

ENG1131: WRITING THROUGH MEDIA
PIXEL MYTHOLOGIES
(CLASS 13368/ 30542)
SPRING 2021

Instructor Name: Lillian Marie Martinez

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Course Meeting Times & Locations: WEIL 408D; MWF Period 4 (10:40 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.)

Online Sessions: M Period 4 (10:40 a.m.-11:30 a.m.); Weeks 12-15, WF, Period 4 (10:40 a.m.-11:30 a.m.)

Screening Time: Online, M Period 9-11 (4:05 p.m. – 7:05 p.m.)

Office Hours & Location: Online, WF (12:00 – 1:00 p.m.);

<https://ufl.zoom.us/j/96241968661?pwd=RHhsVHN0Z1FONXJwVWVhNLys0aVgxdz09>

Course Website: Canvas, Discord



COURSE DESCRIPTION

Myths and fairy tales of wandering warriors, rare creatures, and automaton futures saturate the literary imagination; from Homer’s Odysseus to Neil Gaiman’s Sandman to Netflix’s Lucifer, heroic figures and the landscapes they venture through have received poetic, comic, and visual renderings. But what differentiates video games from other written or visual forms of media? How does the act of play participate in the creation of contemporary mythologies? This course will read video games as engaging in creations of new cultural fables that address aspects of the human condition—including but not limited to morality, suffering, and the meaning of life and death.

The course is divided into five units: “Every Story Needs a Hero,” “Journeys from the Dark Side,” “At the Borders of Our Minds,” “Beyond the Body’s Limits,” and “Building Pixel Mythos.” Although separate, each unit develops a language of game studies and literary theory that will aid in our critical interrogations into these pixel mythologies, putting video games into

conversation with contemporary theoretical frameworks of the hero, the monstrous, and the ludic to uncover the way they engage in discourses of borders, marginality, representation, identity, and agency.

Assignments will include unit reflections, a ludonarrative close reading, an annotated bibliography, a video game review, a video (game) essay, and a research paper. Students are not required to have previous experience with video games or game studies for this course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note: Titles included in gray highlight are video games. This schedule is subject to change.

READINGS		
Week 1 – Introduction: “Every Story Needs its Hero”		
M 1/11	Syllabus and Course Introduction <i>Colossal Cave Adventure</i> (2013) – The Game Company Screening: <i>High Score</i> – Ep. 3 “Role Players” – France Corstel	
W 1/13	<i>Half-Real</i> – Ch. 3 “Rules” – Jesper Juul <i>Zork</i> (1977-1982) – Infocom	
F 1/15	<i>Half-Real</i> – Ch. 4 “Fiction” – Jesper Juul <i>A Blurred Line</i> (2007) – Lysander86	
Week 2		
M 1/18	Martin Luther King Jr. Day – No Class or Screening	
W 1/20	Selections from <i>The Hero with a Thousand Faces</i> – Joseph Campbell <i>Apotheon</i> (2015) – Alientrap	
F 1/22	Selections from <i>Norse Mythology</i> – Neil Gaiman <i>Brawlhalla</i> (2017) – Blue Mammoth Games	
Week 3		
M 1/25	“Ludonarrative Dissonance in <i>Bioshock</i> ” – Clint Hocking Screening: <i>Stanley’s Parable</i> (2013) – Galactic Café	
W 1/27	Selections from <i>The Odyssey</i> – Homer <i>Hades</i> (2020) – Supergiant Games	
F 1/29	“ <i>Bioshock</i> : Complex and Alternate Histories” – Ryan Lizardi <i>Hades</i> (2020) – Supergiant Games	
Week 4 – Begin “Journeys from the Dark Side”		
M 2/1	<i>Hades</i> Review: “A Near Flawless Romp Through Hell” – Ryan Gilliam <i>Hades</i> (2020) – Supergiant Games Unit 1 “Every Story Needs a Hero” Wrap-Up Screening: <i>Untitled Goose Game</i> (2019) – House House	Unit 1 Response Due
W 2/3	<i>Undertale</i> (2015) – Toby Fox	

