

Ut poesis video ludus: On the Possibilities of Remediating Classic Literature into Video-games

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Abstract

My essay debates on the difficulties and problems of adapting classical literature to video-games. Naturally, one can argue that classic literature texts will never be accurately translated into the video-game medium; that the result will always be a superficial imitation, a caricature, an artifact that deforms the meaning and purpose of the originals. But, can art or literature survive oblivion without adapting to the continuous cultural changes of society in the dynamic process of history? If not, then literature adaptation to film and even video games can save texts from oblivion, considering the dramatic audio-visual and digital revolution of a society where images are more and more taking the power of words in communication.

Key words: advergence, ekphrasis, intermediality, Gothic literature, remediation, Shakespeare, Lovecraft, cosmic horror, Survival Horror, story, plot, narrative, video game, game studies, picturacy, educational games.

Due to their popularity, certain classic books have been adapted for decades from print to other media, whether children's books, cartoons, motion pictures and more recently, electronic literature and video-games. As animation and cinema do when translating literature to the audio-visual domain, video-games also impose upon the viewer/player certain patterns of narration and interpretation. One must approach all adaptations with certain care, knowing that the original literary work is, by default, something different from its ekphrastic interpretations. Even though the generic status of video-games status as artistic forms is still unclear, in recent years many literary pieces are being adapted to this medium. Video-games can be understood as forms of ekphrastic discourse, that is, they can evoke similar aesthetic stimuli found in other media such as the literary printed format (for a distinction between ekphrastic object and an ekphrastic discourse, see Rallo, 2012: 107). For some authors (i.e. Ewan Kirkland) video-games can be considered artistic works in themselves because they frequently extend beyond mere entertainment to insert aesthetic elements in their narratives.

For instance, in the case of *Silent Hill*, a surrealist supernatural psychological survival horror video-game series which also includes print pieces and two feature films, the distribution official label by Japanese company Konami Digital Entertainment states "art".

These disks contain music tracks and selected video sequences from the games, together with concept art, advertisements, and brief digital films designed around their content. Each of these short films uses codes and conventions Constance Penley and Janet Bergstrom identify as historical aspects of avant-garde cinema. [...] *Silent Hill* franchise, in its first four installments, exhibits aesthetic styles historical considered "artistic," boasts intertextual relationships with cultural forms deemed "art," and evokes appreciations consistent with cultural "artistry." (Kirkland, 2010: 316).

If video-games can be an adequate format for artistic narrative content, there are also many ways to evoke literature in video-games. These possibilities relate to the content of the message and also to its form. Ewan Kirkland has discussed remediation (see Bolter and Drusin 1999) techniques as applied to survival horror games, arguing that "The recontextualization and defamiliarization of old media forms—radio, television, celluloid film—within new media texts provides insight into the cultural meanings of both remediator and the remediated." (Kirkland, "Resident Evil's Typewriter" 2009: 115) Along with cut-scenes, in Survival Horror video games various forms of text are employed: "the spaces of Raccoon City, Himuro Mansion and The Suffering's Abbott State Penitentiary are littered with narrative fragments in the form of newspaper articles, lab reports, photographs, diaries, audio cassettes, painted portraits and computer logs, accessible through both game-space." (Kirkland "Storytelling in Survival Horror Video Games" 2009: 986). In survival horror, characters frequently keep a journal. Thus, the user discovers two narrative lines, the story to be discovered and that of the characters' discoveries.

Storytelling elements are often employed in video-games genres (adventure, RPG, Survival Horror etc.) and they represent a defining aspect, different from the content of the narrated message, and related to the media through which the act of narration happens. The discussion requires the clarification of two aspects: the difference between the literary source and the various forms its message can be represented by, and the difference between the message and the narrative techniques employed to produce it as a cultural artefact that will finally reach its audience.

