CHRONOTOPE IN WESTERN ROLE-PLAYING VIDEO GAMES:

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE GENERATION OF NARRATIVE MEANING THROUGH ITS DIALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HEROIC EPIC AND FANTASY

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by

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Chronotope in Western Role-Playing Video Games: An investigation of the generation of narrative meaning through its dialogical relationship with the Heroic Epic and Fantasy

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Abstract

The development of the video game industry and the increasing popularity of the medium as a form of entertainment have led to significant developments in the discipline of game studies and a growing awareness of the cultural significance of video games as cultural artefacts. While much work has been done to understand the narrative aspect of games, there are still theoretical gaps on the understanding of how video games generate their narrative experience and how this experience is shaped by the player and the game as artefact. This interdisciplinary study investigates how meaning is created in Western Role Playing Games (WRPGs) video games by analysing the narrative strategies they employ in relation to those commonly used in Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives. It adopts the Bakhtinian concepts of *chronotope* and *dialogue* as the main theoretical tools to examine the creation and integration of narratives in WRPGs with a special focus on the time-space perspective. *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* and *Dragon Age Origins* were chosen as representatives of the WRPG video game genre while *Beowulf* and the tale of Sigurd, as it appears in the *Poetic Edda* and the *Volsung Saga,* were chosen as representatives of the Heroic Epic poetic tradition. References are also made to Fantasy novels, especially the work of J.R.R. Tolkien. Textual analysis along with some techniques employed by researchers working with visual methodologies and compositional interpretation were used to analyse relevant aspects of the texts and games. The findings suggest that intertextual and genre materials considerably shape the narrative of WRPGs and exercise a profound dialogical effect on the ludonarrative harmony of the games investigated through their interaction with the game world and gameplay systems. This relationship is most visible in the chronotopic (time-space) aspect of the chosen games. The findings also suggest that Epic material dialogically orients the WRPG players' experience and adjusts their expectations and understanding of the fictional world. This study as well as the refining of chronotopic analytical tools to encompass *chronotopic awareness, transportation,* and *flow* may be of use in further chronotopic investigations of different games, literary genres, and/or other media artefacts.

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Acknowledgement

To my Mum, who made me who I am. I couldn't do it without you and your support. Love always.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously submitted to the Brunel University London or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

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Chapter 1 - Overview

1.1 Introduction

This is an interdisciplinary investigation that brings together the areas of game studies and literature in an exploration of the narrative nature of video games. This study is based on the premise that stories are how we understand experience (Aristotle, n.d; Booker, 2005; Kearney, 2002; Scholes et al., 2006) and on the view that video games are a means of generating experiences that are unique (Frasca, 2003). The development of the video game industry and the increasing popularity of the medium as a form of entertainment have led to significant developments in the discipline of game studies (Aarseth, 1997; Bogost, 2006; Bolter, 2000; Newman, 2004; Zagal, 2010) and a growing awareness of the cultural significance of video games as cultural artefacts (Bogost, 2010; Ellis et al., 2006; Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Tavinor, 2009). This study analyses how meaning is created in Western Role Playing Games (WRPGs) video games by carrying out a comparative study of the narrative strategies they employ with those commonly used in Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives. It adopts the Bakhtinian concepts of *chronotope* and *dialogue* as the main theoretical tools to examine the creation and integration of narratives and stories in WRPGs with a special focus on the time-space perspective (Bakhtin, 1981). The choice of using Bakhtinian inspired analysis rather than other more fixed theories of spatiality, temporality, and/or genre categorization is because Bakhtinian inspired thought seems to more accurately encompasse the ever evolving and shifting intertextual relations that this study aims to capture. In this study, Heroic Epic pertains to the literature that evolved out of oral storytelling (Kirk, 2010; Quinn, 2000) where the hero and the quest often constitute the main narrative focus. Meaning strategies frequently used in Fantasy, such as secondary belief and world building, are also discussed as a way of bridging the gap between those narrative forms and modern WRPGs and to better understand the differences and similarities between this particular literary genre and the selected games.

This investigation aims to contribute to the field of game studies by furthering the understanding of a specific video game genre and its connections with some literary works, thus drawing on literary criticism to illuminate the analysis of the games. This study follows on the steps of a few previous scholarly works that draw on Epic and Fantasy literature to

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analyse games. For instance, the quest structure and the archetype monomyth (Campbell, (2008) have already been used by some game scholars (Aarseth, 2004; Howard, 2008; Tosca, 2003) to aid the understanding of video game narratives. This work aims to take such examination a step further by adopting a very distinct theoretical framework for the analysis of narratives in WRPGs. One aspect that makes this investigation unique is the use of Bakhtin's (1981) work in the field of literary analysis to examine the narratives strategies in WRPGs. In this interdisciplinary study, I adopt the Bakhtinian concepts of chronotope and dialogue as the main theoretical tools to analyse the generation of narrative meaning in *Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011) *and Dragon Age Origins (DAO) (*Bioware, 2009).

Similarly, this investigation aims to contribute to the field of literary studies by looking at intertextual inclusion and adoption of Heroic Epic and Fantasy material into narratives in the medium of video games. It thus draws on game studies research to better understand how the narrative experience works in complex cultural artefacts, such as video games, in order to illuminate the dialogical intertextual relationship between works separated by long periods of time. By bringing together video games and literature, this study also positions itself in the field of media history where scholars (Howsam, 2014; Ong & Hartley, 2012) examine how medium changes and literature closely relate to each other. As argued by Hammond (2016, pp. 22–37), the move from printing to the digital age is only the fourth stage in medium shifts that have characterized the history of literature: from oral to manuscript, to mechanical reproduction, to the digital age. Moreover, he argues that 'periods of medium transition have tended to be productive moments for literary thinking' as they create 'opportunities to understand better what literature is' (p. 22).

By looking at the literary material embedded in the WRPGs, this study hopes to contribute to our understanding of how literature finds its way into the medium of digital interactive narratives and how reciprocally video games can help literature thrive and expand in a new media environment. This has also the potential to shed light on how archetypal images derived from ancient tales continue to evolve and change through adaptation into new narratives. It may help us see literature as not bound exclusively to the written word, well-established genres, and canonical texts, but as an integral part of human culture that is in constant relationship with new digital forms of human artistic expression (Hammond, 2016,

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pp. 175–197). Simultaneously, it may help us see video games as complex multimedia products that take part in a large network of cultural and artistic manifestations.

1.2 Research focus and research question

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Bethesda, 2011) (henceforth *Skyrim*) and *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)* (Bioware, 2009) were the selected video games for this investigation. They serve as examples for the analysis of chronotope in WRPGs since they display features that are often found in this particular game genre. Although the discussion focuses mostly on these two games, it is important to mention that they serve as illustrations of the principles that may be observed in other games of the same genre, albeit particular instances in other game intellectual properties (IPs) may differ. The analysis of *Skyrim* and *DAO* shows that by evoking elements commonly present in literary Heroic Epic narratives through archetypal inclusion, allusion, and adaptation of heroic material, WRPGs not only enrich the game narrative experience but position the player by creating a guiding narrative framework that shapes the players' gameplay experience and reinforce presence. These inserted narrative elements may come directly from the Heroic Epic or may be mediated by other forms of storytelling, especially the Chivalric Romance, Fantasy, and film. It is the main argument of this study that such incorporation of Heroic Epic narrative elements into WRPGs should be examined beyond a comparison of the similarities and differences between these different media and/or between specific game IPs, but as the archetypal matrix that informs players' attitudes and expectations towards the gameplay and the narrative to be derived from playing similar WRPGs.

This research is indebted to the previous work in the field of game studies and aims to continue some of these initial discussions, such as the one on the role of narratives and their effect on the player's experience. While much work has been done to understand the narrative aspect of games − some giving due focus to the time and space aspect of the video game experience (Ip, 2011a, 2011b; Stamenkovi & Jacevic, 2015) − there are still theoretical gaps on the understanding of how video games generate their narrative experience and how this experience is shaped both by the player and the game as artefact. To advance this understanding, I draw on some literary theory and theory of language informed by structuralist and post-structuralist ideas (Barthes, 1977; Culler, 2002; Kristeva, 1980;

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Saussure, 2011) and apply them to the analysis of the games and texts from a Bakhtinian dialogical point of view. The choice of Bakhtin as the main theoretical underpinning for this study is a natural progression from my previous academic work on the dialogical relationships between Heroic Epic and Fantasy (Lima, 2016) and, above all, reflects my views on the dialogical nature of all living interactions (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 279). It is important to mention that I have not identified in the current literature in the field works which mainly draw on the concepts of dialogue and chronotope (Bakhtin, 1981) as the chief theoretical framework for the understanding of video game narratives as I propose in this study.

I acknowledge and accept the tensions inherent to the video game medium and attempt a more holistic view towards an understanding that the resulting harmonies and dissonances in terms of gameplay and narrative should be viewed as more than just 'good' or 'bad' game design that allows for better engagement or immersion, but as having complex effects on the experience and composition of the game as a whole.

This interdisciplinary piece of research aligns itself with what Bogost (2006, p. 54) calls *comparative video game criticism* as it attempts to ask questions such as 'what do videogames do, what happens when players interact with them, and how do they relate to, participate in, extend, and revise the cultural expression at work in other kinds of artefacts.' By comparing the selected WRPGs and literary texts, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the relationships between Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives and their video game counterparts. This is done by drawing on some of the theories about imaginary world building and by analysing the texts from a dialogical and chronotopic point of view (Bakhtin, 1981) while considering the overall structure of the games and texts. Considerable attention is given to allusion, thematic differences and similarities, characterization, and the inherent differences that come with storytelling in the different media considered in this investigation.

In the light of the above, the fundamental concern of this study can be summarized in the following question:

How do the shared and differing chronotope configurations of the Heroic Epic, Fantasy, and WRPGs help generate narrative meaning and shape the players' game experience?

