. In this place they are forced to confront their worst nightmares and fears in the form of bizarre monstrosities that chase them down and torture them.

In his hallucinating state, James Sunderland is brought to the town by a letter from his deceased wife Mary. The letter was written by her during her time bedridden in a hospital bed and was meant to be given to him after her passing. At the start of the game, the letter seems to specify that she is waiting for James at Silent Hill, since it ends with the line "Waiting for you…" (*Silent Hill 2*). After encountering strange monsters in the deserted town James meets Maria, who is identical to his deceased wife Mary in appearance, yet her manner of clothing and demeanour betray the fact that she is a different person. In their first meeting, James mistakes her for his wife, but she insists that her name is Maria, despite James saying that she could be her twin. When she suggests that perhaps he did not really love her, he snaps back at her, saying, "Don't be ridiculous." (*Silent Hill 2*) What is not quite evident upon first playing the game is the fact that Maria is not a real person, she is a fabrication of reality. In his grief and trauma resulting from the murder of his wife, James had blocked the memory completely as a defense mechanism. Similar to Alan Wake, James is also unwilling to confront the source of his trauma, once more justifying the Freudian idea that traumatized individuals would rather not think about their traumas at all.

Different parts of James mind manifest to haunt him in different forms. For instance, the sexual frustration that James went through after his wife's disease left her bitter and bedridden are shown in the various monsters of the game. This portrayal of the females possessing some "mysterious power…who refuses to stay in her textually ordained "place" (Gilbert and Gubar 28) is similar to how the ghostly character of Barbara Jagger is shown in *Alan Wake*. There are various female looking creatures or monsters that the town creates who are quite sexualized– the Bubble Head Nurses, the Mannequins and the Lying Figures. The Nurses wear very short skirts to seem more attractive, however their heads are completely wrapped in a material, blocking all

orifices from appearing, this also makes them appear swollen and bulging, hence their name Bubble Head. The nurses swollen heads are symbolic of what James had done to his wife, that is, suffocating her with a pillow. The Nurses seem to be unable to breathe and they continuously shake their heads as if in an attempt to break free from their bondage. This symbolizes the patriarchal domination of the submissive angelic figure, who as a result to fight back has become more monstrous. As clarified by Masahiro Ito, who worked as the creature designer and illustrator of the game:

> The meaning of the head of Bubble Head Nurse.
>
> It's representative of suffocated invalid Mary's swallen (sic) head. The nurse in SH2 [*Silent Hill 2*], she shakes her head like struggling to shake off the covered vinyl. (Ito)

The reason they appear as nurses is possibly linked to the time that James had spent with Mary in the hospital. He could have possibly been too sexually frustrated by his wife's condition, leading him to ogle at the nurses who worked at the location.

The other feminine monster called the Mannequin takes the appearance of two pairs of legs that are stacked on top of one another. They are stacked in such a way that the posterior side of the top half emulate the appearance of a woman's breasts, and the top half has no feet to emulate a pair of arms. They are described in the Silent Hill guidebook as a manifestation of James' natural urges and inclinations. Similar to how the nurses depicted his sexual frustration, so too did these Mannequins. However, while the nurses are possibly representations of actual nurses that James felt attraction towards, the Mannequins can be interpreted as more directly linked to Mary herself. When the monster Pyramid Head is first introduced into the story, it is seen violently assaulting two Mannequins in a movement pattern that resembles sexual intercourse. This once again harkens back to James dominating presence over his wife during her final moments when he is suffocating her. Since Pyramid Head is supposed to be the part of James' mind that desires punishment for his sins, it is acting out the gravest sin he had committed in murdering his wife in front of him, over and over throughout the game. The unconscious part of James' mind that holds his repressed memories continues to try and break out despite him wishing to keep it forgotten.

The third feminine creature that is brought out from James memories is the Lying Figure. It takes the form of a human figure that is completely bound in a prison

of flesh similar to how a straightjacket is used to confine prisoners and inmates of jails and asylums. Once again, this restricted figure calls to the helpless state of Mary due to her sickness and how easily James is able to suffocate her to death. It can also be seen as the feeling of helplessness and suffering that James went through during his wife's illness. His situation must have felt similar to somebody who is confined to a straightjacket – since his wife is slowly dying due to her illness and James himself is unable to do anything about it. He also had to endure her verbal abuse during this time, which eventually culminates with his act of murder. In addition, in a similar manner to how Pyramid Head is seen abusing the Mannequins, it can also be seen abusing a Lying Figure in the same manner. The giant masculine monster towers over the smaller feminine monster while holding it down and thrusting itself into it in a movement reminiscent of sexual intercourse. These scenes with Pyramid Head and the feminine creatures represent the oppressive James dominating his helpless wife.

Eddie Dombrowski and Angela Orosco are the other characters in the game who are also called to the town of Silent Hill because of their unresolved traumas. However, unlike James, they do not have any alternate paths in the story, and they both ultimately fall victim to the manifestations of their deepest nightmare. Angela was born into a poor and abusive household, where her father Thomas and her unnamed brother would often abuse her, leading to her having very poor self-esteem, and she became convinced that she could never attain any happiness in her life. Unable to endure the torture any longer, she kills her father and runs away to the town of Silent Hill, where she and James meet during the events of the game. She believes that she deserves to be punished because according to her, "Even Mama said it: I deserved what happened" (*Silent Hill 2*). Her behaviour is relatively accurate to real-life victims of child abuse. According to Kate Walsh and David DiLillo, "Child and adolescent sexual abuse victims also tend to report self-blame, low self-esteem, and stigmatization related to the abuse" (209), which can all be seen in Angela. She constantly apologizes to James whenever they hold conversation. It can also be surmised from the line she tells James, "I know what you're up to! It's always the same! You're only after one thing!" (*Silent Hill 2*) that she is either stigmatized by society or is unable to accept help because she believes that she deserved to live in misery. She believes she is searching for her mother in the town, yet she has no idea whether she is really there or

not. Suspicious of her holding a knife in her unstable condition, James offers to take it off her, but as he approaches her, she shrieks and points it at him before apologizing to him once again shortly later. She says to James, "I'm sorry…I've been bad…Please don't…" (*Silent Hill 2*) and runs away from him, leaving the knife in his possession. She has this apologetic behaviour because of her gendered body that has received repeated sexual assault at an early age. Her thought for her mother is also suggestive of her fear of the dominating presence of the masculine gender. In the angel-monster dynamic of female depiction in narratives it is stated that, "…the monster may not only be concealed behind the angel, she may actually turn out to reside within (or in the lower half of) the angel" (Gilbert and Gubar 29). Angela can be read as a representation of the monster disguised as an angel, since she initially appears to be very submissive but she is also able to fight back against her oppressors such as when she kills her father and brother.

Like James, the town manifests monsters based on the state of Angela's mind. In her case, the monster is called Abstract Daddy, or Ideal Father. It corners her in a room and attempts to force itself upon her similar to how her father would have done in the past. On the walls of this room, there are orifices through which pistons can be seen moving in and out rhythmically, simulating the thrusting motions involved in sexual intercourse. This room is made to remind Angela of the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father and brother, the pulsating pistons depicting what they did to her. Unlike the more resilient and mature James, she is too afraid to confront it and has to rely on him to rescue her from the monster. After James has killed the monster, Angela repeatedly wails on it, kicking it and throwing objects at its fallen form, her demeanour completely changing from the shy and reserved person she was before. This once again shows how Angela can be identified as a monster disguised as an angel. Age also comes into play here as the Freudian concept states that a traumatizing memory from an early age would have a greater effect on an individual's character. In addition to this, it was found in a study that:

> …early trauma exposure may be more damaging than later trauma exposure because it compromises a child's ability to successfully master stage-salient developmental tasks…and damages the foundation of brain architecture and neurobiological systems involved in regulating arousal, emotion, stress

responses, and reward processing, which are all implicated in the onset and persistence of stress-related disorders like depression and PTSD. (Dunn, et al) Thus, unlike James who experiences his trauma at a later age, Angela has been exposed to her trauma since her childhood, which results in her having a much more timid response to it. Her timidity can be further seen in the lines, "It's easier just to run… Besides, it's what we deserve. Are you afraid?" (*Silent Hill 2*). Angela's personal monster is portrayed as two human looking figures fused together into a bed frame, symbolic of how her father would force himself upon her in the past. Her final appearance in the game is standing above James in a burning staircase in the Lakeview Hotel. She is now left in a delusional state of mind and she mistakes James for her mother, telling him that "Now you're the only one left!" (*Silent Hill 2*), calling out the fact that she does not have anyone left except for her mother. When she realizes her mistake, she apologizes to him yet again and tells him that he should not have saved her because she does not deserve it. She berates James for trying to act as the hero for her before walking up the stairs and disappearing, and is not seen again for the rest of the game. This final act of defiance in the face of the masculine protagonist James is also her final role as the monster before it is vanquished from the story. It is implied that Angela commits suicide after this event, disappearing into the otherworld created by the town, unable to escape from the traumas of her past unlike James.

Angela's suicidal tendencies are the result of the sexual abuse that have been inflicted on her by her father and brother from an early age, as explained by Jeanette Krenek, et al, "The trauma of incest may result in adolescent who does not develop a stable identity and uses self-destructive coping strategies, such as substance abuse" (198). She continuously shows during the events of the game and her interactions with James that she internally attributes the reason for her family's treatment of her. Her mother's constant scolding of her and telling her that she deserves what she suffered could have greatly contributed to this fact. According to a study held by K. Brent Morrow, "what was related to greater depression and lower self-esteem was attributing the molestation to something about the victim instead of external attributions or finding no explanation. Such internal attributions were more likely to be made if the molestation involved sexual intercourse" (480). He surmised that self-blame could have been used by some victims of incestual sexual trauma as a coping mechanism,

"By fantasizing that she is in charge of a stressful event, the associated anxiety is allegedly reduced….But while such a coping mechanism may increase a sense of control, it does so by distorting reality. The results of this study also suggest that it is costly in terms of psychological impact" (479-480). The price that Angela ultimately has to pay for her self-blame is her self-destructive tendencies that ends in her suicide in the town of Silent Hill.

The other character, Eddie Dombrowski is a very insecure man, concerned greatly about his physical appearance, thinking that he is too fat to be accepted into society. Since he is overweight, he has to endure bullying from his peers, and this led to him developing symptoms consistent of body dysmorphic disorder. As evidenced in a research paper about individuals with body dysmorphic disorder, it was noted that "individuals with BDD [body dysmorphic disorder] may interpret their recalled teasing experiences as evidence for their appearance flaws" (Buhlmann 384). Individuals who had been subjected to repeated teasing and bullying that targeted their physical appearance tended to actually conclusively believe that this part of their appearance was indeed flawed and ugly, a trait which can be seen in Eddie. During his time in Silent Hill Eddie becomes quite unhinged, and it is implied that he arrived in the town because he is on the run from the law for illegal use of firearms. In a scene later in the game, Eddie is heard muttering to himself, "Killing a person ain't no big deal. Just put the gun to their head…pow!" (*Silent Hill 2*), while holding a gun in his hand and surrounded by human corpses. When James asks him about the corpses, Eddie claims that he did not kill anyone, and begins threatening James. He makes the statement that, "From now on, if anyone makes fun of me…I'll kill em'. Just like that" (*Silent Hill 2*). Similar to Angela, the young and immature mind of Eddie is unable to face the cause of his trauma as well due to experiencing it at an early age. This is in contrast to James Sunderland, an older man who only experiences his trauma during his middle aged years.

