Gaze not open the *
Paganism and history use within digital games
Abstract
This bachelor thesis goal is to explore how paganism has expressed itself within the world of digital games through three different examples. It builds onto already existing research around video games and history use as well as my own term paper that touched upon this subject. This thesis will be done using academic literature concerning digital games, history use and paganism from Russia as well as Japan.

Keywords: Paganism, digital games, history use, rituals, folklore, ludonarrative, Russia, Japan
1. Introduction

Almost as long as mankind has been able to express itself there has been some sort of religion following in her footsteps. Even in the earliest historical footprints left behind by man the academical world has been able to find traces of rituals and deities. From its start running all the way up until today, any form of religious convictions have made themselves ever present in the creations of man. This have included anything from various forms of art, literature and movies.

There is a fair bit of research on the connection between history use and digital games, most of which points towards the fact that this type of media has a way to engage their audience that movies for example lacks. The academical research on this area has therefore been to define terminology for this specific type of engagement such as narrative differences and the players influence over character decisions.

On the ground of this research I choose to try and dwell further into the area of religious rituals depicted in digital games. For my subjects I've chosen three titles: "Pathologic", "Project Zero II: The Crimson Butterfly" as well as "Project Zero III: The tormented". A lot of the substantial academical studies as well as my own previous thesis was built around physical historical places. To further this field of study, I've chosen to touch upon what could be called historical concepts: communicating more upon what we are able to gather from actions rather than what can physically be touched.

1.1 Purpose

This thesis is made with the purpose of further exploring the unique way in which digital games present historical subjects to its players. It is also made with the desire to find out in which ways a player can be stimulated to engage with historical concepts. The purpose is also to see in which way a historical religious perspective can be introduced to players without building itself onto any of the current times largest religious practices such as Christianity, Islam or Buddhism. In order to be able to research this I've broken down three separate religious practices from the above mentioned games. These will be studied in their own regard before putting all these pieces into a bigger context. The areas of analysis will include different parts of the games such as: dialogue, text and gameplay.

1.2 Question

The main question for this thesis is how digital games can portray historical ideas and ideology as well as make these available for a large base of players. In the case of this study the ideas discussed will be paganism and folklore. This will be done by studying the content of all three
games as well as putting them against the background of history use within digital games. Sub questions include:

1. How does the player become familiar with the subject of religious practice through the game?
2. In what way does the history use connect with the gameplay?
3. What benefits are there to using digital games as a learning tool for this historical subject?

1.3 Method and source material

For this thesis I’ve chosen to use a qualitative method, as it best suits the way in which I’ve approached my analysis. I’ve chosen to compare three games and how they all interact with paganistic history use while also limiting the scope and picking out one religious practice from each game. This has been done so that I would be given the chance to deep dive into the subject at hand. The three games have different backgrounds when it comes to paganism as well as folklorism which serves to give a broader scope to the study.

The games chosen are “Pathologic” which was released in 2005 with a remake released in 2019. The game was created by the studio Icepick Lodge. It's culture is grounded in eastern Europe, most notably the use of more Slavic society. “Project zero II: The Crimson Butterfly” as well as “Project Zero III: The tormented” were developed by Tecmo and released 2003 and 2005 respectively. To stand in contrast to the above mentioned “Pathologic” these represent a Japanese folklorist narrative. In order to analyse the games themselves properly they will be broken down into several sub categories. These include text, dialogue as well as gameplay aspects. Those will be analysed separately before being viewed together as a complete concept.

As sources for the digital games I've made the choice to use the Wiki's that are available online. These works as a form of archive where every document can be found. Here one can also access character profiles that accounts for all happenings within the games, including documents, cutscenes or dialogue. This makes it easier to point towards specific happenings within the games. It also provides a written source which allows for anyone to access these facts without having to play through the entire game themselves.

In order to be able to fully explore this subject I shall also be using several academic texts about digital games, history use and the way in which this type of art connects with their players. There has been studies done before this that speaks of the correlation between history use and digital games. One of these research of great importance is the work by Adam Chapman\(^1\). His book

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\(^1\) Chapman, *Games as history: How videogames represent the past and offer access to historical practice*. 2016.
is a deep dive into how digital games have started to form itself as a way to teach history. It touches upon how digital games have been used to show both physical places as well as teaching historical concepts. Complimentary to this study is an article by Wasson Breien. This work takes a deeper look onto the terminology as well as what sort of techniques that game creators utilise in order to engage their audience. To take in a historical use angle I've turned to the work of Peter Aronsson. His work brings up several core ideals for how an individual gets engaged with history and what different types of tactics there are to historical use.

To be able to put this into the context of paganism and folklore I've also chosen academical studies that touches upon these philosophies. Alexander Uchitel and Judith Kalik has written a study on the subject of Slavic gods and heroes. This covers the various gods, symbols and paganistic cultural heritage that has its roots in today's Slavic countries. On the topic of Japanese folklore, religion and it's ties to human sacrifices I've chosen the work of Noritake Tsuda. While this is a very old study on the subject it still serves to bring up an ancient practice around sacrifice that existed in Japanese history. Alongside this I'll also make use of the work of Michael Dylan Foster. While Noritake's texts is a brief glimpse into the folklore beliefs this latter book compliments it by making a deeper dive into the rich folklorism that Japan presents and the rituals and symbols that goes together with it. Finally I shall be using texts that explains the historical connections between Japan and the art of tattooing. On the subject of tattoo's and their places as cultural heritage in Japan I've also picked a text which brings up a different aspect of the art. The webpage Bodylore wrote an excellent study in both the origin of the art of tattoo but also how it grew to be stigmatised in Japan. The point of the article is to provide information about the rich history of tattooing as a cultural artform.

