

Clemson University

TigerPrints

All Theses

Theses

5-2024

Playing Myself: The Gothic's Challenge to Audience Identity

Elena Durant

wmduran@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Durant, Elena, "Playing Myself: The Gothic's Challenge to Audience Identity" (2024). *All Theses*. 4263.
https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/4263

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.

PLAYING MYSELF: THE GOTHIC'S CHALLENGE TO AUDIENCE IDENTITY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
English

by
Elena Durant
May 2024

Accepted by:
Dr. Erin Goss, Committee Chair
Dr. Maziyar Faridi
Dr. Megan Eatman

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents close readings of the 2015 video game *Bloodborne* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* in order to illuminate how the Gothic genre challenges identity. Both *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* respond to their genres and are preoccupied with the ways that their audiences might interact with them. *Bloodborne*'s gameplay directly incentivizes players to reflect on the way that they play the game. *Northanger Abbey* is a parody of the Gothic novel that reflects just as much on the idea of the reader as it does on the conventions of the genre it parodies. Both of these works are engaged in a self-reflexivity that is intrinsically tied to their Gothic elements, and both of these works cause the person interacting with them to evaluate their own participation in the medium. These texts establish an ideal form of audience participation and work to enable their audience to adopt that behavior. Each text leverages its self-reflexivity by creating a relationship with the audience that has consequences for how audiences respond to the texts. *Bloodborne* uses its systems to incentivize ideal player behavior while *Northanger Abbey* is written in a way that models ideal reader behavior. Close readings of the endings of each text show how the structure of Gothic texts generate challenges to audience identity while also constructing forms of ideal behavior.

DEDICATION

For Abena.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
CHAPTER	
1. PLAYING MYSELF: THE GOTHIC'S CHALLENGE TO AUDIENCE IDENTITY	1
REFERENCES	35

CHAPTER ONE

PLAYING MYSELF: THE GOTHIC'S CHALLENGE TO AUDIENCE IDENTITY

The increased prominence of video games as a mode of storytelling creates an opportunity for a new look at older genres. When the player of From Software's *Bloodborne* exits from the introductory area onto the main path, they are met with an image of a towering cityscape, illuminated by a setting sun. It's an image that embodies the excess that characterizes the Gothic genre. Freed from the physical limitations of real architecture, the game's visual aesthetic immediately conveys to the player that this is a Gothic experience. The Gothic mood is emphasized by the sound cues accompanying the action, with the harsh screech of the gate into the city being followed by a swell of music as the player takes in the view. This moment is an example of the new possibilities for storytelling presented by games. Games are well suited to replicating the aesthetics of older genres, giving players a chance to explore Gothic locations in more detail than other mediums are able to convey. Yet, it is still up for debate how games are able to capture the affective qualities of older genres. The Gothic genre was widely associated with a corruption of reader morals constituting a threat to the audience's moral identity. This association was due to the strong absorption in novels that young readers often exhibited. Video games, often associated today with producing violent behavior in young players, present a unique mirror to this contemporary understanding of the Gothic. Despite both of these reputations being largely overreactions, both Gothic games and novels can inspire change in their audiences. *Bloodborne* is a Gothic video game in more than just aesthetic and utilizes its Gothic status to destabilize the identity of its audience.

This thesis presents close-readings of the self-reflexive elements of both the 2015 video game *Bloodborne* and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, in order to illuminate how the Gothic challenges identity. Both *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* respond to their genres and are preoccupied with the way that a player/reader might interact with them. *Bloodborne*'s gameplay directly incentivizes players to reflect on the way that they play the game. *Northanger Abbey* is a parody of the Gothic novel that reflects just as much on the idea of the reader as it does on the conventions of the genre it parodies. Both of these works are engaged in a self-reflexivity that is intrinsically tied to their Gothic elements, causing the person interacting with them to evaluate their own participation in the medium. The very same mechanisms that create self-reflexivity in works of Gothic fiction end up destabilizing the identity of the one who is interacting with the Gothic.

Many writers have noted a connection between the Gothic and identity. This challenge of identity impacts both the Gothic text as well as those who interact with that text. An easy example of the connection between the Gothic and identity comes from the large body of scholarship on the queer Gothic. Queer scholars, and queer audiences both look to the Gothic for its ability to represent difference from societal standards. Eve Sedgwick and George Haggerty, for instance, both connect the Gothic genre to alternate forms of identity. These queer readings of the Gothic are tied up in a modern reevaluation of the Gothic figure. As Fred Botting notes, Gothic figures today are read much more sympathetically than they were when they were originally published. Gothic figures no longer primarily induce fear in the audience; instead "monstrous others become sites of identification, sympathy, desire, and self-recognition" (Botting, 6). Queer readings of

Gothic fiction, while not the cause of this wider shift in attitudes surrounding the genre, contribute to this new understanding of what can be gained from interacting with the Gothic. The potential for self-recognition allows the Gothic to become a place where identity is made unstable. In the queer Gothic, identity and self-recognition fundamentally alter how Gothic texts are read and understood.

Another benefit of the queer Gothic is how it demonstrates the inextricability of transgressive sexuality from the genre. George Haggerty, in his introduction to *Queer Gothic*, links Gothic fiction with the expression of desire. Haggerty also highlights how Gothic fiction helped to “prepare the ground” for more modern definitions of sexuality, which emerged in the later nineteenth century, drawing a clear lineage between the Gothic genre and modern sexual identities (Haggerty, 2). Transgressive sexual desires were able to be expressed in Gothic fiction when they couldn’t be expressed elsewhere, leading to the genre being labeled as obscene. Michael Gamer similarly notes the sexual history of the category of Gothic fiction in his article “Genres for the Prosecution: Pornography and the Gothic.” Gamer examines the categories of “Gothic” and “pornography” in relation to Fredric Jameson’s idea of genre as being a relationship between writers and readers (Gamer, 1043) and goes on to show that the genres of the Gothic and pornography have a common ancestor in the 18th-century legal category of obscenity, which preceded both (Gamer, 1044). These genre categories emerged in relation to each other, partly in response to the contemporary debates over the status of Gothic fiction as obscene. These shifts in genre identity, from “obscenity” being split into the modern categories of “Gothic” and “pornography,” shows that an essential element of

the Gothic is the audience who interacts with it. This audience is having their identity challenged by the genre while simultaneously being able to change the way the genre itself is recognized. If genre is determined by the relationship between text and audience, then the 19th-century audience of Gothic fiction contributed to this relationship via their attempts to redefine the category of obscenity to allow for Gothic fiction to stand separate.