1.3 The scope of this study

The role playing game, or RPG for short, is one of the best established video game genres, having evolved from the table-top RPGs, such as *Dungeons and Dragons* (Wizards of the Coast, 1974) and the Generic Universal Roleplaying System (GURPS) (Jackson, 2004). Video game RPGs make use of various game systems developed by their predecessors, such as levelling up and character stats. The typical RPG setting is the medieval fantastical, which is also common to Fantasy novels with Science Fiction settings being a close second. As a genre, the RPG makes heavy use of the Quest format to aid in its progression. Due to the similarities between RPG and Heroic Epic narratives in terms of generic material and structure, I have chosen for this comparative study texts from the Heroic Epic tradition: the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* (Heaney, 2007) and the Old Norse tale of Sigurd, as it appears in both the *Poetic Edda* (Larrington, 2008) and in the *Volsung Saga* (Byock, 2000). However, the focus of this study is not placed on in-depth textual analysis of these Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts; instead it uses them chiefly as points of reference for the chronotopic analysis of the selected games. For this reason, translations/versions of the poems have been chosen instead of the original texts in the *Cotton Vitellius* manuscript (British Library, 2016) and the *Codex Regius* (Grimm, 2010). My rather limited command of Old English also made me choose translations that I believe would give me better access to and understanding of the intricacies of the texts. Seamus Heaney's modern translation of *Beowulf* was chosen for the poet's ability to preserve 'the flow without sacrificing the vigorous alliterative rhythm of the original lines' (Donoghue, 2000) and, as Eagleton (1999, p. 16) puts it, Heaney's capacity to 'dig down with his pen to "the first stratum of the language"' and appropriate is as 'his birthright'. Larrington's and Byock's translations and editing of the *Poetic Edda* and the *Volsung Saga*, respectively, have also been chosen for the quality of their versions and their accessibility.

The Quest format is also frequently present in Fantasy literature. The Fantasy novel, as it is known today, is a relatively new literary creation, with its most famous works being probably those of Tolkien and his fellow Inkling, C. S. Lewis (Clark & Timmons, 2000; James, 2012). As a genre, Fantasy owes its existence to older narratives (Drout, 2004; Manlove, 1999), epic poems, such *Beowulf* and the *Odyssey,* as well as Chivalric Romance narrative poems, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Tolkien, Gordon, & Davis,

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1967), displaying many characteristics and themes present in both genres. Fantasy literature's most recognizable features are the heavy use of fantastic material (Senior, 2012), hence the term Fantasy, and the tendency to generate self-contained myth and imaginary worlds (Wolf, 2014). Works of Fantasy are hence also considered in this study; however, Heroic Epic literature remains the most pertinent literary genre for a comparison with the selected WRPGs not only because of the recognizable shared generic material and themes between Heroic Epic and most WRPGs, but also for the fact that the Epic has had its own generation of meaning extensively studied. Bakhtin's (1981) work on the Epic is central to this investigation, more specifically the key concepts of dialogue and chronotope. When compared with the contemporary medium of video games as a whole and the selected WRPGs, the ancient origin and mode of narrative of these texts offer a juxtaposition that helps highlight the similarities and unique traits of both narrative forms. *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011) and *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)* (Bioware, 2009), the two video games chosen for this investigation, can be categorized as belonging to the Western Role Playing Game (WRPG) genre, which is known for emphasizing the narrative dimension of video games. References to other specific games are also made when they serve to illuminate the discussion.

1.4 Clarification of terms

The terms presented below are not intended as authoritative definitions, but rather as a means of clarifying how some key concepts are understood and used in this study. The terminology here is divided into three broad groups. The first group presents the core concepts that guide this investigation while the second and the third comprise the two disciplines that are interwoven in this piece of research: literature and game studies.

1.4.1 Core concepts

The two most important terms in this investigation are those in which the analysis of the relationships between the WRPGSs, literary texts, and other media is rooted: chronotope and dialogue.

   Chronotope is time and space as present and depicted in a narrative (Bakhtin, 1981). The time aspect of the chronotope can be divided into three facets: time setting in relation to the reader (past−present−future); the verbal tense of the narration (past−present−future); and

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time flow, which relates to the movement of time throughout the narrative (compression and/or expansion of time awareness within the narrative). Most successful narratives employ more than one chronotope configuration. Bakhtin (p. 85) claims that analysing the most prominent chronotope in a given narrative makes it possible to identify its genre. The space aspect of the chronotope can also be divided into three facets: general setting (geographical location); immediate space of action (the specific location where the action is taking place at any given moment in the narrative); and movement through narrative space (compression and/or expansion of spatial awareness in the narrative).

Dialogue is the term Bakhtin (1981) uses to refer to the two-way relationship between any two objects in the living world, including discourse, where both are generators and receptors of meaning informing each other and creating a constant two-way cycle of influence and meaning. When taken to the context of several interacting objects, this becomes a very complex ever-shifting web of meaningful relations. Any given dialogue can become an object in itself, further adding to the complexity of the webs (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276).

1.4.2 Literature related terms

Two closely connected key concepts often discussed in literary studies are story and narrative. A *story* embodies the human understanding and organization of events, real or not, which necessarily take place in a certain time and space, even if the time and the space are not explicitly made known. A story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, since it attempts to imitate the human experience of time (Aristotle, n.d.). *Narrative***,** on the other hand, is a story that has been arranged and altered for delivery and consumption. A narrative often has a narrator or narrative voice, though not necessarily. A narrative is a story that is being told or shown. It must, thus, necessarily engage a teller and a receiver. The term 'narrative', however, is often used interchangeably with 'story' (Meyer Howard Abrams, 1999, pp. 173–174). *Plot* is another associated term frequently used and it refers to the bare facts of a story. While the story derived from engaging with a narrative has moral and emotional overtones attached to it, the plot extracted from a story presents only an emotionless skeleton of the action.

Another pair of key terms often used in this investigation refers to major literary genres: Epic and Fantasy. By *Epic* I mean an ancient form of narrative characterized by absolute distancing in time where both the time setting and the verbal tense of the narration

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are in the past (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 3–40). It is also characterized by the almost mythological subject matter and is usually populated by heroes and monsters (Booker, 2005, pp. 21–50). The Epic tends to be a highly moralized form of narrative. Heroes and monsters are also frequently present in *Fantasy***,** a modern genre of novelistic writing that differs from highly mimetic realistic fiction by taking a more non-representational and, therefore fantastic, approach to the story, becoming thus akin to myth and epic writing. Being a novelistic genre, the chronotope of Fantasy is in the present tense. As such, Fantasy must create the distancing necessary for immersion through space. It characteristically places its stories in a different dimension, hence creating alien and separate realities without clashing with readers' understanding of their own reality (Tolkien, 2006, pp. 5–48). In this, Fantasy differs from Myth, Epic and Science Fiction, since these other genres achieve a similar effect mostly by distancing through time, namely absolute past and possible future, respectively. Fantasy as a genre tends to incorporate myth and epic material into its own narrative world-building. Tolkien (1937; 1954), most famously, was highly inspired by Old Norse and Old English writing and incorporated ideas and character names from such sources into his own writing (James, 2012).

Archetype is understood here as an idealized collective concept (Jung, 1981) amalgamated from several particular instances that share some resemblance with each other. In literature, archetypes are usually character related. One of the most classic and recurrent archetypes in literature is the 'hero' figure (Campbell, 2008) which is associated with protagonists capable of extraordinary feats, such as Hercules, Ulysses and Beowulf. There is a dialogical relationship between an archetype and any particular representative instance. For example, Hercules, as a character, gains meaning from the hero archetype whereas the hero archetype is enriched by its association with the figure of Hercules. Archetypes are closely associated with another important concept: myth**.** *Myth* is a highly abstract story usually concerning deities and mystical beings. Like epic narratives, myths are usually set in the absolute past. Their subject matter is usually related to the natural aspects of the world and the origins of all things (creational myths) whereas epic narratives tend to concern themselves with human relationship with nature (Frye, 2000, pp. 131–239). *Archetypal image* is a term used here for lesser archetypal feats of imagination, hence the word 'image' An archetypal image can be defined as the amalgamated understanding of what an 'apple' is based on an individual's personal experience with this object, the collective understanding of

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what an apple is, and the surrounding cultural and historical symbols and motifs associated with it. The concept of archetypal image is further discussed in the section on post-structuralism (Section 2.3.2).

Closely associated are the notions of imagination and immersion. *Imagination*, and its various aspects, has been abundantly discussed in literature with thinkers often espousing both complementing and competing views of it (Bronowski, 1979; Coleridge, 1817; Frye, 1964; Kearney, 1998). In this work, imagination is understood as the human capacity to internalize external stimuli (perception) and, through this internalization, criticize, categorize, moralize, relate, abstract, and synthesize them into ideas and concepts. Within the human capacity for imagination, this work discerns two forces in dialogical relationship that drive the imaginative process. One is *mimesis*, which entails the tendency to approximate the internalization as closely as possible to the original stimuli, i.e. perceived reality (Hume, 1984). The other, is *fantasy* (with small f), which consists of the opposite force that tends to distance the internalization from any particular stimuli. Considering both forces, fantasy is the one that tends to lead to higher conceptualization and more non-representational thinking. Human capacity to imagine makes it possible for readers and players to be 'transported' into the narratives with which they engage. The state of being absorbed into the narrative in such a way that the consciousness perceives it as a version of reality is known as *immersion*. The consciousness is drawn into the chronotope of the story temporarily replacing its own for it. Immersion is achieved through suspension of disbelief (Coleridge, 1817, p.314) and/or secondary belief (Tolkien, 2009, pp.3–73).

1.4.3 Game Studies related terms

Before moving into video games, it is important to have a working definition of *game*. According to Suits (2005, pp. 54–55),

> [t]o play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude].

In other words, playing a game means to accept arbitrary rules and unnecessary limitations in order to achieve an objective, be it well-defined (i.e.: put the ball in the back of a net) or open (i.e.: pretend to be a cop or robber) while making the activity not only possible but separate

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from everyday life. *Video games* are games that make use of visual technology and feedback response through the use of an interactive interface device, usually a controller or a computer keyboard (Fencott, Clay, & Lockyer, 2012, pp. 178–180). Often, though not necessarily, a video game presents the development of a narrative as its goal, with the story unfolding as the player clears challenges imposed by the complex rules of its virtual environment. *Role Playing Games (RPG)* are games that make use of complex rules in order to generate a gameplay environment that makes it possible for the player to perform the role of a character in usually fantastic worlds and/or dynamic action (combat and/or travelling) without physical exertion or danger. Many video games take up the moniker RPG and attempt to do the same in their virtual environs, adapting gameplay mechanics from their table-top counterparts. Although there are no clear-cut separation, with exceptions existing in both sub-genres, traditionally there are two main strands in video game RPGs: (1) the Japanese RPGs (JRPG), which typically focus on character development and linear storytelling, leaving little space for player impact, and (2) Western RPGs (WRPG), which often focus on an open gameplay environment, with player choice having a larger impact on the narrative but often sacrificing narrative depth and character development.