Aside from the monstrous creatures, there are various objects and locales that represent the broken state of the characters who wander into the town of Silent Hill. During the course of the game, the players can find three tablets that represent each one of the three mentally damaged characters. The Tablet of "The Oppressor" depicts two figures— the first is Tlazolteotl, the Central Mexican goddess of sin, purification,

lust and filth, and the other figure is an Aztec man who is reaching for the goddess' throat. This particular depiction of the two figures is taken from the illustrations in the Codex Fejérváry-Mayer. Tlazolteotl is the goddess who causes lust and sinful desires within mankind, but she is also the one who consumes these vices and purifies them. This goddess is representative of Mary according to James warped mind. She inspires lust within him but he is unable to act on these feelings because of her illness, and she is also filthy as her illness had deteriorated her physical appearance greatly. The man reaching for the goddess throat can be interpreted as James. He is a mortal man who has been driven to murder and lustful feelings because of the goddess Tlazolteotl, his wife. The so called Oppressor that the tablet refers to would be James. However, it could also be interpreted as being Mary, since she had verbally and physically abused her husband because she was deteriorating in health and became bitter towards him for being unable to help her condition. When the tablet is found in the game, it is located in one of the prison cells of the Toluca Prison, which could hold more meaning as it could represent either James or Mary being stuck in a hellish life where neither of them could move on. After the player has James pick up the tablet, the door to the cell becomes stuck and he has to attempt several times to open it before finally busting through, once more symbolising that he is stuck in an undesirable world and has to endure much pain and struggle before breaking out of it. Thus, it would not be remiss to state that the couple had both oppressed one another, which is evident from the manifestations of James mind– the Nurses, the Mannequins and the Lying Figures, which are all constrained and restricted in some way. James is suffocating in his life, his wife is dying from illness which was out of their control. So, he could not move on with his life with her slowly wasting away, and he has to snuff her life out himself. This guilt continues to haunt and manifest in him even after the initial event, as can be seen in the ghostly apparitions and locations that Silent Hill creates to remind him of the sins he had committed. This is the double wound that Cathy Caruth refers to when describing how trauma works in an individual.

The second tablet is called the Tablet of "The Seductress", and it seemingly represents Angela Orosco. The figure depicted on the tablet is Mayahuel, the Central Mexican goddess of Maguey, this particular illustration of her being taken from the Codex Laud. The maguey plant's primary use is in the manufacturing of the alcoholic

drink called pulque. The fermented sap of the plant is used to make this drink and has been consumed by the Central Mexicans for many millennia. This could represent Angela's father being an alcoholic. This is supported by the fact that he had a violent and cruel temperament towards his own flesh and blood, physically and sexually abusing his own daughter for many years. The goddess Mayahuel in the tablet is seen holding the thorn of the maguey plant, which was used as a tool by ancient Aztecs to prick themselves in their tongue, ear, thigh, arm or other delicate body parts to draw blood which they would offer to their gods. In the game, this is representative of Angela and her knife. This is the same knife that she supposedly used to kill her father and brother, and which she was thinking of killing herself with as well. In addition, the tablet is found inside the shower of Toluca Prison, which once again harkens back to Angela's past. It can be surmised that after being sexually assaulted by her father and brother, she would have felt the need to shower in order to cleanse herself from the taint of incest.

The third and final tablet is called the Tablet of "Gluttonous Pig", and it is representative of Eddie Dombrowski. It depicts the Central Mexican god Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli, known as the god of the planet Venus. He is depicted in legends as a very dangerous deity who would throw darts at any who crossed him. In the game itself, the image of this god is altered from historical codices as he is depicted with the head of a pig instead, to show its relation to Eddie, who was known for consuming copious amounts of food. The dangerous demeanour of the god is represented by Eddie's willingness to shoot people with his gun, as he had shot both his bully and his dog, the manifestations of his bullies in Silent Hill, and even James who had actually done nothing wrong to him. Furthermore, the tablet is found within the cafeteria in Toluca prison, once more signifying Eddie's tendency to gorge himself on food items and the cause of his bullies' attitude towards him.

James wife Mary can also be seen suffering from her own trauma, although she has already passed away when the game takes place. Her illness caused her to consider herself a monster, because her physical appearance had deteriorated significantly and she became a bitter person who would verbally berate and lash out at her caretakers, including her husband. After Mary was discharged from the hospital, she lived out her final days at her home with James. Living with the terminally ill Mary was quite an

unpleasant experience for James, so he took to drinking and became sexually frustrated because his wife was unable to satisfy him. While Mary is initially an angelic figure that James deeply loves, her illness has transformed her into a monstrous version of what she previously was. When James recovers the memories of the circumstances surrounding his wife's death, it can be seen that Mary is actually quite regretful of the way she treated him. This can be seen in the game when Mary is berating James when he comes to give her flowers at the hospital. She lashes out at him, telling him that she does not deserve the flowers, and that "It'd be easier if they just kill me" (*Silent Hill 2*). However, after he has left the room, she apologizes profusely and shows how afraid she really is. With her death fast approaching, Mary sought to cope with her mortality by becoming detached with those she loved. Hence, it can be seen that she has actually transformed into an angel disguised as a monster, instead of just the monster that James sees. Similar to Angela, her behaviour would change depending on the circumstances surrounding her. Whenever James was not present, she would weep and yearn for his presence. But when he was present, she would verbally abuse him and tell him to go away.

The game presents six possible endings for James, two of which are gag endings that were intended for comic relief and will not be examined in detail, narrowing down the endings to four instead. In the ending titled "Leave", James is able to accept the fact that his wife has passed. He confronts Maria one final time and tells her that he doesn't need Maria anymore since she is just part of the nightmare that Silent Hill has created for him. The town issues one final challenge to James in the form of a monster simply called Mary, who is described by the Silent Hill guidebook as "A being that embodies James' conflicted emotions toward Mary during her final days" (Konami). Upon defeating the monster, James is depicted sitting next to his dying wife in bed, having a conversation. He asks for forgiveness from her, and confesses that the reason he killed her was because he hated her. Mary was impeding his progress in life, pulling him into being stuck with her in her bedridden state. This is where the ACT comes into play, where James is able to confront and accept his trauma instead of having it be relegated to a place in his unconscious mind. Since James is still being hung up about the past, Mary tells him, "James…Please…Please do something for me. Go on with your life" (*Silent Hill 2*). The final scene in this

ending shows James leaving the town with Laura, finally able to accept his guilt and remaining hopeful for a brighter future.

The ending titled "In Water" also has James confront Maria and he calls her out on her deception. She transforms into the Mary monster like in the previous ending and James has to fight and defeat her. But this path differs in that, instead of telling James to move on with his life, Mary just states that he had killed her and that he is suffering for it. A dejected James, unable to move on with his life, tells himself that he now realizes why he had come to this town in the first place. He says, "Without you, Mary, I've got nothing…" (*Silent Hill 2*) and proceeds to drive his car off into the town's lake. He subsequently drowns with his wife's body in the back seat of the car. This ending can be seen as a path in which James fails to accept and defuse the source of his trauma, resulting in his death.

In the ending titled "Maria", James falls even further into his delusion. Instead of him confronting Maria, the town shows him another illusion of his wife who berates him for trying to find a replacement wife. James kills this monstrous version of Mary once more, but he does not reject Maria for being a fake copy of his wife. Instead, he tells her that he just wants to see his wife again, even if it is just an illusion. He completely accepts Maria as a replacement for his wife, not caring about the memory of Mary anymore. However, as the two are about to leave the town together, Maria begins coughing, signalling that she would meet a similar fate to Mary– the victim of an incurable terminal disease. By rejecting the reality of his actions, James has doomed himself to reliving his trauma over again. Thus, the double wound of trauma as a repeating event is shown in this ending.

The "Rebirth" ending is similar to the "In Water" ending, in that James shows his inability to go on living without his wife at his side. But instead of committing suicide like in the aforementioned ending, he instead attempts to bring Mary back to life through the sacred rituals of the cultists present in the town. In order for this ending to be attained, James must gather occult objects strewn about the town. Taking Mary's corpse from the back of the car, James puts her on a boat and rows out to a Church situated in a small island out on Toluca Lake. His narration implies that after collecting the occult objects, he has found a way to revive his wife from beyond the grave:

This town, Silent Hill….

The Old Gods haven't left this place….

And they still grant power to those who venerate them….

Power to defy even death….

Ah….Mary *(Silent Hill 2)*

However, the results of the ritual are not shown, it is instead left up to interpretation by the players whether James succeeds in his ritual or not. Thus, from the various endings available in the game, it can be seen what happens to a traumatized individual when they succeed or fail in following the principles of ACT. The acceptance and confrontation of trauma results in a positive and optimistic ending while further repression and avoidance of trauma results in a very bleak ending.

In *American McGee's Alice,* the story follows Alice Liddell as she struggles to cope with a tragic fire that killed her family many years prior to the events of the game. The game is meant to be an unofficial sequel to Lewis Carroll's novels *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). She is a very imaginative young girl who at times is able to escape into her imaginary 'wonderland' where she meets with fantastical creatures. Her father Arthur Liddell, a dean at Oxford University, had an undergraduate named Angus Bumby tutored by him and was a frequent guest at the Liddell household. Bumby grew infatuated with the older sister of Alice, Lizzie. When his advances were revoked by the girl, Bumby resorted to breaking in to the household at night, raping Lizzie and setting the house on fire to cover up his tracks. A young Alice had seen him sneaking into his sister's room, but her overactive imagination had misinterpreted him as a 'centaur' and her sister's noises she had brushed off as her talking in her sleep. Being the only survivor of the fire, Alice is left in a state of catatonia and is admitted into Rutledge Asylum in London for treatment. Being subjected to all manner of archaic operations, Alice's mental and physical condition deteriorated over the years. However, she finally awakens from her non-responsive state on the 7th of September in 1873. The following year, Alice is led by the White Rabbit back into a now corrupted version of Wonderland, where she has to confront the mental manifestation of her madness in the form of the Queen of Hearts. After defeating the Queen in Wonderland, the fantasy world is restored to its former splendour, and in turn restoring Alice's mind to a more

cohesive state. Alice is deemed sane enough to finally be discharged from the Asylum in November of 1874, when she is 18 years of age.

In an interview conducted by John McLean-Foreman for Gamasutra website, lead game designer American McGee shared the reason for crafting such a dark rendition of the whimsical tale of Lewis Carroll's Alice, "Really, turning Alice dark wasn't a result of me forcing that darkness on the story, it just seemed to come naturally out of [Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*] when I read it. It seems like a very dark story to me. I felt like a lot of what was happening here was flowing naturally out of the fiction, and not being pulled out or magnified by myself" (McGee). He stated that most of these ideas were thrown out because they were not being true to the fiction. So the final draft of the story that ended up being developed was lead designer American McGee's own interpretation of Carroll's works, which was the story of a traumatized girl who stood up to and conquered her inner demons.

Alice often seeks refuge from her trauma by retreating to the Wonderland in her mind. However, this land has also become fractured and disfigured in a similar state to her mind since that is what it represents for her. The ruthless Queen of Hearts of Wonderland is revealed to be the mental manifestation of her trauma, so Alice resolves to defeat her. The Cheshire Cat guides her in her quest to reach the Queen of Hearts, it also tells her of the nature of the Queen and what she represents, "You and this Red Queen cannot both survive. You are two parts of the same" (*American McGee's Alice*). This is a depiction of the ACT, where Alice has to accept and live with the representation of her trauma in the Queen. After facing the Queen and achieving victory over her, Alice learns to accept the dark part of herself which the Queen represents. This results in her mental Wonderland being repaired from its damaged state. Similarly, in the real-world Alice's mind is also mended and she is deemed sane enough to be discharged from the asylum.

