Interaction, *Virtuality*, and *Heavy Rain*: An Exploration of Character and Interactive Narrative

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Abstract

This thesis has been a departure from the traditional English classes offered to me at the University of Colorado at Boulder and a journey into a passion of mine: character. While I had originally planned to write about characterization in the more traditional world of Jane Austen novels, in 2011 the interactive narrative *Heavy Rain* caught my attention. I have seen many games, but the narrative strength of this particular piece meant that I could not forget about it. With a focus on character, I wrote a thesis focusing on the historical, present, and future development of the interactive narrative. There are not many published books and articles on this particular subject, but I was incredibly lucky to have the opportunity enlist the aid of scholar Maire-Laure Ryan in discussing and critiquing my own ideas. Through this project, I have come to the conclusion that interactive narrative is an important vessel for the future of literature, and the development of stories such as *Heavy Rain* is incredibly exciting for the genre.

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Introduction

Heavy Rain opens with late-morning sunlight seeping through a large window in the corner of the screen. The screen quickly fills up with five other images: a wedding picture, a bookshelf, and three different angles of a man sleeping in a large bed with his left arm dangling nearly to the floor. The camera replaces these pictures with other angles, zooming in and out on the figure. Finally, the six pictures all align and show the complete picture of a large bedroom with the sleeping man just beginning to feel the warmth of the sun. The scene freezes, allowing the viewer to take in the beautiful colors and sparsely decorated room. When an angle changes with a bit of zoom, the camera comes directly to the front of the sleeper (*Heavy Rain*). This is when Ethan becomes interactable.

Ethan is a character in a recent interactive drama designed for the Playstation 3. Interactive drama is a form of interactive narrative, which prominent scholar Marie-Laure Ryan describes as "integrating the user's activity into a framework that fulfills the basic condition of narrativity a sequence of events involving thinking individuals, linked by causal relations, motivated by conflict, and aiming at its resolution" ("From Narrative Games to Playable Stories" 43). Ryan focuses on maintaining the elements of narrative while still incorporating the player in a significant and satisfying manner. Interactive narratives appear in the forms of books, movies, and computer games, and they all involve the idea of incorporating the reader, viewer, or player into the story.

The idea of a main character in an interactive narrative is exciting because of the notion of a fully created character the player can still influence, but it can become problematic,

especially in games; the author must allow the player to have enough control to be immersed in the story without giving up the essentials of character development, or the character will become a shell. A shell character is simply a player character, or a character that allows the player access into the game, without any inherent mental qualities and no pre-developed personality. Many role-playing games have essentially created a shell and completely abandoned the idea of a fully developed character, choosing instead to create a sort of virtual body through which to experience a game world. To progress from this type of role-playing game to a true interactive narrative, however, the main character must be strong and fully developed. A recent success at creating strong yet interactive characters is the 2010 interactive drama *Heavy Rain*. In this game, the player alternates between playing four separate, fully developed characters as he or she attempts to solve a murder mystery, and the resulting character development and complexity, even in player characters, is unusual in the game world. This game marks a defining accomplishment in the idea of both gaming and interactive narrative, and it provides a glimpse into the future of each.

The purpose of this thesis is to focus on the development and future of interactive narrative through the key component of characterization. I will address what I consider to be the primacy of character within narrative by examining the roots of narrative and how it has been defined and adapted since the age of Aristotle. Immersion is the key to making a variety of readers interested in any literary work. While narrative can exist and even be compelling without characters, for full reader emotional immersion into a story, strong and well-crafted characters are necessary. Character matters because the use of well-designed characters induces and even requires the reader to relate to and empathize with someone separate from herself. Character

allows the reader to experience life events she would never be able to actually live, and this increased perspective makes the reader a more thoughtful and developed person. Next, I will discuss the power of interactive narrative as a form of literature. Although they have been dismissed as juvenile and simplistic, interactive stories are often more interesting and enticing than traditional novels because they focus on the active involvement of the reader; a reader who values the ability to "get lost" in a novel will appreciate interactive fiction. When these two elements of full, round characterization and interactive narrative are combined effectively the results are startling. *Heavy Rain* is an interactive drama that has reached this goal, and it shines as an unusually compelling work of literature. By becoming a powerful form of interactive narrative through its character development, *Heavy Rain* proves that interactive drama can be both serious and mature. The success of this game opens up an entire new world of narrative for authors and creates a challenging new format through which to create a story. *Heavy Rain* is an innovative example of the types of literature that will become prominent in the future.

Section I: Background

Aristotle

The idea of interactive narrative is a fairly new one, but traces of it can be found in the origins of narrative itself. This idea of a story partially authored by the reader has become problematic for the past seventy years as authors strive to make reader inclusion both enjoyable and logical. Interactive narrative is an important aspect of storytelling in general because it stretches the definition of a narrative in more immersive and thus more enjoyable ways. Because it keeps the attention of a reader and even allows the reader to become an author of sorts, the potential of this type of literature constantly grows and evolves with new generations of readers. To analyze the future, however, the primacy of the origins of literature, drama, must be addressed.

Aristotle's *On Poetics* is the original analysis of drama, and it serves as a powerful backdrop to compare with current forms of narrative. By providing base definitions of the elements of drama as well as discussing what makes narrative powerful, Aristotle provides an important view into the value of interactive narrative as both a type of current literature and a progression into the future of narrative itself.

Aristotle dissected tragedy, which can be extended to all genres of narrative today, in minute sections. In *On Poetics*, he emphasizes that all drama is an imitation of real action, and the strength of a narrative can be seen in the quality of this imitation. His six parts of tragedy "are story, characters, talk, thought, *opsis*, and song-making. Two parts are those in which they imitate, one is how they imitate, and three are what they imitate . . . For tragedy is an imitation,

not of human beings, but of actions and of life" (6.1450a.9-17). After specifically drawing out the six parts of narrative, Aristotle points out that great drama is not about people, but about life. The aspects of a narrative all serve to propel this drama of life forward. Three of these aspects, characters, talk and thought, can be link directly to character development. The characters must be strong; the talk and thought, or the dialogue and ideas of the drama, support the strength of the characters. Aristotle does not place immense value on the stock of the characters, however; he states that "without action, tragedy could not come to be, but without characters it could come to be" (6.1450a.19-26). For Aristotle, the most important aspect of a drama was the plot and actions that led to it, and the characters were secondary. This importance of plot over character relates directly back to great drama being about life, not people; a drama can be powerful without focusing on the growth of a specific character. This assertion could actually be used to support certain kinds of interactive fiction, such as the game *Flower*, in which the player becomes the wind and guides flower petals in order to reawaken a field and then a city. This type of interaction can also be seen in the critically-acclaimed game *Portal*, in which the main character is a hollow shell for the player to completely immerse herself in the game, but the incredibly strong plot creates a satisfying experience. When Aristotle's ideas of the primacy of plot are compared to modern-day interactive narrative, the result is games such as these.

When he does emphasize characters Aristotle makes specific points about what is necessary for them to be "good," which in his case means their ability to propel the plot forward adequately. He claims, "There will be character if, on the one hand, the speech or the action, as was said, makes apparent some choice, whatever it is, and the character will be good if the speech or the action makes clear that the choice is good" (15.1454a.16-19). This definition ties

directly into Aristotle's earlier comparison of the relative importance of plot and character because it describes the character in terms of choice, which is an essential aspect of plot. Which choice a character makes can alter both her personality and major plot events, making a story either interesting or predictable. In interactive narrative, this concept of character choice becomes even more important, because the author does not dictate exactly which choice the character will make. There can, however, be multiple pre-written "good" choices, any of which would provide a "good" character to continue the narrative. Interactive narrative does not counter Aristotle's idea of choice in character, it simply expands it.