1.4 Theory and prior research

Mentioned prior in this text is the fact that there has been research done about digital games and their place as tools to teach history. Most of this research has started by studying physical places. This includes real world locations, art and architecture as well as historical figures. All of this research has formed the field of how one approaches history use in digital games: such as terminology for world creation, player engagement ext. There has been some prior research done about historical ideals and concepts: a notable example being Heidi Campbell's study which

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3 Aronsson, Historiebruk - Att använda det förflutna 2004
4 Noritake, Tsuda. Human Sacrifices in Japan. 1918.
provided insight in how religious aspects have been integrated into digital games. In her work she touches upon the vitality of exploring the correlation between digital themes, history use and how it affects the player. This touches upon some of the motivations for my own thesis. While Cambell's work has provided some needed background it has a much more global feeling to it: glossing over any deep dives into any of the games and simply mentioning them on a surface level. In contrast to this I wish to dig deeper and make more clear example with several pieces of each game and their correlation to history rather than just scratching the top of things.

The previous research that can be accessed today on the field will contain a model for how to approach digital games as a source for history: either in an educational manner or for entertainment. On the front of this research are Adam Chapman's book which themes include how creators can reach their players with a variety of methods, what narrative options there is and how they will affect how the player takes in the historical aspects of the game, digital games as a form of re-enactment and much more. Though a couple of years old it perfectly describes where the research are today: the field of digital games as a tool for history use is a now an established field of academical research. Majority of research done have been on historical re-enactment, time eras, architecture ext.

While Chapman's book does make a point that digital games can be used to teach historical ideals or concepts focus is still on the material: what we can touch, time eras we can still recall by opening history books or famous characters from humanities past. Much like Campbell's study I wish to stress that there is more to be found in the ways which we interact with historical ideals and ideologies through our times with digital games.

Theoretically I shall also make use of words such as folklore and paganism. While the second word most certainly will ring a bell in most individuals minds the first has not gotten the same swing. To study folklore means to study mythology and its history. While an academical field in and on itself it is often studying concepts that may have very vague truths to them. Today folklorists are generally gathering material from tales bound to mystical creatures, gods or happenings. These terms both carry a lot of weight in this research as the games are not grounded in major religious practices. As such these terms becomes all the more important to draw parallels between what the games depict as well as what traces they have in human history.

The above mentioned previous research has opened the door for how to theoretically approach digital games. In the case of this thesis the tools I will be using is what is called ludonarrative and framed narrative. These are two theoretical terms: mostly used in academical

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7 Campbell, Heidi Playing with Religion in Digital Games 2014.
8 Chapman, Games as history: How videogames represent the past and offer acess to historical practice. 2016.
literature that concerns digital games. Narratives as a whole is used in the making of games and *ludonarrative* has seen some use after the 2000's, most notably by game creator *Clint Hocking* when he made a debate on *ludonarrative dissonance*. *Framed narratives* includes the static part of a game: backgrounds, music, cutscenes ext. These are the parts of a game in which the player lacks any power or input as they are often obligated to happen. In contrast to these stands the *ludonarrative*. To simplify this expression one can think of it as the part of the game in which a players engagement is needed. It can be choosing a certain path or making a tactical choice which will have a long lasting impact on the experience. Both of these play a large role in my chosen subject as it is what lays the ground work for how the player becomes familiar with the religious practices of the games. This terminology is brought up by Chapman as the two most common terms used for researching digital games and how they make use of history.9

This thesis will also be done with *historical use* in mind. The term means the act of using any cultural heritage: be it of entertainment or educational purpose. It is what ties this entire thesis together: since the goal is to find how the research material can be tied to previous studies of the same area. *Aronsson* brings up this term in his work, explaining how history use is simply the way in which we use the past to engage the present.

2. Background

Though many societies today tries to move away from state and religion being connected, for a large majority of humanity's life on earth the latter have influenced the creative fields. Art, literature and architecture, to mention a few, have long been used to either praise religious virtues or critique them. The result of which is that this subject is commonly present, even if not a vocal point, in several creations of mankind. A notable example would be the *Rose Window* of *Notre Dame* cathedral. Carrying several symbols of saints, apostles and scenes from the bible, it has become a cultural staple of humanity. A version of it makes an appearance in the 1996 movie *The hunchback of Notre Dame*, which itself is ripe with religious imagery. While but one example, it goes to show that the creative endeavours that followed humanity and her relation to religion still has a foothold even to this day.

Digital games as a media have not been left out of this category. Though certain genres of games choose to create a new religion for their stories many of them still carries traces of real world religions. For example the *Dragon Age* games have several religious factions, one of which is called the *Chantry*, an organisation that uses the *sister* title that generally is found in Christian branches of

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10 Chapman, *Games as history: How videogames represent the past and offer acess to historical practice*. 2016. p.121
11 Aronsson, *Historiebruk - Att använda det förflutna* 2004
religious practices\textsuperscript{12}. Others are not so subtle: a notable example being the game \textit{Blasphemous} which borrowed it's imagery, boss design and world views from the \textit{Roman Catholicism} of Spain\textsuperscript{13}.

(Above: \textit{Gemino} from \textit{Blasphemous}. Inspired by the painting \textit{Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian}.\textsuperscript{14})

The subjects I've chosen to study marks themselves away from more notable examples in the digital game industry since they do not build themselves around any of the major religions of their areas.

\textbf{2.1 Pathologic}

This game was developed by \textit{Ice-pick Lodge} and originally released in 2005 with a reimagine released in 2019\textsuperscript{15}. The story takes place in an unnamed village in an isolated part of Russia which has become riddled with a plague like infection. What caused it is up to anyone's guess and there is no cure in sight. As a player one can choose three roles in the original release: \textit{The Bachelor}, \textit{The Haruspex} and \textit{The Changeling}. Being given but 12 days to solve the towns dilemma, the player spends their time trying to get to the bottom of what have caused the disastrous state of the town as well as how to develop a cure.

Though the games setting is never named by any real life location, context clues such as names indicates a Russian setting. The town itself also presents the player with a whole new religious belief that draws heavy inspiration from the pagan belief systems\textsuperscript{16}. These are not bound exclusively to Russia and will, in this thesis ,be refereed to as Slavic \textit{paganism}.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Official \textit{Dragon Age} wiki. 2020. \\
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Blasphemous} wiki. 2020. \\
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Blasphemous} wiki. \textit{Gemino}. 2020 \\
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Pathologic} wiki. \textit{Pathologic}. 2020. \\
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Pathologic} wiki. \textit{The town}. 2020
\end{flushleft}
Pathologic is a very text heavy game and most information is found by reading rather than through cutscenes or audio.