Two important concepts in the field of game studies particularly relevant for the discussion on the WRPGs in this study are game system and gameplay. *Game system* is a term mostly used in relation to video games rather than games in general. It is the series of programming rules that 'determine the procedures and operations that will utilize game resources' (Barry, 2010, p. 69) and which dictates the player interactions thus generating gameplay. *Gameplay* is understood here as a pattern of actions that revolves around the playing of a game. In video games, gameplay is defined as the player's interaction with the game rules and programming systems (Ermi & Mayra, 2007, p. 40). Gameplay can vary considerably from game to game: from reflex-based, more active interaction, and even frenetic pace at one end of the spectrum, to slow, considerate, and strategic action at the other. Occasionally, such variations occur within a single given game.

Crucial for the discussion of how the chronotopes of the narrative and the game affect players are the concepts of presence, immersion and engagement. These have been extensively discussed in video game studies generating multiple, and at times conflicting, definitions (Bracken & Skalski, 2010; Ermi & Mayra, 2007; Lachlan & Krcmar, 2011; Lee,

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2004; Lombard, Biocca, Freeman, IJsselsteijn, & Schaevitz, 2015; Wilcox-Netepczuk, 2013). In this study, I adopt some working definitions drawn from the literature in the field and which I believe are in line with my epistemological understanding of the nature of the WRPGs and the experience they afford players. Basically, *presence* is the sense of inhabiting the game fictional space to a certain degree through heightened chronotopic awareness. *Immersion,* which is mentioned in Section 1.4.2 in relation to suspension of disbelief, can be described in the context of game playing as the state of being absorbed into the game narrative to a degree that the player's consciousness perceives it as a form of reality, being thus momentarily drawn into the chronotope of the fiction. *Engagement* is understood as the holistic act of being in the game flow and hence actively committed to the playing of the game and/or engaging with its narrative.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This chapter has provided an overview of the focus of this study and established its scope in the interdisciplinary context of video game and literary studies. It has also provided definitions of core concepts and key terms in both fields which, albeit recognizing the existance of conflicting and competing definitions, closely reflect how such terms are generally understood in the context of this investigation.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical underpinning of this investigation. It starts by considering relevant general concepts drawn from philosophy, epistemology, and literary criticism, such as the concepts of mimetic imagination, fantastic imagination, suspension of disbelief, and secondary belief (Section 2.2). The following section (Section 2.3) consists of a discussion of literary theory per se by briefly considering structuralist and post-structuralist/deconstructionist theories. Appoaches to the analyis of literary texts serve as a gateway to an understanding of Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue, distancing, and chronotope (Section 2.4), which are the pillars upon which the analysis of the video games in this study rests. Chronotope is first discussed in relation to narratives and genres and then in terms of chronotopic awareness, transportation, and flow. These are fundamental concepts for the analyis of the video games selected for this investigation. This is followed by a section on game studies theory (Section 2.5) which focuses on understandings of time and space in the field since these aspects are highly significant for this piece of research. This section also examines the concepts of immersion, presence and engagement and presents a brief survey

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on Bakhtinian informed research in the field of game studies. The chapter continues with an examination of different forms of storytelling focusing on the Heroic Epic, Chivalric Romance, the Fantasy Novel, and WRPGs (Section 2.6). The final section in the chapter (Section 2.7) makes considerations on research methodology and provides a description of the analytical stages taken in this investigation.

Chapter 3 starts with a general discussion of time in narrative (Section 3.2) where the concepts of 'real' time and narrative time are scrutinized and discussed in relation to each other and in relation to readers and players' experiences of time when engaging with narratives. This is followed by sections that look at time in the Heroic Epic (Section 3.3) and Fantasy literature (Section 3.4) before moving into the discussion of time in WRPGs in general (Section 3.5). The following sub-sections are then concerned with the examination of particular aspects related to time in *Skyrim* and *Dragon Ages Origins* (*DAO*). The chapter concludes (Section 3.5) with a discussion of the importance of an understanding of time in both games, and in the WRPG genre as a whole, from a chronotopic point of view and how this differs from other temporal understandings proposed by most game theorists so far.

Chapter 4 extends the discussion of chronotope to the spatial aspects of narratives in general (Section 4.2) and then more specifically in the Heroic Epic and Fantasy (Sections 4.3 and 4.4). The chapter then proceeds with the examination of the spatial elements and the understanding of space in WRPGs (Section 4.5) with sub-sections on *Skyrim* and *DAO*. Similarly to the previous chapter on time, Chapter 4 concludes (Section 4.6) with a discussion of the importance of understanding space in both games and the strategies they use to situate the player and deal with the disorientation factor, also pointing out how such Bakhtinian informed understanding of the space differs from other approaches to space in video games.

Chapter 5 brings the previous chapters together by conducting an examination of specific aspects in the games that serve as evidence of the ongoing dialogue among Old English and Old Norse Heroic Epic narratives, Fantasy narratives, and WRPGs (Section 5.2). It includes discussions on the hero and the quest, the characterization of NPCs, bestiary, and weapons and other items. This is followed by an analysis of how such dialogue forges the players' experience of the game (Section 5.3) thus affecting their sense of presence and immersion. This section also includes considerations on dissonance and orientation through intertextuality and imagery. The chapter ends with a brief summary of how the concept of chronotope illuminates particular aspects related to the game design of *Skyrim* and *DAO*.

Chapter 6 concludes this study by summarizing its findings (Section 6.2) and examining its limitations (Section 6.3). This is followed by a discussion of the relevance and the main contributions this investigation offers to the field of games studies by adopting a chonotopic approach to the analysis of time and space in the generation of WRPGs narrative meaning. The section also focuses on the possible implications of adopting this approach to game developers and researchers and those who want to better understand the WRPG video game player's experience with some suggestions for further developments of research in the field. The final section is devoted to the steps that have already been taken to disseminate the ideas proposed here as well as future initiatives to circulate the findings of this study.

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Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The literature review that follows draws mainly on scholarship in the two main disciplines in which this study is positioned: literary studies and game studies. This chapter starts with an examination of the general concepts and theories that underpin this research (Section 2.2). It constitutes an important part of the literature review since the analysis carried out in this study hinges upon such theoretical framework (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006; Correa & Owens, 2009). These are notions that inform all 'higher' levels of theorizing in the fields of literary criticism and game studies (Fossheim, Sageng, & Larsen, 2012) and are crucial to this investigation. They are, therefore, discussed in their own section, so that the reader can better follow the line of thinking adopted in this work. At the same time, the comparative critical analysis of the texts both supports and informs this study's philosophical framework since my understanding of the concepts and theories presented here have been influenced by the critical thinking behind the analysis of the games.

The second section deals with literary theory (Section 2.3) focusing on structuralism and post-structuralism/deconstruction and how they are relevant to video game scholarship. This is followed by a discussion of Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue, distancing, and chronotope, and their relevance to this study (Section 2.4). The following section on theoretical approaches to video games (Section 2.5) focuses on studies related to time and space in games, as well as notions of presence, immersion, and engagement. This is followed by a section on forms of storytelling (Section 2.6) which examines narrative in the different media, from the written/oral text in Heroic Epic literature to digital video games, discussing how their similarities and differences affect the application of the literary theory and the analysis of the texts and games themselves. The chapter ends with a clarification of the research methodologies employed in this investigation (Section 2.7).

2.2 General concepts and theories

2.2.1 Stories, narratives, generation of meaning, and archetype

Stories are intrinsic to human nature; they are how humankind understands its own experiences (Aristotle, n.d.; Bakhtin, 1981; Berger, 1996; Frye, 1964; Kearney, 2002; Lévi-Strauss, 1978; Propp, 1984). Events are only understood by the human mind upon ordering and organizing them unto a story (Kearney, 2002, pp. 1–14) and as such they are present in our everyday life, as well as in history and fiction. The definition of what exactly stories are, and the difference between story, narrative, and plot is far from clear-cut (Karhulahti, 2012) as the terms are often used interchangeably. In order to avoid confusion, since the terms as they are used here might differ from what the reader might understand as being story, narrative and plot, I elect to use a particular set of definitions that are informed by my reading of various alternative views of the terms (Section 1.4.1). The conceptual definitions proposed here owe a good debt to Semiotics and its concern with the relationships between sign and signifier (Saussure, 2011). Although the differentiation between story and narrative adopted in this study was borne mainly from the necessity to distinguish the terms when conducting the analysis of the texts and games, 'even the preliminary investigations' (Cobley, 2014, pp. 3–4) exposed the need for establishing the fundamental differences between them.

Story is thus understood as a sequence of all the events, real or otherwise, 'which are to be depicted' (Cobley, 2014, p.5) and which have a link running through it so as to make the grouping logical. Bakhtin (1981, pp. 84–258), when discussing time and chronotope in the Novel, asserts that the method of organizing any story is always that of time and space since these are the basic units that enable humans to understand experience. Without both of them, events would not be possible and what is told would instead be a static description rather than a story (Berger, 1996, p. 4). *Narrative*, on the other hand, is understood here as a story that has been transposed into signs by a teller for the consumption of others (Toolan, 2012, pp. 1–11). Signs should be understood as any particular entity used to stand for another object or concept in order to facilitate communication. Examples of signs are images, graphemes, and sounds (Barthes, 1977). A narrative may not necessarily be organized in a strict chronological order since the reader will, upon reading it, 'reconstruct' the story from its signs. The idea of story, as it is presented here, is thus an idealized form; it cannot be physically construed except in the imperfect form of the narrative. As Cobley argues (2014,

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pp. 11–19), the 'notion of narrative progression or a movement from A to B implies that there is such a thing as narrative space' but it also involves the notion of time. A story could also be understood as the basic unit of any narrative, as no narrative can be told without a storyline. A narrative, however, may contain more than one storyline, weaving them together into a larger story or *plot*. According to Chatman (2004, p. 121),

> Structuralist theory argues that each narrative has two parts: a story (*histoire*), the content or chain of events (actions, happenings), plus what may be called the existents (characters, items of settings); and a discourse (*discours*) that is, the expression, the means by which the content is communicated.

However, it is important to emphasize that definitions of narrative are far from settled and agreed upon by either scholars in various fields of knowledge or narratologists themselves. Ryan (2007, pp. 22–24) considers various definitions of narrative and three potential domains for a definition − 'discourse, story, and use' − but, controversially, argues that unless you are a narratologist, 'differences in opinion do not carry significant cognitive differences' (p.31) since we all seem to know what a narrative is (pp. 32–33). Yet, it is significant that many of the definitions Ryan reviews make explicit reference to temporality and relations between narrative elements (p. 23), which are aspects particularly relevant to this study and to my argument for the importance of understanding narrative chronotope and the dialogical relationships between different narratives forms. Ryan also argues that the fact that most humans can, to a large extent, distinguish different forms of narrative and different genres is more important than debating over analytical concepts of narrative (p. 32). This is also an important argument since at the core of this investigation is a consideration of the relationships between different narrative genres in different media (Hammond, 2016, p. 41).