Aristotle continues in this section to list three other elements of character: a character must be fitting, similar, and consistent. By "fitting," Aristotle means that the character is appropriate to their identity and description; the example he gives as to an unfitting character would be giving a woman "manly valor." By “similar” he means "true to life," another very closely tied descriptor. These two similar points mean that a good character should be believable for his background and environment, and he should make decisions that would be believable when considering his situation. Consistency, of course, refers to whether a character stays within his believable structure and makes choices that are consistent with his past actions. Consistency can be an issue, by Aristotle's definition, in interactive narrative because of the ability of a player to make contradictory choices for the character of the narrative. In the game *Mass Effect*, the player makes choices that are for or against the main government of the game universe, making the character either a hero or a rebel. If the player does not make consistent choices, the character stays in a sort of limbo between the two moral poles. In a game like *Heavy Rain*, however, the choices are all pointed in a certain direction, which requires the player to move the plot forward

in a predetermined manner regardless of her intent.

Interactive narrative, while incorporating Aristotle's ideas of what creates a narrative, expands from the original intention of drama to create a new kind of literature. Aristotle never imagined the possibilities of a computer interface, and so his ideas of drama were limited by the technology of the time. He did not imagine a drama in which a member of the audience could step into the plot an unlimited number of times and make the story end a different way in each instance. While Aristotle places all of the responsibility for plot and character on the author, the notion of interactive narrative automatically places a certain amount of this responsibility on the player. Depending on the game, the author can have either a strong or weak set of characters for the player to interact with. The question of how narrative functions and how a character can serve a narrative have evolved since Aristotle's time, providing new opportunities for literature.

Marie-Laure Ryan

More recent scholars had applied this base of narrativity, drama, beyond its original intentions as the definitions of literature grow and change. Marie-Laure Ryan is a preeminent authority in the world of interactive narrative, and one of the only scholars in her field to discuss the role of character at length. In her article "From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of Interactive Narrative," Ryan takes the reader through the challenges and rewards of creating interactive narrative. Ryan first discusses the fundamental problem of creating a compelling interactive narrative: how can a well-crafted narrative story coexist with non-trivial user input? This question asks how a story can move forward in a logical and powerful manner while allowing the user to make plot-changing choices. She touches on the *Star Trek* holodeck, a full-body virtual reality simulation, as ideal but impossible, then labels "hypertext fiction,"

which limits user input to a menu of choices, as the other, much easier extreme (Ryan, "From Narrative" 44). Both of these options will be discussed in Section IV of this thesis. This question of significant user input is the paradox of interactivity within a narrative. Interactivity, at its core, tends to work towards full mind and body immersion, which is what the holodeck represents in a futuristic setting. The more control, both physical and mental, the player has, the more complete the interaction becomes. This format would organically incorporate any dialogue or actions the player makes into the narrative of the experience, allowing full freedom from syntax and input errors. Because of communication limitations between humans and computers, however, this type of interaction is as of yet impossible in the world of digital narrative. Hypertext fiction, by contrast, provides a pre-written menu of choices for the reader, allowing her to choose the direction the narrative takes but not the way that it changes. This type of fiction uses blind choice instead of deliberate choice; in a choose-your-own adventure novel choices are laid out before the player, while in Hypertext they are obscured. Hypertext fiction is fully realized and used in narrative at this time, but it also presents a limited spectrum for interactivity. The reader cannot use her own words and opinions to interact with the story, she can only choose from the pre-written responses. The 2007 interactive drama *Façade*, discussed at length in Section II, was an attempt to solve this problem, because it allowed the player to type in her own responses to the other characters instead of just choosing from a menu. This format allows the player to make more personal choices and decisions. The problem with this game, however, is that not all user inputs are recognizable by the game. When the player says something that was not anticipated, the game simply does not respond. While it is a monumental attempt at fully immersive player-computer interaction, *Façade* falls short because of technological inadequacies.

Ryan then goes on to discuss the two current forms of interactive narrative: "the *narrative game*, in which narrative meaning is subordinated to the player's actions, and the *playable story,* in which the player's actions are subordinated to narrative meaning" (Ryan's emphasis, "From Narrative" 46). In other words, in narrative games such as *Modern Warfare*, the actions of the player take precedence over the story's agenda. In a playable story, by contrast, the goal of all player interaction is to produce a specific, coherent story. While the narrative game is about succeeding at certain specified goals, Ryan says, playable stories are about experiencing the world of the game and the relationships of its characters regardless of whether there are prizes for skilled interaction. Interactive drama, as a genre, is necessarily in the category of playable story, with Heavy Rain as its primary example. The immersive plot and character experience is most important, while the actions of the player only serve to further these goals. The initiative to create playable stories is a somewhat recent development for computer gaming, but it has roots in the literature of Jorge Luis Borges (discussed in section II) and other novelists. Interactive drama is a combination between the interaction that is so important to computer gaming and the idea of narrative drama that is essential to Aristotle's description of tragedy.

The rest of Ryan's article focuses on different types of immersion and how they are achieved in interactive narratives and other computer games. Especially essential to the question of character development is emotional immersion in interactive narrative, which Ryan describes as "the most problematic of all because it involves interpersonal relations between the player and computer-operated character" (Ryan, "From Narrative" 56). She goes on to say that human emotions can be categorized as self-directed or empathetic, and part of the power of narrative is that it can evoke this empathy even for fictional characters. A challenge of interactive narrative is

trying to trigger these emotional connections between the player and the other characters in the game as well as with the player character (PC); ideally in an interactive narrative, the player would feel a deep-seated emotional connection to both the character that she is playing and the other common characters in the game. *Façade* attempted this by placing the PC at odds with his friends Grace and Trip, but the game ultimately fell short at establishing a strong emotional connection between the player and the shell character they are playing. If the player doesn't care how he acted at the end of the day, the emotional immersion has been insufficient. *Heavy Rain* attempts to make this emotional connection with the player by first having her play Ethan, the character most emotionally invested in the plot. After setting the scene, the game hits Ethan with tragedy, attempting to create an emotional response on the part of the player that both ties her to Ethan and makes her want to find his kidnapped son. Unlike the uncomfortable awkwardness of *Façade*, *Heavy Rain* relies on tragedy and nostalgic empathy. By making the player relate to a desperate and depressed father, the emotional immersion of the game is accessed in an alternate and more powerful manner. Ryan is not the only author to question the power of emotional immersion in a game, but there are many issues to reconcile in the creation of interactive literature.

Montfort

Character development is crucial to any narrative, and the addition of a player's desires only complicates this important element. Nick Montfort is a game developer and professor of digital media, placing him in a unique position to both fully understand and critique the world of interactive narrative. In his article "Fretting the Player Character," Montfort discusses the difficulties of producing a PC who can create the emotional immersion that Ryan questions.