Alice's tendency to retreat into her wonderland when the traumas she encountered in the real world become too much for her to bear are consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which she shares in common with Alan Wake and James Sunderland from the other games in the study. As described by the APA, the fact that Alice "makes deliberate efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations about the

traumatic event" (464) is a symptom of those afflicted by PTSD. Since Alice had been a frequent daydreamer from her childhood, and the fact that she recognizes that Wonderland is separate from reality, it would not be accurate to call it a case of schizophrenia. More accurate would be to call her coping response the term "Maladaptive daydreaming", which was coined by Professor Eli Somer. He defines it as an "extensive fantasy activity that replaces human interaction" (197). Alice also does not continually retreat to Wonderland, but only does so when she wished to hide from reality. This can be seen in the interim between the fire that killed her family and the events of the first game, where it is stated by the inhabitants of the fantasy realm that she had been away for a long time, and the world had changed a lot during that time. Furthermore, at the end of the first game, she has seemingly left Wonderland behind as a thing of the past. This fact is further solidified at the start of the second game when she responds to Bumby who is trying to make her remember her past that, "I'd rather not, Doctor. My Wonderland's shattered. It's dead to me" (*Alice: Madness Returns*). The fact that Alice had repressed all memory of Doctor Angus Bumby because she wishes to not be reminded of the night of her fire falls in line with Freud's statement that individuals with traumatic memories are "more concerned with not thinking of it" (7). The repression of her memories is so powerful that even after working under Bumby as a maid and having frequent hypnotherapy sessions with him, Alice is unable to form an inkling of remembrance about who he really is.

The sequel to *American McGee's Alice*, titled *Alice: Madness Returns,* takes place a year after the events of the first game. American McGee describes the narrative of the game as Alice "confronting really the mystery of what happened, as opposed to the damage related to it – though there is still a lot of psychological damage as you move into Wonderland, you'll notice" (McGee). Although deemed sane enough to leave the Asylum, Alice is still haunted with memories of the fire which left her suffering from hallucinations. This once again shows the nature of trauma as a double wound as described by Cathy Caruth, where the traumatic experience is relived repeatedly. Alice, now 19 years of age, works as a maid in an orphanage run by Dr. Angus Bumby, who has now become a practicing psychiatrist. He subjects Alice as well as the orphans under his care to hypnotherapy, which he claims to be beneficial

for their mental health. In reality he is manipulating the minds of the children so that he can sell them off to the highest bidder. Since Alice does not remember his role in starting the fire that killed her family, she does not suspect anything from the doctor. However, this hypnotherapy that Bumby performs on her has the side effect of makings Alice enter her Wonderland once more. This time, a new tyrant appears in her Wonderland named the Dollmaker. This malicious being brings ruin to Alice's mind and attempts to destroy both the inhabitants and the world itself. Similar to how the Queen of Hearts represented the source of trauma for Alice in the previous game, the Dollmaker is now the mental manifestation of Alice's source of trauma.

Joel Wade, executive producer of the game, describes the narrative theme of Alice's journey through the game as:

> The whole game is actually almost like a murder mystery…She's recovering repressed memories about the mysterious fire that killed her entire family ten years ago (00:10:18).

In accordance with this statement, the crux of the story in *Alice: Madness Returns* is centered around Alice's attempts to find fragments of her forgotten memory. She has repressed her traumatic memories in order to cope, however these memories keep coming back to haunt her until she is able to accept and confront them on her own. Alice harbours great guilt within her for not realising that the intruder in their household was not an imaginary centaur but was actually Angus Bumby. If she had been able to realize that in the past, then perhaps she could have foiled his plans on that night and her family would have survived. However, she is able to defeat her inner demons in Wonderland at the end of the first game, and is able to live as a sane person despite the pain from her guilt still remaining within her. It is only after she comes into contact with Bumby again during the events of the second game that her repressed memories come back to her. As Freud has stated that traumatized individuals tend to subconsciously think of memories and thoughts that are far removed from the source of trauma, so too did Alice choose not to remember her trauma because she feared it. She is able to remember her trauma only because of coming into contact with Bumby once again during the events of the second game.

Alice's imaginary friends in Wonderland help her to recall what she has repressed out of her guilt. After realizing that she is guilty of something, she is finally

able to recall that she did indeed see Bumby long ago when he was still an undergraduate. She also realizes that the key that he wears as a pendant around his neck is the key to her sister's room that he has kept with him as a souvenir. This key is symbolic of the oppression of the male figure of Bumby over both the sisters Lizzie and Alice. He had raped Lizzie before killing her family and he is also able to get away with it entirely, which prompted the previously "angelic" Alice to become a "monster" in order to defend herself. This can be seen in the game as Alice is able to fight against various horrible creatures within her Wonderland.

After accepting that she is partly to blame for the death of her family, Alice breaks free from Bumby's hypnotism. According to ACT, this would mean Alice has now found a new goal or values in her life, that being the thought of bringing Bumby to justice for his crimes. When she confronts him, the doctor admits to her that it was him who had committed the arson and also raped Lizzie. However, he is not fazed by her accusations since he claims that there is no evidence of his actions. He also reminds Alice that she is recognized by society as a "former lunatic" so her testimony would not hold much weight. This provokes her into pushing him down to the tracks and he is run over by an oncoming train, showing the "monstrous" side of her personality in Wonderland has now transferred to her real-life identity. Having eliminated the source of her torment, Alice exits the station to find herself in an amalgamation of reality and Wonderland. Her constant guide and companion The Cheshire Cat tells her that they can't go home again after this, implying that she is now a fugitive and would have to hide from the law. Resorting to violence and going against the established rules of the patriarchy causes Alice to deviate even further from the rest of the male dominated society.

The recurring theme in all of these games is the confrontation and acceptance of the sources of trauma for all these characters. This shares parallels with the ACT, which "assumes that the psychological processes of a normal human mind are often destructive and create psychological suffering….The goal of ACT is to create a rich and meaningful life, while accepting the pain that inevitably goes with it" (Russell 2). From the cases of the aforementioned characters presented in the games, it can be surmised that the goal of ACT, of being able to accept pain and anguish to keep on enduring through life, can be seen in Alice Liddell, James Sunderland in the "Leave"

ending, and Alan Wake as well. They have all found new values to hold on to, values which spur them on to continue living. Alan values his wife's safety above all else, he refuses to rest until he is certain of her safety, and in the end, he even sacrifices his well-being for her sake. Alice is able to defeat the demons that tormented her— both the real life demon of Angus Bumby and the figurative demons in her Wonderland, enabling her to remember the memories she had repressed of the enabling role she had in her family's demise. Her newfound convictions helped her to be discharged from the asylum, as well as finding the strength to fight against the oppressive and abusive Dr.Bumby. James Sunderland, in the "Leave" ending finds enough resolve within himself to keep on living for the future, despite all the terrible things that he had committed before. While on the other hand, the characters Angela and Eddie, unable to cope with their pain and guilt, suffer far more than they might have otherwise, ultimately resulting in their deaths within the town.

It has also been found that the various traumatized characters are all from different backgrounds and experience different pasts. As a result, they all possess different memories of trauma and react differently to it as well. With regards to the effects of age in response to traumatic stressors, it can be seen that the characters who have experienced unresolved trauma at an early age such as Angela Orosco and Eddie Dombrowski in *Silent Hill 2* and Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* are more deeply affected by it. They stand opposed to the older characters who experience their trauma at a later age like Alan Wake in *Alan Wake* and James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2,* who are able to recover from their traumas owing to their strong mental fortitude. Furthermore, with regards to the portrayal of gender and the effects it has on trauma, the video games consistently fall in line with what can be seen within the writings of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. They have stated that there is a tendency in narrative writings to depict females as either one of two extremes— the angel and the monster. As can be seen in this chapter, the female characters of the video games can all be categorized into either one of the two, or as a hybrid of these two forms.

NOTES

[1]A third person video game perspective refers to games where the view point of the player is at a distance behind and slightly above the player character

[2]A first person video game perspective refers to games where the point of view is situated through the character's eyes

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CHAPTER 4

'MEMORO-POLITICS' OF THE OTHER

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'Memoro-politics' of the Other

Ian Hacking coined the term memoro-politics, which is based on Michel Foucault's anatomo-politics of the human body, and bio-politics of the population. These were the names that the latter attributed to the "two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations" (Foucault 139). Anatomo-politics is about maintaining discipline and optimizing the capabilities of the human body, and bio-politics refers to the supervision of the "species body" in order to draw out the maximum potential of the population as a whole. These two politics together constitute the concept of biopower, and they are responsible for holding power over the human way of life according to Foucault. Based upon these politics that govern the physical aspects of humanity, Hacking comes up with the concept of memoro-politics to be a politics of the human soul.

Hacking states that what he calls memoro-politics is "a third extreme point from which we can triangulate recent knowledge" (Hacking 35) in addition to Foucault's anatomo-politics and bio-politics. It is a politics of the human soul, and not necessarily just of the human mind. This soul that is referred to by Hacking is not something that is transcendental or eternal, it is not the spiritual or supernatural definition of the word, but rather it is something inherent within man that invokes "character, reflective choice, self-understanding, values that include honesty to others and oneself, and several types of freedom and responsibility...Love, passion, envy, tedium, regret and quiet contentment are the stuff of the soul" (Hacking 35). He talks of the functional uses of this memoro-politics, of how it can be used to internalize the laws of a social order within a person, so that they would adhere to the laws laid down by the society they lived in without having to be enforced time and again. In order to identify a discipline that studies the soul, Hacking states that this begins with physiology, with his reasoning being that other disciplines such as psychology are about the body when applied practically. In fact, the practical applications of psychology are physically involved with the body, such as electro-shock therapy and injection of chemicals to regulate patients suffering from mental distress.

The idea of memoro-politics is based on the collective consciousness of the public, of how knowledge is gained on the way memory works. In tracing the development of Foucault's biopower, Hacking's work takes a look at how the word trauma evolved to the modern definition of a spiritual wound that inflicted pain on the mind of individuals, when the term used to be limited to physical wounds in the past. He stresses that what memoro-politics is concerned with is not simply the act of the recollection or erosion of a memory. The act of forgetting the exact details of a poem that was learned during childhood school lessons is not what memoro-politics deals with, but what it actually deals with are instances of pathological forgetting. More so than the act of remembering, memoro-politics is concerned with what has been forgotten, whatever hidden secret that may reside in the depths of the mind that holds control over humans. This approach to memory harkens to Freud, who has stressed on the importance of the unconscious mind in the development of an individual's identity:

> The unconscious is the larger circle which includes within itself the smaller circle of the conscious; everything conscious has its preliminary step in the unconscious, whereas the unconscious may stop with this step and still claim full value as a psychic activity. Properly speaking, the unconscious is the real psychic; its inner nature is just as unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly reported to us through the data of consciousness as is the external world through the indications of our sensory organs. (Freud, *Dream Psychology: Psychoanalysis for Beginners* 117)

As can be seen in the traumatized video game characters examined in this study, they are shaped by their past traumas more than they are aware. For instance, James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* experiences ghostly apparitions and monsters in the titular town without knowing the reason why it happens to him. But as he continues to explore the town, it is gradually revealed that all these events are occurring to him because of a memory of trauma that he has repressed unknowingly— the act of murdering his wife. All of the events that occur in the game can be explained and their symbolism understood in light of this memory once it is remembered by James. Similarly, these forgotten memories acting against a traumatized individual can also be seen in Alan Wake in *Alan Wake,* when the titular character's memories of his wife's death become unclear. In his unconscious mind he recognizes that his wife is not really dead but still

exists in the other world where she is being kept hostage by the Dark Presence. This unconscious memory of his wife's safety is the inspiration that he uses to keep pushing forward despite all hope seemingly becoming lost for him.