The relational aspect of genre identity also works in the opposite direction. While the audience's participation in the Gothic allowed for the category to emerge as its own genre, the genre is also able to challenge the identity of its readers. The Gothic offers an understanding of identity that is fluid, and able to be redefined via the relationship between audience and text. In her article, "Character in the Veil," Eve Sedgwick briefly discusses a Gothic definition of identity: "In the Gothic view... individual identity, including sexual identity, is social and relational rather than original or private; it is established only *ex post facto*, by recognition" (Sedgwick, 256). By this definition, identity is not a static thing, but a relationship that can be altered through an alteration in how that relationship is recognized. The Gothic is able to trouble identity because of how it alters the dynamics of recognition. Through their Gothic elements, both *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* recognize their audience, and in doing so alter the ways in which those audiences are able to recognize themselves. The self-reflexivity that both of these titles engage in recognizes their audiences and invites those audiences to participate in the act of change alongside them.

The Gothic has historically invited a high level of audience participation. Charlene Bunnell identifies that a key aspect of the Gothic is that it functions as an interactive literature, demanding audience participation within the narrative (cited in Kirkland, 109). Ewan Kirkland connects this idea to the player participation inherent in video games (Kirkland, 109). Kirkland's writing highlights the connections between the Gothic and the medium of video games, which has been the subject of a large push in scholarship recently, with many writers trying to identify specific ways in which games can be Gothic or how to gamify the Gothic. Tanya Krzywinska notes five coordinates of how games can embody the Gothic: false heroes, *Mise-en-scène*, representation of psychologically affective states, style, and function (59-61). Different combinations of these coordinates produce various Gothic effects in video games and form a helpful baseline for evaluation of a game's Gothic attributes. While the specific relationship between the Gothic and video games is still up for debate, it is clear that participation in Gothic video games acts as an extension of the affective potential of the Gothic genre. Michael Hancock attributes this extension to how gameplay mirrors the Gothic traits of repetition and doubling, claiming that "the gothic doubling inherent in the game play calls into question notions of the stable Enlightenment self" (Hancock, 166) before going on to claim that "gameplay itself is a form of doubling" (Hancock, 167). Hancock's reading identifies a Gothic element inherent to the medium of games that can function as a destabilizing agent, though, as Hancock notes, "players are so used to this doubling, that this apparent potential for Gothic destabilization of self is left somewhat unrealized" (Hancock, 166). While this doubling is a mode of identity destabilization, it is not the

primary mechanism at work in games like *Bloodborne* or novels like *Northanger Abbey*, both of which utilize that Gothic potential on both audience and self.

The affective potential of the Gothic has been recognized by those who oppose either the reading of Gothic novels or the playing of violent games. Both the Gothic genre and the medium of video games have historically been the targets of ridicule and censorship, where opponents diminish the worth of engaging with texts of this type while also acknowledging that they can have a tangible impact on those who engage with them. Gothic novels were historically rejected due to a fear of their corrupting influence on the young women who read them, and violent video games have continuously been accused of causing violent tendencies in the teenage boys who form the primary audience for these kinds of games. These reactions to games and the Gothic have been widespread enough to become an inextricable part of the legacy of both the genre and the medium. A reading comparing *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* would be incomplete without understanding how both function as responses to the backlash to the Gothic genre and the medium of games. While genre is a relationship between writer and audience, hostile audiences also participate in the identification of genres; thus a Gothic text's attempt to recognize its own audience must also contend with those who view the genre as an inherently immoral and corrupting influence.

Both *Northanger Abbey* and *Bloodborne* are engaged in a form of self-reflexivity that simultaneously addresses the hostility surrounding interaction with the Gothic and games and facilitates the Gothic's challenging of identity on both the text and audience. *Northanger Abbey* makes this panicked response to the Gothic novel's relationship with

identity into a central pillar of the novel's satire. Early in the novel, Austen includes a defense of the Gothic novel that breaks the standard voice of the novel in such a way that makes it clear that it is much more likely to be Austen's opinion than that of Catherine Morland. Austen writes that she will "not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding" before bringing up how the heroines of these novels are made to also have a personal distaste for novels (Austen, 58-59). This disdain for novels is not shared by the heroine of *Northanger Abbey*, who is, above all else, a reader of novels. Catherine's status as a reader allows for the audience to see themselves in her actions, and Austen's strong defense of their passion for reading encourages the audience to continue that identification. This moment both establishes a clear position on the discourse surrounding novels and provides an opportunity for audience recognition.

Bloodborne doesn't respond to the topic of video games causing violence in as direct a way as *Northanger Abbey* responds to the discourse surrounding novel reading, as the conversation primarily took place in the United States in relation to rising gun violence and *Bloodborne* is a Japanese game. Nevertheless, this conversation still ends up influencing how the game is understood in the United States. Naomi Clark connects the negative reputation surrounding games to the similar history of how queerness was historically maligned and uses this connection to highlight the ways that games attempt to deal with this reputation. Similar to the understanding of assimilation in queer studies, Clark notes how some game creators attempted to market their games in family friendly

ways, to avoid the negative associations that games had (Clark, 10). *Bloodborne* resists this urge to assimilate and centers its violence instead. The gameplay of *Bloodborne* is sped up compared to other *Souls* games, to feel more dangerous, and the commonly used shield item type is notably replaced with guns, which hadn't been featured in any *Souls* game before. It's hard not to read these changes as a form of doubling down on the violence in games, showing that if games do have an affective potential as is being claimed, it is not directly causal. This mentality surrounding violence in games serves to excuse the actions being performed by the player, which allows the player to engage with that violence more easily. The player becomes a more willing participant in the gameplay experience, which, like in the case of *Northanger Abbey's* defense of novels, allows for audience self-recognition. In both of these cases, the texts are forming responses to contemporary discussions surrounding the worth of their genre and medium. Both of these texts reflect on their mediums via the same mechanisms that allow for the audience to identify with them.