2.2 Project Zero II: Crimson Butterfly

Released in 2003 and developed by Tecmo, it also had a remake released 2012 which was only available in Australia, Europe and Japan\(^{17}\). As a player one takes on the role of Mio Amakura, the younger sister of a twin pair. The sisters are visiting a forest in which they played as young children which is to soon be flooded as part of a dam project. While Mio is drifting off in thoughts, her sister Mayu is lead astray by spirits, an action which causes both sisters to get stuck in Minakami Village, also refereed to in game as The lost village or All god's village. Legend says that a ritual is repeating in this ghost town which is forever stuck in darkness. It soon becomes apparent that the fact that a twin pair got lured into the village was no coincidence.

Crimson Butterfly stars characters from the late half of the 1990's yet the setting is that of a village from the late 1800's\(^{18}\). It borrows heavily from Japanese folklore and mythical beliefs, both when it comes to the belief of gods, sacrifices and symbolism.

While a tad more streamlined than Pathologic, Crimson Butterfly is giving most of the vital information to the player via text and speech.

2.3 Project Zero III: The Tormented

Known as Shisei no Koe, which roughly translates to Voice of the Tattoo, in Japan, it was released as The Tormented in Australia, America and Europe. Developed by Tecmo it was initially released in 2005\(^ {19}\). As a player one follows three protagonists. Rei Kurusawa, a photographer who has lost her fiancée recently in a car accident caused by her own reckless driving. Miku Hinasaki, the protagonist of the very first Project Zero game, tormented by the loss of her older brother. Finally one takes on the role of Kei Amakura, the uncle of the second instalments Mio and Mayu, as he's on a frantic search for answers about his niece's strange medical condition. One after another, the protagonists gets lured into the so called Manor of Sleep, in which they believe they can once more meet their beloved who have departed. This however brings on a curse of endless sleep which threatens to consume them.

The Tormented sees a similar formula as its predecessor: while the main leads seem to exist in a world between 1990 – 2000's, the main setting is that of a large estate from the 1800's. The folklore aspect is heavy on symbolism and taboo.

More text heavy than *Crimson Butterfly, The Tormented* also offered notes written by the main lead which slowly develops as more aspects of the story are uncovered.

3. Analysis

In order to analyse how each game lets the player come into contact with the religious aspects and in what manner they then become familiar with it, I've chosen to give each game its own section. As such they are allowed to be studied as a separate object before being put into a whole context during the discussion. Each game also relies on different religious beliefs, cultural costumes and symbols: all of which needs to be studied by themselves before being put side by side with the others.

The games will be presented in the following order: *Pathologic, Crimson Butterfly* and *The Tormented*.

3.1 The scarlet mistress and the white mistress

During the time the player spend with *Pathologic* they'll be introduced to the unnamed town's religious beliefs. Despite the supposed location in which the game takes place there is no mention of Christianity in any shape or form. The religious factors are abundant and shared between if one lives inside of the town or out on the steppe that surrounds it. The most prominent role however is that of scarlet mistress as well as the white mistress.

As can be deduced by the names this is a role that falls only to women and can not be held by a man. They are said to be blessed with otherworldly powers: clairvoyance and premonitions following in their wake. They form a duality in which the scarlet mistress will tell of horrid disasters to come while the white mistress is instead a bringer of good news. During the runtime of the game there will also be several women who are granted other mistress titles but none of these carries the same weight as the two others. When the player enters into the game the previous scarlet mistress and white mistress are already dead and those that are to carry the roles are covering in fear due to the plague. This is an act that have caused the townsfolk to doubt if these women are even suitable to be a mistress in the first place.

The scarlet mistress is, as mentioned above, one that is respected as well as feared. She represents the darkness: a mistress who rules the domains of chaos, fear, schism and unease\(^\text{20}\). Her visions where those of grief and grim news: which is described in game as having brought the village folks into terror at the mere presence of a scarlet mistress. As of the game the former scarlet mistress was Nina Kaina. Though she has passed away before the player themselves arrives at

\(^\text{20}\) Pathologic wiki. *Mistresses*. 2020
footsteps is clearly felt in the town. By speaking to other NPC’s (None playable characters), the player will learn how she was viewed by the people she served. Her height was already an impressive 185 cm's yet many describe it as looking upon a giant whenever she was in the room. Nina's demeanour was interpreted by the towns people as that of someone with the power to breath life into inanimate objects, some saying that candles seemed to bow down to her even when the wind was still.

At her passing some villagers considered that a heavy darkness had finally left their town but others feared that without her reign the town had also been deprived of some of its charm. When the plague starts making itself known, the villagers actually turn more fondly to the memory of their former scarlet mistress, claiming that if Nina had still been alive she would never have allowed for such a tragedy to befall them. The player may find her tombstone in game that reads: “Nina Kaina the Wild has not found her resting place here. Even in death, she remains passionate and restless.”

In stark contrast to this stands the white mistress. Her symbolism is that of warmth and nurturing. As such she serves as the complementary part of the scarlet mistress, their light and

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21 Pathologic wiki. Nina Kainan. 2020

(Above: Nina Kaina the scarlet mistress)
darkness combining to create balance. Just as the above mentioned mistress she has otherworldly abilities and can see visions others can not. At the start of the game the former white mistress was Victoria Olgimskaya. Though her death came to her 9 whole years before the events of Pathologic, she is still fondly remembered by the villagers. Her demeanour is described as motherly and caring; a woman who nurtured while the scarlet mistress Nina was viewed as destructive. Just like her counterpart, to be in her presence was to be at the side of a giant, despite Victoria only being 170 cm's tall.

As the plague starts to ravage the town, the villagers also turns to the memory of Victoria for comfort, claiming that she would have been the first out in the street, using her powers to heal the sick. The players can read the following inscription on her tombstone: “Victoria Olgimskaya the Warm has not found rest here. She rests across the whole town's streets, houses, and yards.”