Over the years of human existence, the need for classifying and identifying the various types of people arose, and through this classification of people came the concept of applying a sense of normalcy to the population. Hacking stresses that what is normal is dictated by the enumerators, those who take a census of the population, as they are the ones who determine what is average and what is healthy human behaviour within society. This development in turn leads to the tendency of psychologists to take a look at the most average group of people who were classified in a population, and then base their studies and research on that. So, the field of experimental psychology became a discipline that increasingly depended upon the majority population as the basis. The study of memory itself was brought into focus by Hermann Ebbinghaus, who in his initial studies focused on himself as a test subject, where he made himself learn some nonsensical syllables and documented how effectively he was able to retain the learning process of these syllables. These early experiments of his were later added upon by later researchers, by taking data from the collective population and thus included a wider variety of test subjects instead of being limited to just one.

The normalcy of an individual within the context of Foucault's politics is a determinant for alienating people who are considered abnormal from the societal boundary. However, in memoro-politics, Hacking considers no individual to be either normal or abnormal in the same way. Yet, the state, for its interest, generalizes Foucault's bio-politics too much. For Hacking, everyone deviates from the normal in some aspects. Just as the concepts of normalcy and pathology used in the aforementioned bio-politics were transferred from terms that were originally used in medicine and physiology, the term trauma which is a core part of memoro-politics is also transferred from having mainly a meaning associated with physical wound to a term used to describe fractured memories. The concept of traumatic events causing individuals to forget details about their past and rendering them as unreasonable, abnormal people was conceptualized in order to explain the reason for these afflicted people's sense of abnormality. Since humanity always requires a sense of normalcy, a

necessity arises to explain and understand why and how there could exist people who operate outside of the bounds of what is considered normal by the majority of society.

Those outside of the bounds of normalcy are referred to as the Other. The Other's existence is required in order for the Self to take form, since the definition of Self requires that something else exists which is different from it. Describing that the normal societal structure is constructed on the exclusion of what is not normal, Lawrence Cahoone writes:

> What appear to be cultural units – human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations – are maintained in their apparent unity only through an active process of exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization. Other phenomena or units must be represented as foreign or "other" through representing a hierarchical dualism in which the unit is "privileged" or favored, and the other is devalued in some way. (16)

The otherness of those who have been inflicted with trauma is put on display in the video games under scrutiny in this study. It is their otherness that enables them to transcend the limits of reality and enables the scenarios depicted in the games. For instance, from what can be gathered in the happenings of the game, the town of Silent Hill only makes physical manifestations out of the minds of troubled individuals who harbour intense feelings of guilt within themselves. In *Silent Hill 2*, James, Eddie and Angela are all subjected to this experience by the town, whereas the innocent and pure little girl Laura is unphased by any of the monsters, implying that she does not see any of them but only perceives an abandoned town. Alan Wake in *Alan Wake* is able to write fiction into reality because he was foretold to be able to do so many decades earlier by the writer Thomas Zane. It is because of his unique ability that the two main antagonists of the game, the Dark Presence and Dr. Emil Hartman, want to use for their own agendas. Alan also finds it difficult to convince the townsfolk of Bright Falls to believe him and his wild stories, and he is even locked up in the sheriff's jail for a time because he is perceived as a raving lunatic. Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* series of games is also able to perceive her own imaginary world and retreat into that world when the real world becomes too much to bear for her. And in a more literal sense of being the Other, she is ostracized by society because of her shattered mental

state, and being suspected of having set the fire which killed her family years prior to the game.

Memoro-politics is a politics of the human mind, or of the soul as Hacking puts it. As mentioned previously, it is a politics of some of the most passionate and endearing values that a human can come to possess such as love and envy, and so it should be without doubt that it holds significant control over the resulting personality of an individual. The mind is shaped and defined by the memories that it holds from past experiences, and Hacking proposes that there are actually two kinds of politics of memory – personal and communal. Communal memoro-politics plays an important part in forming group identity. Each and every group - named and identifiable group of people - shares a common identity that helps define them and where they stand in the world. For instance, Christians all share a collective identity that is established from teachings that can be found in their sacred text, the Bible. Similarly, there are other faiths whose identity is based on their sacred text, such as Judaism and Islam. Perhaps one of the most commonly used instances of Communal memory with relation to trauma is the Holocaust. However, the topical memories of the characters in the video games in the study are all personal and not communal, although Hacking does admit in his writings that there are shared links between both group and personal memory. One of these links is that of trauma noted by Hacking:

> The science of traumatic stress teaches that individual concentration camp survivors, and by extension their progeny, suffer from the psychological effects of trauma very much as the victims of child abuse do. (211)

It can be seen that the symptoms of trauma that arises from different sources can be very much similar when it is played out. As such, whether personal or communal traumatic memories are involved, it can be justified to examine their resulting effects using the same methodologies because they do share traits.

Memory or experience is critical in determining the personality of an individual, how they behave and perceive things can change quite drastically depending on what information or knowledge they have stored away and what they can call upon. Sigmund Freud has stated that although there is no guarantee of the correctness of our memory, there is a tendency within individuals to "attach belief to its data far more often than is objectively justified" (519). As further noted by Anne

Whitehead in *Trauma Fiction*, this nature of memory (or forgetting) has also been a popular theme in fiction over the years:

> Many contemporary novels are concerned with traumatic events, whether these emerge out of collective experiences such as war, slavery or the Holocaust, or the more individual experiences of rape or bereavement. (161)

This is also portrayed in the characters of the games discussed in this study. As stated in the previous chapters, it is precisely the loss of memories by the protagonists that is the focal point of the games. For instance, in the case of Alan Wake, it is his drive to rediscover his lost memories that continually pushes him onward despite all the obstacles that stand in his way. However, in sharp contrast to this empowering and positive effect of memories on an individual, there is Eddie Dombrowski in *Silent Hill 2,* who acts very abrasive towards people who he thinks are body shaming him. For example, when he gets angry with James, he attempts to kill him, because he believes James to be no better than the people who had tortured him his whole life. Thus, depending upon the pasts experienced by the various characters of the video games analyzed in this study, they all have very different reactions to trauma. As examined in the previous chapter, age and gender can play a significant role in the reaction to trauma for the traumatized characters.

Eddie Dombrowski's physical appearance does not fall in line with what is considered normal in society. The most visible and striking part of his appearance is his obesity, and he has been bullied over and over again over the course of many years because of it. Apart from his physical appearance, he has also become quite unhinged mentally, as he had no qualms with injuring or even killing other humans. When James finds him during the latter parts of the game, he is brandishing a gun and standing in a room full of human corpses, which implies that the supernatural powers of the town has manifested his nightmares in the form of his bullies. He raves about how his bullies used to insult him, and he accepts the fact that he is "fat, disgusting piece of shit" (*Silent Hill 2),* as he had been heckled before. However, he also comes to the conclusion that it doesn't really matter what a person looks like, because a corpse can't do anything and he now has the ability to make people into corpses with the gun he possesses. Society has failed Eddie, simply because he did not live up to the standards of normalcy that had been set up. He is looked down upon and driven to the point of

breaking through bullying from the normal and accepted individuals of society. This is what Cahoone calls an "active process of exclusion….as foreign or other" (16). During the course of the game, Eddie becomes a truly mentally unhinged man who rejects all the social standards that he cannot achieve, such as being considered attractive physically. As a result of becoming so excluded from the rest of society, Eddie turns to violence and is content to kill anyone who disagrees with him. This act pushes him further into becoming the Other since he has no qualms about breaking societal standards anymore. For Eddie, the monsters in his head are not the grotesque abominations as seen by James and Angela, instead it is just normal looking humans who are his tormentors. Years of bullying have left their marks on him and he has internalized the verbal abuse would receive constantly in the past. What is considered normal for anyone else transforms into what he considers to be fear-inducing and truly nightmarish.

Apart from Eddie, Angela Orosco in the same game is also a victim of the act of othering by the society. This is in addition to what her family has already inflicted upon her. Thus, she sees everyone except her mother as caring only about themselves. She sees society as having an evil design to assault or her sexually and physically. This conception of society is caused by her memory of her childhood in which she was sexually abused by her own father and brother. While her father and brother are given space in society as normal individuals, she is not provided the same space. Instead, she is considered abnormal and abused repeatedly by the society too. So, she is essentially an outsider to the rest of society, existing on the other side of what is considered normal. As she sees James, she bursts out: "I know what you're up to! It's always the same! You're only after one thing!" (*Silent Hill 2*). Her outburst against James is representative of her angst against the masculine gender and the patriarchal society. Thus, the act of othering is associated with the norms of the patriarchal society she has been subjected to. Even though she loves her mother, she has internalized her abuse as well, accepting that she deserves what she has got in life. She is repeatedly told to believe that she is unable to experience real happiness as a result of what has happened to her in the past at the hands of her family. She is seen holding a knife while collapsing in one of the apartments in Silent Hill. Then, on seeing James, she brandishes her knife at him, as she is afraid of anyone in society, especially males. Thus, her memory of

the abuse by her brother and father has shaped her conception of society. This makes her othered. While, according to Hacking, "no thing or person is simply 'normal' or 'abnormal'" (39), Angela Orosco is still considered abnormal. As such, she has to confront this othering in order to secure her own life. However, the society that considers Angela abnormal does not recognize her past as its own. Since this past is central for the construction of Angela's identity, she sees James as a representative of the society that does not recognize her past. So, her brandishing the knife on seeing James is her memoro-politics, a struggle to secure her life from the "normal" society that considers her abnormal.

James Sunderland's relationship with the young girl Laura can also be read as an instance of a constant reminder of othering. While he is fighting for his life against the monsters in the town, the girl is completely innocent and free from trauma so she does not have the same problem he does. Laura serves as a bridge for James between the real world and the other world of Silent Hill. While James as a traumatized and othered character is being subjected to all manner of horrors, the girl Laura brings a sense of normalcy and hope to the world of Silent Hill. It is only when the ending of the game takes place that James can choose to cross over into the real world. When he is free from his trauma, he is able to find new values in his relationship with Laura, someone to look after since his wife is now no longer with him. The transferral across the two very different worlds also depicts James transition from being the Other into becoming whole and finding his true Self.

With regards to other characters in the games in the study who have forgotten crucial details of their pasts, Ian Hacking states that "What is really powerful is not what is remembered but what is forgotten. It is powerful because the very fact that something is forgotten makes it a secret that works on us" (45). The main characters who are the focal point of the stories and the viewpoints through which the player will be experiencing most of the games are the ones burdened with what is forgotten. In *American McGee's Alice,* the Alice-Bumby conflict is a normal-abnormal conflict in which Alice is the abnormal. Therefore, she is also the Other. After the rape of her sister and the arson on her house, she is no longer a fun-loving, carefree girl that society considers normal. So she is assigned to a mental asylum where her abnormalities would be fixed. As she becomes abnormal, people from all walks of life treated her

differently. This can be seen in the way she is treated by the Nurse Pris Witless who treated her in the asylum. Apart from the cruel treatments practised in the asylum, the nurse would also go on to blackmail Alice after her discharge, threatening to send the young girl back to the asylum if she did not provide her with alcohol or money. There were also the orderlies, who would gleefully watch Alice suffering as she is subjected to all sorts of brutal therapeutic treatments like trepanning and leeches.