Reflexivity in both *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* must establish recognition of an audience. This form of recognition will be evaluated on different dynamics, as the audience for a novel cannot be recognized the same way as the audience for a video game since audiences interact with the texts in distinctly different ways. The interaction of a novel reader who turns text into mental images and impressions and experiences a journey from the first to the final sentence is not immediately comparable to the interaction of a video game player, who simultaneously takes in visual, aural, and haptic sensory feedback in order to respond with controller inputs. *Bloodborne's* recognition of

its audience, and subsequent challenge to that audience, is a recognition of how players interacted with other games in the *Souls* series. This reflexivity takes the form of a change in gameplay allowances by making previously viable combat strategies no longer functional. *Northanger Abbey* recognizes its audience both through its allusions to Gothic conventions as well as through the characterization of Catherine Morland, who can be primarily understood as a reader.

Much like how the self-reflexive elements in *Northanger Abbey* are easiest to evaluate against the conventions of a Gothic novel, the self-reflexive elements of *Bloodborne* should be evaluated against the standards of its own gameplay genre. Because games are so malleable in form, gameplay genres can be difficult to define. It is common for game genres to be named after the game that kickstarted the genre's popularity. Genre titles like "Doom clone" or "roguelike" indicate a specific lineage of game design principles that lead to games within these genres playing about the same as other games within these genres. It is worth noting that these genre classifications only correspond to the gameplay itself, and the narrative genre of each game is not standard across entries within the gameplay genre. My evaluation of gameplay genres is informed by Ian Bogost's concept of procedural rhetoric, focusing on the "rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures" (Bogost, ix). Bogost's prioritization of rules and interactions over words and images helps assess the genre as a gameplay mode rather than a narrative one, which helps bridge the gap between gameplay-driven reflexivity in games and narrative reflexivity in novels.

Bloodborne is a game within the soulslike genre, which is the term used to describe any game that plays like a *Souls* game, usually prioritizing a high difficulty. The game was developed by the people who made the previous *Souls* games, which makes the differences between *Bloodborne* and other *Souls* games more interesting. These differences indicate specific avenues of Gothic self-reflection that highlight how Gothic games affect their audience through gameplay. A key example of *Bloodborne*'s differences from previous *Souls* games that demonstrates how these changes can radiate outward toward the audience comes from the removal of the shield. Shields, used to block and parry incoming attacks, were replaced with "bloodtinge" weapons, which are usually guns that can only parry. This replacement changes the rhythm of combat to be more aggressive and fast. Replacing the shields brings the combat more in line with the Gothic setting and tone, as the lack of protection within combat makes the world of Yharnam feel much more dangerous than previous *Souls* settings. While future titles in the *Souls* series brought the shields back, the speed of *Bloodborne*'s combat remained, and experienced players often go without using the shields at all, even when returning to the games released before *Bloodborne*. The removal of shields in *Bloodborne* impacted the way that players approached the series.

The removal of the shield incentivizes players to recognize their own habits, pushing them to adopt an aggressive playstyle to suit the Gothic theme. If a player previously relied on shields to get through other games in the series, *Bloodborne*'s combat will be an initial challenge as they get acclimated to playing without the shield. Part of the game of *Bloodborne* is in recognizing the ways in which previous *Souls* games

conditioned players to behave, and contrast that against how *Bloodborne* expects players to behave. The item description of the one shield that remains in the game makes this case clear. It states that “hunters do not typically employ shields, ineffectual against the strength of the beasts as they tend to be” before stating that shields can “engender passivity.” This description is as direct an instruction as the game ever gives, suggesting to players that the use of this type of item is not worth it. The game recognized the desire of some players who previously relied on shields for more protection, and at the same time suggested that these players change their behavior. In addition to the removal of the shield, *Bloodborne* also added a new mechanic, that has not reappeared in any subsequent *Souls* games, where a player can regain lost health if they attack an enemy quickly after losing health. This mechanism reflects another departure from previous series conventions, as in other *Souls* games damage can usually only be healed through the use of a healing item, which are often slow to use in combat. While previous games encouraged taking time, playing defensively, and trying not to get hit, *Bloodborne* encourages players to care less about receiving damage, and more about dealing it. Both of these changes suggest to the player that this game rewards an aggressive playstyle and punishes a defensive one, encouraging players to swap from one to the other.

Northanger Abbey is similarly self-reflexive, and its reflexivity similarly stems from its pointed relation to texts that have come before it. For *Northanger Abbey*, it is Gothic parody that drives much of its reflexivity, as the novel emulates the form of the Gothic novel for comedic effect. *Northanger Abbey*’s early sections constantly remind the reader of the conventions of the Gothic novel, while defining itself as something

separate from the novels it is emulating. The very first sentence places Catherine Morland in opposition to standard generic expectations: “No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have ever supposed her born to be an heroine” (Austen, 37). This same technique of defining her novel by stating what tropes are not present is used often in the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*. In the next chapter, the reader is told about Catherine’s journey to Bath that “Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero” (Austen, 43). In these moments, Austen is defining what her novel is at the same time that she is reminding the reader of the conventions of the Gothic novel. The reader is not allowed to forget that they are reading a novel, and that the novel they are reading should, by the conventions of genre, look a certain way. Deviation from this ideal generic path is one of the foundations of the parody, and it both relies on the reader’s understanding of genre conventions and attempts to subvert that understanding by decidedly not having the typical Gothic trope occur where the reader expects it to.

Much of the scholarship on *Northanger Abbey* evaluates Catherine’s status as a reader within the text, as the novel constantly draws attention to how Catherine behaves as a reader. Because Catherine’s reading causes her to misread social situations outside of her novels, she is often compared to an imagined “ideal” reader, who is based on contemporary discourse on what reading is meant for, and if novels were worth considering as quality, worthwhile literature. In her examination of the figure of the female Quixote in *Northanger Abbey*, Jodi Wyatt argues that Catherine Morland is closer to an ideal reader than she is often depicted to be. Wyatt claims that Catherine’s reading

of novels encourages her social growth. Being absorbed in a novel, while historically associated with the corruption of women's morals, is depicted in Austen's fiction as positive. Austen thus works to redefine the image of the female reader as an individual working on personal growth (Wyett, 262). This highlighting of the absorbed reader is an example of Austen's novel establishing recognition of its audience, who would have been more likely to exhibit the trait of absorption in novels, and using that recognition to alter the self-perception of those readers. While *Bloodborne* altered a gameplay element to directly incentivize players to adopt new behaviors, Austen's novel suggests to readers how an ideal participant of a novel would behave.