Narrative in video games comes in many and varied forms. Some more abstract video games, such as Tetris (Pajitnov & Pokhilko, 1984), could be seen as not having a narrative at all, whereas some action and adventure games, such as the *God of War* series (Santa Monica, 2002) and the *Uncharted* series (Naughty Dog, 2007), present narratives very similar to those found in cinema (Carr, et al, 2006; Ip, 2008, p. 108). There are also games, such as the *Dragon Age* (Bioware, 2009) and *Mass Effect* (Bioware, 2007) RPG series which present narratives that adapt to particular choices made by the player. Finally, there are games, such as *The Sims* (Electronic Arts, 2000) and *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011), which depend entirely on their game system to generate events in a largely unscripted manner. Commenting on early

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arguments by Juul and Aarseth against approaching videogames as narratives, Hammond (2016, p. 189) argues that at the moment players reach a point where their freedom to determine the game narrative is restricted by the game programming, players are taken back into the domain of traditional narrative. He sees the 'persistence of narrative' as 'a firm link connecting the world of literature to that of videogames' which allows us to evaluate 'their suitability as a carrier for the literary impulse into the digital future' (p. 190). The comparative analysis between narrative in WRPGs and in Epic and Fantasy literature proposed here is, as mentioned above, largely informed by theories of meaning and by a Bakhtinian approach to literary criticism, consisting of a dialogical view of the relations between all parties involved in the consumption and interpretation of a video game while paying close attention to the chronotopic aspect of the story experience.

The concepts of *meaning* and *generation of meaning* have been historically connected to the interpretation of texts and constitute one of the foundation stones of literary criticism (Eagleton, 2008). These are complex concepts and, as such, have been the concern of various philosophical traditions. At a more superficial level, generation of meaning could be defined as how things come to make sense to the human mind. Much academic and scholarly thought has been given to the subject of what meaning constitutes, ranging from classic philosophy and scholastic doctrines (Moser & Nat, 2002) to modern Hermeneutics (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2013). A great part of the difficulty surrounding attempting to understand what meaning is comes from the fact that to even begin to explain the term *meaning* is likely to depend on the use of some form of synonym, such as how things make *sense*, how we *understand* things, or what we *infer,* which in turn require further scrutiny themselves. In spite of such difficulties, generation of meaning is perhaps still one of the most important concepts there is since the capacity for understanding is the hallmark of the conscious mind and one of the cornerstones of human experience (Bronowski, 1979; Brook, 2013; Ricoeur, 1981; Skirbekk & Gilje, 2001). The term *generation* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015b) is used here to better convey the sense that meaning is always gradually accumulated and added to over time, rather than the idea of a more instantaneous original source of meaning that may be conveyed by the term *creation* and its biblical associations (Oxford English Dictionary, 2015a).

Philosophical discussions of how perception, meaning, and understanding happen in the human mind (Hermeneutics, and also Semiotics) (Ramberg and Gjesdal, 2013, online)

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have been the subject of human preoccupation as far back as Plato (n.d.). In the allegory of the cave, Plato alludes to a true reality outside the 'shadows' of the normally perceived experience to which a philosopher's mind connects. Scholarly discussion on the topic has continued throughout the Western history of thought (Moser & Nat, 2002). For instance, the Romantics (Warnock, 1978, pp. 72–130) associated a similar 'ideal and complete reality' to the realm of the divine, hence all meaning derives from God and we are but His image. Jungian psychology and archetypal literary criticism (Lévi-Strauss, 1978), on the other hand, perceive a similar form of idealised meaning, which they term archetype, but describe it as several instances of amalgamated meaning deriving from the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1981).

Archetypes can then be seen as 'original or founding' images or figures which provide an enduring and timeless pattern of understanding and which, albeit 'unrepresentable in themselves', are 'manifest as "archetypal images"' (Coupe, 2008, p. 131). Frye's (2000) *Anatomy of Criticism* is an example of archetypal literary criticism since he uses Jung's theories and applies them to an analysis of modes, symbols, myths, and genres in literature. Although not the focus of this study per se, the philosophical preoccupation of how perception and understanding occur are relevant to this investigation as it demonstrates that from very early in history humans have perceived that their understanding of the world was partial and derived from an ideal image. This becomes much more relevant when we deal with human attempts to convey meaning through representations and signs, as in literature and video games.

Latest to the discussion, post-structuralism argues for the breakdown of meaning by denying any form of contact with the real (Derrida, 1998), claiming that such contact is no longer possible as our society has become inundated with meaningless signs (Baudrillard, 1994). The post-structuralist point of view becomes perhaps more significant when analysing video games as they tend to contain more 'superfluous' and multifaceted information than fictional written texts which tend to present more selected information to the reader who has to reconstruct and fill in the narrative gaps. A video game player, it can be argued, will usually filter out in the act of gameplay information that is not essential to progression and understanding (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 17). Kirkpatrick argues that that the overflow of information coupled with the ludic aspect 'cheapens' or makes 'meaningless' (p. 187) any

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narrative possibility emerging from pure gameplay. In this study, I argue that that is not necessarily always the case, but rather that that information adds to the experience and helps shape and guide the player's reaction, interpretation and expectations through dialogical and intertextual relationships with genre and literary rich archetypal material.

The concepts briefly mentioned above have a wide range of applications as they approach all meaning and understanding. They have close links to psychology (Jung, 1981) and linguistics (Saussure, 2011), due to their direct relation to brain functions and basic signs of meaning, such as language (Culler, 2005; Foucault, 2002; Frye, 2000; Saussure, 2011). In Section 2.3, I focus on literary theory relevant to the reading of and engagement with narratives, rather than on generation of meaning at a more general level.

2.2.2 Mimetic and fantastic imagination

In the *Poetics,* Aristotle (n.d, p. 3) states that 'poetry is a species of imitation'. 'Poetry' for Aristotle is an encompassing term that is applied to all narrative forms known to the Greeks at the time: epic poetry, drama (tragedies and comedies) as well as poems to be accompanied by the pipe or lyre. The Greek word for imitation is 'mimesis' ($\mu\acute{\iota}\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$) (Oxford University Press, 2014). For Aristotle (p. 42), imitation must be 'either the kind of thing that was or is the case; or the kind of thing that is said or thought to be the case; or the kind of thing that ought to be the case'. Therefore, in Aristotelian terms, any act of telling a story, in any form, could be said to consist of an imitation of reality. The creation of fictionalized narratives, thus, depends on the storyteller's capacity for imagining and creating other realities which, to different degrees, 'imitate reality'. The act of creating alternative realities depends on the powers of imagination. For the purposes of this work, two impulses of the narrative imagination are considered: mimesis and fantasy (Hume, 1984).

According to Frye (2000, p. 51), *mimesis* is the 'impulse towards imitation of perceived reality', or 'the tendency to verisimilitude and accuracy of description'. In his all-encompassing analysis of how the Adamic myth has influenced Western concepts of imagination, Kearney (1998, pp. 39–61) lists mimesis, or 'the human imitation of the divine act of creation', among the four properties of imagination. Conversely, *fantasy* is the impulse towards creative invention. Different critics have attempted to define such impulse using different terminology. Coleridge (2000, p. 313) calls it 'secondary imagination', since it reinvents the natural world. Frye (2000, p. 51) simply refers back to Aristotle's use of the

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word 'mythos'. Tolkien (2009, p. 47) explains fantasy as 'a word which shall embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression derived from the Image'. He applies the term fantasy to a combination of 'Art' with 'freedom from the domination of observed fact'. Tolkien's concept of fantasy, however, differs from Coleridge's secondary imagination only in degree since a work of 'Art', despite its verisimilitude, is not constraint by perceived reality since what a work of art recreates is ultimately not 'real'. For instance, even if the events in a story plot have actually taken place, they are unlikely to be narrated in the exact manner in which they happened. No matter how highly mimetic a work of art is, it will always contain a certain degree of fantasy. Although Coleridge does not mention either fantasy or mimesis by name, he does describe similar concepts as being of the utmost importance to literary creation in a particular anecdote in the *Biographia Literaria*,

> During the first year that Mr Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination (p. 314).

The interrelationship between mimesis and fantasy is the main aspect to the generation of deep engagement with a text known as immersion. *Immersion*, as it is understood in this work, refers to the deep engagement a player or reader experiences when in the act of consuming the game or text (Bogost, 2006, p. 98; Wolf & Perron, 2003, pp. 68–72). In terms of the gamer's experience, immersion can be divided in two aspects: the narrative immersion, where players are enthralled by the game narrative thus creating a diminished sense of their surroundings and a heightened experience of the story; and ludic immersion, where players are immersed in the performance of the actions related to the game. Both forms of immersion have as a distinguishing aspect a lessened sense of real time and space by the player (Stamenkovic & Jacevic, 2014, p. 184). In a sense it could be argued that immersion then consists of a partial transportation of the player/reader's consciousness unto the chronotope of the game/text, a phenomenon that in this work is also termed, in some instances, as presence.

Presence, as the term implies, is often used to denominate the positioning of the reader/player's consciousness within the narrative (King & Krzywinska, 2006, pp. 97–123). For narrative immersion, especially that of fiction, the reader/player must go through the

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process usually termed suspension of disbelief so that immersion is possible. Presence, however, comes from a sense of inhabiting the fictional space to a certain degree and often requires a deeper form of immersion with a very strong chronotopic pull. Presence is hence arguably more readily achieved in video games through gameplay and the sense of agency that it can provide. Although presence can also be felt in other storytelling media, the sense of presence is often delegated to an observer position, such as the listener to an implied narrator's tale in Heroic Epic. Further considerations on immersion and presence in relation to video games are made in Section 2.5.2.

2.2.3 Suspension of disbelief and secondary belief

The term *suspension of disbelief* was first coined by Coleridge (Newlyn, 2002) in a passage in the *Biographia Literaria* in which he attempts to describe immersion:

> [S]o as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith (p. 314).