Alice's station in life has fallen drastically, even though she is the sole heir of her father's fortune. Their family lawyer Wilton J. Radcliffe has cheated her out of what remained of her inheritance. Alice becomes othered not only mentally but also financially. She lives in poverty, barely able to make ends meet. This othering also leads to the reason for Alice resorting to the murder of Bumby. He is a respectable member of high society in addition to being a very learned man, so his testimony would stand strong against anything that Alice could conjure up. The ending of *Alice: Madness Returns* shows Alice walking into a strange new land, one that is part Wonderland and also seems to be set in the real world as well. By the end of her story, the girl who had been rejected by society for being abnormal has brought her abnormal world into the normal world that is reality, fusing the two together. In this new world constructed by Alice, she is most likely be the only normal, as she is the only one with knowledge of both worlds and has previously co-existed in both of them. The residents of the real world and Wonderland are now the ones who have to adjust to the new world she has brought about, a world which does not truly have a normal state anymore. This can be seen as the state which Hacking proposes with his theory of memoro-politics— since reality and Wonderland are now joined, there would have to be a new concept of normal.

The character archetype of the orphan that Alice represents in the game has been described by John Mullan as,

> an essentially novelistic character, set loose from established conventions to face a world of endless possibilities (and dangers). The orphan leads the reader through a maze of experiences, encountering life's threats and grasping its opportunities. Being the focus of the story's interest, he or she is a naïve mirror to the qualities of others. (Mullan)

This characteristic of the Other can be seen in the games as Alice does not conform to the rules and limits set on her by society, and she is forced to take matters into her own hands at the end of her story. This is her memoro-politics. Apart from Alice, there are also the other children who live in the orphanage with her. These are the children deemed fit to be kept in an institute because in the estimation of society they are abnormal. All these children have a past of their own which society fails to acknowledge. They struggle to survive through a memoro-politics which comes into conflict with the bio-politics of the society. These children as a result were preyed upon by Bumby in the same way he did to Alice, in that they were hypnotised and made subservient to the doctor's every whim.

In Alice's Wonderland, the orphans are represented in the form of a group of odd-looking children who are named as Insane Children. When their world began falling into ruin after the invasion of the Dollmaker, they shack up in a large structure named Fort Resistance. The name of this fort is symbolic of what the Other have to do in order to survive. They have to resist and struggle continually so that they do not become a part of society's plan for them. Part of Alice's character development in the game involves her avenging the orphans for what Bumby has done to them. In the real world, Bumby is hypnotising them, making them forget their memories. This has the effect of making them forget what constitutes their self or their identities. Bumby is portrayed as a wealthy and contributing member of high society, however, he hid a dark secret that is much more abnormal than the mental state of any of the orphans under his care. As such, Hacking's statement that each person is "normal or abnormal in one or more particular respects" (39), is justified with regards to the character of Bumby and his position in relation to the orphans. In this case, the truly harmful abnormal being who deserves to be put into a psychiatric ward is him and not Alice.

In *Alan Wake*, the protagonist is driven by his two objectives – to locate his wife and to recover his lost memories. This provides the impetus for his search of his wife. The characteristic trait of Alan in this game that makes him the Other is that whatever he writes as a fiction turns out to be real. Unlike the Other in other games discussed in this study, Alan's otherness is different because he has some abilities which are not possessed by the other protagonists. His wife forces him to see a therapist because she believes that his inability to write is abnormal. Not only his wife, but the

residents of the town of Bright Falls also consider him abnormal. This can be seen when the town's sheriff refuses to believe him and places him in prison. As Hacking says that "no thing or person is simply 'normal' or 'abnormal'" (39), it is very difficult to identify which one is abnormal: Alan or Hartman. Hartman can also be considered abnormal because of his immoral activities to harm characters like Alan and Barry. This leads to the conclusion that the conception of being abnormal is a subjective one.

In his struggle to find a place for his true self, Alan tries to recover his lost memories. His memoro-politics includes his visit to Hartman, meeting the Anderson Brothers who help him recover his memories and his visit to the lake to finally recover what he has forgotten. After recovering his lost memory, Alan becomes his own Self from being the Other. During his struggle, the forgetting of his past plays a more vital role in the construction of his Other identity than his recovered memory's role in the construction of his true Self.

The characters like James Sunderland and Angela Orosco in *Silent Hill 2* exhibit signs of creating false memories in order to cope with their trauma. The construction of false memories that deeply affect an individual's lifestyle and personality is not officially recognized in either the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* by the APA, or the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* by the WHO. However, there have been studies conducted that aim to prove that there is some semblance of truth in cases of False Memory Syndrome (hereafter FMS). This syndrome is defined by Robert Kaplan and Vijaya Manicavasagar as:

> False memory syndrome (FMS) is caused by memories of a traumatic experience- most frequently CSA- which are objectively false, but in which the person strongly believes. Personality factors often play a role in the development of FMS. (342)

They take a look at three cases of claimed FMS to verify whether the concept is real or just a fabrication of popular media. They believed that FMS to be more prevalent in cases of child sexual abuse and other instances of severe trauma, such that the mind would have to create false memories as a defense mechanism of some sort. In their conclusion, they noted that FMS should be diagnosed under the category of "'factitious

disorders," with a sub-category "false memories/beliefs of abuse," and a further subdivision, "induced by therapy"' (347).

In another study to ascertain whether FMS really exists or not, David H. Gleaves, et al, performed a review of various experimental and clinical evidence. Their conclusions in their paper reads:

> …there is a wealth of data related to both sides of this controversial coin. Recurrent claims that no data exist that support either of these phenomena are, in our opinion, contradicted by the actual data. Furthermore, we believe that it is also inaccurate to paint this debate (as has been done both in the popular and scientific media) as being the academics against the clinicians with only the clinical data supporting the recovered memory position and the experimental data supporting the false memory position. Research from numerous bodies of experimental research supports the reality of memory blocking and recovery. (20)

Thus, it is not incorrect for one to say that false memories as well as repressed memories that are depicted in the fiction of this paper are completely fictitious. There indeed exists real research and proof of cases similar to the ones seen in the games where traumatic victims exhibit instances of FMS.

One of the most notable instances of False Memory that gained mainstream attention occurred on March 15, 1990, when Gary Ramona was confronted by his 19-year-old daughter Holly of raping her during her childhood. She had been treated at the Western Medical Center in Anaheim, California for her bulimia when her counsellor Marche Isabella suggested that the reason for this eating disorder was usually caused by incest. This seemingly either awakened a long-repressed memory of Holly or implanted false ones in her mind that led to her confronting her father for his supposed abuse. His wife Stephanie Ramona divorced him as a result and he also subsequently lost his job as vice president of Robert Mondavi Winery. In response, Gary sued Western Medical Center for 8 million dollars in response for damages caused to him and his lost wages in Napa County Superior Court. However, the final decision of the jury in 1994 did not grant him the 8 million that he sued for, but instead awarded him with a significantly lesser sum of 500, 000 dollars. The jury found the therapist Marche Isabella and the chief of psychiatry at the center guilty of negligence

in their treatment of Holly. Gary Ramona was rather elated by the outcome of the case and saw it as a tremendous victory which meant that the jury agreed with him on the belief that his daughter Holly's memories were indeed just a fabrication and implanted by her therapists. However, the jury foreman Thomas Dudum later clarified to the *LA Times* newspaper that they did not believe the therapists used drugs to implant Holly with false memories. He stressed that the final decision that was made was reached through a series of many unanswered questions and it was very difficult to come to that verdict. Hence, it can be seen that not only does the false memory phenomenon find credence in clinical examinations to an extent, the judicial side of things also finds legitimacy in the phenomenon as well.

Of all the characters with traumatic symptoms in this study, James Sunderland in *Silent Hill* 2 possesses perhaps the most extreme case of FMS. His repressed memories create fabrications of reality in order to keep him away from the truth. This comes about as a result of what has been stated in the Freudian ideology— that individuals with trauma prefer to not think about their traumas if at all possible. It is because of this that James' mind creates the false memory of his wife dying from her illness instead of the reality that she was killed by him. Until the ending of the game, James is unable to confront and accept this falsified memory. So up until he realizes that truth, the forgotten memory continues to work on him while he keeps believing in his false memory instead. This can be interpreted within the rules of the game as the reason why James comes across so many monsters in the town. Since the town is linked to the severity of the trauma of an individual, James' encounters much more manifestations of his trauma than the other characters.

Similar to James, Angela Orosco also has falsified memories as a result of her trauma as well. She believes that her mother is the only who cares for her well-being. Yet during the instances where her traumatic symptoms manifest, she states that she deserves whatever happens to her because "Even Mama said it: I deserved what happened" (*Silent Hill 2*). Despite all of this, the only value she still holds in life is centered around her mother. So all she can do is chase this hopeful fabricated memory. She has forgotten what her mother is really like, so she conjures an idealized version of her in order to keep herself from losing her identity completely. There exists a juxtaposition between Angela's ideal mother and her ideal father, where they both lie

on extreme ends of a spectrum. Her ideal mother is the opposite of her ideal father, which can be seen symbolized in the form of the monster Ideal Father or Abstract Daddy. Because her entire life has been full of negative and traumatic experiences, Angela had to resort to creating fabrications of what she perceives as a normal mother. The dominating presence of the patriarchy is so ingrained in her that even the ideal father for her is someone who will abuse and oppress her, which implies that she will forever be stuck in this state of being the Other.

Thus, the memories of the past hold great power over the traumatized characters. At times, the vents in the past, even after they are completely forgotten, can influence the characteristic traits of an individual. As stated earlier, memories become more powerful when they are forgotten. In search of the source of their trauma, traumatized individuals frequently behave in extremely unusual ways making them the Other. Such is the case of Alan Wake in *Alan Wake*, Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice*, James Sunderland, Angela Orosco and Eddie Dombrowski in *Silent Hill 2*. Alan Wake relentlessly searches for his wife as he has forgotten what has happened to her. Alice Liddell fancifully created an entire other world for her to retreat into when reality became too burdensome. But her horrible past still haunts her even in her Wonderland. It is also evident that the act of repressing terrible traumatic experiences will cause more harm to the traumatized individuals than benefitting from it. The ACT as mentioned in the previous chapter helps individuals to cope with their fears and traumas. Instead of fighting their trauma, according to ACT, traumatized individuals can become one with it and recover. The loss of memory in the characters causes them to deviate from the perceived normal state of mentally healthy individuals, and they become the Other. As a result, characters like Alice are treated unfairly and discriminated by society. Hence, as can be seen from the various ways in which the characters are portrayed, of how they operate outside the bounds of what is considered to be normal, they are treated accordingly by society.

As mentioned previously, Hacking's concept of memoro-politics is a third pole of politics to complement Foucault's bio-politics and anatomo-politics. As Hacking calls it, the cardinal meta-concept of bio-politics is normalcy, a desire to achieve the state of normalcy becomes ingrained into the minds of individuals so as to fit into the rest of society. According to Foucault:

It is these processes- the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so on-together with a whole series of related economic and political problems which, in the second half of the eighteenth century, become biopolitics' first objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control. (243)

The state seeks to control all aspects of human life, and it is able to achieve that through disciplinary institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons. This attempt at the control of human life through institutions can be seen in the cases of Alan Wake and Alice Liddell in the video games analyzed in this study. Both of them are identified as having something abnormal within them by the therapists in their respective stories. And so they are subjected to therapeutical methods in order to get rid of their abnormalities. However, it is then revealed that their caretakers at the institutions are actually abnormal themselves since they do not really wish to cure them but only desire take advantage of their helpless states of mind. This is symbolic of what Hacking means when he states that no person is simply normal or abnormal in the same way. Everyone has their own deviations from what is the standard definition of normal.