While both of these texts constantly work to remind the audience of the conventions of the Gothic, they also emphasize their own Gothic traits. Once these texts establish their recognition of the audience through their self-reflexivity, they can act on their audience through their Gothic traits. Both *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* are thoroughly Gothic texts that utilize the affective potential of the Gothic to incentivize audience re-evaluation of how they interact with these texts. *Bloodborne*'s change to *Souls* gameplay causes the player to reevaluate the way they interact with soulslike games just as *Northanger Abbey*'s parody makes the reader reflect on their own reading habits. The mechanisms these texts utilize to establish this relationship with the audience are the same mechanisms that reinforce the Gothic nature of each. These texts' status as Gothic is dependent upon the audience recognizing them as such. By acting upon the audience, they enforce their own Gothic identity while also challenging the identity of those that interact with them.

Similar to the evaluation of Catherine Morland as an ideal reader within *Northanger Abbey*, *Bloodborne*'s self-reflexive elements ask what it means to be an ideal player. Both the concern over an ideal reader and the concern over an ideal player represent a textual attempt to alter the relationship between text and audience, to challenge the identity of an audience the same way that the audience is able to challenge the identity of the genre. In the case of games, this discourse concerns the ways in which the player is meant to embody the avatar, as well as the various gaps between player and character that do not exist to the same extent when reading a novel. Speaking literally, there are more ways to play a game than there are ways to read a novel. As such, the gap between player and character is variable. This relationship can change between different games, as well as shift within different moments of the same game. Gothic games, however, can utilize this relationship to incentivize players to alter their own relationship with the game. Hancock notes that Gothic games are able to "draw out the gaps and ellipses in the hyphen between player and character, gaps normally only noticed in brief moments of failure or error." (168). By drawing out these gaps between player and character, these games are able to emphasize the malleability of the relationship, indicating that it can be altered by the player. In the case of the *Souls* game community, there is a large focus among the playerbase to better embody the role of the ideal player, due to the difficulty of both playing and understanding these games. Ideal play becomes a social obligation, mirroring how reading in *Northanger Abbey* is depicted as a gateway to social development.

Players of other *Souls* games inherit an understanding of the relationship between player and character that sets their initial expectations for *Bloodborne*. The changes to combat within *Bloodborne* alters this relationship, causing the player to shift their mentality from the loosely defined player character in previous *Souls* games to that of *Bloodborne*'s beast hunters. The player characters in previous *Souls* games were usually depicted as bearers of an undead curse, which is used in-game to justify the respawn mechanics that form the basis of gameplay. Playing as a cursed character implies that the agency of choosing to participate in the game and fight is that of the player who controls the character, rather than of the player character themselves. Instead of a cursed main character, players of *Bloodborne* play as a hunter of beasts, who signs a contract to participate in the hunt. This contract, signed in a cutscene at the beginning of the game without player input, demonstrates a level of agency belonging to the player character that exists separately from that of the player. The player character having agency as a character outside that of the player, which is demonstrated before the player is able to make any inputs, means that the player is made to embody the role of the hunter. Instead of the player character being defined by the control of the player, *Bloodborne*'s hunter is predefined, and the role of the player is to behave as this character. The player is encouraged to play in such a way to make their actions fall in line with the diegetic expectations of behavior placed upon the character that they are inhabiting. An ideal player of *Bloodborne* behaves as the hunter and makes choices that align with what that character would do.

Bloodborne offers a Gothic impenetrability that demands a player adjust their own approach to playing *Souls* games in order to better embody the role of the ideal player. This impenetrability is both ludic and narrative and is intricately tied to the ways in which *Bloodborne* establishes a relationship with its audience. First experiences with *Bloodborne* tend to follow a similar pattern, even among those who played previous *Souls* games, in which the first time a player interacts with the game usually ends in that player dropping the game entirely. The heavy difficulty of the game, as well as the oblique narrative structure, create a relationship with the audience that encourages players to change the way they think about approaching the game. Players who bounce off the game initially often return, and they return with the knowledge that changing their own behavior can dramatically change their ability to enjoy the game. The impenetrability of *Bloodborne* leads to players forming strong individual relationships with the game, which contributes to the creation of strong fan communities dedicated to expressing these personal relationships. This fan community is ultimately the audience that *Bloodborne* gives the most direct power to interpret and reinterpret the game's genre. *Bloodborne*'s status as a Gothic text is dependent on the audience forming these relationships because of its impenetrability.

As with the other *Souls* games, *Bloodborne* resists traditional narrative structure. This atypical narrative structure leads directly to the growth of a fan community, where the Gothic affective potential is celebrated. While there are standard narrative elements like cutscenes and dialogue, they are often delivered without narrative context. Most first-time players complete the game with no cohesive knowledge of the narrative of the game.

Relevant narrative context is delivered almost entirely through the short descriptions of the various items that the player is able to find within the game world. Delivering narrative information in this way means that acquiring enough information in order to fully grasp the context of the narrative requires the player to both spend time reading and spend time connecting narrative fragments. While it is possible to put the narrative pieces together by oneself, sharing narrative information with others cuts down on the total time investment, so many choose to participate in fan communities in order to be able to understand the narrative. This relationship is evidenced by the popularity of youtube channels like VaatiVidya, who posts recaps of *Souls* narratives and has 2.8 million current subscribers. The channel's most viewed video is a broad explanation of the story of *Bloodborne*. *Bloodborne*'s altering of previously defined relationships to the player character incentivizes players to seek out explanations for the obscured narrative, which has directly contributed to the growth of the game's strong fan community.

Instead of prioritizing narrative coherence, *Bloodborne* prioritizes the emotional impression of each scene, with the player having to pick up the narrative pieces afterward. This theme is explored in Alexander Kolassa's examination of the sound design of the game, in which he demonstrates that this lack of traditional narrative elements allows for the parts of the game like the sound design to create a "ludic sublime," where the emotions caused by the game speak louder than the narrative itself (Kolassa, 25). Many players cite the emotions that these games provoke as a key factor in their attachment to them. Even while they are not able to piece together the narrative of the game, a community has formed around the emotional experience of play. Because the

emotional impressions are so potently delivered, players who enjoy the game will seek out more information. Once a player decides to seek out more information, it is incredibly easy to find spaces where the games can be discussed with other players. These player desires contribute directly to the formation of larger fan communities, where the emotions caused by play can be shared while players attempt to piece together narrative fragments.