The difference between message and form was much discussed in Russian formalism as the distinction between *fabula* (story) and *sjuzet* (plot or discourse; see Eco, 1979: 27). This distinction also exists in literature since a message can be approached in various ways through various narrative genres and styles. Altogether, a literary work can be evoked in sculpture or painting because it is more than just words and ideas, it has a coherence that presents itself as an aesthetic response (or feeling) that can be expressed and translated through other arts. Thus, the distinction between story, plot and narrative runs parallel to the distinction between sequence, organisation and representation of a series of events:

The story is the information about an event or sequence of events (typically linear), the plot being the causation and links between events, whereas the narrative is the unique way in which story is being presented to the audience. [...] narrative may be regarded as more malleable than story or plot. Although the element of time and the sequence of events are tightly bound by the structure of a story, and the causation and links between the events are encapsulated in the plot, the narrative determines how these events are expressed, the order in which they are presented, the duration of each event, and the frequency of each event (Ip, 2011: 106).

Therefore, as an ekphrastic discourse, video-games can employ within their narrative the plot and the story of a literary work of art, placed in a content-container relationship where the message is the content and the container is the form. Narrative includes planning the timing of every aspect of the game: from the cut-scenes to game-play. When dealing with adapting literature to video-games one must care for the relation between plot and story with the game's narrative: "The game's narrative encapsulates the methods used to deliver the necessary scenes, the order of the scenes, the time taken for the events to unfold (duration), and the frequency with which these scenes occur." (Ip, 2011: 107)

There are, however, elements borrowed from different texts, like the names of Dante's pistols -Ebony & Ivory in *Devil May Cry III*- baptized after the well-known song by Paul McCartney, or like the allusions to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in *Final Fantasy X 2*, that do not go as far as becoming relevant to the game's narrative, nor do they recreate in the ludic medium their literary source aesthetic response (or feeling). They do, however, have the power to puzzle a player who has already read Shakespeare, for instance, and suggest, by means of its intermedial and intertextual cross-references, that ludic entertainment is also constructed on a solid cultural foundation.

The *Devil May Cry* series, and many others, do not require from the player the cultural competence of recognising the elements recycled from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* in order to complete the games. Nevertheless, the allusions are there to evoke Dante's thoughts on the variations of the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical that a single piece of writing can carry (*Convivio II*). The allusions can further point an eventual 'Model Player', to be understood in close relation to Umberto Eco's concept of Model Reader:

Many texts make evident their Model Readers by implicitly ~presupposing a specific encyclopedic competence. [...] But at the same time text (I) creates the competence of its Model Reader. [...] Thus it seems that a well-organized text on the one hand presupposes a model of competence coming, so to speak: from outside the text, but on the other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence (Eco, 1979: 7)

The Model Player in *Devil May Cry* does need to know about Medieval Florence in order to complete the game. Besides, the person looking at the screen is alternately player and reader, and might come to different interpretations once his or her basic cultural lexicon has incorporated information about Dante Alighieri. What I want to

emphasize here is that video games create an extended competence in their audience that goes beyond ludic aspects. This extended competence is often included in the tutorials at the beginning of many games. Besides, video-games create also a textual competence since the player gets information about things and events related to various literary works.

It is, however, hard to identify, both in literary texts and in game narratives, exactly the number of the senses that Dante Alighieri described. Some aspects indicate the presence of the allegorical sense, presented only fragmentarily in games such as *Silent Hill* by means of allusions to alchemy which are discretely incorporated in the narrative environment in the form of posters or advertisings that reveal the structure of the plot inspired by alchemical stages. For instance, the *Antique Shop* sign in *Silent Hill 1*, with a lion eating the sun which is, in fact, an image taken from Medieval representations of *Verdigris*, the third alchemical stage. Other suggestions to alchemy are discretely incorporated throughout the game, but they do not need to be understood in order to complete it. The visual transformations of the environment are set following the transition from one alchemical stage to another, and Harry Mason is actually the unaware operator of a complex ritual, making the player participate in this bizarre refashioned occult practices. Literary adaptations to video games vary between extremes of subtle allusions and ambitious attempts at reproducing the books within the games. Our examples in this paper concentrate on various ways of remediating literary content in order to emphasize the responsibility of these narratives towards their literary sources.