Montfort says that instead of "playing" the typical PC in a gaming sense of the word, "the interactor is putting on the character as a pair of eyes and a pair of hands--not as a human being with emotional and cognitive existence, a physical body enacted by one's own physical body" (Montfort 139). The distinction is that the PC is usually used as a tool through which a player can explore and interactive with the game environment instead of being a character that the player builds a relationship with. Montfort claims that the former is not actually playing a character, but playing a game; the example he gives is an individual saying that he enjoyed playing the hat instead of saying that he enjoyed playing *Monopoly*. When he goes on to discuss extraordinary PCs, Montfort points out that including backstory in a character's narrative makes for a much more compelling player experience. When talking about the game *Savoir-Faire*, he notes that a reviewer "states that she had enjoyed not playing but 'being' Pierre and notes, referring not to Pierre but to the game, that you can 'play it right'" (Montfort 141). In this case, Pierre, the main character and by definition the PC, has a definitive personality that the reviewer enjoyed getting to know. Far from being just a lens through which to view the interactive world, Pierre became more of a friend, and the player could conceivably making a wrong choice in regards to making choices that fit his character. As the player learns about Pierre's backstory and his personal connections to his environment, this bond is strengthened.

Montfort's conclusion is that the PC in an interactive narrative "is a constraint and possibility defined by the author, within which the interactor is bound to a particular perspective and a particular set of capabilities, by means of which the interactor can explore everything in the world and figure everything that the interactive fiction holds and offers" (Montfort 145). This definition differs from the usual idea of the PC as a freeing mode through which to explore the

world at the player's leisure. Instead, it pushes the idea of a constrained viewpoint that the author uses to make the player see the world a certain way. While these limitations can seem harmful to certain player experiences, they are essential to creating a coherent interactive fiction. An interactive world without direction is a game, while an exploration of a world through a specific character perspective is a story. Montfort finishes the article by describing the delicate balance in creating a proper PC and states, "The author forces the world and the vessel of the PC within it, fixing these in code" (Montfort 146). By fixing the PC in code, Montfort says, the author creates his own character and his own environment, then works to let the player into this world in a non-intrusive but still immersive manner. When done correctly, this apparent conflict can produce strong, unique characters who can also serve as exploratory vessels, which is the purpose of a shell character. In *Heavy Rain*, the basic plot and personality of Ethan, the main character, are set by the author of the game, David Cage. The player can explore Ethan's world, but Ethan himself is limited to the world that Cage created for him. In this way, *Heavy Rain* serves as a creation that fulfills Montfort's ideal of a PC, which in turn defines the abilities of interactive narrative.

Montfort and Ryan are unusual in the world of gaming in that they chose to discuss character at all; most scholars in the field of interactive narrative and gaming in general focus on the power of plot in creating a virtual world. Indeed, the most essential aspect of narrative is plot. Nothing except the imitation of action is essential to creating a story. While a vague plot can survive on its own, however, to make an emotional connection to the reader or viewer the story must include relatable, human, emotional characters. Montfort and Ryan realize this while describing the essentials of the genre, prompting them to explore the elements of interactive characterization. Interactive narrative has even more power over the player than normal narrative

does over the reader because of its constant involvement, but good characters are essential to make this further incorporation of the player powerful. In other words, straight plot creates narrative, but characters make an outside observer care what happens in this plot. *Heavy Rain*, through its outstanding character development even in PCs, has become the current poster child of the idea of a heavy emotional connection between player and character, but the power of interactive narrative in general has gone through significant transformation in the last half-century.

Section II: History

The history of interactive literature can be traced back for the last seventy years, with its beginnings rooted in the nonlinearity of postmodernism. Jorge Luis Borges was the most important early influence, and his ideas can be seen throughout the evolution of interactive narrative. In the 1970s interactive narrative took on a juvenile mask with the popular Choose Your Own Adventure series, which combined a branching narrative with a strong second person voice to lead the reader through a simplistic maze of options. The development of computer gaming in the late twentieth century only led to greater opportunities for interactive authors. While it may seem like a toy for children and teenagers to use as an escape, interactive fiction is an essential development in the future of narrative. By incorporating the reader into a story, interactive narrative can escape the well-established tropes of the literary cannon and explore new territory.

The turn to gamebooks (books which incorporate reader participation) and Choose Your Own Adventure novels for children degraded the idea of interactive fiction in the eyes of the literary canon. For traditionalists, the idea of a novel without a fully and carefully designed and intentioned structure is challenging, to say the least. John Sturrock, an admirer and critic of Borges, discusses the problems with discontinuous narratives in his book *Paper Tigers*. He remarks of one of Borges's works that "This elaborate chain of duplications, symmetries, and small variations sets the mind ricocheting uncomfortably from one degree of fictiveness to the next" (Sturrock 119). This discomfort, he argues, can create a wall between the reader and the text, limiting enjoyment and interpretation of the work. The origins of interactive narrative, while

they directly descend from this discontinuity, are exploratory and revolutionary, and they are influenced by much of postmodern literary thought.

A central purpose of the story, whether in a traditional or digital format, is to escape reality. This idea has also been debated, especially in America; as early as 1887, William Dean Howells discusses the dangers of escapism in an imperfect world in his essay "Pernicious Fiction." He argues that escapist novels draw the reader away from real-world problems and make them unconcerned with improving reality. Escapism, in his view, allows readers to also escape from morality, and any deviation from morality in the alternate reality will bleed over into actual reality. He states, "If a novel flatters the passions, and exalts them above the principles, it is poisonous; it may not kill, but it will certainly injure" (Howells 43). In an ever-changing world that sees science fiction become reality on a regular basis, however, escapist creations are both acceptable and necessary, and personal morality may be attached to any real or imagined universe. With an interactive narrative, the user escapes her current reality to dive into another equally valid reality, one that is represented with both pictorial and auditory formatting. Along with the postmodern belief that realities are social constructs, interactive narrative games are literal constructs of the imagination; they are another reality that can be altered by user input, unlike a traditional book, to reflect personal beliefs and values. In addition, pastiche can be applied to the specific idea of interactive drama and *Heavy Rain* in particular. This game connects the elements of gaming, cinema, and the literary tradition of the murder mystery to create a story that is told in a unique format. Intertextuality continues as the user becomes another author in the unfolding drama. By combining a traditional story genre, the murder mystery, with a pastiche of media formats, *Heavy Rain* legitimizes itself as a work of postmodern

fiction that echoes back to the gamebook of the mid twentieth century.

One of the original creators of the gamebook, Jorge Luis Borges, experimented with the genre without actually writing one himself. Borges is credited with being an influential predecessor to the postmodern and Magic Realism movements in literature (Literature Online). His writings from the 1940s played with intertextuality and indirect narrative far before the postmodern movement began. John MacFarlane says in his article in the book *Relative Truth* that "In his story 'The Garden of Forking Paths,' Borges invites us to reject [the] linear picture and think of time as *forking* or *branching*" (MacFarlane's emphasis, 81). By examining how time and narrative can splinter off instead of being straightforward and direct, Borges was actually doing work that would lead to the development of the interactive narrative. Even though "The Garden of Forking Paths" is not itself interactive, its meta-narrative elements can cause the reader to question the narrative's content and the main character's interaction with his own story.

"The Garden of Forking Paths" tells the story of Dr. Yu Tsun, who discovers a literary labyrinth, or "garden of forking paths," made by his ancestor Ts'ui Pen when he visits Dr. Stephen Albert. One of the great revelations of the story is that the book and the labyrinth that Ts'ui Pen was working on during his lifetime were one and the same. The book reconciles the idea of literature with the idea of the existence of multiple universes, with the eventual conclusion that Tsun decides that his own reality is only one of many. Tsun subsequently shoots Albert in a last attempt to succeed at his military mission, causing his own imprisonment and death. Tsun makes this decision because of Albert's explanation of the garden; Albert stated that Ts'ui Pen "believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent and parallel times. This network of times which approached one another, forked,

broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces all possibilities of time" (Borges 9). This idea of time forking and branching into a net of connected possibilities breaks open the concepts of both linear time and the traditional consecutive narrative. The jump from Borges's idea to a fully interactive narrative requires only user input to say which path the character should take. This connection from non-linear postmodern literature to interactive narrative can be seen across the era as well.