The lack of direction that *Souls* games give their narratives applies also to the instruction of how to play the games themselves, leading to a strong reputation of obtuse difficulty. This difficulty of understanding how to play *Bloodborne* combines with the difficulty of actually playing the game to encourage the growth of strong fan communities to share advice for how to succeed in the game. An example of the lack of direction that *Bloodborne* offers comes from the most direct piece of advice the player is given in the early game. A note in an early area advises players to “seek paleblood to transcend the hunt.” At this point in the game, the player likely has no knowledge of what paleblood is, nor any idea where they might find it. As a directing note, it does almost nothing to give concrete instruction for a player who might feel lost in the world. The only options given to a player in this situation are to either keep playing through the frustration, read more item descriptions in an attempt to find a hint, or to ask for help. A confused player is unlikely to choose the first two options, given the lack of a guarantee of finding the correct answer even after all that work, so asking someone else who has completed more of the game is the easiest solution to frustration. Fan communities

develop not just from piecing the narrative together, but also from helping each other find out what is expected of them.

Bloodborne's gameplay contributes to the game's Gothic impenetrability just as much as the narrative does. Gameplay elements play a strong role both in the fulfillment of the Gothic's affective potential and in the establishment of the wider fan community. Hiranya Mukherjee's article "'Fear the Old Blood': The Gothicism of *Bloodborne*" evaluates *Bloodborne* through this Gothic lens, with respect to the five coordinates of Gothic games previously outlined by Krzywinska. Particularly important is Mukherjee's evaluation of the fifth coordinate, that of the function that the Gothic elements serve within the game. Mukherjee argues that the specific combination of Krzywinska's coordinates that *Bloodborne* exemplifies produces a strong affective response within the audience, citing the prevalence of online posts attributing an improved mental state to the feeling of accomplishment produced by succeeding against the game's challenges (Mukherjee, 18-19). The sense of accomplishment that *Bloodborne* and other *Souls* games produce is tied directly to the difficulty of these games. *Souls* games feature a repetitive gameplay loop in which it is quite easy for the player character to die, thus requiring players to reattempt sections of the game that trouble them. These repetitions accumulate over time, with the player either demonstrating growth in the area, allowing them to move on, or they remain stuck and continue the repetitions. Upon finally passing a difficult area, the player is rewarded both with newer areas to explore, and with the personal sense of accomplishing a difficult task. This feeling is widely cited as a core appeal of the game and is the cause of the affective response that Mukherjee highlights.

Bloodborne's ludic difficulty, emphasized by the removal of the shield, is directly tied to the audience relationship that *Bloodborne* cultivates.

The Gothic alterations to *Bloodborne*'s gameplay led directly to alterations in the level design of the game, putting emphasis on the elements of *Bloodborne*'s gameplay that most directly challenged the audience's approach to play. The opening area of *Bloodborne* was, at the time of its release, the most difficult starting area in a *Souls* game. This area, named Central Yharnam, creates an immediate pressure on the player to conform to the way that the game is designed to be played. Central Yharnam has some of the highest enemy density in the entire game, and these enemies are arranged in progressively larger and harder-to-manage groups. There is no checkpoint within the area until after the player is able to defeat one of the two bosses in the area. Leveling up the player character also isn't an option until after the player acquires one point of "madness," which can be found upon entering boss fight arenas or by taking a more-difficult hidden side path in Central Yharnam. Either way, the player must demonstrate competency with the core mechanics of the game before they are allowed to progress past this initial area. The requirement for ludic competency is further reinforced by the boss fight against Father Gascoigne, who fights incredibly quickly but is very susceptible to parry attacks. The player who does not know how to use the parry system will have a much more difficult time than a player who parries often.

The specific difficulty of this introduction to the game is best viewed in contrast to the beginning of other games in the series. The starting areas in other *Souls* games feature much more flexibility of approach than Central Yharnam does. The starting area

for *Dark Souls*, one of the most famous areas in the series, the Undead Asylum, also features a boss fight that blocks progress to the rest of the game until the player is able to demonstrate their competency with the basic systems of the game. The Undead Asylum teaches many lessons in a very short area, both with explanatory notes detailing how to block with a shield and attack with a weapon and also with the basic design of the area. Enemies in the Undead Asylum are spread farther apart and move much slower than their counterparts in *Bloodborne*, with some being completely unreactive until the player attacks them. The enemy placement here is meant to deliver a basic understanding of how to operate the player character within the game world, and what the basics of combat will look like. Combat in *Dark Souls* is slow and deliberate, which lends itself to a much wider flexibility of approach than *Bloodborne* has. The boss of the area, the Asylum Demon, can be defeated in many ways. Both ranged and melee combat are effective in this fight, and the slow combat means that the player can choose a different approach to make up for what they are less comfortable doing. It is also possible to bypass this fight entirely with the use of the black firebomb item that damages the boss for just under a quarter of its maximum health and ten of which are available to acquire at the start of the game. This teaches the player that *Dark Souls* offers the flexibility to try multiple approaches to a problem. *Bloodborne*, in contrast, does not offer this flexibility to its players. The only path of success available in *Bloodborne* is aggressive play. If a player cannot defeat Father Gascoigne, then they cannot continue with the game.

The *Souls* series' difficult gameplay directly contributes to the relationship that *Bloodborne* builds with its audience, encouraging this audience to think of the game as

something that has the potential to allow them to achieve a form of self-improvement. These games are known for their difficulty, which is the thing that most players cite as contributing to a strong emotional experience while playing. The fan culture surrounding the game's difficulty also places emphasis on how the game's often overwhelming difficulty remains fair. These players engage with the game with the assumption that failure to succeed within the game is a failure of their own ability to play, not a failure of the game itself. *Souls* players celebrate this difficulty and treat it as a way to improve themselves as players. Beating difficult encounters is a personal victory, where the player was able to figure out how to proceed with the game. Conversely, the culture surrounding difficulty also leads to a hostility in fan spaces against those who attempt to make the game easier for themselves, claiming that they cheat themselves out of learning how to improve. In a response to a PC Gamer article about beating the 2019 *Souls* title, *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*, using cheats, one twitter user said: "You cheated not only the game, but yourself. You didn't grow. You didn't improve. You took a shortcut and gained nothing." (@fetusberry). This tweet has been taken as representative of the wider *Souls* fanbase, and the specific ways that they view game difficulty as being synonymous with personal growth. An article on *The Verge* covering the tweet clarified the intent of the twitter user, claiming that while the tweet's writing was exaggerated, the author did believe that games were "an avenue for personal growth" (Statt, par. 4). *Souls* fans take improved mastery over the games' systems as evidence of personal growth. While this hostility has led to wider public discourse surrounding the role of difficulty in play, the

core audience of *Souls* games recognize that their relationship with the game is one where they are meant to change their own behavior.