(Above: Victoria Olgimskaya the white mistress)

In Uchitel and Kalik's study they bring up that there are certain difficulties when it comes to naming religious Slavic figures: bringing forward the fact that in many cases the documentation of

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23 Pathologic wiki. Mistresses. 2020
Slavic paganism have been done by studying anti-pagan texts\(^\text{26}\). Through this research there has been frequent mentions of Chernobog (Black God): a god of bad faith and evil. In opposition of this there is also Belobog (White God), the opposite of Chernobog and that on which many academics have based the belief that Slavic paganism had a theme of duality into it. I feel the need to point out that this is still a field in which academics are divided: while some have cemented the thought that this is as accurate a depiction as one gets there are others who think there needs to be more research. Such is the case with Yaroslav Gorbachov who writes in his book that though there may be some truths to the claims of Chernobog and Belobog the research should continue as the sources many academics site for these deities are limited\(^\text{27}\).

Michael Strmiska also makes a reference to ancestral beliefs among the Slavic pagans\(^\text{28}\). Commonly found among several paganistic beliefs around the world this brings forward the fact that some gods was often viewed through the lens of ancestry: in other words a Slavic pagan could believe that a god was the remanent of their ancestors souls still watching over how they lived out their lives.

When putting these facts side by side one can see the dualistic trend in how Ice-pick Lodge handled their scarlet mistress and white mistress. They are a duality and should not exist without one another. Just as Chernobog was a god of bad faith so was the scarlet mistress a bringer of bad omens. The women who carries these roles also possess otherworldly powers generally frowned upon outside of pagan cultures. A clear example are the witch-hunts that plagued both Europe and America in which most commonly women that proclaimed they had visions were executed for blasphemy. The beliefs of *Pathologic* is the stark contrast. The scarlet mistress may have been feared but her visions were just as much taken into account for the well being of the town as those of the white mistress.

Through the use of these mistresses, a woman of flesh being hailed as a goddess, the game runs with the themes of Slavic paganism as we know it now. While this may be open for change at the time of writing this is a rather clear parallel between reality and fiction. This also plays into the ancestral angel: while only a selected few characters in *Pathologic* were actually biologically related to the scarlet mistress and white mistress, the entire town acts as if they shared ancestry with these women.

Author Breien makes the following statement in their work which correlation to how a game creator allows their player to interact with the themes of the game:

A quest-based hub-landscape world, in which confined areas of the full world (hubs) are


\(^{27}\) Gorbachov, Yaroslav. *What Do We Know about *Černobogъ and *Bělъ Bogъ?.* 2017.

explored at will, and where reaching objectives in sequences (quests) open new hubs in the landscape and close others, depending on player choices.  

This rings true to how a player will be allowed to interact with the above mentioned content. *Pathologic* drives its story forward through exploration and conversation rather than relying on more forceful methods such as cutscenes. The difference between the two is that instead of forcing the player to take on the information *Pathologic* shows that it trusts its players to be curious enough about the world build to wish and explore and understand it better. As such much of the information about the *scarlet mistress* and the *white mistress* are uncovered by the investigative mind of the player.

### 3.2 The Crimson Sacrifice Ritual

Standing as the main theme and also the main threat in *Crimson Butterfly* is the ritual that is refereed to simply as *The Crimson Sacrifice Ritual*. Many texts early in the game keeps this name obscure: instead mentioning it as a *festival ritual*, *hidden ceremony* or all together censoring it with a simply *. This in turn gives the player the feeling that said ritual is something so terrifying that it is taboo to even write out its full name.

The ritual itself needs the participation of identical twins. Through documentation in the game the twins are called *Twin Shrine Maidens* if they are females. If they were instead males they would be called *Altar Twins*. Out of these two options it is made clear that a pair of female twins were more desirable than that of a pair of male twins. Twin pairs consistent of one boy and one girl was never used: there is no in game documentation of how these twins lived out their lives in the village. Fan speculation even suggest that twin pairs that did not incorporate same sex children were probably abandoned. Through context clues in the game it becomes clear that the desired age for a *crimson sacrifice* was about 15 years though one notable twin pair performed the ritual while seemingly no older than 10.

There is no specific time span between the rituals. Generally this information is kept rather vague: some text indicating the time gap between each ritual could be 10-15 years, while others seem to happen in rapid succession. If one ritual failed it is noted that another needs to happen as quickly as possible. There are no in game explanation for how the small remote village in the Japanese mountains managed to have such a high rate of twins born within it.

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32 Zero Wiki. *Info: Akane Kiryu*. 2020
There are mentions about several steps that needs to be taken before *The Crimson Sacrifice Ritual* would commence. Exactly what these steps are is never fully developed in text: the only indication given is that:

The Kiryu House and the Tachibana House are linked by a connecting corridor and are called the "Twin Houses". The Twin Shrine Maidens will stay there before the ceremony and are apparently cleansed there too. During the cleansing they are not allowed to go outside, but they may pass freely between the houses.

This indicates to the complexity of the ceremony as this purifying ritual is indicated to have taken place for several days. The folklorist Seijiro Makabe, a visitor to the town during the late 1800's, is the one that leaves behind the most notes on the ins and outs of *The Crimson Sacrifice Ritual*. Through these runs the theme of isolation: as stated above the twins were often times isolated and feared by the villagers, meaning their only company would have been one another.

As for the ritual itself there is references to how one ceremony was *public* and the other *hidden*. The latter took place in a room which contained a massive hole into the ground. Here the older of the twins would be required to kill the younger by method of strangulation. If the ritual failed a new pair of twins would need to perform the ritual within the span of just a year or two: a

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failed ritual is indicated to have angered the deity the village tried to appease. However, if the ritual succeeded the soul of the dead twin would return as a bright red butterfly that would guard the village and still the stirring of the deity for a longer time. During the ceremony the twins would also have a red rope tied around their waist, connecting them. The symbolism of the ritual was that the soul that had split into two to make a twin pair would now become one again.

(Above: Yae and Sae Kurosawa, the red cord connecting them as one35.)