In previous eras of human society there would be a single absolute leader whose word was unchallenged because it was given to them by divine law. However, in time these methods of ruling were overthrown in favour of a democratic state, where all the people both men and women could have a right to vote for their preferred ruler. There was a move towards the ruling and the ruled becoming a single massed entity, instead of the ruler being a wholly separate power which lorded over the population. However, in order to ensure that this unity would be achieved and order be maintained, this is the instance when bio-politics functions comes into play. With the sciences becoming increasingly advanced, and the secrets and workings of the human body becoming more known to man, the body itself becomes a tool for politics. According to Foucault, this politics is put in place in order to "ensure, sustain, and multiply life, to put this life in order" (138). Most of the traumatized characters discussed in this study have lost their memories and subsequently become the Other. Therefore, they have been the target of society's bio-politics. Hacking argues that the population is more than just a single united body, for there are many different minds with various different thoughts that make up a state. For him, every person is normal or abnormal to some degree in their own way, and they cannot simply be lumped together and

expected to perform the same as anybody else. As human understanding of the body continues to grow, the aspect of the human mind too must grow along with it. The protagonists who are traumatized in the games are representative of the message that Hacking conveys.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

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The video games examined in this study are chosen based on their themes and how they are handled by their developers. A defining trait of video games is their ability to endow a power fantasy upon the players, which would be a contradiction to characters who are supposed to be wounded by trauma. This narrative dissonance is present in many video games. The purpose of this dissonance is to disconnect the player from reality so that he can perform actions that he would not be able to do in real life. However, the games selected for this study mitigate this dissonance between the story being told and the capabilities of the characters. All the characters in *Silent Hill 2* are normally capable human beings. None of them have fantastically altered characteristics. The protagonist James is not armed to the teeth with weapons as in other games. James instead has to scrape and scrounge for resources to survive the supernatural threats he encounters throughout the town. While in other games such as *American McGee's Alice* series, the fantastical powers that Alice showcases are present only in Wonderland, a literal depiction of her imaginary mind. In reality she is but a simple girl with no whimsical powers to speak of. Among the characters in the primary texts, *Alan Wake* is the only one with a protagonist who exhibits supernatural abilities. However, Alan is seen having no sort of great finesse with firearms or time dilating abilities. He is still very close to a normal human. Thus, compared to most other games that pander to the power fantasy of the players, the games in this study are much more grounded and explore themes such as trauma and abuse, which are meant for a mature audience.

The video games analyzed in this study share the common theme of trauma and how is overcome by the traumatized individuals. The concept of trauma and mankind's understanding of what it entails continues to grow and develop with the advancement of technology and experimental methods. Trauma has been a common theme in storytelling across various forms of media in the modern age, with the trend coming into particular focus with the publication of Cathy Caruth's writing on the subject, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). She clarifies

in the book how literature has come to be used as a medium for depicting traumatic experiences:

> If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet. (3)

Here she attempts to find a clear-cut definition of the term 'trauma', whether it is the actual event or the after effects of it that can be called as such. Her interpretation of trauma is as a sort of double telling that oscillates between two crises – one of death and one of life, the event that brings one close to death, and the subsequent consequence of having to live with a memory of this event. So, an event can be traumatic if it continues to haunt the victim long after it has passed. This revisiting of the moment of trauma is evident in all the instances depicted in the games analyzed in this study.

As humanity continues to evolve in their understanding of the human body and mind, new techniques and methods to deal with the problems encountered in daily life are devised. While there are various different methods that have been proven to be successful in aiding victims of trauma to cope with their afflictions, the traumatized individuals in the selected primary texts recover from trauma through ACT, wherein they are made to face their fears and confront their repressed memories. The desired outcome of ACT is that the traumatized individuals no longer feel impeded by the recurring memory of their source of trauma. They are not made to forget the experience or to keep it hidden as a means of moving on with their lives. Instead they take their trauma as a part of their own lives. It is a given that the average person will encounter many different hardships throughout the course of life. ACT at its basic premise, is simply to come to terms with this fact that no person is completely free from experiencing difficulties and hardships. These are a normal part of life. The selected games carry this message that instead of becoming an abnormal person, one must learn to accept the afflictions that are heaped upon him and take them in stride.

This ACT method of coping with trauma is what can be seen in many popular literary narratives, and it is also a common trope of storytelling in video games. The goal of it is to be able to accept "unpleasant feelings, sensations, urges, and other private experiences; allowing them to come and go without struggling with them, running from them, or giving them undue attention" (Russell 7). While the resolution of trauma is able to be achieved through the utilization of ACT, it should be noted that the traumatized characters all come from various different backgrounds. There are characters like James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* and Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice,* both suffering from symptoms of PTSD while having different causes for it. This speaks of the encompassing nature of ACT with regards to the treatment and resolution of trauma. Even though the video game characters are quite different from one another because of their pasts and the ways in which they handle their trauma, the principles of ACT are able to serve as a definitive solution for their afflictions.

Speaking further on this difference that is present among these traumatized characters, they are analyzed in this study mainly through the lenses of age and gender. Similar to how female characters have been depicted in literary narratives as either one of the extreme polar opposites of "angel" and "monster", the same holds true for their video game counterparts as well. This dichotomy of the female character in literary narratives has been noted by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar as:

> …while male writers traditionally praise the simplicity of the dove, they invariably castigate the cunning of the serpent— at least when that cunning is exercised in her own behalf. (28)

This angel-monster dichotomy holds that the angel is representative of the ideal woman who is submissive and exists to serve mainly as an agent of pleasure for their male partners. Whereas the monster is whatever female dares to stray from this path of the subservient woman, thereby becoming a threat to the authority of the patriarchy. In the cases of females in the video games analyzed in this study, the submissive angel is forced to transform into the savage monster in order to fight against the trauma inflicted upon them by the male dominated society. For instance, Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* appears to be a timid young girl as a result of the trauma

inflicted upon her by Angus Bumby. However, she transforms into a new form that is able to rid herself of her fears and insecurities and comes into direct conflict with the intentions of her male oppressor.

It has been observed that the female characters in the video games analyzed in this study are more susceptible to fall into trauma. The societal context behind this depiction of females can be surmised from some relevant statistical data. As reported by James C. Anthony and Naomi Breslau in their study of the gender differences in the sensitivity to PTSD of urban young adults of a large mid-Atlantic city in the United States, they found that the risk for PTSD following traumatic experiences was higher in women than in men. In this study of 1698 participants, they reported that:

> Among men who reported any exposure, 23.2% experienced assaultive violence as their worst event, and, of those, 7.1% met criteria for PTSD. Among women who reported any exposure, 21.4% experienced assaultive violence as their worst event, and, of those, 23.5% met criteria for PTSD. (609)

The sociological findings of this statistical report are reflected by the number of female characters experiencing trauma in selected video game narratives of this study.

As has been examined in the preceding chapters, memories have an extremely instrumental role in the development of an individual. It is the earliest memories during a person's formative years that is responsible for shaping their character in the future. Freud has stated the importance of memory as well as dreams in developing the personality of an individual when he states that:

> …every dream reveals itself as a psychical structure which has a meaning and which can be inserted at an assignable point in the mental activities of waking life. (35)

> The way in which the memory behaves in dreams is undoubtedly of the greatest importance for any theory of memory in general. It teaches us that 'nothing which we have once mentally possessed can be entirely lost.' (53)

Dreams according to Freud are a representation of the deepest wishes of a person, and these wishes or desires are formed from what one has experienced in life. For traumatized individuals like the characters in this study, this is taken to an extreme

point where they are instead haunted by nightmares. Alan Wake in *Alan Wake*, Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* and James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* are all shown during various scenes in their games as having recurring nightmares of the source of their trauma. This reinforces the Freudian idea of memories holding great power over a person's construction of identity.

On the topic of the effects of age on the formation of trauma, the APA states that "it is not uncommon for the age at onset for many disorders placed in other sections to be during childhood or adolescence" (10). In addition, it is stated in their *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* that clinicians must all be familiar with the disorders and afflictions that can affect children. This implies that experiences of trauma at an early age— around childhood to adolescence— is much more overwhelming and dominant than when it is experienced at a later age. Within the games analyzed in this study, this can be seen in the individuals exposed to traumatic events at an early age such as Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice*. they She suffers from her PTSD to such a severe extent that she is left in a catatonic state for over a decade. Whereas the older and more mature adult characters such as Alan Wake and James Sunderland are able to recover quickly from their traumas even after experiencing PTSD.

The traumatized individuals in the video games analyzed in this study become abnormal as a result of their afflictions. During this time, they operate outside the bounds of normal society and become ostracized as a result. The reason for this othering has been stated by Ian Hacking as:

> The idea of normalcy was transferred from individual bodies to kinds or classes of people or their behavior. And then it was internalized, and worked upon us from the inside. In our very souls we strive to be normal. (38)

This line explains that it is quite uncomfortable and traumatic for individuals to be othered because their very sense of identity in their soul wants to be normal. In the modern day the state has deeply ingrained into each and every one of the populace the desire to be normal and to be a part of the united species body. So, whenever a traumatic stressor occurs to and individual and the mind is forced to break apart from

the normal, a great disturbance is caused within the victim. This disturbance is what Cathy Caruth identifies as the double wound of trauma. For the traumatized othered, the event of the deviation from the normal continually repeats itself within their mind. For James Sunderland, it is whenever the events surrounding his wife's passing are brought up. For Angela Orosco, it is whenever a male comes close to her. For Eddie Dombrowski, it is whenever someone doubts or confronts him for what he has done. For Alice Liddell, it is whenever the events of her family's passing are brought up, prompting her to retreat to the safety of her Wonderland. Only by facing the truth behind the causes of these traumatic stressors are these afflicted minds able to ensure their continued well-being. After becoming normal once again, formerly traumatized individuals are then able to assimilate once more into the unified biopower of the population as a whole.

Ian Hacking argues that instead of looking only at the physical and surface level characteristics of the people in a society, there has arisen a need for a transformation of the politics of biopower. Memoro-politics is the concept that he has brought forward, where individuals are not separated from the rest of society because of their abnormality. Hacking states that no person is normal or abnormal in the same way, which can be seen in the various responses to trauma that the characters in the video games analyzed in this study have. As such, society must undergo a transformation where the soul or memories of individuals are given due attention. The present practice of separating traumatized people from the rest of society because of their abnormality is shown in a negative light in the video games that have been examined in this study. The asylum provided for these traumatized individuals is depicted as a foreboding place in the video games, and none of the characters who have interactions with this institution in the games have positive experiences of it. Such institutions are what Hacking describes as outlets through which the state seeks to control and regulate normality within society. Both Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* and Alan Wake in *Alan Wake* are admitted to therapeutic institutions for a time. However, both Dr. Emil Hartman and Dr. Angus Bumby in these two games are depicted as immoral and cruel individuals who hide their true otherness from the rest of society. This further reinforces Hacking's statement that there is no definite

normal or abnormal in society, and that the current model of societal standards needs to be reformed.

The games that have been analyzed in this study depict trauma as a wound of the soul. It is an inner wound as opposed to being a wound that is visible to the naked eye. The politics of this soul is what Hacking defines as the concept behind memoro-politics. According to him, the deepest emotions that form the character and identity of a person can be found in the soul. When the soul becomes damaged as a result of being afflicted to traumatic experiences, it also in turn damages the entire being of an individual. This can be seen in the game characters that have been examined in this study. Instances such as Alice Liddell in *American McGee's Alice* becoming a catatonic patient in a mental asylum results from the trauma inflicted upon her. As has been seen time and again in all of these traumatized characters, rather than the actual event in the past instantly afflicting them with PTSD it is the act of remembering the source of trauma that has greater impact on their souls. For the characters like James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* and Alan Wake in *Alan Wake,* the repeated remembering of the traumatic event is too much to bear and they develop amnesia as a defense mechanism in order to cope with their pain. The Freudian idea that memories of the past play an instrumental role in an individual's character during the present moment can be seen in these instances of trauma.