The willingness to accept what is only an imitation of reality was first alluded to by Aristotle when describing the disposition of theatre audiences to partake of the fiction so as to achieve catharsis. According to Heath (1996, p. xiii), 'Aristotle contention, then, is that human beings are by nature prone to engage in the creation of likenesses, and to respond to likenesses with pleasure'. Suspension of disbelief could be thus defined as the willing act of overlooking the narrative's 'unreality' (Murray, 1998, pp. 97–125). Brown (2012, p. 3) claims that suspension of disbelief in game studies is 'the elephant in the room' and proceeds to attempt to create a way of understanding its inner workings in relation to video games and its players. Brown ultimately determines that suspension of disbelief in video games is dependent on the player's 'willed disavowal of presence' (p. 216). He claims that due to the tension between the ludic immersion where the player is focused on performance of the actions and the narrative presence dependent on suspension of disbelief, the player is then forced to forsake her position within the gamic text as observer of the fiction to that of a performer of the fiction, who – like an actor in a play – is complicit in its creation and therefore aware of its non-reality. To better understand what Brown means by this, it is perhaps necessary to examine how games relate to some theories about generation of meaning, as well as how immersion and suspension of disbelief work in other media.

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In most literary genres, such as novels, suspension of disbelief is seen as dependent on two factors: the reader's capacity and willingness to believe in that which is not necessarily real, and the text's capacity to bridge the gap between the readers' perceived reality and the fictional narrative's constructed reality (Coleridge, 2000, p. 5-18). The complex interaction between reader and text makes it hard to determine where one factor ends and the other begins. Video games as artefacts must also be read in order to be interacted with, hence their relation to suspension of disbelief does not vary too wildly from that required from the reader of more traditional literature, even if the narratives often found in games are more highly fantastical thus demanding from the gamer greater willingness to suspend disbelief (Brown, 2012). An examination of the personal disposition of any particular reader or player and hers/his ability at fantastic imagination is outside the scope of this study. An author's capacity to address the gap that separates perceived reality and the fictional narrative is, however, of relevance and perhaps more easily approached.

The techniques used by writers when attempting to facilitate suspension of disbelief are generally what the reader perceives and what separates the texts they read into different genres (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 85). Realistic fiction, for instance, deals with the cognitive dissonance between perceived reality and the artistically constructed one by emulating the first as closely as possible (p. 23). By narrowing the gap between fiction and the reader's perceived reality, realistic fiction makes it easier for the reader to move from one to the other (Bakhtin, 1991, p. 23; Mendlesohn, 2008, pp. 13–14). Conversely, other literary genres, such as historical fiction and magical realism, make use of techniques that explore the human impossibility of a perfect perception of reality and/or the inherent disconnection between consciousness and the world around it (Bakhtin, 1981; Kant, 1998) to unsettle the reader's perceived reality 'meta-narrative' and make what would usually seem impossible gain an aspect of plausibility (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 17). One of the tools that can be used to generate this heightened sense of the unknowable aspect of reality is, in this study, termed *distancing* (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16) (Section 2.4.2).

Tolkien (2009, pp. 1–81) in his essay 'On Faery Tales', expounds on his idea of *secondary belief*, as opposed to the suspension of disbelief proposed by Coleridge, as a way of approaching other literary realms. By crafting another world coherent in itself (secondary world), an author is capable of tackling highly allegorical images without breaking the

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reader's immersion, allowing both the symbolism and the tale to work at the level of the subconscious in addition to the conscious one. In other words, this form of suspension of disbelief is the attempt to supplant the perceived reality 'meta-narrative' as the reader's contact point altogether, therefore negating the disbelief aspect. It exchanges the readers' contact point narrative for that of the narrative of other literary genres. While Tolkien poses his concept of secondary belief in opposition to that of Coleridge's suspension of disbelief, Coleridge does expound briefly on a concept that has some striking similarities with Tolkien's in what the former calls a 'kind of temporary and negative belief' (Coleridge, 2000, p. 458). The following passage, which occurs during Coleridge's analysis of *Don Juan,* is also remarkably similar to Tolkien's concept:

> [A] specific dramatic probability may be raised by a true poet, if the whole of his work be in harmony: a dramatic probability, sufficient for dramatic pleasure, even when the component characters and incidents border on impossibility. The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and with our judgement *perdue* [hidden away] behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only, not to *dis*believe (p.459).

The works that attempt to create the form of secondary belief expressed by Tolkien also utilize the technique of distancing albeit in a different manner as seen later in the section where forms of storytelling are discussed (Section 2.6). The same can be said of most video games that tend to aspire to authored narrative experiences to a greater degree, such as WRPGs. Their often fantastical settings and distancing techniques, however, are perhaps more complex due to their ludic aspects, a facet of their narrative experience I discuss in more detail in the analysis of the games and texts themselves (Chapters 3, 4 and 5).

2.3 Concepts and theoretical approaches in Literary Studies

As a foreword, it is important to point out that in this investigation some literary concepts and approaches are seen as instrumental for the understanding of the narrative and structural aspects of WRPGs in general, and of *Skyrim* and *DAO* in particular. The discussion that follows is, therefore, punctuated by frequent references to video games.

It was not until the 20th century that the idea of applying specific theoretical approaches to the analysis of literary texts came to challenge the practice of close reading as

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the main approach to the investigation of texts. The idea that texts should be considered in relation to philosophy and wider historical and social forces (Eagleton, 2005), although not entirely strange to literary critics before that, acquired then greater significance. It had the positive effect of leading 'to inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary projects' but also had the negative side-effect of forcing scholars in the field to often devote more time to theoretical reading than to the reading of the texts themselves (Wood & Lodge, 2013, p. 1). Nonetheless, it could also be argued that any form of close reading that goes beyond the mere superficial attention to words is likely to be informed by some ontological and epistemological principles, even if these influences are not clearly acknowledged. On the other hand, theoretically informed readings without close attention to the text run the risk of largely ignoring the very object they were supposed to consider (Wood & Lodge, 2013, p. 25). For these reasons, the line of analysis I adopt here is a close analysis of the texts and instances in the video games which is simultaneously informed by the ideas of structuralist and post-structuralist criticism. To better understand these two modes of thought and how they connect with the understanding of video games proposed in this work, it is necessary to first delve into structuralism, which is generally deemed to be the predecessor of post-structuralism and deconstruction. This approach is hardly an original technique of inquiry; rather it is often considered problematic to study post-structuralism and deconstructionism without first coming to terms with structuralism (Norris, 2002, p. 30).

The relationship between these two modes of thought is important to this study, especially taking into consideration the dialogical perspective (Bakhtin, 1981). Instead of seeing both critical traditions as entirely distinct, I attempt to reconcile with both structuralism and post-structuralism to better understand the medium of video games. I acknowledge that the association that I make between structuralism and post-structuralism, which are theoretical approaches usually used in literary studies, with the medium of video games might prove contentious among game and literary scholars alike. However, theories and concepts originated in linguistics and literary criticism have been historically applied to other fields of enquiry. For example, although structuralism emerged from linguistics, in the early 1940s Levy-Strauss already argued for the application of structuralist analytical methods in anthropology (Ungar, 2004, pp. 158–159). Likewise, post-structuralist perspectives, originated in philosophy and literary criticism, have informed scholarship in a wide range of disciplines, such as education and linguistics, especially through discourse

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analysis (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001). Besides that, there are some studies in the field of gaming where such theoretical perspectives have, to different degrees, informed the analysis of specific aspects of games, such as agency (Murray, 2000), identity (Boudreau, 2012; Filiciak, 2003), and gender and sexuality (Consalvo, 2003).

2.3.1 Structuralism

Structuralism, as a school of thought, basically begun with the work of Saussure (2011) in the field of Linguistics (Morpurgo, 2004; Sanders, 2004). In his lectures, compiled in a book titled *Cours de Linguistique Générale,* Saussure explains his theory of the sign, which is of great interest to this work. As Bouissac (2004, p. 240) points out, although the sign has been extensively discussed in Western philosophy 'since Plato and the Stoics', it was not until the work of Pierce in America and Saussure in Europe that Semiotics − the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation − began to be seen as a discipline.

The sign, according to Saussure (Joseph, 2004, p. 60), is constituted of two parts: the *signifier* (the phonemes or graphemes that make part of a word) and the *signified* (the concept or idea that the signifier refers to). Saussure argues that the relationship between both is arbitrary, determined by social convention, and 'a product inherited from preceding generations' (Saussure, 2011, p. 71). He also maintains that the human understanding of the world is intrinsically bound to the system of signs and their complex net of relationships and differences which constitute language (Thibault, 1997, pp. 44–46). Therefore, if the world cannot be understood outside language, an understanding of language is also necessary to the study of video games. This is true not only in a general sense − considering that most video games make use of natural language and are, as physical artefacts at the very least, part of our world − but also due to the fact that video games are intrinsically bound to their own system of 'language' in the form of computer programming (Bogost, 2010, p. 5). This does not mean that a player must understand coding to engage with the game, nor that a scholar or critic need to be acquainted with programming to be capable of analysing video games. It means, however, that we should not overlook the fact that video games are made possible due to their own complex linguistic system and that a player, by sending the system input through a controller, is entering into a linguistic exchange. Particularly important for this study is also the shared understanding that any form of representation is theoretically a sign; be it a picture, a sound, a grapheme, or a button prompt.

A structuralist understanding of the sign, with its focus on underlying systems and rules of combinations (Abrams, 1999, pp. 300–303), can be potentially useful in game studies, as games mostly rely in 'base rules' and structures to make their existence possible (Barry, 2010). For instance, football would not be considered a game if the base rule of only using one's feet to control the ball (apart from the goalkeeper) was not observed. Video games in particular, due to their computer programmed nature, tend to have several structural overlays, besides their base rules of engagement. These structures are often used to allow the player to know their position in the game and avoid the sensation of being lost (Koenitz, 2010, p. 181). For instance, they can be employed to separate progress into different stages, phases, or levels which are often called 'chapters' or 'scenes', depending upon what particular medium the game would be trying to evoke: a novel, in the case of *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* (Konami, 2010), or a TV series, in the case of *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment, 2010)*,* respectively.

Saussure's division of language as a whole into its regulating systems, *langue,* and actual usage, *parole* (Gordon, 2004), is equally interesting when compared to games. Saussure himself used the metaphor of chess to describe the differentiation of *langue* and *parole* where the game's rules and components, such as boards and pieces, are analogous to *langue* while a game session is equivalent to *parole*. When taken into this context, video games can be not only understood as texts themselves, but also as having their own particular *langue*, or in other terms, as possessing a language or grammar all of their own (the game program) which is then performed by the player in the act of playing (*parole*) according to what the program structures allow (King and Krzywinska, 2006, pp. 9–10).