The *Nouveau Roman*, a French creation in the 1950s, is a "new novel" that reflects both the horrors of the Second World War and the non-linear narrative of Borges's branching stories. In her book about France in the 1950s and 1960s, *New Novel, New Wave, New Politics*, Lynn A. Higgins explores the complicated series of factors influencing this development, especially the concept of belated reactions to the war. She explains, "In the fictions, erasures, censorship (and self-censorship), blank spaces, deafness and silences are the objective correlatives of this amnesia, its characteristic structuring devices, whatever the content may be" (Higgins 213). This literature is characterized by the inconsistency of emotional pain and coping mechanisms, which results in the continual shifting of narrative style. The inability to distinguish what is true and accurate is seen in the postmodern novel in general; in the *Nouveau Roman,* it is not the plot and character that are significant, but the world in which these elements exist. This genre relates to interactive narrative because it reflects the personal element of this type of writing; the ideas of memory and interpretation become varied in both forms of literature, requiring the reader to either interact directly with the text or make a mental connection to the author's intentions.

The next stage of interactivity in narrative came with the development of hypertext in the early 1990s. Stuart Moulthrop, one of the most influential developers of hypertext, explains this

form of narrative as "a complex network of textual elements. It consists of units or 'nodes,' which may be analogous to pages, paragraphs, sections, or volumes. Nodes are connected by 'links,' which act like dynamic footnotes that automatically retrieve the material to which they refer" (Moulthrop). Basically, when using hypertext the reader is able to direct her own journey through different sections of text. The sections of text connected by links can be as small or large as the author desires, and the flexibility of interlinking also allows for the reader's ability to feel as if each hypertext experience is personal and unique. When applied to fiction, this idea of immediately available intertextuality can create a branching fiction much like Borges's labyrinth.

The purpose of hypertext, according to Moulthrop, is "connection, linkage . . . affiliation, correspondence, and resonance" (Moulthrop). Hypertext fiction is not a passive form of reading; rather, it involves the reader in the complex series of links that draw the story together. Hypertext still uses the visual word, like a print book, but it allows interaction through links and correspondence both with the story and with the author's intentions. Resonance is discovered through the affiliation of connected words, and so the purpose of hypertext is continuously cyclical. How the different elements connect, however, is up to the reader, making the ultimate product of hypertext fiction a creation of both the author and the reader.

Besides non-linear narrative, the other main root of interactive narrative and *Heavy Rain* in particular is the development of computer gaming. According to Brenda Laurel, one of the first authors to write about the combination of computers and drama, the first computer game was called *Spacewar* and was invented in 1962 by a group of hackers at MIT. An interesting aspect that Laurel discusses, however, is that this group was not alone in inventing *Spacewar*; apparently, all of the early games closely resembled this one. She says that "Its designers

identified action as the key ingredient and conceived *Spacewar* as a game that could provide a good balance between thinking and doing for its players" (Laurel 1). In other words, the intellectual challenge of the game was correctly proportioned with the physical activity involved in playing it. In this way, computer games were born. Continuing, Laurel considers the potential of the computer to be "in its capacity to represent action in which humans could participate" (1). The promise of computer gaming, and the computer in general, was in its ability to create a hypothetical situation and invite the user to play through it. *Heavy Rain*, for example, creates a story in which the user can interact and participate in the solving of a mystery. The action changes depending on the user's interactions, but the feeling of the game stays consistent.

When discussing theater characters (referred to as agents) in the context of computer interaction, Laurel says that character traits can be separated into two categories, "traits that determine how an agent can act (internal traits) and traits that represent those internal predispositions (external traits)" (61). Characters in theater, and consequently in computer gaming, have both internal reasons and external reactions. She also notes, "Traits function as a kind of *cognitive shorthand* that allows people to predict and comprehend agents' actions" (Laurel's emphasis, 61). A character needs both reasoning and suitable reactions in order for a viewer or player to understand and interact with him appropriately. This is why many PCs turn into shells that simply allow the player to imagine herself in the game; it is much more challenging to create a well-motivated and understandable character than to let the player insert her own fully developed personality into the game. Developing characters for gaming is as essential as developing them for drama or fiction; all of the rules still apply, but the challenge of working with a digital interface creates new challenges. In order to make an interactive drama,

the character quality has to move beyond that of a mere game and become novelistic; making these characters visually perfect, however, is much harder on a screen than in the reader's head. This concept of combining gaming and fiction was addressed through the game *Façade*, which has exceptional meaning recognition on the computer's side but lacks the eye-catching graphics used by most modern games.

Façade, which was created in 2005, is widely recognized as the first interactive drama game. Instead of focusing on graphics and letting character focus slide, *Façade* used what appears to be incredibly simplistic graphics and deep characterization to create a new trend in gaming. In his 2005 article "You Must Play *Façade*, Now!" Ernest Adams, a writer for the gaming journal *Gamasutra*, extols the virtues of this new genre of game. He first points out *Façade*'s similarities to theater, saying that

> Theater is live and immediate. On a stage you can't show an earthquake destroying all of Los Angeles, but you can show people who are affected by that earthquake, and what it means for them personally. In theater it is the actors who carry the story, and the story is conveyed to the audience primarily through dialog. That's unusual for video games. (Adams)

While previous computerized interactive narratives dealt primarily in plot, *Façade* took a step towards gaining an unprecedented emotional connection with the player. In the game, the player is invited to dinner with his married friends Grace and Trip at their home. The married couple then begins to fight about their relationship, giving the player the power to either bring them together or break them up. The game can be played again and again with various resulting endings.

An interesting aspect of *Façade*, when compared to the later interactive drama *Heavy Rain*, is that there is virtually no player character (PC). The player is told that she is an old friend

of the couple's, and gets to choose her name and sex, but otherwise the PC just serves as a direct portal into the narrative for the player. This method of creating emotional connection in the character in *Façade* is completely different than in *Heavy Rain*, in which the PCs are all fully developed and do not need the player to shape them. They are both interactive dramas, but interactivity is used differently: in *Façade*, it brings the player in and gives her full control over both her character and the plot of the game, while in *Heavy Rain*, it brings the player into the game to share the emotional involvement of a pre-created character while directing plot development. The latter is a more poignant form of narrative because it directs the player into a literary experience instead of serving as a sandbox of relationship options. Adams also says, "*Façade* doesn't give you a goal, which is why it's not a game. You can try to save their marriage, or you can try to split them up, or anything else you feel like. There's no way to win or lose, no value judgments about the quality of your play" (Adams). This division between a game and *Façade* is an intrinsic quality of the experience for Adams, but it is again different than *Heavy Rain*. While *Façade* has no clear goals and the only failures the player can experience are personal, *Heavy Rain* allows failures but accommodates them. Ethan, Madison, and Jayden can all die in the game, but the game adapts to play without them. Some of the endings are less happy when characters are dead, but the player usually still has enough sense of purpose to continue with the storyline. *Heavy Rain* uses controller skills as a challenge as well, whereas *Façade* has limited physical interaction in the game. These features make *Heavy Rain* more game-like, but it still retains some of the interactive drama qualities, such as interpersonal turmoil and relationship problems, that make *Façade* unique.