No matter what age or gender an individual may belong to, there is the ever-present possibility of falling to trauma. However, the susceptibility of developing PTSD is slightly different depending upon the background of an individual. This has been portrayed in the traumatized characters analyzed in this study. It has been shown that females experience more instances of assaultive violence that threatens their state of well-being. Whereas the male characters are more likely to develop PTSD as a result of witnessing violence upon somebody other than them. James Sunderland and Alan Wake both become traumatized because they witness their wives dying in front of them. The victimization of the female has been a trend in literary narratives written by males, which holds true for the games analyzed in this study as well. In addition, the age at which the onset of trauma develops goes a long way in determining whether an individual would be able to cope with it effectively.

This study mainly focuses on the thematic aspects of video games. The portrayals of trauma in the games analyzed in this study have been found to be close to literary narratives. Hence it is justified as to why literary critical theories have been applied to these video games. Although the existence of the medium of video games is barely over five decades, it has been noted by Mark J.P. Wolf that:

> …while this is a relatively short time compared to the histories of other more traditional media, it is fast moving and exciting, with innovations and advances at a rate unparalleled in other media. The history of video games is dense and multifaceted… (xv)

As such, there still exists many possible areas of research that can be undertaken with regard to video game narratives and their place in the scholarly world. The more technical aspects of them such as their visuals and their interactive nature that set them apart from their literary counterparts are some areas which call for further research. In addition, an analysis of the more theoretical aspects of video games such as the violence and themes of political conflicts that are inherent in them also holds merit for in-depth research.

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BRIEF BIO-DATA OF THE CANDIDATE

Name   :   Malsawma

Father's Name   :   Albert Liantluanga

Mother's Name   :   C. Hmangaihzuali

Date of Birth   :   3rd November 1993

Gender   :   Male

Address   :   House No C – 29/II, Ramhlun North,

                                         Aizawl

Mobile No   :   9615675443

Email   :   christopher.wesker@gmail.com

Educational Qualifications:

Class	Board/University	Year	Division	Percentage
H.S.L.C	M.B.S.E	2010	First	60.00
H.S.S.L.C	M.B.S.E	2013	Third	42.60
B.A	Mizoram University	2016	First	69.50
M.A	Mizoram University	2018	First	68.86
N.E.T	U.G.C	2018	—	42.86

PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

Name of the Candidate	:	Malsawma
Degree	:	Master of Philosophy
Department	:	English
Title of Dissertation	:	Gaming with the Pasts: A Study of Trauma in Select Video Games
Date of Admission	:	24.07.2019

Approval of Research Proposal:

1. Date of DRC	:	23.03.2020
2. Date of BOS	:	31.03.2020
3. Date of School Board	:	29.05.2020
4. Date of Submission	:	
MZU Registration No.	:	2192 of 2013
M.Phil. Registration No. & Date	:	MZU/M.PHIL./579 of 29.05.2020
Extension	:	January 2021 – July 2021

(PROF. K.C. LALTHLAMUANI)

Head

Department of English

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

List of publications and papers presented at Conferences:

1. Presented a paper titled "The Omnipresent Church in Mizo Culture" at the MIELS General Conference cum Seminar – 'Interpretations of Mizo Culture in Literature' held at Pachhunga University Auditorium, Aizawl on September 4th, 2019.

2. Published an article titled "The Omnipresent Church in Mizo Culture" in the *Journal of MIELS,* Vol.7, December 2020, an annual peer reviewed journal. ISSN 2348-8611.

GAMING WITH THE PASTS: A STUDY OF TRAUMA IN SELECT VIDEO GAMES

ABSTRACT

MALSAWMA

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

Trauma has been a regular theme in video game narratives. It has been defined as "a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury" (*Merriam Webster's Dictionary*). Individuals suffering from trauma are subjected to reliving the moment of affliction repeatedly until they are able to recover from it through various means, mostly by therapy. This study attempts to analyze the dynamics of trauma in select video game narratives where trauma is a major thematic aspect.

The primary texts for this dissertation are the four video games – *Alan Wake* (2010), *American McGee's Alice* (2000), *Alice: Madness Returns* (2011) and *Silent Hill 2* (2001). These games share the common trait of having protagonists afflicted with trauma who proceed to learn to cope with their conditions through the course of the story. In order to achieve this, the traumatized characters have to learn to accept their new state of being as a part of themselves instead of rejecting it. These characters all come from different backgrounds and have different experiences in their own pasts, which results in them having different responses to trauma. Their response to trauma differs according to their age, gender and the social context of their lives. Interdisciplinary theories are utilized in the analysis of these traumatized characters, such as the Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (hereafter ACT) that is used to treat traumatized patients as well as Sigmund Freud's emphasis on the memories of the past influencing the present. Hacking's concept of memoro-politics is also utilized to understand the social context of the traumatized characters analyzed in this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the concept of video games from their inception to their eventual assimilation into contemporary popular culture. Technical differences between the literary narrative and video game narrative are also explained. In this study, video game narratives are regarded as literature since they share similarities with other forms of video media such as cinema and television serials. Mark J.P. Wolf and Steven L. Kent have extensively studied the history of video games. They have explained how video games began as simple projects that were undertaken by

engineers and scientists, before eventually capitalizing on the potential of monetizing their creation to great success.

Video games have taken many different forms over the years. The first ones were simple dots or line graphics displayed on Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) screens, which were later given access to the public through cabinets called arcade machines. The first video game platform that made it possible for individuals to take them home was the Magnavox Odyssey designed by Ralph H. Baer in 1972. The particular features of this device came to be known as a video game console, and as the years continued to pass, more consoles were developed by different companies, eventually resulting in the decline of the arcade cabinets that needed to be paid for whenever a game was to be played. As home computers also began to become more accessible to the general public, such computers began to have video games playable on them as well. In the modern day, there exists four major platforms for video games – the PlayStation series of consoles manufactured by Sony, the Xbox Series of consoles manufactured by Microsoft, the various consoles manufactured by Nintendo, and the Personal Computer.

Apart from the historical development of the console, the major strides that the medium has taken in transitioning from a medium of pure leisure to one that has large production costs and involvement of narratives are also presented in this chapter. This shift in direction was first seen in games like *Colossal Cave Adventure* by Will Crowther (circa 1977) and *Dragon's Lair* (1983) by Cinematronics. Instead of the simple games like *Pong* (1972) and *Pac-Man* (1980) which dominated the video game scene during their time owing to their simplicity, the aforementioned games took the time to attempt telling a story through the visuals and sounds they projected through the screen. As technology continued to develop, so too did game developers' intentions and aims with their products. The video game *Maniac Mansion* (1987), created by Ron Buecheler had a storytelling technique where control of the video game was taken away from the player, and cinematic sequences would play in the same vein as a movie, which came to be known as a "cutscene" and this continues to be used in modern games. However, these cutscenes have been met with derision and critique from

various sources. Jesper Juul, a professor of video game theory has admonished the concept, stating that,

> Cut-scenes are often considered problematic because they prevent the player from doing anything and are in a sense a non-game element in a game. Still, they play an important role in projecting fiction in modern video games. (Loc 1274-1275)

This would take away all the uniqueness of a video game if the medium simply resorted to showing cinematics in a way that movies would, but the response to this came in the form of Quick Time Events (hereafter QTEs), a term which first came about with the game *Shenmue* (1999). As reported by the *Polygon* website, the creator of the game Yu Suzuki clarified that he desired to have the player switch seamlessly between the movie like cutscenes and gameplay scenes. Thus, QTEs were created, they are events where the player is prompted to press a button indicated on screen in order to respond to the action that was happening in a cutscene. So, while watching the cutscenes, a player had to interact with the game in some way by pressing a button. Failing to do so could have adverse effects, for instance, the protagonist could have dodged a punch aimed at him if the button was pressed, or get hit if they failed. In addition to quick time events, there are also dialogue options in various video games where the player is given a number of options to choose from for the characters to say. Doing so could guide the narrative down a number of different paths, which is a feature that remains unique for the medium differentiating it from the literary narratives.

Chapter 2: Trauma and Video Games

In this chapter, the history of the depiction of trauma as a recurring narrative theme is examined in connection with the medium of video games. Cathy Caruth (1996) and Anne Whitehead (2004) in their writings have both noted that the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and the aftereffects it had on the soldiers who served were a pivotal moment in the development of modern trauma theory. Subsequently, many stories began to take form around this concept of a recurring traumatic event.

Most of the materials for research works on trauma narratives are sourced from literary works. As such, the aspect of trauma in video games narratives and how they

compare to that of literary narratives are also looked into in this chapter in terms of the characteristic traits of the traumatized characters in both the narrative forms. Though video game narratives are of recent development, their narrative aspect has the capacity to carry the same academic significance that literary narratives have. In the Post-Vietnam War Period, with the academic interest in the study of trauma narratives getting momentum, American Psychiatric Association (APA) defined the features of PTSD as:

> …the development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. (463)

The symptoms of PTSD include intense fear, helplessness and agitated behavior whenever the traumatic event is brought up in some way or form. The most defining effect of trauma is defined by Cathy Caruth as a "double wound" or a repeating event, where the traumatic event is continuously relived by the traumatized individual (3-4).

This double wound characteristic of trauma shows that the memory of the source of trauma holds great power over the afflicted individuals, more than the original event itself. On the power of memory over an individual, Sigmund Freud has stated that:

> There is in general no guarantee of the correctness of our memory; and yet we yield to the compulsion to attach belief to its data far more often than is objectively justified. (519)

Despite memories proving to be unreliable and altered because of the passage of time, humans will always possess an inclination to rely on them. This can be seen in the traumatized characters that have been analyzed within this study. An example is James Sunderland from *Silent Hill 2* who strongly believes in his own version of the events of his wife Mary's death, which differ greatly from what has really occurred. His

memories of his wife's death are so traumatizing to him that he instead commits to believing in a false memory that is less traumatizing for him.

The defining feature of the trauma novel according to Michelle Balaev is "the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world" (15). The transformation of the individual described by Michelle Balaev is interpreted in this study through the ACT, a concept devised by Steven C. Hayes. The objective of ACT is to be able to confront and accept the cause of trauma as a natural and sometimes necessary part of everyday life. It states:

> Nothing external ensures freedom from suffering. Even when we human beings possess all the things we typically use to gauge external success—great looks, loving parents, terrific children, financial security, a caring spouse-it may not be enough. Humans can be warm, well fed, dry, physically well—and still be miserable. Humans can enjoy forms of excitement and entertainment unknown in the nonhuman world and out of reach for all but a fraction of the population—high-definition TVs, sports cars, exotic trips to the Carribean—and still be in excruciating psychological pain. (Hayes, Steven C., et al 3)

Using the concept of ACT as a framework for interpretation of trauma, select video games with trauma narrative as a major aspect such as, *Planescape Torment* (1999) by Black Isle Entertainment, the *Max Payne* trilogy (2001-2012) by Remedy Entertainment, *The Walking Dead* series (2012-present) by Telltale Games, *The Last of Us* (2013) by Naughty Dog, are examined to show how trauma has been a recurring topic in the most popular and well regarded video game narratives over the course of one decade.