The works of Propp (1984) and Levi-Strauss (1978) are also of note to this study due to their analysis of the structure of folk tales and myths at the narrative level, respectively. Albeit the differences between them (Dundes, 1997), they both argue that different tales have overarching similarities with each other on how they are structured and on how plot and character function. A case in point is Propp's observations on the hero, the villain, and the helper. Levi-Strauss, in particular, takes the exploration of such patterns to an extensive analysis of myth, which he sees as the most fantastical and abstract of all narratives that attempt to explain the world (Lévi-Strauss, 1978, pp. 15–21). To him, all human thought and action respond to a certain pattern of rules (pp. 11–13). This structuralist approach to

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narrative framework and functions is of special importance for this study; firstly when considered alongside the understanding of game systems as *langue,* and later when comparing and contrasting the chosen Epic texts with the narrative heavy WRPGs video games. The importance of structuralist thought lies largely on the fact that the Quest structure is often utilised in WRPGs to drive their mythical narrative and gameplay forwards, but it is also of note in the spatial structuring of the game and the effect of its gameplay structure on its temporal flow. As the analysis of the specific games in this study shows, in a sense, the WRPGs' structure by and large helps determine the pattern of its mythically oriented chronotopic experience.

2.3.2 Post-structuralism and deconstruction

Structuralist thought, with its preoccupation with the system of signs, is not, however, fully capable of addressing the complexities of video game design and the multiple interactive experiences that some games generate. No matter how rigid or visible may the structure be, deviations and oscillations can and will occur upon any given gameplay session. In many ways, that is the very purpose of the systems that allow gameplay: to allow variation and prevent identic experiences (Frasca, 2003, p. 227). Therefore, there is the need for a critical approach that considers the complexity of gameplay beyond the sole understanding of its structural elements. Further philosophical investigation of Saussure's theory of the sign and language, as well as the works of other structuralists, largely laid the foundations for what is understood as post-structuralism (Onega, 2006).

Post-structuralism 'designates a broad variety of critical perspectives and procedures' that seek to undermine the 'notion of a systemic structure whether linguist or other, [that] presupposes a "center" that serves to organize and regulate the structure yet itself "escapes structurality"' (Abrams, 1999, p. 238). Chief among the post-structuralist thinkers is Derrida (1998) whose attacks on the systematic approach to language and the centralizing notions of knowledge and truth led to a theory and practice of reading known as deconstruction. According to Norris (2002, p. 1), to view deconstruction as though it is a seamless theory is to do it a disservice. Like most theoretical backgrounds, its subscribers brought to the deconstructive school of thought their own insights and their own interpretations of the works of their predecessors and peers. Its overarching components, however, seem to be the supremacy of the signifier over the signified, the openness of *mis*reading, and the view of the

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world as text (Leitch, 1983). The general consensus among the founding deconstructionist theorists, such as Derrida (2013, pp. 211-224), is that deconstruction is at its heart the natural logical next step if one is to take the structuralist logic of the referential nature of sign and structures to its final implications. If signs are arbitrarily generated in relation to their signifier and are, therefore, inherently empty (making language only definable by its relations), then it follows that any particular sign becomes defined by what it is *not*; by their differences. The infinite sum of their possible relations creates a destabilised field of meaning in which 'trace' and 'play' become the defining 'forces' of signification. Leitch (1983, p. 28) argues that, 'the trace is the sum of all possible relations, whether isolated or not, which inhabit and constitute the sign' whereas play 'disrupts presence, producing chains of substitution at the center, undermining the solidifications of structure and subverting the stability of the origin' (p. 37).

Deconstruction then does not follow structuralism in being uninterested in truth (Norris, 2002, p. 4), but rather disavows its existence altogether, opening up the text to multiple readings, making any reading valid, just more or less 'energetic'. Since no reading in particular has any claim to truth, all reading is necessarily *mis*reading (Leitch, 1983, p. 59). This multiplicity and referential relation of differences is taken beyond the sign and into texts themselves, with texts feeding off each other for *mis*-signification into an endless textual fabric (Barthes, 1977, p. 159) which is ultimately empty and paradoxically fragmented. Rather than the hidden underlying structures and ordered reality of structuralism, deconstruction visualises a chaotic wasteland of fragments with any truth inexistent or unreachable. As such, deconstruction denies the narrative structures and functions that structural literary criticism 'unearths'. Instead, it claims that any such structure is non-existent in the text but rather imposed on it by the reader as a 'belated construction' (Leitch, 1983, p. 79).

Paradoxically, despite the inherently orderly programmed nature of video games, deconstruction's unlimited possible and acceptable interpretations can help us understand the player/reader experience of WRPGs, or perhaps of any game. On a physical text, such as a book, the artefact with which the reader interacts is mostly stable since the graphemes on a particular printed page remain largely unchanged through various readings; it is the interaction between the reader and text that generates multiplicity (Iser, 2013). This

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possibility of multiple, equally valuable, interpretations of a sign holds doubly true to video games as the very experience of the signs presented to the player on the screen usually change in the act of playing. Every time the player engages with the game, the programmed structure generates a multiplicity of possible signs which the player/reader can read in various ways. Although these signs are pre-coded and programmed, they are not immediately visible and stable as the graphemes on a page, hence requiring from the player a double effort to decode and interpret them as they are generated in the act of playing the game (Grodal, 2003, p. 147). Thus, if to critically analyse a traditional text under deconstructive thought is an exercise in impossibility (Leitch, 1983, p. 59), attempting to do so with a video game is especially so. For example, when a reader engages with the Wordsworth Classics 1992 edition of *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 1861), he or she will unavoidably come to the following sequence of signs on page 4, 'The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside-down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread.' The reader will then interpret the signs to construe their meaning and thus generate the text-as-event; additionally every reader's interpretation can be potentially different. The man, narrator and piece of bread I imagine probably differ from those in another reader's imagination. Thus the reader's activity is one of interpretation since the variation of readings lies in the signified part of the sign equation whereas the signifiers of the text as artefact, graphemes in this case, remain immutable. In video games, however, the player is presented with a system, limited as it may be, that allows the player to alter the signs presented − be they graphic, sound or grapheme − at the signifier level which the player/reader can then interpret.

For instance, a 'gamefied' version of the *Great Expectations* lines mentioned above might allow the player to choose what is in Pip's pockets, or potentially even allow the player to guide Pip to escape Magwitch and evade getting the poor boy turned upside down. This generates the problem that there is not a single specific 'text-as-artefact' to analyse in a video game, but rather a system that generates various 'texts-as-artefacts' which vary to differing degrees through player interaction, thus making the job of analysing a game-as-text even more complex than the already challenging interpretation of the largely fixed written text-artefacts. Some researchers try to address this challenge by employing a range of research methods and basing their analysis, for instance, on branching narrative theory (Aarseth, 1997; Moser & Fang, 2015), a poetics of interactivity (Ryan, 2009), and combining a number of

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methods to critically analyse games as texts (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006). As a contribution to these attempts to address the issues of game interaction and narrative construction, I propose instead to look at them through the theoretical dialogical standpoint advanced by Bakhtin for the analysis of the narrative time/space structure in the Epic and the Novel (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 4–40).

2.4 Bakhtinian concepts and analytical approach

Although Ricoeur (1981, p. 145) defines text as 'any discourse fixed by writing', here I adopt Lotman's (1977) classic definition of 'text' as any object that can be read and interpreted. Both structuralism and post-structuralism/deconstruction highlight different aspects of understanding the game as text. Structuralism sheds light on its formation and 'game' aspects whereas post-structuralism helps us understand the infinitely variable play interactions and receptions by the player/reader. However useful the insights provided by both modes of thought may be, such juxtaposition still does not seem to fully address the uniqueness of the video game medium and, in fact, creates further problems not least because both modes of thinking are often seen as incompatible. The understanding of video game as 'text' is thus taken into a conundrum since in video games, the shifting structures that deconstruction labels as an illusion, are not only products of our mind, but the very underlying rules that make the possibility of their existence a reality. Besides that, according to Leitch (1983, p. 106), the natural tendency of 'play' to generate a myriad of experiences denies the possibility of a single, logically structured, and controlled understanding of the player's experience since it significantly opens the video game, as text, to the playfulness of textuality proposed by Barthes. As discussed before, while different genres of games allow for greater or lesser variation within their structure for the player to modify, variation is always a factor, even if not particularly meaningful in terms of plot. The very language of deconstruction often evokes the idea of games since the terms 'ludic' and 'play', are often used for the description of the open *mis*reading deconstruction proposes. Yet, games are, by definition, ruled by programmed imposed structures that make the very activity possible (Suits, 2005). Hence, in the endeavour to critically understand video game as 'text', it is necessary to engage with a third perspective to mediate between structuralism and post-structuralism/deconstruction, namely Bakhtin's concept of dialogue.

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2.4.1 Dialogue

Dialogue, Bakhtin (1981, pp. 276–279) argues, is the concept that explains the complex relationships between different subjects, where they are both meaning givers and generators to each other by both opposition and similarity. The relationship is ever evolving, a constant 'conversation', which can only grow in complexity the longer it lasts and the more subjects are considered (Irvine, 2013, online). While the work of Mead (2010) in socialization bears some resemblance with Bakhtin's dialogue and makes direct references to games and play, Mead's major preoccupation is with the generation of the identity of the self, whereas Bakhtin's dialogue is more readily applicable to narratives and literature (McCarthy, 2004; Nielsen, 2012). The reason why I choose to use the Bakhtinian concept rather than the more conventional term 'relationship' is because the terms 'dialogue' and 'dialogical relationship' better convey the nuances of symbiosis and interdependence. They also refrain from putting one of the related parties as more prominent than the other, as in the phrase 'the relationship between A and B'. Instead, the word 'dialogue' emphasizes an ongoing relation of influence as parties in dialogue both inform and are informed by each other in a complex circular motion that may involve various subjects rather than the more direct two-way connection that is perhaps more commonly associated with the use of the single word 'relationship'.

Mimesis and fantasy (Section 2.2.2) are examples of forces in dialogue as they are both aspects of imagination necessary for artistic invention and perception. It is through their interaction that humans are capable of imaging (the creation of images in resemblance to perception), creativity (derivation and variation from the image), abstracted perception (to derive meaning from the not immediately visible), and symbolism (to assign meaning by association with different objects/concepts). These forces complement and yet oppose each other (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 270–272). Mimesis constrains fantasy and gives it shape, thus it can be seen as a *centripetal,* centralizing force, whereas fantasy springs forth and fills mimesis by giving it content, making it a *centrifugal,* decentralizing force. One depends on the other to be meaningful.