Of note is that the village went by old twin laws. It is described that in some countries along the coast the order would be reversed to how western countries views twins. The one born first was the younger and weaker while the older was the second born who was stronger and allowed their weaker half to be born first. This is described in a note found relativity late in the game:

Twins play an important part in the ritual. In recent years, the government issued a decree that the first twin to come out is the eldest. Each region used to have its own roles until that decree was made. When I asked the Ceremony Master about the village's rules, he grinned and said that tradition is tradition. This village still practices the old way. The twin that is born second is considered the elder.36

There is no real explanation for exactly what the above mentioned deity is but it is taboo to write it's name out. In most texts an * indicates that the text makes mention of said deity. Among players it has also been granted the name of Hellish Abyss or Utsuro, the latter name translating to void or emptiness. There are no indications of how this deity came to be and context clues indicates that the village was built on top of it. If this was by design or coincidence there is no real answer. The few notes found indicates a fear from the town folk that if the Hellish Abyss was not satisfied it

would spill over and the souls of the dead would come to haunt the village. Such an event was called the *calamity* or the *repentance*.

Though it is noted that it is rather uncommon some rituals appears to have taken place with simply one twin instead of two. Assumptions can be made that this would be the case if one of said twins had already passed before they were an appropriate age to be a *twin shrine maiden* or an *altar twin*. A note from the *ceremony master* reads as following: “Still, Sae is a maiden, and she has been purified. Even alone she should appease the * for a while. The records note that the ceremony can be performed with just one. That is what we shall have to do…”

This seems to have been an exception however and in the events played out in the game this is one of the reasons why the very last *Crimson Sacrifice Ritual* failed.

Once completed the surviving twin would get the title of *Remaining*. The above mentioned *ceremony master* held this title and seemingly lived a normal life after his ritual. There is in other words no indication that a *remaining* was shunned or forbidden from falling in love, getting married and have children. The only thing that makes them stand out from any other person is that the traumatic events of *The Crimson Sacrifice Ritual* would turn their hair white. Indications in the game points however to the fact that most *remaining* did not make it far after their rituals. Many exhibit signs of deep depression and emptiness: as would come natural from taking the life of a sibling. There is only mention of three other remaining, all of which meet their doom within a years span of their ceremony. In the case of *Akane Kiryu* she was manipulated by a spirit possessing a doll made to look like her deceased sister and her soul was stolen. The two others: *Itsuki Tachibana* and *Tsuzuri Osaka*, are indicated to have suffered severe depression which lead to their death, in *Itsuki’s* case by suicide.
If there would be no suitable twin pair for a sacrifice there were also notes that mentioned a second ritual. This was often called the *Hidden Ritual*[^39]. Generally an outsider would be picked as sacrifice but otherwise the town would resort to using a person from the village which had committed some sort of criminal act. The *ritual* itself meant that the choose sacrifice would be strung up and cut with several blades. It was of the utmost importance that the victim had to suffer: the more suffering the stronger the ward but they also had to be alive through the process. Would the victim die during the ceremony they would not be offered to the *Hellish Abyss* and instead discarded while another sacrifice had to be found. During this ritual the victims limbs could also be removed and simply bound to their body. If, by a twisted sense of luck, they were alive after this excruciating process they would be thrown into the *Hellish Abyss* to appease it. Once this was done the sacrificed would be called a *Kusabi*.

There are no indications in game if this ceremony was exclusive to one sex as the player themselves only get to meet one *Kusabi* in the second instalment who was a man in life. Any other appearance in later *Project Zero* titles also shows the *Kusabi* to be of male gender and as such one can make the assumption that this was not a role in which one would use females as sacrifice.

calamity upon the people of this district."40 These words were uttered during a sacrifice to appease a river so that a bridge could be constructed over it. The word that is used in this speech, calamity, is also specifically used in texts in Crimson Butterfly. This links together that the act of human sacrificing had a general correlation between appeasing an unnamed force which would otherwise bring harm or bad luck onto the people living in the region. It is also of note that these sacrifices were done to a natural element. The Hellish Abyss appears to be little more than a hole in Crimson Butterfly, which causes earthquakes to happen. In Noritake's book it is a body of a river and the author makes note that: “The motive for the deification of the river may seem to be in the calamity-causing power of the water rather than in any real being supposed to be in it.”41 As such there is a parallel between the older religious practices of Japan and their view of appeasing nature which also rings true in the game.

Mentioned in the text above is that the sacrificed twin would turn into a butterfly. In fact this is even visible in the title of the game: Crimson Butterfly. In Japan the motif of butterflies are strongly connected to metamorphose but are generally also viewed as the spirit of the dead. A soul may be presented in the form of a butterfly as it is making its way into the afterlife. This hooks together the motives between reality and fiction: as said creatures carries the same role and symbolism within the game.

Crimson Butterfly presents itself as a game which relies heavier on framed narratives and gets complimented by their ludonarratives. In Chapmans study he spends a long time explaining how, by adding historical context to the environmental parts of a game, it allows the player to also learn about it's subject42. During the time a player spends with Crimson Butterfly they'll become familiar with the religious historical motives of butterflies and twins through stone carvings, clothing and architectural design. By doing this the game makes its player more aware of what themes and symbols are important for the enjoyment of the story.

The ludonarrative side of Crimson Butterfly comes in the form of text. There is nothing forcing a player to pick them up. Technically this means that a player can run through the game without reading much of the documentation at all which damages the story presented as most of the gaps not filled in by cutscenes will be apparent. Instead the creators have, just as with Pathologic, put their focus onto a players sense of wonder and exploration. The texts also works heavily with their narrative through repetition: words such as calamity, sacrifice and twins to mention a few are repeated heavily throughout texts. This becomes another way for the player to interact with the religious aspects of the game on their own terms. By using repetition the creators achieve a longer

40 Noritake, Tsuda. Human Sacrifices in Japan. 1918. p. 761
41 Noritake, Tsuda. Human Sacrifices in Japan. 1918. p. 761
42 Chapman, Adam ,Digital Games As History, 2016
last impact on the player.