When trying to adapt or translate literature through the ekphrastic discourse of video games, the specifics of the original need to be reproduced at as many levels as possible. Otherwise, the literary source ends being mutilated and re-signified in the wrong way, which in my opinion means losing the inner aesthetic effect/feeling, maintaining only the superficial aspects. Although Shakespearean critics argue that it is through this process of re-interpretation that the works of the bard continue to survive (on this see Gomes, 2012: 83), it is necessary to define what is Shakespearean and what is not beyond superficial aspects. The question of ekphrastic mimesis rises again: what survives the borders of media transgression and what is forever lost?

For my purposes, I begin with a Shakespearean play adapted to film in order to show the similarities in the process of cultural remediation of classic literature in video-games. Remedio Perni observes how Shakespeare has become "a fellow of infinite jest" (Perni, 2012: 31-43), through his multiple interpretations and adaptations. Miguel Ramalheite Gomes argues that this has, in fact, contributed to making Shakespearean plays alive today. Shakespeare's readings have changed dramatically from their classical theatrical playground, being made into audio-plays and film adaptations, and even becoming a motif to criticize contemporary political struggles between the third and the first world, as Maria Mayer does in her adaptation *Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome* (cited in Gomes, 2012: 83). In some cases, Shakespearean texts are fragmented and reproduced in other cultural mixtures that are hardly identifiable. Martin Roberts tried to use the entertainment specific to video-games in order to promote original Shakespeare's works

in *Speare*: “While zapping enemy spaceships players have to help recover the stolen text of Romeo and Juliet by memorizing lines from the famous play, learning facts about Shakespeare’s life and devising synonyms and homonyms for parts of the text.” (Roberts, 2007 n/p). *Speare* contains a link to a database entitled Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare developed by the university as an educational resource. The site includes lesson plans for teachers, video interviews and e-books. Ieva Mikelsons, a 12-year-old student at the King George Public School in Guelph, tested the game while it was being developed. She said it taught her more about Shakespeare than books used by her older sister. In *Speare* the ludic aspects remain visibly distinct from the Shakespearean text. Although it is useful in informing players about the bard’s work and life, the game and the Shakespearean work have nothing to do one with the other. *Speare* resembles an “advergame”, that is, “a video game constructed around a brand or a specific product,” (Ghirvu, 2012: 115) where in-game advertising represents the insertion of a product within the game.

Another example of sending the player back to the source of literary inspiration is the forthcoming adventure game *Odyssey* that aims at redirecting players to Homer’s texts in order to solve its many puzzles. At the 4th Global Video Game and the Future of Entertainment Conference, held in Oxford (2012), Monica Evans and Spencer Evans (from University of Texas, Dallas) presented their video game project *Reading the Book is Cheating*, an adaptation of Homer’s *Odyssey* to a video game that will maintain itself as close as possible to the original text:

It has been said that every act of communication is an act of translation. [...] The game is intended to translate Odysseus’ actions and narrative into puzzle game mechanics that are strictly accurate to the text, balancing the fun of playing in Odysseus’ world with the (surprisingly difficult) challenges of, for example, surviving the Cyclops’ cave or subduing Circe the enchantress. One of the project’s goals is to inspire players to read or re-read the original text, perhaps initially as a hint guide for the game. Ultimately, the project is intended as a series of art games that are informally educational, but are less about teaching the source material than inspiring an appreciation for that material through the medium of games. (Evans, 2012 n/p)

Speare’s and *Odyssey’s* main purpose is declared educational; they use different methods to integrate their literary sources in the video-game mechanics, while at the same time trying to motivate the player to read the original texts. There are, however aspects of Shakespearean motifs that go beyond this level, for example in survival horror video-game series *Silent Hill*.