Much of *Northanger Abbey* shares a similar focus on changing behavior, with the genre standards of novels directly supporting the idea that the reader must change to fit an ideal standard. The novel's romance plot forms the basis of this theme of self-improvement, as the heroine's growth within the novel demonstrates how a reader might improve themselves. While Catherine Morland represents an ideal reader, Henry Tilney acts as a corrective force to Catherine's initial naiveté, helping her change into a more fully self-aware individual at the end of the novel. Henry's critiques work on both Catherine and the reader, clearly articulating a list of both minor and major examples of ways that Catherine's focus on reading impedes her personal growth. For instance, take Henry's complaints during a walk with Catherine and his sister, Eleanor. The walk begins by establishing Henry's enjoyment of novels, providing a positive counter to John Thorpe's distaste for them. Henry's initial complaint is in response to Catherine referring to Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* as "nice," as he dislikes the overuse of the word. Eleanor then explains this to Catherine: "the word 'nicest,' as you used it, did not suit him; and you had better change it as soon as you can" (Austen, 121). The conversation then moves to the forms of reading that Catherine prefers, and Henry chimes in again after Catherine refers to reading history as a "torment." Henry criticizes Catherine for using the word "torment" synonymously with the word "instruct," before defending the boredom of instruction by bringing up a hypothetical situation in which Anne Radcliffe, the author of the book Catherine praises the most, had never learned how to read (Austen,

123-4). Both of these moments feature Henry pointing out ways that Catherine's specific excitement for novels over any other form of reading can limit her, whether that be in her vocabulary or in her distaste for learning history. These complaints are so minor that they are something that the reader of the novel is likely to be guilty of, meaning that Henry is also criticizing the audience. Because Catherine behaves in this scene like an average reader, sharing her opinions about reading enthusiastically, Henry's criticism can be easily applied to the reader. While it is up to interpretation how pointedly to take Henry's comments, the fact that they are articulated clearly with direct parallels to the reader's own behavior makes those comments memorable.

Henry Tilney's criticisms point to the understanding that an ideal reader of *Northanger Abbey* is one that is able to separate themselves from the novel they read. The relationship that the novel cultivates with its audience is not exclusive, and time spent away from them is essential for both personal growth and continued enjoyment of the form. In a key moment of growth for Catherine, Henry challenges her on her idea that General Tilney might have killed his wife. Catherine imagines murder in this case because she views the world from the perspective of the novels that she reads, where such a suspicion is actually likely to be rewarded. Henry tells Catherine to "Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians," before asking her to "consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you" (Austen, 195). Viewing the world in terms of novels has limited Catherine's personal growth. Afterwards, Catherine considers the plots of novels, and judges that "it was not in them perhaps that

human nature... was to be looked for” (Austen, 197). Here, the novel directly shows how Catherine’s relationship with novels changes as it provides a model for the reader to adopt a similar change. After this reflection, Catherine resolves to “forgive herself and be happier than ever,” demonstrating to the audience how this reflection is beneficial (Austen, 198).

Northanger Abbey ties the reader’s interpretation of the novel’s narrative to their own self-examination. Even a reader who disagrees with Henry’s criticisms still has to consider them, as they form the basis for his relationship with Catherine. In order to be fully engaged with the novel, as an ideal reader should be, the reader of *Northanger Abbey* must examine Henry’s criticisms of Catherine’s readerly qualities, which the reader is likely to also exemplify. This examination is aided by Austen’s realist style. Because there are no extraordinary circumstances separating Catherine from a typical reader, the novel makes it easy for readers to apply the interpretation of Catherine’s character to real readers like themselves. Considering Catherine’s status as a reader in relation to an ideal, with specifically articulated and memorable criticisms of how she strays from this ideal, provides the reader with an easily understood indication of how their own behavior might change. Self-examination is tied to the romance plot of *Northanger Abbey*, which creates a tidy opportunity for behavioral change. This opportunity is made difficult to ignore because of how simply and pointedly it is conveyed.

Northanger Abbey’s plot doesn’t just tie together the expectations for change in the reader with its romance plot, it also ties the Gothic elements that facilitate these

behavioral changes to the parody itself. Austen's parody of the Gothic does more than replicate the form of the Gothic novel; it also interacts with the form by poking fun at its tropes. In an examination of *Northanger Abbey's* Gothic parody, George Levine argues that the emulation of the Gothic tropes that are being parodied is a condition of parody itself (Levine, 336). Levine cites three terms in parody: the literature being referenced, its opposite, and the "new reality that emerges from their juxtaposition" (Levine, 338). Evaluating the novel in these terms, Levine takes up the example of General Tilney and his "monstrous secret" of attempting to secure the wealth he believes Catherine to have. Levine argues that Tilney's secret plotting emulates the Gothic trope even while the novel makes a joke out of Catherine's belief that the General was hiding a monstrous secret of his wife's death. For Catherine, her misreading of General Tilney is a changing point in her existence as a reader and demonstrates the need for her to change her relationship with reading. Demonstrating the ways that the novel's parody is intertwined with its Gothic elements, General Tilney's bad actions both confirm the presence of Gothic tropes within the narrative of the novel and offer a key example of Catherine imagining Gothic tropes where there are none.

The tidiness of *Northanger Abbey's* writing allows for the reader to follow along multiple intertwined literary axes at a preset pace. This preset pace forms a key difference between a Gothic novel's ability to build a relationship with its audience and a Gothic game's. While a reader's relationship with the novel occurs over predefined literary axes, in *Bloodborne*, these changes occur over mathematical axes, as the systems of the game do the work that the writing of the novel would do. There is a fluidity inherent to the

mathematical approach to building audience relationships that a novel is less able to replicate. Similarly, the preset pace of the novel allows for a specificity and clarity that is similarly difficult to replicate alongside the unknown variables of player input in games. Both approaches have strong advantages that alter the ways that these audience relationships are built and expressed. *Northanger Abbey*'s writing is precise, and the neatness of the novel's construction allows the reader to offload the work of self-reflection onto their interpretation of the main character. On the other hand, *Bloodborne*'s fluidity means there are multiple ways to navigate the difficulty of the gameplay and narrative, which leads directly to the creation of large fan communities where the drive to become an ideal player can be reinforced by other players. In both cases, the self-reflection each text causes is tied to how the audience was already interacting with the text.