3.3 The piercing of the Soul

While The piercing of the soul is a vital part of the rituals in The Tormented, it is also surrounded by several other rituals. All of these are interconnected, existing more as a step by step guide on how to proceed would one ritual fail or wear down by time. Unlike the above mentioned Crimson Sacrifice Ritual it also took place over a prolonged period of time and involved several other participants: even though one can speculate on how willing some of them were.

In order for the piercing of the soul to be able to commence, the shrine needed a tattooed priestess. Through documents in the game it is apparent that the women chosen for this role would do so voluntarily. Those who decided to become a priestess were generally women who had experienced intense tragedy or loss of loved ones. While one could speculate onto how much this choice was of religious conviction or grief is another area of debate. What seems to be the common thread is that said woman would be taken to the Kuze Shrine and adopt their surname, ridding themselves of their past identity.

Through text it is described that the shrine was exclusively run by women. A note reads:

When I called upon the head of the family, she said they allow visitors until the snow melts. They carry out a rite here to protect a sacred area in the mountain. Men are not allowed in the rite, but it seems every few years they invite men in order to continue the bloodline. They call them "outsiders." I think that I've heard of a similar custom.43

There is no exact reasons given as to why this is but another tome claims that all men entering the shrine had to cover their faces as “to keep the priestess' heart from stirring.”44 The cause as such appears to be that the priestess should not become emotionally connected or romantically involved with anyone after she takes on her role. Once more it can be noted that this completely exclude that the priestess may of be of a different romantic orientation but there are no mentions of such within the game.

Accompanying the priestess was the handmaidens. These could be children from the Kuze family line or orphans that had been adopted and brought up as part of the family. Their training started young: as of the game the handmaidens seems to be between the ages of 7 – 10. The purpose they served was to look after the priestess while she underwent her purification as well as the piercing of the soul. Finally they would be the one to stake the priestess within the Chamber of thorns: singing songs in their own designated chambers to keep her slumbering forever.

Time of year was essential for when the Piercing of the Soul would commence. Visitors to the shrine would only come in winter and would bring along any relative or loved one who had passed away. Once inside the shrine the visitors themselves would have to give up a small amount of blood. The same would happen to the bodies of the dead: if possible they would be drained as well. The blood of the living would be mixed with regular tattoo ink to create red ink. When mixed with the that of the dead it would be refereed to as indigo ink. Combining these created the ink of the soul which was vital to the ritual.

The priestess would be tattooed several times a day with the motif of a snake and holly. As her skin was pierced the pain and sorrow from those who had given up their blood would be etched into her instead. It is indicated that through this process the priestess would lose her own memories and instead become a vessel of others grief. Not until her entire body was fully tattooed would she be staked in the Chamber of Thorns. In the example of the game the last tattooed priestess even had her eyes engraved: this however seems to have been a regrettable act. The matriarch of the Kuze family, Yashuu Kuze, writes the following:

One of the handmaidens led a man who came to offer his pain into the Kuze Shrine and so tattoos have entered the priestess' eyes and the doors to the Chamber of Thorns have opened. We should never have let a man enter the shrine. No matter who it was, we should never have engraved the priestess' empty eyes.45.

To etch the holly into the eyes seems to be an act not encouraged. It remains unclear what

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reasons there were for doing so onto the last priestess.

(Above: Reika Kuze, displaying the tattoo that has entered her eyes.)

Once the priestess could carry no more of the visitors pain, she would be led into the Chamber of Thorns and staked to the floor by the handmaidens. Here she would enter into an eternal sleep, subdued forever by her maidens singing the Sleeping priestess song. It's unclear if this is a natural state of sleep or if it more closely resembled a coma but through the way that one talks about the priestess in game as well as seeing several of them in the Chamber of Thorns one can deduce that they all remain sleeping. Ageing does not seem to affect the priestess as all bodies one sees in the game are just as intact as Reika's, the one that has been there the least amount of time.

Not all priestesses seem to have been made equal. Some would be unable to remain sleeping or to be subdued by the song of the handmaidens. If this were to occur there was the risk that such a priestess would wake up: the result of which would have been her eyes reflecting all the pain she had taken on back onto the world. This disastrous event was called the Unleashing in which the rift between the living and the dead would blur and allows for the living to be etched with the pain of those long passed. The fate that would befall such a priestess is described as:

The tattooed priestess who cannot enter the sleep of no regrets must be stripped of her tattoos and sent to the other shore. The removed tattoos must then be enshrined in the tranquillity of the stone shrine and the lullaby must be sung to pray for an end to the pain. The tattoo priestess who will not sleep, who cannot endure the pain, will be enshrouded in misery and cast into the Rift.\(^{46}\).

In game one can find two sets of skins that have been strung up in the Tattoo Altar: which hints at the fact that at least two priestess before Reika have failed.

(Above: The removed skin of a priestess.)

Would a priestess awake there was only two more steps to prevent the Unleashing, the first of which were dependant on the shrine carpenters. These were the only males allowed to enter the Kuze Shrine whenever they were called upon. They were lead by Tengai Narumi, who's family had been serving the shrine for generations. There were two ranks to the workers: most of which were simple carpenters but four of which belonged to the Moriya family and who were tasked with upholding the code of construction. While their duties were not exclusively tied to preventing the Unleashing, they were vital to keep it contained and prevent the rift from reaching further out into the real world. Once they arrived they would construct a shrine on top of the Chamber of Thrones, so that no sunlight could reach it. This act is described in a text in game as:

Top shrine carpenters have been gathered together to seal the Kuze Shrine into the depths of (a) great cavern so that not even a single ray of light can enter into the darkness. Then, we must erect a Shrine of the Rift in front of the great cavern using Spirit Trees as the core pillars, and with Sacrificial Pillars arranged so that the darkness is purified and the rift cannot leak into the world.\footnote{Zero wiki. Moriya Tome 1. 2020.}
The text above mentions sacrificial pillars. This appears to have been a consistent ritual while the shrine was built and after its completion. These pillars were people who would be murdered rather unceremoniously and then entombed into the walls. Through the text in game it becomes apparent that the shrine carpenters believed this to act as a ward against the rift. Only the four Moriya carpenters and Tengai Narumi seems to have been aware of this code. During gameplay the player will see the simple carpenters fleeing in terror from the Moriya carpenters and Narumi, which indicates that they were completely unaware that they would not leave their assignment alive.