Another important dialogical relationship to be considered is the one that takes place between the reader and the text (Fish, 1982; Frye, 1964; Iser, 2000). The reader enters in dialogue with the text filling its signifiers with meaning since the signifiers of the text are but empty signs without a reader that can interpret them (Section 2.3). The sign will still exist,

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but it cannot function without a reader; for example, a person who is illiterate in Japanese has little use for a book written in that language, as the book's narrative, as opposed to its physical text-as-artefact, is to a large extent inexistent to that particular person. Without the reader there is no story, only ink on paper and without the text there is no reading and no reader (Kearney, 2002, p. 156). Bakhtin, however, notes that we are always in dialogue with the world and a text will eventually find its reader, either direct or indirectly since,

> [t]here is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and into the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogue in the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue (Bakhtin in *Estetika*, p.281, cited in Holquist, 2002, p. 39).

Texts are also in dialogue with each other. When a thought is put into discourse and/or when a story is turned into narrative, they enter the wider dialogue with previously produced texts of similar and/or different genres and related to them in one form or another (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 269). Human thought and culture can thus be understood as a complex web of dialogues reaching backwards and forward in time, ever evolving in complexity. As one of the oldest forms of human expression, stories are in 'conversation' with each other and with the world, hence creating an extremely complex dialogic network. Works in a particular genre are in intrinsic dialogue with works on the same genre – their relationship being what we use to define their genre groupings in the first place since they partly rely on conventions and reader generic knowledge to generate their meaning. That does not mean that readers need to necessarily have previous reading experience of the genre to enter in dialogue with the text. If such were the case all genre reading would be inaccessible. However, the more knowledge readers have of a genre, the more meaning they are capable of generating out of the dialogue between a specific work and its genre (Fish, 1992). Generic knowledge can be also acquired from works outside the specific genre for, as previously argued, all works are in dialogue with each other to a greater or lesser degree. This is the basic premise of the concept of *intertextuality*.

The attempt to merge dialogue and post-structuralism thought was firstly made by Kristeva (1980) who endeavoured to join Saussure's semiotics of the referentiality of the sign with Bakhtin's dialogue (Allen, 2011, pp. 8–58). It resulted in Kristeva's theory of 'intertextuality' where a text is seen in constant dialogical relationship with all other texts

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where all parties in the dialogue simultaneously inform and are informed by the others. Kristeva's theory of intertextuality gives us an ever shifting web of relations where all threads intersect. Such a theory has many merits and is a significant step towards better understanding of texts in general. However, like Derrida's (2001) *differance*, where signs are largely defined by a negative relation to each other, it still poses a particular enigma: if all signs and texts are dependent on their relationship with others to generate their meaning then – like Russian dolls – they are all inherently empty and, therefore, such a relationship would not constitute dialogue, but silence. Instead of a wasteland of shards, or an ever evolving and revolving web, the prominent image would be that of a gaping void. That, however, is not the case, as signs and texts *can* be read and, arbitrary as their relationship might be, a signifier *is* filled with a signified.

Deconstructionist critics argue that the things we visualise as the referent of the sign when reading any particular sign are a 'delusion, misperception, dream' (Leitch, 1983, p. 44). If such a description is by and large correct, this is an illusion born of imagination and perception. The referents or 'truths' to which a word relates are, in the words of Nietzsche, 'illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions' (Spivak in Derrida, 1998, p. xxii). The image brought to mind when a reader reads the grapheme 'rose', for example, is not only a single flower but a compounded image of all roses with which that reader has come in contact, directly or indirectly. As such, 'rose' is both 'a' rose and 'all' roses simultaneously. If one is to understand the filling of a sign in this way, the process works similarly to the perceived narrative structures of Propp (1984) and Levi Strauss'(1978) archetypes of myth. I elect to call this 'delusional' referent an *archetypal image*, while the term may have been used before by others, the definition and use of the term in this study is to my knowledge unique.

The word 'archetypal' refers to an amalgamated ideal borne out of imperfect instances, an evolving grouping of meaning that in turns generates meaning whereas 'image' is a facet of imagination and, as such, not a physical phenomenon but an imagined one. To attempt to fully grasp any given archetypal image would be the metaphorical equivalent of chasing after the horizon or touching a mirage. The archetypal image can only be accessed through language; it at once both informs language and is made of language. Once the archetypal image is assigned to a signifier as the signified, it then enters into a dialogical

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relation with the said signifier which can no longer be broken, only mutated. Like the traditional archetype, the archetypal image as sign is in constant dialogue with every representation of it, both informing and being informed by any particular instance. This process happens in all levels of signification to varying degrees of complexity, from the 'basic' sign, to narrative structures, such as Propps' functions (1968, pp.19-24), and unto full texts themselves.

This internalization of language, structures, and texts is acknowledged to a certain degree by deconstruction theorists. Barthes' expounds on the internalized dictionary of the writer as 'scriptor' arguing that 'thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue' (Barthes, 1977, p. 148) Alternatively, Foucault (2002) develops the notion of the *archive*, a socially and historically constructed structure that regulates the discourse of any given era and discipline. As the 'general system of the formation and transformation of statements' it can only be understood from a distance of estrangement,

> since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is which to what we can say – and to itself, the object of our discourse – its modes of appearance, its forms of existence and co-existence, its system of accumulation, historicity, and disappearance (p. 130).

What Foucault identifies as the 'archive' can be alternatively understood as the historical analysis of the dialogue in a certain era and its internalized amalgamated structures. Hence, if one is to take into consideration archetypal images as the basic units of such internalizing systems, they become dependent on distancing not only for analysis but also for their formation. Archetypes, as abstract and hence fantastical notions, are dependent on distance from the particular subjects they relate to in order to generate an idealized image that can be used generically. In a sense, it is the 'belated production' (Leitch, 1983, p. 58) of structuralism, which deconstruction reviles, that allows for such internalization to happen and thus for deconstructive multiplicity and text as event to exist. The image when internalized necessarily distances itself from its source; its existence is simultaneously linked and separate from the origin. The internalized image further evolves by its dialogical relation to other internalized images and associations to external sources, an example being the Hero figure. The trickster Ulysses and the warrior Beowulf are decidedly very different figures, both, however, are a part of the archetypal Hero. This fact is due to an abstract understanding of

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their function as well as an interpretative amalgamation of their commonalities that simultaneously adjusts their differences to the archetype image, bending and altering the image to fit both the Trickster or Comic Hero image of Ulysses and the Warrior or Tragic Hero figure of Beowulf into the dialogue that forms the greater archetypal image of the Hero.

Dialogue is the theoretical concept that I adopt in this study in order to solve this apparent paradox. If viewed outside the dialogical multiple directional relationship, the fact that the capacity for any form of communication is derived from abstract structuring leads to an understanding that no communication *would be* possible, as anything and everything is unstable and meaningless and hence unreadable. It is through the constant tension of both forces that meaning and language can be borne; should any one of the two stop, the other becomes insufficient to stand on its own and to generate any meaning. Thus a dialogical relationship between structuralism and post-structuralism can conceivably be proposed, where structuralism plays the centripetal role of mimesis containing the centrifugal abstract fantasy of deconstruction (Bakhtin, 1981). One needs the other for existence: the centripetal contains the centrifugal force, disallowing it to overextend into un-determination whereas the centrifugal force fills the centripetal one keeping it from contracting into non presence. One's beginning and the other's ending is forever blurred due to the constant motion and as such neither can be fully understood without allusion to the other.

Such dialogical relationships can be found at several levels of the video game experience. For instance, it also applies to the dynamic relationship between play and rules. 'Play' is an intrinsically centrifugal force and the term is often used in deconstruction to convey the idea of the generation of infinite possibilities, never settling into a fixed state. As such, 'play' has a liberating dynamism. 'Rules', on the other hand, are inherently constricting since they limit and delimit what is allowed. As such, they align themselves with centripetal forces. *Gameplaying,* therefore, is only possible in the dialogue between both play and rules, in other words, gameplaying *is* the dialogue between these two forces. Without rules, play does not happen, it exists but cannot be acted on as it has no basis to act upon; play without rules is simply idealized action, free of constraints and/or labels; without play, rules are superfluous as they only exist to make play possible. For example, all the rules and programming of *Mario Super Bros* (Nintendo, 1985), are pointless if there is no one to engage with the game and control the eponymous character; conversely, if there were no

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gravity and space simulation rules in the game, no movement would be possible for Mario and then there would be no play.

This play-and-rules dynamic is almost analogous to the interaction between player/reader and the video game artefact, where the will to play and read brought in by the player/reader enters in relationship with the rules and signs embedded into the game artefact. In this study, playing and reading are also seen as in a dialogical relationship: 'reading' is necessary to play as it is imperative to interpret the signs presented by the game. These interpreted signs both enable and limit play since one can only play in the *langue* that is presented by the system. Conversely, further reading of the game is only made possible through play as it is the act of playing that generates the signs that are presented for interpretation. In other words, the player interaction is answered by the game system with sign feedback which is then read and interpreted by the player, who in turn uses that information to shape further interaction. For example, we can imagine the following sequence of events in the *Mario Super Bros* (Nintendo, 1985) game:

1. The player presses the button for Mario to move forward,
2. The game then sends back to the player the images of Mario moving forward through the setting on the screen,
3. What is the shown on the screen (the visual signs) then changes to show a hole on the floor,
4. Seeing the hole, the player then knows he/she should instruct Mario to jump if he/she wishes to proceed through the game.

When engaging with a video game artefact, the player comes into contact with a physical interface control device, be it a keyboard or controller, and it is through this physical interaction that the player affects what is presented on screen. The signs presented by the video game are thus in a relationship with the button prompts in the control device that is similar to the relationship between the signifier and signified. The buttons prompt a signal reaction, becoming thus analogous to that reaction. For example, in modern day military First Person Shooters (FPS), such as the *Call of Duty* (Infinity Ward, 2003) and *Battlefield* (Visceral Games, 2002) franchises, the button prompts assigned to shoot the gun held by the player's character is typically assigned to the back right trigger on controllers and to the left

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mouse button on mouse and keyboard interfaces. When the player wishes to tell the game that he/she wants the character to shoot, all that is necessary to do is to press the assigned button and the game will almost instantaneously feedback the appropriate sign and reaction to the input sign – such as hit or miss the shot, use a bullet, or any other pre-programmed action. This fairly simple description generally applies to almost all the button interactions with a video game programme.

Although these two examples are quite straightforward, they serve to illustrate the dialogical relationships (play/rules, player/game-as-artefact) working somewhat independently from each other in relation to video games and their 'consumption'. However, all these dialogical relationships happen simultaneously and are interconnected thus generating a very complex web of relations constantly affecting each other. All these actions and responses together constitute the highly complex event of playing a video game.