The endings of both *Bloodborne* and *Northanger Abbey* represent the distinct relationships that their mediums are able to have with the Gothic's affective potential. *Northanger Abbey*'s ending, following novel conventions, represents an end point of an audience relationship, presenting the audience with an easy opportunity to move on from the novel, as *Northanger Abbey* encourages. By the end of *Northanger Abbey*, genre expectations demand that there be a resolution. As is the case in all of Austen's work, that resolution is marriage, and the dissipation of the narrative tension that was built over the course of the novel. Catherine's marriage to Henry Tilney is the end of the novel's ability to exercise the potential of the Gothic on the audience, and is thus the ending of that audience relationship as well. While this relationship is not truly ended since a reader

could choose to simply read the novel again, there are clear indicators of when the relationship is active. Rereading the novel, rather than being a continuation of a previously established reader-relationship, offers the beginning of a new iteration of this relationship. Most people generally reread novels after a considerable amount of time has passed, meaning that they likely do not think the same way that they did when they originally read the book, and thus their interpretation of the novel will differ as well. Rather than continuing the relationship with the novel where they left off, the repeat reader initiates a parallel relationship with their original time reading the book, where the relationship is developed the same way it was previously, though to a different effect.

The multiple endings of *Bloodborne*, on the other hand, demonstrate a much different relationship to the Gothic's affective potential, where the relationship with the audience is both the resolution of the narrative and the direct continuation of the Gothic themes that the game has previously established. There are three possible endings to the game, and three possible final fights. Each ending, as well as the fight that accompanies it, represents a different relationship to the game and a different definition of ideal play. The first ending, the easiest to achieve and the only one to not be directly coupled to a boss fight, occurs if the player chooses to give up the hunt. This ending represents a failure of the player to embody the role of the hunter, signaling a lack of ideal play. Upon making this choice, the player character is beheaded, and returned to the "real world" outside of the Hunter's Dream that they had been previously inhabiting. The option to give up the hunt is unlocked after the player defeats Mergo's Wet Nurse, a large, cloaked phantom who is found atop the tallest tower of the final area in the game. Mergo, the

eldritch infant the wet nurse is protecting, is the target of the hunt, so defeating the wet nurse is the accomplishment of the stated goal of the game. Giving up on the hunt is the logical choice. As the goal of the hunt is already completed, it makes narrative sense to choose this option. It also makes sense for the player to choose this option, given that the two boss fights for the other endings are each difficult. If a player simply wants to see the credits roll, ending one is the rational choice. However, the rational choice is rarely the Gothic choice. While this is the easiest ending to achieve, it also directly fights against a player's instincts, as the ending that requires the most player investment is generally coded to be the most narratively satisfying ending. Giving up on the hunt is the equivalent of giving up on a player's obligation to play ideally and represent the role of the hunter.

If the player does not choose to give up the hunt, and instead chooses to continue fighting, the second ending shows their player character being placed in charge of the hunt, ultimately changing nothing. This ending represents the middle ground of ideal play, where the player participates within the gameplay through the high-skill requirements but fails to represent the full ideal by not participating in the fan community. The final boss for this ending is the hunter who was previously in charge of the hunt, Gehrman. Each final boss fight in *Bloodborne* presents a mirror to the player's behavior, and this fight is the most direct mirror in the game. Gehrman both looks and fights like the player character: he's fast, dangerous, and able to parry the attacks of the player character. The player is given a chance to recognize themselves one final time in this fight. Upon winning the fight, the player character is seized by an eldritch entity that the

player had no previous knowledge of, and the game ends with the player character sitting in Gehrman's chair, having taken his place as the leader of the hunt. It's a narrative anticlimax that pushes the player toward the idea that they missed something important in the game, causing the narrative to conclude in a cycle. The status quo of the world is upheld, because the player did not put in enough effort to fully embody the ideal player and was not able to piece together the full narrative and gameplay twists of the game.

The final ending of *Bloodborne* requires the most work to achieve, but it represents the ideal state of the relationship between the game and the player and shows the ways that this relationship is inherently transformative. This ending requires the player to find three items hidden within the game world, and thus relies on extensive knowledge of both the game's narrative and the gameplay mechanics. Most people who achieve this ending on their first playthrough of the game have learned about it via the game community sharing gameplay and narrative secrets. After the fight with Gehrman, if the player has found and consumed all three required items, there is an additional fight against the entity that took control of the player in the previous ending, the Moon Presence. This ending forms a reward for those players who participate fully within the game's player relationship, by giving them an extra fight that further contextualizes the narrative. The players who choose this ending are most likely to be the players who enjoy the difficulty of the combat, or who have the most personal investment in the narrative. After defeating the moon presence, the player character is transformed into an eldritch slug, one of the Great Ones that the player was targeting during the hunt. The player character is treated as though they have ascended, further emphasizing the understanding

of this ending as being the ideal form of player participation. *Bloodborne*'s final ending suggests that the ideal form of player participation ends in the player being directly changed by the experience.

The endings of *Bloodborne* gradually get more Gothic as they go, mirroring the progression of player investment that the endings establish. *Bloodborne* twists the standard expectations of most game players by making the ending that is easiest to achieve the "happiest" ending, while the ending that requires the most effort is considered the "true ending." The cyclic nature of the second ending presents a last second Gothic twist, reminiscent of the demonic twist at the end of classic Gothic novels like *The Monk* (1796), but still leaves room open for greater narrative satisfaction correlating with greater player involvement. The final ending of the game sees the player completely consumed by the bestial nature of the ones that they spent the game fighting against. Gothic corruption and player participation go hand in hand, leading directly to the transformation of both narrative and ludic meaning. *Bloodborne*'s ideal player participates both with the ludic and narrative demands of the game, but also in the demands of the Gothic genre. Regardless, no matter which ending the player chooses, the game ends with one additional Gothic twist: the denial of a definite ending.