Although it appears secondary to other forms of postmodern literature, such as magical

realism, interactive narrative is both an important and influential step in the evolution of literature. Borges's incorporation of a branching narrative added an element of excitement to "The Garden of Forking Paths," and the *Nouveau Roman* invites the reader into the complicated world of the post-war French psyche. With the addition of the computer into the literary tradition, narratives gained the ability to shape the audience using both visual and imaginative scopes. Even with the obviously simplistic graphics of *Façade* (it was an experimental project without a game's budget) the player becomes another character in the game because she can visually see the world she is playing in. *Heavy Rain*, with its stunning graphics and highly emotional moments, takes this combination of literary and cinematic elements to a new level. Interactive narrative has used computers to expand its scope and reach more people, both through visual attraction and imaginative devices. Interactive narrative is important to literature because it uses reader involvement to create emotional investment to the story's outcome, but it also uses a critical combining of genres to fully realize the potential of postmodern fiction.

Section III: *Heavy Rain*

Ethan Mars first sits on his bed with his head in his hands while the player figures out the controls to the game. The game prompts the player to experiment with making Ethan stand up slowly and quickly, making him jerk back and forth like a fully automated rag doll. When the player is finally satisfied with Ethan's mobility, he can be directed to move around the room. The player is prompted to examine objects as Ethan walks past them, but these items of interest are optional. Then, when Ethan opens his closet, a voice that cannot be mistaken for someone else's thoughts mentions that he should take a shower before getting dressed. With this inner monologue, the characterization of Ethan begins. Using internal and verbal dialogue, choice, and uncontrollable dramatic scenes, Ethan becomes a fully developed PC as the game continues. Through primary development, the player becomes emotionally invested in a piece of literature that is both dynamic and impactful. *Heavy Rain*'s carefully crafted characters combine with its intriguing plot to create an imaginative but realistic world and experience that stands as a narrative piece of art.

Heavy Rain, an interactive drama created by David Cage and his company Quantic Dream, uses cinematic qualities to draw the viewer into the story before she becomes the player. By the time the player has any controls at her disposal, the scene is already set, and a Playstation 3 (PS3) controller diagram appears with white instructions on the screen. The instructions start out very basic; the player makes Ethan sit up and get out of bed while receiving instructions about how to use the controller motions to specify how fast Ethan moves. Once Ethan is standing, the player learns how to make him move around the room, stopping to look at things on

the way; his wedding picture is framed on a table. When Ethan goes into his closet, however, the game changes a little as the world narrows and Cage works to control the direction. Ethan is perfectly capable of opening the door to his closet, but instead of reaching for clothes, the reader can hear his musings about needing to take a shower before getting dressed. Ethan is free to wander within the upstairs of the house, but any time he reaches an aspect of the game that would cause a decision, he is prompted to take a shower by his own thoughts. While it may seem simplistic and potentially annoying to a player expecting an open-world game, this direction begins immediately developing characterization: Ethan is the type of person who needs to take a shower before he starts his day. This structure begins to develop Ethan's character at the start of the game: a happy, successful architect.

By treating the game like a film, Cage manages to push the player into a complete characterization of Ethan from the beginning. The camera angles are uncontrollable at first, and even when they become controllable, the player usually has a choice of two. The camera zooming and the angle changes affect the game in such a way that the player is sometimes unaware of whether she actually has control of Ethan or not. The game is "filmed" in third person, mostly following the player character (PC) but sometimes shifting to show his or her face. This use of variable focalization emphasizes that the PC is not particularly special in the game; in most action role-playing games (action RPG) the PC is the hero, but in *Heavy Rain* the story takes precedence. To emphasize that the story, not the character, is priority, the PC changes throughout the game, switching between three men and a woman. The player is never able to play from the point of view of the central figure in the story, a young kidnapped boy. Despite prioritizing the story, however, Cage develops strong characterization through the thoughts of the

current PC. Because the player can hear the current PC's thoughts at will, while the other characters can only be represented through dialogue, the point of view becomes third person limited with the perspective changing independently from the camera angle. This third person can be confused with a first person point of view, however, when something traumatic happens to the PC. When Ethan has a panic attack in the train station, the scene is technically in third person because the camera is either looking at Ethan's back or at his face. The player, however, experiences Ethan's panic with him when the sides of the screen begin to blur and the game is reduced to tunnel vision. The player does not look through Ethan's eyes, but she can still experience Ethan's agoraphobia. This combination of point of view elements often manages to confuse the player as to whether *Heavy Rain* is a third or first person game, which reflects the way in which the player is at once one with the PC and a simple observer of the unfolding character development.

The way the game functions also works to achieve the goal of player immersion. Most immediate actions in the game are made using quick-time events, meaning that the player must press some or all of the four action buttons on the controller in the order that they are prompted on the screen. During fight scenes the player has a limited time to push the button and complete the action, and this time is represented by a circle around the image of the button that steadily decreases as time passes. This visual indicator prompts a sense of urgency in the player, who often does not even pause to consider the prompted action before frantically attempting to push the right button. The immersion created by this tension creates a bond between player and character and makes the player feel personally responsible for the outcome. It also creates mistakes because of stress; someone actually fighting for her life might make a blunder in the

heat of the moment, and the player is more inclined to make a mistake when the visual pressure of time is present. This style of gameplay is captivating and difficult, but it is more startling than frustrating. Whenever a player fails at an event, the character suffers consequences, but the game never stops and starts the scene over. Instead, the story progress organically regardless of the player's ineptitude. The game changes depending on the fight, but the player never gets into a frustrating loop of repeating the same actions over and over in an attempt to do it right. Immersion is easier to achieve when the player is not limited by the need to conquer a certain task. In addition, the game is consistent in its gameplay, so the player can concentrate on the story instead of learning new control methods. Instead of attracting video game players who focus mostly on challenge of gameplay, *Heavy Rain* attracts players interested in story imersion.

Another way that the game encourages player immersion through controller-centered gameplay is the use of the DualShock functions on the PS3 controller. When a character is in a dangerous situation or having mental difficulties with a task, the controller literally vibrates in the player's hands. This physical interaction with the game causes the player to feel some of the character's suffering and tension in that moment, creating a mental link between them. Many actions, such as shaking or moving objects, are performed through physical manipulation of the controller. This use of technology that physically reacts to the game environment provides a view into the future of gaming, but full immersion is not yet possible. The newest generation of PS3 control is the Play Station Move, which experiments with using cameras to integrate the player into the game without using a controller at all. While the idea is ultimately a progressive one, the player's constant attachment to a television is still limiting. The current DualShock controllers, while still obviously controllers, lend a feeling of integration into the game without losing some

of the fundamentals of storytelling that are made easier with a stationary reader or player.

A main difference between the PCs of *Heavy Rain* and the PCs of many other games is the lack of player personalization. In most RPGs, the player can choose what her character will look like during the game. This customization ranges from gender to hair and clothes colors to minute facial structure changes between games, but the main purpose is to make an attachment between the player and the PC, leading her to feel invested in the game. In *Heavy Rain*, this process of attachment through customization is nonexistent; not only does the player have no way to identify with the PC physically, but the PC changes depending on the section of the game. Because of the difference in personality and choices, playing as Ethan is completely different from playing as Detective Shelby, even though the controls are all the same. By switching between well-developed characters, the game prevents the player from feeling that a PC is essentially the same as herself. This treatment of the character-player relationship is seen in many recent story-based games, such as *Uncharted*, but *Heavy Rain* places an even stronger emphasis on the use of a character as a narrative tool, not as a shell for the player to customize. The game draws the player into the story, not into a virtual shell of herself.