F 2/5	“The Rhetoric of <i>Undertale</i> : Ludonarrative Dissonance and Symbolism” & “Ethics at Play in <i>Undertale</i> : Rhetoric, Identity, and Deconstruction” – Frederic Seraphine <i>Undertale</i> (2015) – Toby Fox	
Week 5		
M 2/8	<i>Monster Theory: Reading Culture</i> – “Seven Theses” – Jeffrey Jerome Cohen <i>Undertale</i> (2015) – Toby Fox Screening: <i>Among Us</i> (2018) – InnerSloth	
W 2/10	<i>Undertale</i> (2015) – Toby Fox	
F 2/12	“Undertale: The Kotaku Review” – Nathan Grayson <i>Undertale</i> (2015) – Toby Fox	
Week 6		
M 2/15	<i>A Raven Monologue</i> (2018) – Mojiken & Toge Productions Screening: <i>Little Nightmares</i> (2017) – Tarsier Studios	
W 2/17	<i>The Supper</i> (2020) – Octavi Navarro	
F 2/19	<i>The Supper</i> (2020) – Octavi Navarro Unit 2 “Journeys from the Dark Side” Wrap-Up	Video Game Review Due
Week 7 – Begin “At the Borders of Our Minds”		
M 2/22	“Understanding Video Games as Emotional Experiences” – Aki Jarvinen <i>Bird Alone</i> (2020) – George Batchelor Screening: <i>Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice</i> (2017) – Ninja Theory & QLOC	
W 2/24	“Videogame Semiotics” – Duilio Giordano Faillaci <i>INSIDE</i> (2016) – Playdead	Unit 2 Response Due
F 2/26	<i>INSIDE</i> (2016) – Playdead	
Week 8		
M 3/1	“Between the Lines: Games and Diegesis” – Ian McCamant “Mimesis and Diegesis: Thinking Through the Ways Games Tell Stories” – Bianca Batti <i>INSIDE</i> (2016) – Playdead Screening: <i>Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice</i> (2017) – Ninja Theory & QLOC	
W 3/3	<i>Life is Strange</i> – Episode 1 (2015) – DONTNOD Entertainment	
F 3/5	“Fear of Failing? The Many Meanings of Difficulty in Video Games” – Jesper Juul <i>Getting Over It with Bennet Foddy</i> (2017) – Bennett Foddy	Close Reading Due
Week 9		
M 3/8	“Play Along: An Approach to Videogame Music” – Zach Whalen Screening: <i>Celeste</i> (2018) – Matt Makes Games	

W 3/10	“Everything Merges with the Game: A Generative Music System Embedded in a Videogame Increases Flow” – Joshua D. Sites & Robert F. Potter <i>Friday Night Funkin’</i> (2020) – Ninja Muffin, PhantomArcade	
F 3/12	Selections from “Video Games through Theories and Disciplines” – Bernard Perron and Mark J.P. Wolf <i>Undertale</i> OST (2015) <i>Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice</i> OST (2017) Unit 3 “At the Borders of Our Minds” Wrap-Up	
Week 10 – Begin “Beyond the Body’s Limits”		
M 3/15	“Game Design as Make-Believe: Depiction vs. Narration” – Lauren Orsini Screening: <i>Pyre</i> (2017) – Supergiant Games	Unit 3 Response Due
W 3/17	<i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i> (2015) – Moon Studios	
F 3/19	“Repetition, Failure, and Permanence” – <i>A Play of Bodies: How We Perceive Videogames</i> – Brendan Keogh <i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i> (2015) – Moon Studios	
Week 11		
M 3/22	“Sorry, Wrong Apocalypse: <i>Horizon Zero Dawn</i> , <i>Heaven’s Vault</i> , and the Ecocritical Videogame” – Megan Condis Screening: <i>Spiritfarer</i> (2020) – Thunder Lotus Games	
W 3/24	<i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i> (2015) – Moon Studios	
F 3/26	<i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i> Review – The Completionist <i>Ori and the Blind Forest</i> (2015) – Moon Studios	Annotated Bibliography Due
Week 12		
M 3/29	“No Mastery Without Mystery: <i>Dark Souls</i> and the Ludic Sublime” – Daniel Vella Screening: <i>Journey</i> (2012) – Thatgamecompany	
W 3/31	<i>Never Alone</i> (2014) – Upper One Games & E-Line Media	
F 4/2	<i>Never Alone</i> (2014) – Upper One Games & E-Line Media Unit 4 “Beyond the Body’s Limits” Wrap-Up	
Week 13 – Begin “Building Pixel Mythos”		
M 4/5	Selections from <i>How Games Move Us: Motion by Design</i> – Katherine Isbister Screening: <i>A Short Hike</i> (2019) – adamgryu	Unit 4 Response Due
W 4/7	<i>NieR:Automata</i> (2017) – Platinum Games Inc.	
F 4/9	“A Cyborg Manifesto” – Donna Haraway <i>NieR:Automata</i> (2017) – Platinum Games Inc.	
Week 14		
M 4/12	“The Algorithmic Experience: Portal as Art” – Michael Burden & Sean Gouglas <i>NieR:Automata</i> (2017) – Platinum Games Inc. Screening: <i>Portal 2</i> (2011) – Valve Corporation	Video (Game) Essay Due

W 4/14	Selections from <i>Once Upon a Pixel: Storytelling and Worldbuilding in Video Games</i> – Eddie Paterson, Timothy Williams, and Will Cordner <i>NieR:Automata</i> (2017) – Platinum Games Inc.	
F 4/16	Research Paper Round Table	
Week 15		
M 4/19	Research Paper Peer Review Screening: <i>Dreams</i> (2020) – Media Molecule	Research Paper Draft Due
W 4/21	@petermolydeux: “Obviously this isn’t the real Peter Molydeux”: Imagining the Next Pixel Mythology <i>Donut County</i> (2018) – Ben Esposito Unit 5 “Building Pixel Mythos” Wrap-Up	

OTHER DEADLINES

F 4/23 **Unit 5 Response Due**

M 4/26 **Research Paper Due**