In *Silent Hill* series, Shakespeare allusions are employed in various riddles, particularly in two situations: one from *Silent Hill III*, when the player has to solve a difficult puzzle involving Shakespeare, and which requires a vast cultural competence on his work, as well as video-games skills. The riddle sends the player to read Shakespeare’s works in order to learn making correlations with mathematical care. The other more relevant example is from *Silent Hill: Origins*, when Travis Grady reaches the theatre of Silent Hill and is involved in playing another type of Shakespearean puzzle

that remediates theatre as a whole medium when Travis has to participate in a simulated Victorian theatre play: *The Tempest*, almost like an actor:

The theatre has various notes lying around describing the preparations for one of Shakespeare’s plays that was to be performed there. [...] The characters described in the notes are Prospero, Ariel and Caliban, who are the major characters from Shakespeare’s play “The Tempest”. (Silent Hill wiki n/p)

Referencing Shakespearean-like language paradoxes and contextual ontological paradoxes employed in the narrative that sometimes are mirrored by literary quotes, *Silent Hill* emphasizes a synonymy between language/thoughts and the physical world as one of the bard’s characteristics:

Let us imagine the line ‘The world is but a word’ (2.2.152) – from Shakespeare’s *Timon of Athens* [...] The sentence suggests that the word – uttered or written, a crucial medium of both an actor and a book – makes up the world itself. [...] Another Shakespearean line [...]: ‘All the world’s a stage’ [...] both are displaying the theatrical nature of reality. They are, thus, either discrediting the validity of reality as theatrical, or upgrading the world of the stage, theatrical play as real [...] it is impossible not to detect the irony, and perhaps the self-assurance of the author, the one who has power over words and over the stage – that is, over the world. (Matuska, 2012: 53)

In the *Tempest* puzzle from Artaud Theater (*Silent Hill: Origins*), Travis travels through the looking glass, from the stage of artificial decorum to its real representations, culminating in his fight with the monster Caliban. In Artaud Theater the theatrical play and the stage determine the structure of the real world according to rules set by Alessa’s psychological traumas, her thoughts, her feelings and her suffering:

The Otherworld and the Fog World are representations of Alessa’s distorted perception of Silent Hill and her experiences there [...] When Alessa was seven years old, Dahlia became convinced that a certain ritual to summon the cult’s God would likely be a success if she used her daughter as its birth mother [...]. Alessa was offered as a sacrifice by Dahlia to the God on the second floor of their house by immolating her body. Despite the interfering actions of Travis Grady, the plan was a success, with Alessa becoming pregnant with the deity in embryonic form. (Silent Hill wiki n/p)

Alessa’s power extends from thoughts to physical reality. In her thoughts, she creates parallel worlds that enter in conflict with the everyday world. This tendency of invading reality with imagined interstitial unnatural entities is essential in art-horror (on this see Carroll, 1990: 31). Thus, Alessa resembles god-like Shakespeare, creator of infinite fictional worlds and, thus, the presence of Shakespearean quotations and ambiguity rhetoric in the *Silent Hill* series does not deviate from the original purpose of his theatrical plays. Space-time switches in the pluriverses of this game series are designed to create confusion in the player’s expectations. The characters from such games are the first to demonstrate human behavior when dealing with such liminal problems. “*The world is but a word*” takes deep meaning in the rhetoric of *Silent Hill*, where Alessa’s thoughts become material reality. Here, the characters from the bard’s dramas take the form of monsters from Travis’s past traumas. The Shakespearean idea

of contemplating the writer as a god of creation, artificer of his own imagined universes, goes here beyond the limits of the text, interrogating the principles of the world. Characters in *Silent Hill* play the drama of being entrapped in someone else's text. Thus, although direct references and allusions to Shakespeare are common to many games, in *Silent Hill* they succeed in creating a specific aesthetic response or feeling that goes beyond the quotations and point to the bard's atmosphere.

As mentioned above, Miguel Ramalheite Gomes' paper "The Artwork on exhibit runs about: Brigitte Maria Mayer's Filmic Adaptation of Heiner Müller's *Anatomic Titus Fall of Rome*" discusses the statuesque characteristics of Lavinia as cultural artifact both in Shakespeare's play *Titus Andronicus* and in Maria Mayer's film adaptation:

Mayer actually recuperates important aspects of Shakespeare's work with emblematic forms and powerfully connects these with the problem of aesthetically pleasing depictions of scenes of violence. [...] By comparing the raped and mutilated Lavinia with the most paradigmatic of ancient art forms as seen from a contemporary perspective, the broken statue, Mayer and Müller suggestively conflate two forms of ruins into the disturbing image of a raped and broken woman, put on display for an audience to contemplate. [...] Shakespeare's work is actively engaged with, so that its contemporariness is the result of a constant dialogue between the present and the past, rather than the product of uncritical acceptance or even a spurious fidelity. As opposed to Lavinia, then, Shakespeare is saved from the fate of becoming an artwork on exhibit for the purposes of passive consumption (Gomes, 2012: 83).