Once all of the regular carpenters had been disposed off, the Moriya carpenters would be next. With their knowledge of the Moriya Tome's it can be assumed that they went willingly. The events of the game breaks a vital part of the tome's however.

Excluding one who exceeds in their crafts, all the carpenters must fulfil their duty to protect the secrets of the shrine by being buried as the sacrificial pillars lining it. The remaining Moriya carpenter must become the Master Builder and ensure that the craft is carried on to the next generation."48.

This text indicates that, during regular circumstances, a Master Builder would be allowed to leave. As of the game this would have been Narumi. However, due to the strength of the rift that spread through the manor, he choose to become a final sacrificial pillar. As such the very last of the shrine carpenters and their knowledge perished with him.

(Above: Tengai Narumi, impaled as the last sacrificial pillar.)

If even this was not enough then a final act would be called upon that is named the Final

Impalement. This was a heavy burden that would fall onto the oldest of the handmaidens. Would the sacrificial pillars not be enough to contain the rift she would have to sacrifice her fellow handmaidens. By all previous indications of how important a role they had to subdue a sleeping priestess it leaves little speculation as to how drastic a measure the final impalement was. Once she had carried out this duty the last remaining handmaiden would also be requested to end her own life. While it is known that her comrades died by impalement it is not specified in game exactly how the final one was requested to take her own life. The only record given in game is through a diary entry that simply states: “Amane has been impaled at the bottom of the abyss. Same with Shigure and Minamo. Everyone's been impaled. I'm the only one left in the manor... because I was the last chosen.”

(Above: Handmaiden's completing the final impalement.)

The Tormented leans heavily onto symbolism with its tattoo motifs. In the book “Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees” the holly is mentioned as a symbolism of foresight and defence. Said books also mentions how western Christianity came to adopt this pagan flower into their interpretations of the suffering of Christ. In Japanese connotations however the holly is named Hiiragi. This name is derived of two parts hiira, which translate to aching or throbbing as well as ki which means tree. With this interpretation it makes a connection to the game: the holly represents pain that is engraved into the priestess, much like the prickly leafs of the holly tree.

There are many sources for the symbolic nature of snakes and how it ties together with the older folklore beliefs of Japan. A so called Hebi Tattoo or Japanese snake tattoo, is quite a popular motif to this day. The webpage Tatring speaks in detail of this traditional motif and how it's

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symbolism difference to that of the west: the Christian view on snakes are often negative due to how they are portrayed in biblical manuscripts while their meaning is much more positive in Japanese folklore\textsuperscript{51}. Snakes symbolises rebirth and renewal. These creatures are also mentioned in Foster's study on mythical beings from Japan. Here they are mentioned as popular creatures to tie myths around: more so from a scientific point of view as their bodies goes through transformations and can sometimes be born with two heads upon one body\textsuperscript{52}. In game this is mentioned in a folklore legend:

> The girl who lost her lover goes to the mountain to confide in the Master about the pains of her heart. Upon hearing the girl's story, the Master engraves a tattoo on the girl. After that day, the girl dreams of the man. But then she falls in love with someone else. The tattooed dream soon becomes a nightmare and the tattoo aches severely. The suffering girl goes to visit the Master again to see if she cannot remove the tattoos. The Master washes off the tattoos with water that gushes forth from a mountain spring. As she does this, the snake swims into the water and disappears deep into the spring.\textsuperscript{53}

Through the story told above the snake carries on the same sort of symbol of working through the pain and setting the snake free into the river: metaphorically allowing it's carrier to be reborn without the pain of the past.

Including the art of tattoo is itself calling back to Japan's rich but troubled history around the subject. This is brought up in the article found at the webpage Bodylore\textsuperscript{54}. The art of tattoos are refereed to as irezumi and ties far back into Japan's history. Despite the fact that it was a rich and popular tradition it was outright banned during the edo period: a stigma we can still see today due to the fact that public baths has the right to deny tattooed clients. In the article they touch upon the fact that tattoos became closely related to criminal activity and as such did not represent an upstanding citizen. The Tormented does not touch upon the more modern interpretations of tattoos. Instead it acts fully as a symbol connected with the folklore interpretations. Still, in the game there is an aura of secrecy and taboo around The Piercing of the Soul as a ritual: perhaps playing off the more modern stigma around tattoos as an art form.

Just like Crimson Butterfly, The Tormented also touches upon the subject of human sacrifices. In Noritake's text there is the following quote: “The tradition of human sacrifices is also concerned with the building of large bridges. For example, in the Yasiitomi-ki, a diary of the

fifteenth century, a famous tradition is contained, called Nagara-no Hitobashira (hitobashira, "human pillar"). Of note is the word hitobashira or human pillar which parallels with the use of sacrificial pillars within the game. Another type of mummification within religious practice in Japan was the so called Sokushinbutsu. Born as a connection between the old ways of Shinto and Taoism during the 7th century: this was the act of self starving to reach nirvana. In the works of Tullio Lobetti they mentions the powers that the body of a Sokushinbutsu would provide:

The body of the sokushinbutsu produces power and benefits by its mere presence, without the need for activity. They are objects of veneration, dispensers of gifts, refuges in time of calamity. Like living Buddhist saints, they spread the Dharma throughout the world by their mere physical presence.56

Within the context of this The Tormented has implemented a strong connection between a real world ritual that would bring a strong ward against anything otherworldly and their own interpretation of such an act.

4. Discussion

While each game treats a different subject and does not take place within the exact same cultural settings there is a great deal of work that has gone into making these paganistic and folkloristic worlds seem like something we could put into our own reality. Peter Aronsson details in his work on what he calls private history use and how it is usually a fuel to create a historical connection and companionship with others who share the same interest. This is spoken of in the following quote:

I realiserandet av dessa ser vi plötsligt en länk till den verksamhet som vikingabyarna gestaltar. Historiebruk som vi med föremåls eller tidskategorier inte alls skulle ställa nära varandra blir mer lika om vi utgår från vilka individens personliga drivkrafter kan vara bakom myndighet.57

Translated it reads as following:

In the realisation of these actions we can see a link between the history use in reconstructed Viking villages. Historical objects that span years apart can still be put next to one another and work their purpose if one instead looks upon what the individual interacting with them strives to learn about history and the use of it.