In 1999, when *Planescape Torment* was released it was praised for having an engrossing storyline centred around a tale of redemption of its amnesiac protagonist, called the Nameless One. After committing many evil and insidious acts he became deeply traumatized. In his effort to escape from trauma, he cut off his memories from himself using a magical ritual, and the events of the game follow him as he sets about

making amends for the wrongs he had done in the past. Upon regaining his memories, he decides to accept his sins instead of separating himself from them anymore. Similar to the Nameless One's journey of acceptance of his traumatic past, the titular protagonist of the *Max Payne* series of video games also goes through a sequence of events starting with his attempt to escape from his past, and his eventual acceptance of the terrible things that happened to him. Starting as a detective working in the New York Police Department, Max's line of work causes him to lose his wife and daughter, as well as many of his fellow policemen, leading to his trauma. During the course of the three games in the series, Max retires from being a detective to a bodyguard, but his past as well as new tragedies continue to hound him. He finally finds absolution at the end of the third game, accepting his trauma instead of continuing to run away from it.

The Walking Dead and *The Last of Us* share very similar settings – both follow the exploits of an older male character who has to care for a young girl with whom they share no familial bonds. Both the stories are set in a post-apocalyptic setting where the world has been torn apart by an infection. In the zombie-infested world of *The Walking Dead,* Lee Everett finds a girl named Clementine and chooses to take care of her since her parents were missing. During their journey together, the two grow close and develop a close bond, but Lee passes away at the end of the first game. However, this does not traumatize Clementine to a great extent, and she instead chooses to accept the fact that her guardian has passed away and resolves to remain strong. This is evident in the sequels of the first game where she has matured considerably and becomes a source of hope and guidance for other characters.

In these aforementioned popular video games released during the course of a decade, trauma is a central theme. Thus, the historical and social contexts of these video game narratives are also explained in this chapter. A close examination of the narratives suggests that acceptance of trauma is always a necessary step to conquering it as seen in the depictions of these traumatized characters over the course of a decade.

Chapter 3: Age, Gender and Trauma

In this chapter, the characters in the selected video games who have undergone traumatic experiences are looked at from the point of view of factors such as their age and gender to see what differing effects it has on them. Appropriate male and female traumatized characters from the primary texts are selected for a comparative analysis in terms of gender. Similarly, a comparative analysis of the young and the mature traumatized characters is also undertaken.

Alan Wake in *Alan Wake* and James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* are both middle-aged husbands whose source of trauma originates from the loss of their wives. While the effects of these traumatic experiences are similar for both of them – they repress the memory of the event; they handle the aftereffects quite differently. Alan Wake is part of a supernatural story where a dark entity attempts to deceive and trick him, making him believe that his wife has died. However, he wakes up from the illusion and faces the darkness with great resolve and banishes it from interfering with his life any further. The game has a quite straightforward resolution, where strength of will enables Alan to push past the darkness residing in his mind and achieve victory over the evil opposing force. The mental maturity of Alan can be seen from the line he says after triumphing over the Dark Presence:

> There's light and there's darkness, cause and effect. There's guilt and there's atonement, but the scales always need to balance. Everything has a price. (*Alan Wake*)

Accepting the wrongful things that he has done throughout the course of the story, Alan does not try to escape from the retribution that is to be laid down upon him. Instead he faces the troubles of his past head on by himself so that other people close to him like his wife Alice Wake do not have to suffer any more on his behalf.

Silent Hill 2 however is a non-linear video game narrative, meaning that many possible endings can be achieved by the player. While *Alan Wake* will always tell the same story that ends the same way, the story of James Sunderland in *Silent Hill 2* contains six possible endings that can be attained by the player. The four main endings for the game that are discussed in this study are – Leave, In Water, Maria and Rebirth. The actions of James controlled by the player will influence the ending of the story.

This will reflect his mental state of the character at the end. The "Leave" can be considered the best ending, where James comes to terms with the fact that he euthanized his terminally ill wife, and he resolves to continue living; this ending follows the guidelines of ACT, that is accepting the source of trauma and resolving to live with it. "In Water" instead has him committing suicide by driving his car into a lake, unable to live with himself for what he had done. The "Maria" ending has him continue to live in delusion, preferring to live a lie than to accept that he had killed his wife. And "Rebirth" ending shows James attempting a ritual to bring his wife back to life, still making him somewhat delusional and refusing to accept that his wife had passed away.

Apart from James in *Silent Hill 2*, Angela Orosco and Eddie Dombrowski in the same game are two other individuals who are haunted by their traumatic experiences in the past. Both of them are still quite young, but their trauma prevents them from living normal lives and they both end up dying as a result. Angela comes from an abusive family where her father and brother repeatedly abuse her both physically and sexually, while Eddie has been bullied and body shamed for being overweight. Unlike James, they succumb to their traumas and are unable to make it out of the town of Silent Hill in any of the possible endings of the game. Angela is 19 years old at the time of the game and is already driven to suicidal thoughts because she has internalized her family's abuse of her. She is unable to cope with her trauma since there was nobody to help her in her past. Eddie is also only 23 years old when the game starts. Yet being bullied his entire life and being unable to fit into society, he has become utterly insane and deranged during the events of the game. He has been told by everyone that he is ugly and hideous, and so he lashes out at them and is no longer averse to injuring anyone who teases him for his appearance again. He feels alienated and friendless in a hostile social environment. Being subjected to traumatic experiences at an early age for both Angela and Eddie, it results in them succumbing to their traumas much more easily than the older character James. Unlike these two young characters, James is a very normally adjusted adult, who is able to get married and live a comfortable life with his wife. The trauma for him only comes about at a later stage in his life so he is able to weather it more effectively.

Finally, Alice Liddell from *American McGee's Alice* series of games is intended to be an unofficial continuation of the character from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871). The events of the first game start off when Alice's family perishes in a tragic fire, and she is committed to the Rutledge Asylum for therapy. As in the original novels, Alice often retreats to the Wonderland in her mind when reality becomes too much for her to bear. This is a defence mechanism concocted by her fanciful and childlike mind to protect her against the overbearing truth of reality. One such instance is when Agnus Bumby sneaks into their house and sets fire to it. Alice sees him but her terrified mind instead processes his figure as a centaur. She is able to prevent the fire and save her family, but her childish imagination prevents her from doing so. The story follows her as she attempts to piece together the forgotten memories of the house fire and search for some kind of resolution and inner peace. An example of how the ACT is invoked within this game is when Alice is told by the Cheshire Cat that "You and this Red Queen cannot both survive. You are two parts of the same" (*American McGee's Alice*). The Red Queen is symbolic of the part of her mind that Alice refuses to accept, but she is eventually made to do so in order to recover from her trauma of the past.

From the cases of Alice Liddell, Angela Orosco and Eddie Dombrowski, it can be surmised that individuals subjected to intense traumatic experiences at a young age are more akin to be unable to cope with their trauma, requiring special aid in order to do so. While the more mature and middle-aged characters Alan Wake and James Sunderland have stronger mental faculties and are able to bear much more abuse. In a study conducted by Erin C. Dunn, et al, it was found that:

> Although the mechanisms linking early trauma exposure to subsequent psychopathology risk are not well known, early trauma exposure may be more damaging than later trauma exposure because it compromises a child's ability to successfully master stage-salient developmental tasks (e.g., self-regulation, secure attachments) and damages the foundation of brain architecture and neurobiological systems involved in regulating arousal, emotion, stress responses, and reward processing, which are all implicated in the onset and persistence of stress-related disorders like depression and PTSD. (Dunn, et al)

As for the subject of gender, women are often victimized in these video game narratives, as can be seen in the case of Angela Orosco, whose only fault was being born a female. This also applies to Alice Liddell's sister Lizzie Liddell, who was the subject of Angus Bumby's infatuation, and which resulted in the tragic demise of the entire Liddell household save for Alice herself. As reported by James C. Anthony and Naomi Breslau in their study of the gender differences in the sensitivity to PTSD of urban young adults of a large mid-Atlantic city in the United States, they found that the risk for PTSD following traumatic experiences was higher in women than in men. In this study of 1698 participants, they reported that:

> Among men who reported any exposure, 23.2% experienced assaultive violence as their worst event, and, of those, 7.1% met criteria for PTSD. Among women who reported any exposure, 21.4% experienced assaultive violence as their worst event, and, of those, 23.5% met criteria for PTSD. (609)

This sociological fact is evidenced by the number of female characters experiencing trauma in the selected video game narratives.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have found that "The ideal woman that male authors dream of generating is always an angel" (20). This angelic depiction of females is in contrast to the other form of them as written by male writers – the form of the monster. The portrayal of females in these video games adheres to this statement closely. The angelic females like Alice Wake in *Alan Wake* and Angela Orosco in *Silent Hill 2* are subservient and need rescuing. They exist mainly to drive the male characters forward in their journey. Whereas the monstrous female embodies a character who "refuses to stay in her textually ordained 'place'" (Gilbert and Gubar 28). This depiction of the female can be seen in the characters of Barbara Jagger in *Alan Wake*, and Angela Orosco in *Silent Hill 2* transforms over the course of the story from a meek angel into a dangerous monster as well.

Chapter 4: Memoro-politics of the Other

This chapter utilizes the concept of "memoro-politics" as coined by Ian Hacking. It is based on Michel Foucault's "anatomo-politics" of the human body and "bio-politics" of the population. He described it as "a third extreme point from which we can triangulate recent knowledge" (Hacking 35). While Foucault's focus was

mainly centered on the species body, Hacking's memoro-politics serves as a representative of the human mind or the soul.

Foucault's biopower is based on the classification of the human population based on the different types of people. In order to maximize efficiency of the state, the most well performing individuals are grouped differently from those that are less capable. This meant that people were separated into groups based on how normal they were, and how they deviated from what was considered the normal. Memoro-politics argues that the act of traumatized individuals being segregated from the rest of society only came about because of the desire for this aforementioned classification of people. And so, these traumatized individuals became the Other. The Other being defined by Lawrence Cahoone:

> What appear to be cultural units – human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations – are maintained in their apparent unity only through an active process of exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization. Other phenomena or units must be represented as foreign or "other" through representing a hierarchical dualism in which the unit is "privileged" or favored, and the other is devalued in some way. (16)

From the video games in the study, the characters such as Angela, Alice and Eddie are treated harshly by society because of their inability to attain the standard of normalization. Hacking's memoro-politics is an argument that society cannot be judged as a single united body where, and that the mind works differently for each individual, affecting their status in society.

This othering can be seen in the characters of the video games such as Eddie Dombrowski in *Silent Hill 2* who does not fall in line with what is considered normal in society because he is obese. As a result, he has been repeatedly bullied and traumatized. When James finds him during the latter parts of the game, he is brandishing a gun and standing in a room full of human corpses, which is symbolic of his willingness to harm other people who did not treat him kindly. Society has failed Eddie, and he is left with no other choice than to lash out and use violence as an equalizing tool. This can be seen when he tells James that, "From now on, if anyone makes fun of me…I'll kill em'. Just like that" (*Silent Hill 2*). Similarly, the characters of Angela Orosco and Alice Liddell are also unable to fit into the normal standards of

society, becoming ostracized for no fault of their own. A close examination of these characters suggests that individuals experiencing trauma are not only haunted by their pasts but also alienated by a society that fails to accommodate them.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

It has been found that the ACT method of therapy is invoked to a great degree in all of the games under scrutiny. The traumatized characters are either able to find resolution and find a better life by accepting the source of their trauma, or they are continually afflicted by the traumatic past and social othering leading to tragic ends. However, this might not have been such an intense affliction if society has not implanted the idea that everyone should strive to achieve the normal standard. If there is more understanding of the workings of the human mind and the effects it has on an individual, and if such individuals are not so ostracized by their community, trauma can be better overcome for most afflicted people.

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