One of *Heavy Rain*'s most evident departures from other games is how choice functions. In many games, such as *Mass Effect*, the choices the player makes are fundamental to how the character develops; in this particular game, choices make the PC allied with or rebellious against the central government of the game. These choices change how the character reacts to other characters and thus changes how he or she develops as a PC. In *Heavy Rain*, by contrast, the player cannot make personality-changing decisions for the PC. In Ethan's first interaction with his wife, he has a choice of dialogue points, but they are all related and they can all be used.

Most of this dialogue is simply asking for information about his son's birthday party later that day. This informative dialogue allows the player to situate herself in the game, but it also serves to characterize Ethan as a somewhat clumsy and uninvolved father. He loves his children, but he has trouble keeping up with their lives. This absentmindedness foreshadows the later events of the game, in which Ethan loses track of his son Jason, who is killed in a car accident as a result. Ethan's lack of involvement is seen again in his scene with Shaun after Jason has been killed and Ethan's wife has divorced him; the forced and awkward interaction between Ethan and his second son is one of the most painful and touching in the game. If Ethan was a shell character, the player would be able to make a connection between father and son that would break through the awkward setting and change the relationship between them. Because the game develops Ethan as a troubled and awkward father after the death of his first son, however, the player can only choose from dialogue that continues the pain felt by both the characters and herself.

A key lack of standard choice in the game, one that makes the plot seem more film-like, comes when Jason dies. Trying to find Jason when he disappears is under the player's control; the direction Ethan walks and when he calls to his son are the choice of the player. When Ethan sees Jason across the street, however, the initiative is removed from the player's control as the action unfolds. In one of the most influential action scenes of the game, the player can only watch as Ethan jumps in front of a car to try and save his son. Jason is killed and Ethan ends up in a coma, but the player can do nothing as tragedy strikes and the opening credits begin. This removal of player action at a crucial moment serves a both dramatic and didactic purpose. After this moment, the player understands both the cause of Ethan's anguish and the function of a game that has a specific direction to take its characters. The player can alter the story, to a point, but

she cannot significantly alter the characters or how their lives play out in the moments that do not directly relate to one of the twenty-two different endings to the game. Which ending occurs is up to the player, but how the characters develop and function is pre-determined by the creator.

Action scenes also provide a difference between *Heavy Rain* and its modern contemporaries. In most action scenes in games, when a character loses a fight, he or she dies and must respawn. In *Heavy Rain*, when a character loses a fight or challenge, the game just continues with the storyline altered slightly. When Detective Shelby gets into a fight in Lauren Winter's apartment, whether he wins or loses does not change his character or cause an extreme plot shift. It just changes some dialogue and the plot continues without the player knowing what events might have been altered by her apparent success or failure. Three of the four PCs can die at some point during the game, but if a character dies they do not come back to life; they simply drop out of the story's plot. When there are major character-changing decisions, such as the death of a PC, they are used to alter the story, not the characters themselves. The character is a vessel for the player to experience the world, but instead of exploring and changing the way the world works, the player realizes the depth of the game's central mystery. Instead of having a "sandbox" world, in which the player can ignore any small storyline to explore the greater environment, *Heavy Rain* uses a linear narrative that branches depending on player actions and abilities.

A similar element that allows immersive character moments in an interactive game is the increased cinematic quality of *Heavy Rain* during moments of strong emotional expression. When Ethan's ex-wife Grace meets him in the police station after Shaun has been kidnapped, her resulting interaction with Ethan is full of pain and aggression. When Ethan doesn't explain his blackouts, Grace is left reeling at the pain of losing both her sons when they were under Ethan's

watch. During this time of heavy-handed dialogue and desperation, the controls are completely removed from the player, who is forced to simply watch the interaction regardless of whether she has any idea of how to better it. At one point, Grace yells at Ethan, "Wasn't it enough losing Jason?" The pain that this question causes both of the characters is intense and unavoidable. The awkward emotional moments, such as Ethan almost hugging Grace when she breaks down in front of him, are again out of the player's control. By removing player interaction during a crucial emotional moment, the game draws the player even more into Ethan's story and the sense of helplessness that leads him to try to find his son. The player, by feeling her own sense of helplessness from the removal of the controls, can relate to Ethan. Ethan becomes a whole, developed desperate character despite the player's desires about what he should do to fix his family situation.

A main purpose of the characters of *Heavy Rain*, according to creator David Cage, was to induce empathy in the player. He considered the type of emotional immersion that Marie-Laure Ryan focuses on in her *StoryWorlds* article when writing the characters for the game, and this priority creates a different kind of characters for the game. The concept of violence in games was something that Cage experimented with. For example, in one scene, Ethan has the option to kill a man to get information about where his son has been hidden. In an interview with the gaming journal *Joystiq*, Cage states with interest that "what I wanted to do was say, 'Look, you just need to press this trigger, you kill this man and you get a reward. Do it.' And we realized about 80 percent of people don't shoot, just because it's about role play. They feel they are Ethan, and they believe Ethan would not kill" (Kietzmann). This sudden concern with the emotions and depth of the character marks a difference in how a player reacts with *Heavy Rain*, and it changes the

conception of playing a video game. Suddenly, there are repercussions to actions, and the player changes accordingly. If the player had a connection with a shell of a PC, she would make a decision based on her own moral values and desires, but in *Heavy Rain*, the player empathizes with Ethan enough to try to play according to his values instead of her own.

A similar method of complete characterization shapes the character of Detective Shelby, but his case is more severe. When Shelby saves Mrs. Bowles and takes care of her and her baby, he creates himself as a sympathetic character. The game directs the player to act kindly towards the two vulnerable characters, so it becomes easy for her to see Shelby as a nice, caring individual. The inclusion of a baby within the storyline makes Shelby's case even more sympathetic; he is so naive, yet sweet, in caring for the baby that the player cannot help but feel compassion for him. This combination of empathy and sympathy for the character, who has already claimed to have lost someone in an earlier scene, creates a strong, quiet, independent detective who appears to deserve the respect of the player and other characters alike. This careful attention to Shelby's development makes his betrayal at the end of the game even more alarming; his real identity becomes not just a betrayal of the other characters, but of the player who has grown so attached to him. This contrast in player feelings shows that Shelby is a truly developed PC who can lead the player on as much as the other characters. The concept of a PC lying, even in his thoughts, is one that is not usually explored in games. In most RPGs, the player has created the character somewhat and has complete control over what he or she says, so if the PC does lie to another character in the game, this lie was the player's choice. In contrast, Shelby, through his thoughts and actions, lies to the player as well.

Another instance of this concept of the unreliable PC in *Heavy Rain* is the character of

Madison. When the game introduces her as a PC, Madison is in a desperate situation in which she, and consequentially the player, must fight for her life against armed robbers. The music, camera angles, and fast quick-time events all lead the player to think that this fight is incredibly important to ensure Madison's survival. After inevitably losing the fight and being killed, however, Madison wakes up with a start; this entire fight scene was a nightmare, and the results are actually irrelevant to the game world. The anticlimactic adrenaline rush is ultimately both disappointing and intriguing as the player becomes more invested in Madison's character while becoming unsure of what is real when she is concerned. Madison's deceit continues when she meets Ethan. When they talk in his hotel room, Madison tells Ethan that she is a furniture photographer, and as this is the first time her occupation has been addressed, the player has no reason to expect a different answer. Later in the game, however, the game reveals Madison to be a journalist. The player character's lies to both other characters and the player, which would be impossible in a standard RPG, show the development of these interactable characters; they can make different life choices, but when they have a secret, the player is often as much in the dark as the other characters.