The Shakespearean – and later Gothic – obsession with ruins and the statuesque is recuperated/reproduced in survival horror video games series at various levels, beginning with the tortured bodies invested with decorative functions and images depicting multiple layers of spatial and environmental degradation that build the visual aesthetics of these games, including rhetorics in *Silent Hill* series, deeply anchored in Gothic literature. As Laurie Taylor indicates, "Tracing survival horror's lineage thus includes the Gothic, as defined by the transgression of borders and boundaries [...] or subversions- within a given text. Hence, horror may rely on the Gothic to create the situation necessary for fear, and the Gothic may create horror in designing its boundaries and their illicit crossings." (Taylor, 2009: 733).

The frequent use of books, paintings, pictures, vases, sculptures, and other elements populate the game world to show that it is already inhabited by the past.' Like Gothic literature's use of lost letters and hidden stories, games drawing on the Gothic tradition rely on the same elements for the game narratives and then extend those elements into the gameplay as with *Silent Hill 2*, which begins with the main character James receiving a letter from his dead wife. The letter begins the game's narrative, but James finds other documents throughout the game - which allow the player to solve puzzles and progress through the game (Perron, 2009, Kindle Locations 780-786).

Discussing the adaptation of *Titus* in Maria Mayer's film (*Anatomic: Titus Fall of Rome*), Gomes uncovers essential motifs related to ruined bodies and statues in Gothic, Horror and Survival Horror genres:

The strategy that interests me here, that of arresting movement, has been identified in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* particularly as a tendency for tableau-like scenes, due to 'the way in which the characters in the play so often seem to become emblems, to be frozen into postures that are the very picture of supplication, grief or violent revenge' [...] Indeed, a good part of ancient sculpture appears to us as ruins and fragments. [...] The production of Lavinia as a ruined statue, a production which proliferates in the film to the point of affecting other characters, ultimately points to a recurring baroque presentism. Benjamin tells of the baroque cult of the ruin [...]: "[...] That which lies here in ruins, the highly significant fragment, the remnant, is, in fact, the finest material in baroque creation"[...] The idea of producing a ruin as itself a work of art may add to an explanation of why some of the present revisions of the figure of Lavinia tend to show her as a fragmented statue, a popular paradigm of the classical work of art, which starts moving and shies away from the gaze of a contemplative audience [...] This striking image figures Rome, that is, the presence of ancient Rome in contemporary Rome, as a field of ruins.[...] Just as the Goths produce Rome as a ruin, so Tamora, through the actions of her sons, produces Lavinia [...] as a mangled ruin of a human being. The fall of Rome is replicated in the destructive anatomy of Lavinia. Pursuing still further the analogy between a statuesque Lavinia, robbed of her arms, and the ruins of Rome dug up by archaeologists [...] (Gomes, 2012, page 80).

The raped, mutilated body and the arresting of movement motifs are also emblematic in the case *Silent Hill* and the character Alessa, who shies away from the gaze of the player who indirectly learns about her tragic story. The entire universe of the game, starting with *Silent Hill's Otherworld* represents her projected and materialized suffering in the physical world.

The town of *Silent Hill* is represented as multiverse of rhetorical textual isotopies (concept coined by Eco, 1979: 28). There are many narrative levels interconnected in tensioned relations: the story of the notorious American real town is subverted by *Fog World* (its Gothic ghost-like deserted version, ruled by other semantic topics), shifting periodically to the *Otherworld*, the town's ruins being invaded by horrific abjections that transgress natural boundaries (walls invaded by rust and human skin patches, blood and body parts employed in the structure of constructions reduced to their skeletal steel frames).