This sentence plays into how each game have chosen to approach their use of religious

history. For example The Tormented decided to rely heavily onto folklorist symbolism as well as the art of tattoos. Here they’ve used parts of Japan's history that does not accurately correlates with historical time periods: The Piercing of the Soul appears to have taken place in the 1800's, long after the Edo period ban of tattoos as an art form. In Pathologic's case there is debate even to this day if the gods from which the scarlet mistress and white mistress were created are even an accurate historical representation of Slavic paganism. Other subjects such as the act of sacrificial pillars are spanning over a large majority of time yet summed up in the most basic of ways within Crimson Butterfly and The Tormented.

Still from a history use perspective all of these small time skips work: just as was pointed out in Aronsson's study. A reason for this is that all three games makes heavy use of the ludonarrative. They rely on the player to be curious and interact with the content. As such these subjects are explored from a place of wonder meaning a player can enjoy them as individual pieces of history in a broader context. It is very possible that most players won't even know the ins and outs of these paganistic parts of history before they start dwelling deep. As such the games can serve as a light step in the right direction for developing deeper interest into the world of folklore and religious rituals.

Champan makes the following statement:

We experience and partake in a mimetic construct, but in doing so we decide/reveal a narrative. Thus, we can leave a game as we might a film, with a fully formed narrative. However, unlike the film, we can also leave with the memory of our actions and an acknowledgement of their role in the narrative that was created.  

This cite encapsulates the way in which digital games interacts with its audience. Putting this into the context of this thesis there is a pattern of how these relies heavily onto dialogue and written word to achieve this connection.

Pathologic stands out as a prime example of relying completely on the players interaction with the world. As mentioned in the analysis most information about the scarlet mistress and white mistress is made by talking to the inhabitants of the town. In this situation the player becomes a folklorist in their own regard, gathering information by conducting what most closely resemblance interviews with the townsfolk. Of note is also the ludonarrative at play: the player is given all information through the filtered gaze of the towns population. For example some seem to have feared the former scarlet mistress and feel relived that she is gone which is contradicted by others speaking highly of her. The narrative that is “true” is chosen by the player themselves.

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58 Chapman, Adam ,Digital Games As History, 2016. p.120.
All three games rely heavily on text and not too much onto cutscenes. This generally means a heavier emphasis on the players interactivity with the world around them. *Crimson Butterfly* and *The Tormented* have a plethora of in-game documentation of various rituals, sacrifices and other religious beliefs. This also leans into the ludonarrative side of digital games and their history use. A player’s session with the game can difference by several hours depending on how thorough they are in their investigation. As a reward they get more knowledge of how the in-game world works, finals to character arcs as well as a deeper understanding for how everything they are experiencing has come to be.

Chapman's book touches upon the fact that in some aspects a digital game and a film share some characteristics. He does however hit the head of the nail as to what the difference is: how deep the interactivity and choices of games can touch its players. This I consider to be a main example for what a source digital games can be as a learning tool for history and culture.

Given the open story structure of games have this further layer of narrative play beyond the spartial, they can more easily include historical concerns less focused on material action and can therefore more freely include ideological, cultural, intellectual and political themes as part of gameplay."59

So reads another citation from Chapman. It touches upon the usefulness of games as a tool to teach not only about the material things that a person would be able to see and touch. This is a vital role in a game as every player will not only be discussing these matters with their peers or other players but there is a heavy emphasis on what debate the player have with themselves as they are moving through the story.

Each game deals with a religious aspect yet none of them have been made in order to change anyone's religious conviction. In *Pathologic* the player is either a part of the village: when playing *The Haruspex* or *The Changeling* yet they are free to interpret how where they stand on the religious aspects of the town. As *The Bachelor* one is instead an outsider and free to take in the pagan beliefs of the town with a view not yet coloured by any family ties to it. In both cases the player themselves are free to think, philosophies and construe about the topic at hand. For every inhabitant that may scoff at their belief there will be another that is willing to agree. This creates a narrative in which the player themselves have full freedom to engage and create their own narrative of the religious aspects.

While the two latter games have narratives more set in stone there is still a heavy emphasise on historical ideals. A way in which these help the player is how their ludonarrative ties

itself onto physical objects. Crimson Butterfly have the symbolism of butterflies spread all over the village: tying together what the player reads and narrates to themselves to what they can also see in the framed narrative of the game. Both games include items that needs gathering but many times the player has already heard what ritual purpose these are for. In a broader context this can be seen as the creators building up a very believable religious environment. The thoughts, ideal and convictions of the games are introduced first but then tied to objects. This calls back to how religious aspects are often interacted with in today's society: many of the main religious beliefs relies on places of prayer and artefacts with strong connection to their convictions.

Digital games can form their narratives and worlds to discuss historical ideas as well as physical places. In this study it has been shown that they can even introduce and entertain ideological and religious ideas without infringing onto a players personal belief.

5. Conclusion

Digital games as a medium to express history, be it in ideals or historical settings have started to cement itself within the academical world. Many studies have paved way for this thesis: relaying gathered information of the depth that a creator can go into to retell historical information to their player base. This thesis have shown that there is a broad array of ways in which one can use the traces of real world paganism to inform and grown an interest in a player.

During my analysis I've found that there are more ways to teach history than just the inclusion of a historical object, city or battlefield. With the help of narrative structures creators can also touch upon the ideals, ideologies and philosophical nature that has followed humanity. As such most of the previous work onto games as a story tool for history is very correct in their terminology. I do feel however that there is plenty of rooms for studies similar to this which could serve as a tool for further deepen narrative structures when it comes to digital games and their use of history.

As the studies continues to grow it is my sincerest hope that more academics will turn towards the historical concerns and ideals rather than simply concentrate on what can physically be touched.
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