The characters of *Heavy Rain* are constantly being developed, but this development occurs as the characters are unfolded to the player, not as the player shapes them. Every choice the player makes affects the story in some manner, but the base character remains unchanged. The way the game works is surprising and strong because the player is given the opportunity not to shape a character, but to experiment with the details that make life progress. This strong sense of characterization prior to the player's involvement creates PCs that are uniquely driven and interesting to play. Far from being the only person in the game who knows the whole truth, the

player becomes just another pawn in the mystery, susceptible to lies from even the PC. This inherent complexity, paired with the power of the characters to attract empathy from the player, proves the ability to create a fully-developed PC within an interactive narrative. *Heavy Rain* proves itself as powerful interactive drama through the characterization that makes drama in general so enticing. It is a bridge between gaming and literature, and it matters to both fields because it is a successful example of this cross-disciplinary idea. The fictional character stands as an essential method to connect people with those of other backgrounds, and character drama in a game takes this immersion towards its ultimate versatile goal. While interactive drama is still rare because of the inherent difficulties of creating a powerful character drama that allows for player interaction, *Heavy Rain* proves that this genre can both exist and succeed.

Section IV: Character and *Virtuality*

The future of interactive narrative is as wide open as it is fascinating. The idea of a fully interactive world has captured the imaginations of writers and consumers everywhere, leading to the creation of interactive literary worlds such as *Pottermore*. Simply making an interactive world from a popular literary creation isn't enough, however; *Lord of the Rings Online* was a game placed in a world based on an incredibly popular book series, but it was not compelling because it lacked Tolkien's intricate storylines and original characters. This section aims to show that the idea of character is not only essential to creating an interactive narrative, but also important to combine the existing idea of a story with the use of future technology with the ability to physically immerse the player into the action. The dream of interaction in general has long been the holodeck seen in *Star Trek*; it is a fully immersive and personal digital world in which the player is both her own character and the controller of the narrative. This idea would present the most realistic and personalized version of interactive narrative, and it would ideally allow the player to create favorable situations and experience them again and again. In essence, the player and the PC merge into one. In the pilot of the near-television series *Virtuality*, however, the element of a corrupted artificial intelligence makes this similar mode of virtual reality (VR) more of a traditional interactive narrative as the characters lose control of their VR machines and can no longer control every aspect of the story (Moore). These ideas are part of the combination of science fiction and future technology that marks the ideal of the new narrative.

The question of how digital technology can aid in telling a story in the future has progressed as technology developed, and it was approached by Janet Murray in 2007. In her

book *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Murray expresses an idea for the integration of computer technology with television shows, with both appearing on a single interactive screen. She says that

> An integrated digital archive would present visual artifacts from the fictional world of the series, including not only diaries, photo albums and telephone messages but also documents like birth certificates, legal briefs, or divorce papers. Such artifacts . . . do not sustain our interest without the motivation of a central dramatic action. (255)

Murray notes that these extra items of interest, especially in a mystery or drama, drive the player to become more involved with the story. Contextual clues and small windows into the lives of characters both expand the world of the story and complicate the plot of, in this case, the show. Murray also notes, however, that these elements need a story to give them importance. This is why open world story-based games with a weak story are unpopular; there are extra items of interest that relate to the story, but nothing holds the player's interest after the initial novelty of learning extra information not previously released. More than ten years after Murray wrote this book, *Heavy Rain* used this idea to combine the concepts of a mystery story, a movie, and a game into a compelling narrative. The player can, by spending more time on each chapter of the game, find numerous clues about the killer and figure out the mystery sooner. These elements, however, are unnecessary to succeed in the game; they simply change the ending and the scenes leading up to it. Ethan, Madison, and Jayden can all be the one who finds out who the killer is, but in order for Jayden to figure out the mystery, the player must spend much more time analyzing clues than with the other two characters. This optional element creates a sense of personalization that allows the player to control how the game develops and how involved she is in this development. In future forms of technology, such as a completely immersive VR machine,

the player would have the choice to create as many details as he or she wants in a narrative. In addition, the need for a single screen that displays both the narrative and additional content might become unnecessary as the player simply becomes immersed in a VR world.

Murray also discusses the possibilities of a straightforward narrative that could be explored with the combination of traditional authorship and a digital format. One of the challenges posed to humanity, she says, is overcoming limited perspective in order to fully reach cerebral potential, and digital narrative could aid with that. Murray notes,

> Cyberdramatists of the future could present us with a complex world of many characters . . . and allow us to change positions at any moment in order to see the same event from the viewpoint of another character. Or they could let us enter a particular town over and over again in the guise of many different individuals, enabling us to see how different the same people present themselves to us. (283)

This idea combines the enjoyment of narrative with a concept of self-betterment, and it uses the central importance of the character to lead the player to new experiences. In this case, the character takes on even more of an influential role in the narrative than is traditional, with the plot simply providing a situation in which to view the character's motivations and actions. By switching between four PCs in the game, *Heavy Rain* approaches this level of viewpoint shifting. Each character has a different relationship to the kidnapping and a different way of approaching the problem, and the player gets to experience these differences as the game switches between them. Murray's suggestion, however, takes the idea to a whole different level, one which involves a full storyline written from each character's perspective. This change would create a story which is less interactive and more of a selected journey for the player; the plot might be set, with only specific actions controllable by the player. The author would be much more involved in this experience. Another key difference between *Heavy Rain's* brand of perspective switching

and the one envisioned by Murray is the ability to switch characters, and thus perspectives, at will. *Heavy Rain* chooses when to allow the player to switch, which allows both more anticipated interactivity and less confusion on the part of both author and player because of additional controls. This is where VR technology could really aid the narrative; with full immersion into the experience, the player could simply switch perspectives at will without becoming confused as to which character is the current PC. The clumsy physical elements of digital technology are currently somewhat interfering, but a smooth transition would be easiest with a personal, digitally projected world.

Marie-Laure Ryan takes another point of view about VR and narration in her book *Narrative as Virtual Reality*. She argues that any form of VR would automatically change the structure and content of a story to make something different than traditional narrative. Ryan remarks, "In contrast to narrated narratives, simulation systems do not re-present lives retrospectively, fashioning a plot when all events are in the book and all the potential narrative material is available to the storyteller, but generate events from a perspective point of view, without knowledge of their outcome" (64-65). The way a plot unfolds in a VR system depends more on the actions of the player than on the decisions of the author. In this way, the author is experiencing the unfolding of the plot as much as the player is. Ryan notes the importance of perspective, as Murray does, but in alternate situations. While Murray argues for the importance of changing perspective within a given narrative, Ryan believes that a narrative using a VR system should be created as the player interacts with the game or story, making it result in a different ending each time. Ryan stresses that the VR would promote interactivity in a story instead of simply providing new ways of viewing the narrative. Both use the technology to its

full potential, but the methods are different. She also, however, argues that such a future is utopian; the development of artificial intelligence has been slow in the last several decades. The opportunity for new types of interactivity is trapped within the limitations of progress.