All these different versions of *Silent Hill* interfere with each other in the games' narratives. After being ritually burned alive and somehow surviving death, Alessa (not having a *Titus* father at her disposal as did Lavinia) starts her own vengeance against the cult. Her pregnant body is kept alive in Alchemilla Hospital, but, like a statue, she cannot move. The process of her entrapment is reflected in the endless projections of her suffering, and her inability to escape from *Silent Hill*. The similarities with Mayer's film can be seen in the statuesque mutilated baroque figure of Lavinia and the violence towards her (derived in this case from Cold-War documentaries). Similarly, Alessa's traumas surround, frame and define the space and time qualities of *Silent Hill's* opposite versions and their rhythm of cyclic succession. Both Lavinia and Alessa are raped and

mutilated and their suffering becomes emblematic for their narratives, projecting the individual drama of their objectivization towards the entire society/community/universe. Lavinia is raped by the Goths and the Fall of Rome happens under the Gothic invasion. The theme of ruined Rome seems to float through history as a nostalgic memory and somehow impregnates Gothic literature and further art-horror and Survival Horror video-games with its stylistic feeling and more generally as a baroque cult of the ruin.

There would be more to add on this matter, but perhaps the aspect of Shakespeare's remediation has been sufficiently emphasized. The process, as pointed out before, takes place at various levels, some of them rhetorically questioning the status of the world today in a similar way as Shakespeare questioned his world, others recreating an inner Shakespearean atmosphere, as in the case of *Silent Hill* and other recent adaptations of *Titus Andronicus*. In the *Silent Hill* series, Shakespearean motifs are strategically remediated and the narrative mixes multiple tropes from the Shakespearean world. The situation is different with the ambitious *Dante's Inferno* and *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corner of the Earth*.

While we find *Dante's Inferno* too poor an adaptation to be discussed here, we may focus on *Call of Cthulhu* that, as Tanya Krzywinska affirms, is a successful translation of the Lovecraftian *cosmic horror* stories into the medium of video games (Krzywinska, 2009: 4006-4565). The storyline of the game follows the narrative plots of *The Call of Cthulhu* and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* novels recreating closely the atmosphere of Lovecraft's narrative style. The player has limited control, engaging in the unfolding story by reading and solving puzzles, as well as communicating with other characters and evading the unbeatable enemies as in adventure story-driven video-games from the Survival genre. The user-unfriendly controls are connected to the detective-like mood that turns viewers into Peeping Toms, writes Krzywinska, punished because of their transgressive gaze: "This frequently used rhetorical device can be seen as part of the way in which horror films seek to involve their audience, in this case punishing the audience by proxy for their interest in the 'forbidden'." (Krzywinska, 2009: 4237). She adds that one of the core selling features of the *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth* is its "Insanity Effects" that provide a very direct way of linking the character's psychological state to the perceptual and action field of the player, an equivalent of literature's unreliable narrator. If players gaze too intently at the horror in the game, they will develop hallucinations that impair their ability to act in the game world. This device where you are asked "not to look" is reinforced by the game mechanics, which owes much to the rhetorics of cinema, and is one of the major paradoxes of the game, tied to the theme of denial which is structural to the game's narrative, according to Krzywinska. In fact, it seems to accentuate the status of what Aevermann noticed to be the Lovecraftian destruction of the hero, one important specific of Lovecraft's supernatural horror grammar (see Aevermann, 2009: 19-25).

The particular aspect of losing mental sanity works differently in Lovecraft's novels where the narrator informs the reader about the characters' thoughts, beliefs, emotions etc. In the game the psychological and cognitive aspects are also told through

texts but an additional audio device (introduced to inform the gamer about the protagonist's inner thoughts) is associated with visual distortions of the screen, loss of user's control, accelerated heartbeat and difficult breathing sounds, thus translating the first person narration from the two novels in the first person view (including protagonist's monologue and sounds) parameters of the video game. This equivalent of literature's unreliable narrator of the insanity effects in *Call of Cthulhu* is built to better immerse the player in the Lovecraftian fictional world and is constructed following the relation between the human characters and the subject of cosmic horror. In their journals, Lovecraft's protagonists confess their emotions provoked by hearing about, imagining or gazing at the horrific spectacles in terms of sensorial perturbations and rational paradoxes, emphasizing the limited human condition and the difficulty to withstand the monster's proximity, as in the example that follows:

I can hardly describe the mood in which I was left by this harrowing episode—an episode at once mad and pitiful, grotesque and terrifying. The grocery boy had prepared me for it, yet the reality left me none the less bewildered and disturbed. Puerile though the story was, old Zadok's insane earnestness and horror had communicated to me a mounting unrest which joined with my earlier sense of loathing for the town and its blight of intangible shadow. (*The Shadow Over Innsmouth* Kindle Location 4811).

Lovecraft often used ekphrastic techniques to describe in words the visual aspects of the troubled works of art his characters are puzzled by, like the statue of *Cthulhu*:

No recognised school of sculpture had animated this terrible object, yet centuries and even thousands of years seemed recorded in its dim and greenish surface of unplaceable stone. [...] This thing, which seemed instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy, was of a somewhat bloated corpulence, and squatted evilly on a rectangular block or pedestal covered with undecipherable characters. [...] The cephalopod head was bent forward, so that the ends of the facial feelers brushed the backs of huge fore paws which clasped the croucher's elevated knees. The aspect of the whole was abnormally life-like, and the more subtly fearful because its source was so totally unknown. (*The Call of Cthulhu* Kindle Location 1019).

By connecting the specifics of Lovecraftian narrative style with the game mechanics, the video-game *Call of Cthulhu* succeeds in recreating the atmosphere of cosmic horror, remediated also its rhetorical aspects by means of the translation of rhythm and narrative elements onto the game. This is possible by means of an ekphrastic picturacy, that is, the "ability to read visual signs and speak for pictures" (Heffernan 2006: 38) already present in Lovecraft's novels, combined with the management of still and animated images, and the interconnections of the game's agency elements.

To conclude, adaptations of classic literary works to video-games can be accomplished in multiple and various ways. There are few attempts that superficially recycle the surface of their story-line sources reinvesting in the game narrative the cultural material with a different meaning while maintaining the same title and characters as in the original, that is, using the cultural impact of well-known texts. This might be the case of the *Dante's Inferno* mentioned above and aiming to suggest that the game

would have somehow a similar cultural significance. This is no more than promoting the game by using the already famous literary material.

Another way is to make superficial allusions pointing to classic literary works with different purposes, not necessarily connecting the narrative core of the game with the texts mentioned. In this case, allusions are secondary, although perhaps relevant to reveal the hidden source of inspiration for certain situations, game characters or ideas. For example, *Devil May Cry* series points to the *Divine Comedy*, Final Fantasy X2 incorporates phrases from *Macbeth* suggesting that the three feminine characters are constructed after the three witches from the Shakespearean's play etc. Most of the games remain at this level when recycling cultural material.

The third way includes educational games that are specifically designed to inspire gamers to read the books; this is the case of *Odyssey* and *Speare*. Even here there are differences relating the specific game narratives: *Odyssey* follows Homer's source, while *Speare* generally informs the player about the bard's work. These games are specifically designed to promote the literary works, functioning like advergames for cultural brands.

The fourth case includes games that reproduce in their narrative more than just the story or plot, frequently using different layers of meanings in order to not only create intertextual/intermedial allusions but also induce similar aesthetic responses, feelings and atmosphere as the related sources of inspiration. *Silent Hill* and *Call of Cthulhu* are such games, although only *Call of Cthulhu* aimed to be a video-game adaptation of the literary source of inspiration.

Even if the status of video games is still suspended between the dispute of those who view them as art and those that label them as entertainment, attempts to translate/remediate literary works into the ludic medium brings to mind Horace's *ut pictura poesis* maxim, contextually formulated here to fit my purpose as *ut poesis video ludus*, since games such as *Call of Cthulhu* demonstrate how well the intermedial transition from books to the video ludic platform can be accomplished.

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