By the end of *Bloodborne*, the relationship that has been built with the audience is not ended, it is merely redefined before sending the player back into the game. No matter which ending of *Bloodborne* the player chooses, they are sent back immediately after the final cutscene to the game's beginning, where the hunter signs their contract. Sending the player back to the beginning of the game represents the pinnacle of ludic self-reflexivity.

Typically, games send the player back to the menu screen after credits roll, emphasizing the end of the experience. The cyclicity of the narrative is reinforced by making the player reexperience the beginning of the game. This decision also makes closing the game into more of an active choice than it is in other games, as the player must choose to exit to the menu screen themselves, rather than the game doing it for them. The final action a player performs upon completing a playthrough of *Bloodborne*, no matter what ending they chose, is to leave a second playthrough of the game unfinished. Players of *Bloodborne* are refused the narrative closure that a reader of *Northanger Abbey* achieves simply by finishing the book. There will always be some part of the game left unfinished, just as there will always be an opportunity for the player to return and continue the affective relationship that the game previously established. If a reread of *Northanger Abbey* creates a reader relationship that is parallel to the original one established, then *Bloodborne* creates a recursive relationship that creates a new instance of itself using the original relationship as the starting place.

The recursive nature of *Bloodborne*'s player relationship is evidenced by the game's "new game plus" (referred to as NG+) feature, allowing the player to restart the game using all of their previously earned upgrades and equipment. *Bloodborne*'s NG+ radically changes the way that the game is played and continues a recursive cycle of play that lasts as long as the player's willingness to continue. Because player equipment upgrades are carried over onto the NG+ playthrough, all enemies are given boosts to their health and damage to compensate for the increase in player strength. However, these differences are not linear, as the strength a player inherits from their first playthrough is

more than enough to trivialize the initial difficulty of the game, before becoming a more even difficulty toward the end. Because the difficulty operates on different dynamics than the first time through the game, and the difficulty is so integral to how the game builds player relationships, NG+ represents a progression of the player relationship that is non-parallel to the original playthrough. This change can be continued well past the first ng+ playthrough as well, continuously altering both the difficulty and the way the player interacts with the game. While the difficulty scaling of NG+ only continues to repeat six times, the player is able to continuously engage in new playthroughs without limit, indicating a player relationship that does not end the same way that a novel ends.

Bloodborne and *Northanger Abbey* both present a form that an audience relationship can take, with each relationship defined by the qualities of the medium that they exist within. *Northanger Abbey* utilizes the genre standards of the Gothic novel through its parody to present an example of an ideal reader choosing to not rely solely on novels for personal growth. The relationship the novel builds with its audience has a definitive, authored stopping point, demonstrating the change it attempts to inspire in the reader and the ultimate end goal the reader is supposed to achieve. *Bloodborne* uses its game systems and its narrative to create a Gothic experience for the player that incentivizes that player to behave differently, and to participate with the game more fully. Conversely to the relationship that *Northanger Abbey* builds with its audience, *Bloodborne*'s audience relationship has no definitive stopping point, and ends when the player decides to move on from it. The Gothic elements of both of these texts create a space where the interaction of the audience can be commented on and altered. The two

mediums that these texts represent inform how directly the audience's interaction can provoke change. *Northanger Abbey* is a novel that models its preferred audience behavior, while *Bloodborne* is a game that incentivizes it. While video games are a newer medium, interfacing with older genres in ways that are still being explored, *Bloodborne's* use of the Gothic to challenge the audience demonstrates how games can capture the affective potential of the genre in ways that highlight how Gothic novels have historically done the same.

WORKS CITED

- Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Broadview, 2002.
- Bloodborne*. Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2015.
- Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. MIT Press, 2007.
- Botting, Fred. "Aftergothic: Consumption, Machines, and Black Holes." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge. Edited by Jerrold E. Hogle. Cambridge University Press, 2002. *ProQuest*,
<http://libproxy.clemson.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/aftergothic-consumption-machines-black-holes/docview/2137995536/se-2>.
- Clark, Naomi. "What is Queerness in games, anyway?" *Queer Game Studies*. Edited by Bonnie Ruberg and Adrienne Shaw. Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 2017, pp. 3-14.
- Fetusberry [@fetusberry] "You cheated not only the game, but yourself." X,
<https://x.com/Fetusberry/status/1114364382606053378>.
- Gamer, Michael. "Genres for the Prosecution: Pornography and the Gothic." *PMLA*, vol. 114, no. 5, 1999, pp. 1043–54. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/463463>. Accessed 25 Jan. 2024.
- Hancock, Michael. "Doppelgamers: Video Games and Gothic Choice." *American Gothic Culture*, Edinburgh University Press, 2022, pp. 166–84,
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474401623-010>.
- Haggerty, George. *Queer Gothic*. University of Illinois Press, 2006.

- Kirkland, Ewan. "Gothic videogames, survival horror, and the Silent Hill series." *Gothic Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, Nov. 2012, pp. 106+. *Gale Academic OneFile*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A373678178/AONE?u=clemsonu_main&sid=bookmark-AONE&xid=6d3622c9. Accessed 22 Nov. 2022.
- Kolassa, Alexander. "Hail the Nightmare: Music, Sound and Materiality in Bloodborne." *The Soundtrack (Bristol)*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 2020, pp. 23–38, https://doi.org/10.1386/ts_00003_1.
- Krzywinska, Tanya. "The Gamification of Gothic Coordinates in Videogames." *Revenant*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015 pp. 54–78.
- Levine, George. "Translating the Monstrous: Northanger Abbey." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1975, pp. 335–50. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2933073>. Accessed 22 Jan. 2024.
- Mukherjee, Hiranya. "'Fear the Old Blood': The Gothicism of Bloodborne." *Games and Culture*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231155325>
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel." *PMLA*, vol. 96, no. 2, 1981, pp. 255–70. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/461992>. Accessed 25 Jan. 2024.
- Statt, Nick. "Sekiro's difficulty debate results in incredible 'you cheated not only the game' meme" *The Verge*, April 9, 2019. <https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/9/18302796/sekiro-shadows-die-twice-copypasta-you-cheated-not-only-the-game-memes>

Wyett, Jodi L. "Female Quixotism Refashioned: 'Northanger Abbey', the Engaged Reader, and the Woman Writer." *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2015, pp. 261–76. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24575169>. Accessed 25 Jan. 2024.