To create a fully immersive VR, the technology to do so must first be developed, and the ideas of two futuristic options will be explored in this section. The notions of *Star Trek's* holodeck or *Virtuality's* VR machines are different in practice but similar in concept. Janet Murray describes the holodeck as "an empty black cube covered in white gridlines upon which a computer can project elaborate simulations . . . The result is an illusory world that can be stopped, started, or turned off at will but that looks and behaves like the actual world" (Murray 15). This world differs from a projection using current technology in that it can actually be physically touched and changed by the character's intentions and actions. The holodeck is described as a fantasy machine that can be used by the characters to escape and live out their desires in alternate, controllable worlds. The VR machines in *Virtuality* are wearable headsets, and the person wearing one usually simply sits down in order to use it. Instead of being able to walk into a projection of a world, the characters of *Virtuality* are simply mentally transported into another world, which they can experience and alter at will. One of the advantages of this system is that it takes up no physical space and requires no movement on the part of the person to interact with the virtual world; a paralyzed person can walk using the VR, and an asthmatic can become a top athlete. *Virtuality's* VR can be seen as a more sophisticated version of the holodeck, which reflects the timing of the two: the holodeck was first imagined in 1987, while *Virtuality's* VR appeared in 2009. The succession can also be partially attributed to writer and producer Ronald Moore, who worked on both *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Virtuality.*

Whatever the style, the idea of a fully immersive alternate reality machine has captured the minds of science fiction writers for decades, and it provides a basis for the future of gaming. When combined with the future of narrative, the possibilities become endless. While *Virtuality's* VR is currently only the topic of a traditionally filmed and non-interactive science fiction show, it provides an idea for the future of the genre.

One of the most exciting components of *Virtuality's* VR is its versatility. Rika Goddard uses the VR as a portal to a world in which she can safely have an extramarital relationship; Dr. Meyer uses it to create beautiful paintings with an entire world as his canvas; Billie Kashmiri experiences her dream of being a pop star using the VR; Commander Pike uses the VR to challenge his mind with direct reenactments of Civil War battles. One of these people uses the VR to be secretive, two use it as a highly personalized escape to another reality, and one uses it to play through an interactive narrative. Pike's relationship to the VR is the most interesting because he uses it unconventionally. When he is with Rika, Pike uses the VR to access their shared world, which is an invitation-only romantic getaway. When he is alone, however, Pike runs replays of battle scenarios, which are essentially stories, with characters and plot, that Pike can alter the ending of by planning his battle skillfully. The way Pike has programmed his VR, he cannot simply tell the computer how he wants the simulation to end. He must replay the scenario over and over until he can make the necessary military maneuvers to win the battle.

Most of Pike's VR characters are simple but influential; they are his fellow soldiers, who serve as sources of military advice and as friends. Pike created them specifically as support, probably with help from the incredibly intelligent VR. At one point Pike, horrified at watching his men die around him, asks the computer, Jean, to pause the simulation and inform him of his

mistake in the battle plans. The soft female voice immediately informs Pike of his mistake and gives him the opportunity to retry. Jean acts as the ultimate interactive author; she can create complex characters and situations, then make them respond to the actions of the player. Ryan's dream of an immersive, reactive narrative is easy under the unlimited prowess of such an author. The ultimate in VR, Jean is as responsive as a human and as intelligent and omnipotent as the most advanced computer. The only thing it seems that Pike cannot do is physically experience something from someone else's perspective; Murray's idea of switching between characters, as is seen in *Heavy Rain*, is impossible in a VR that hinges on everyone playing as themselves. The limitations of *Virtuality's* VR lie in its strength: the full immersion of a player into a story, where the player can do anything she wants to besides being someone other than herself.

A key element of compete VR immersion in the examples of both *Star Trek* and *Virtuality* is the complete control of the player. This element is sensible; the only plot that a person can always relate to and never lose interest in is one she designs herself. The player, however, can only experience different types of emotions while in complete control. A key element of the plot of *Virtuality* is the Virtual Man, who has found some way to invade and violate the VR worlds of the other characters. When each character panics and asks Jean to pause the simulation, she is somehow unavailable. This idea of technology gone wrong is a common trope in science fiction, but in this case it serves as a narrative point as well. If the VR has the power to simulate anything, it should have the ability to simulate real fear, which will not occur in a comfortable, player-created simulation. VR as author, as opposed to the player as author, draws an interesting line between two potential types of interactive narrative. If the player is in control, the narrative can become completely personalized, but loses some of the elements of surprise of a good story.

If the computer is in control, however, the VR becomes a sort of portal into an unknown narrative where the player may have different levels of control over her own actions and their effects. In some combination of these elements lies the formula for a perfect interactive narrative.

The future of interactive narrative depends on many elements, none of which are certain. Computer technology, visual storytelling, and the development of PCs all are essential to the future of the field, and there are multiple contrasting ideas about all of these elements. Despite the importance of plot to keep the player's attention, character is essential to creating an interactive narrative, regardless of whether the player is being engrossed in a traditional gaming consul or a future projected world. If a game uses a PC instead of simply porting the player into the simulation, this character must be fully developed and relatable as a human being. If the player is simply given a portal into a different world, the supporting characters must be strong to add interest to the situation, regardless of the plot. The future of interactive narrative can propel the idea of storytelling forward, but it must be approached with the intelligent planning of both the VR itself and the story that is being promoted.

Conclusion

Heavy Rain stands on its own not just as a video game, but as a monumental stepping stone in the progress of interactive narrative. As a game that makes the player feel the pain of loss and the depth of a father's love, *Heavy Rain* uses strong emotional ties between the player and the PC. Without the use of strong characters and scenarios the player can relate to, the game would have been an exciting escape from reality but would have no real resonance. Creator David Cage remarked in an interview that

> [T]he main goal of Heavy Rain was to trigger different types of emotions and not ones you usually find in video games. So, it was not about stress or fear or tension or frustration, it was about empathy. It was about sadness, it was about depression, it was about making you feel uncomfortable. And, basically, enlarging the kind of emotions that you can feel. (Kietzmann)

The game is not simply an exercise in beautiful graphics or a strong mystery plotline, although it contains both of these aspects. What makes *Heavy Rain* special, both to Cage and to its players, is its sometimes painful emotional connection to the player. When Ethan is forced to crawl through broken glass to prove his love for his son, the player is forced to make every movement, causing her to fully appreciate the danger and seriousness of the situation. This interactive drama succeeds in creating enough empathy to really connect with the player, much as a well-crafted novel can. Through this connection, the player can gain from the experiences of the game without having to go through the tragedy themselves.

The characterization at the core of *Heavy Rain's* success is not unique to one specific genre of narrative; writing of all types incorporates empathy and relatable circumstances to create emotional connections to the reader. A piece of writing can be entertaining without

character involvement, but it will not create as profound of an emotional impact on the reader. Writers in all mediums, including gaming, have realized that all genres of narrative can be deep and powerful with a strong character focus. Using this realization, gaming can begin to break away from its reputation as a juvenile hobby and prove itself as a legitimate medium for all ages of players. The use of empathy is a more powerful tool for self-reflection than an entertaining plot.

As this newer form of gaming begins to meld with the future of VR technology, interactive narrative can begin to reach its full potential as a prominent future form of literature. The maturation of technology and the fine tuning of interactive narrative in general will lead to a fully personalized, complex system that can incorporate both the design desires of the user and the reasoning capabilities of a computer system able to fully react to the environment around it. Interactive narrative is powerful not just because of the fascinating situations it has created, but also due to its incredible potential when combined with the technological future. The new wave of immersive, interactive literature is almost here.

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