In this study, I emphasize the language-like aspect of such interactions and their dialogical nature, since the actions available to a player through the control interface are in a sense the grammar that the video game makes available for input into its textual space. While many games allow for the player to customize their controls, making it possible to assign different actions to different buttons, many of the control configurations are genre determined – as in the FPS example above. For instance, the basic attack button on action adventure games, such as the *God of War* series (Santa Monica, 2002), is conventionally set to the top left button of the face buttons of a controller. On the other hand, the control configurations can also be culturally coded, as in the confirmation prompt difference observed between Japanese and Western PlayStation controllers: Western games and western localizations tend to use the 'X' button whereas Japanese ones tend to use the circle or 'O' button for confirmation prompts. Therefore, the concept of internalized dictionaries and language, such as Barthes' dictionary and Foucault's archive mentioned earlier, becomes of interest when considering the player interaction with the game environment as language, since the 'grammar' of a game with which the player is allowed to use to alter that which is communicated/shown is intrinsically limited by the programmed interaction with the controls that are made available to the player/reader.

The idea of internalized concepts and 'dictionaries' is also significant when considering the importance of allusions and the incorporation of other texts into the ever

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shifting textual environment of video games, as allusions do not only refer to other cultural artefacts, but also open a more direct dialogue between different narratives.

2.4.2 Distancing

Bakhtin (1981, p. 26) was the first to expound on the concept of distancing. The core idea of distancing is that any narrative that is similar to the reader's personal perceived reality is 'close' and knowable, and will necessarily conform to the readers' expectations grown out of their own experience. On the other hand, a narrative with less contact with the perceived experience of the reader is 'distant' and unknowable, thus allowing for more fantastical thought and for higher allegorical meaning without breaking engagement with the text.

Bakhtin (1981, p. 19-20) argues that the 'world of high literature in the classical era' up to the Middle Ages was projected into a 'distanced plane of memory', a 'valorized, finished and closed' past that has no uninterrupted connection with the present. He argues that,

> [w]ithin this time, completed and locked into a circle, all points are equidistant from the real, dynamic time of the present ; insofar as this time is whole, it is not localized in an actual historical sequence, it is not relative to the present or to the future; it contains within itself, as it were, the entire fullness of time. As a consequence all high genres of the classical era are that is its entire high literature, are structured in the zone of the distance image (p. 19).

As Bakhtin (1981, pp. 4–41) proposes in his essay on the Epic and the Novel, this completely distanced and unknowable past is the past of the Epic. By being absolutely unknowable, the completely distanced past is, conversely, also in a way absolutely represented in the work since there is no point of reference with experienced reality. The distancing effect reaches its maximum influence in aiding to counter disbelief; this allows engagement with the narrative in its own terms rather than from the close referential points of the 'real' or 'known'. The cornerstone of distancing lies on the basis of all human experience and the foundations of narrative: time and space. Placing the narrative in the past or future leads to greater distancing; conversely, the closer to the present, the weaker the distancing. Spatial distancing works similarly though the point of reference for what is close or distant depends on the narrative recipient's own space which varies from person to person. For example, a narrative set in Argentina is somewhat distanced to a British person but close to an Argentinian. In the

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WRPG, the player is both close and distanced from their hero protagonist; the sense of closeness comes through the gameplay, sense of agency, and presence whereas the sense of distance comes from the chronotopic setting and the very performance aspect of gameplay since one cannot actually be the hero if one is performing the part of a hero.

2.4.3 Chronotope

Keeping in mind that the two main aspects that comprise human experience are time and space, Bakhtin argues that the two main aspects of a narrative could also be understood in the same way as that of human experience. He termed the narrative time and space *chronotope* (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84) after the Greek words for *chronos*, time, and *topos,* space. One of the foremost examples of the effect of chronotope on storytelling is that a higher distancing effect can be achieved by placing a tale far from the intended audience's time and space of experience, as discussed above (Section 2.4.2).

When applied to textual analysis, chronotope takes on several more layers of complexity as it refers to more than just the general setting of a narrative. It also refers to the flux and flow of the fictionalized time and space (p. 20). For example, a tale may be set in the seventeenth century and thus in the past, but be narrated from the point of view of the characters thus making the experiential flow that of the present tense. This is the typical chronotope of historical fiction. Compression and depiction of space also exert considerable impact on genre definitions. An example of a narrative with swift movement through space with minimal compression would be a travelogue. Complex narratives tend to incorporate several forms of chronotope within themselves to enrich their experience, since almost no piece of fiction is a perfect representation of its genre (p. 252). Yet, the relationship between time and space in the narrative cannot be neatly separated as described above, as one tends to inform and transform the other in a dialogical relationship.

The concept of chronotope, as Bakhtin (1981, p. 84) has coined it, is thus far more complex than setting and action. At its core is an understanding that narrative chronotope does not deal with 'real' space and time but fictitious ones generated solely by the fictional piece in question in relation to the reader/player. While this awareness may seem quite straightforward, its full significance and the profound effect it can have on textual interpretation can often be lost to readers when fully engaged with the text (Coleridge, 2000, pp. 5–18). In the same way that readers can promptly forget in the midst of the act of reading

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that the written word is essentially only a conjunction of graphemes (Montgomery et al., 2007, pp. 7–12), little drawings on a surface whose sequence and meaning are generated by convention and context, the reading and generation of narrative chronotope may also be taken as natural and unproblematic with their complex relation between reader/player and narrative artefact passing almost unnoticed in the midst of the narrative event.

Narrative chronotope

The narrative chronotope is not 'real' time and space in the conventional sense, but the *perception* of time and space generated by engagement with the work. This fictional perception is achieved through representation, which is the act of presenting something through the medium of something else, such as an object through a picture or a word (Kearney, 2002; Plato, 2007; Saussure, 2011). In literature, this representation is mostly achieved through the medium of language, oral or written, whereas films and video games, besides their use of written language, also rely heavily on images and sounds. Video games add a further layer of depth to those components by allowing the exploration of the represented space through interactivity. The most basic level of the narrative chronotope is that of the setting, but it is also, in many ways, the most important level because it literally serves as the basis for any imaginary endeavour to come. Narrative setting is hardly an innovative area of analysis; literary critics working on different traditions have touched upon it in one form or another. For instance, in psychoanalytical criticism, the general setting and particular environments of a narrative can often be linked to the mental state of a character or even of the author (Hartman, 2008) whereas post-colonial readings (Said, 2003) can blend character and environment identities in their critical analysis of colonial exploitation and the several effects of colonization on both the colonized and the colonizers (Brathwaite, 2004) as well as raise questions about the very nature of the concept of 'post-colonial' (Hall, 2004; McClintock, 2004).

The difference between such views of narrative setting and a chronotopic approach to the same subject is the latter's heightened awareness that the basic setting opens a dialogical relationship with all that follows it, quite literally influencing every aspect of the narrative. Before analysing the multi-faceted narrative chronotope of WRPGs, with their different modes of narrative, as well as their varying modes of delivery and complexity, an example of how this chronotopic approach to setting works at the language level may illustrate the point.

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For instance, upon the utterance or the reading of a single word, such as 'garden', as long as the word is known to the recipient, an image is formed in the reader/listener's mind. Adding a particular setting to that single word, the image will most often be radically changed, for example, 'Victorian' garden or 'Feudal-Japan' garden. Based upon the reader's understanding of the particular setting, the basic concept/object 'garden' is altered. By adding the setting 'Victorian', the resulting image generated is transformed by the dialogical relationship between the two terms (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276).

This relationship is similar to that of an archetypal image and its particular instance, as discussed in Section 2.3. Therefore, it is perhaps fair to say that the setting of a narrative is its most prominent archetypal image. As it happens with other archetypal images, a recurrent setting, such as Victorian England, is influenced by the dialogical relationship between the reader's personal understanding, the social cultural understanding (Aarseth, 1997; Fish, 1982; Iser, 1993), and the various narratives that surround and utilize it. Hence, recurrent settings such as the ones mentioned above can be seen as ever evolving and shifting concepts, and as higher forms of archetypal images.

As such, the chronotopic setting, as the foundation for the understanding of any narrative event, permeates the interpretation of all actions as well as objects. For instance, the single action 'bow' also changes when placed in different time and space settings, such as 'Victorian England' or 'Feudal Japan'. Not only does the imagined action differ, but its perceived meaning is also very likely to change due to the different cultural notions associated with each setting (Said, 2003). Most importantly, one can argue that the chronotopic setting not only informs the interpretation, but also generates expectations on the narrative recipient. When reading a story in Victorian England, an informed reader may expect to find in it gentlemen wearing suits, hats and canes walking around a foggy London, which are images that are likely to be generated by previous experiences reading Victorian novels or watching films set in the same period. The same can be said of a Fantasy medieval setting, even if it contains highly fantastic material. Knights and kings as well as swords and bows are genre materials that are rooted in their chronotopic setting and create a common interpretative zone for the narrative recipients to ground themselves and allow the particular setting to flourish in their imagination. The same remains true to media with high volumes of sensory representation, such as film and video games, regardless of the amount of

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information presented at any particular time. As if considered in isolation without wider points of reference, that information would still not be enough to give the recipient a sense of orientation in the strange realm and of a fictional narrative.

Genre and chronotope

Genre is, like most other literary terms, a shifting concept. It alludes to the grouping of narrative work together due to a certain form of similarity. A genre, as a whole, is an aggregation of works with a perceived similarity in terms of content, so as to aid categorization and understanding (Frow, 2014). In this work, I adopt the convention of referencing to particular genres with a capital first letter to differentiate them from the words in their more common sense or other specific meanings and therefore avoid confusion as much as possible. Several rules for aggregation for genres have been proposed since the time of Aristotle (n.d.) with further developments and increasing interest in genre studies in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Culler, 2011; Eagleton, 2008a; Fowler, 2002; Frow, 2014; Wellek & Warren, 1987). Such taxonomies are representative of an ever evolving human attempt at categorizing and understanding the world and its contents, imaginary or otherwise. Some forms of categorization define genre by selecting key works and surrounding them with other works deemed similar. Conversely, other forms of categorization choose different focuses or criteria to determine the classification of works into a particular genre. An example of the latter is Frye's (2000) archetypal theory based on five modes.

Frye's (2000, pp. 33–34) categorization of five fictional modes, as he calls them, is defined by the position of the hero in contrast with the world and society: Myth is when 'the hero is superior in kind'; Romance, when superior in degree; High Mimetic, when the hero is superior to others but not to the environment; Low Mimetic, when equal; and Ironic, when inferior. According to Frye, the work is then further divided into Comic or Tragic. Following this mode of definition, *Beowulf* would be a Tragic Romance since the hero is superior in degree, but not kind to his contemporaries and the poem itself reads as a dirge for the loss of Beowulf's greatness and the entropy of humankind through time. Frye's definitions are unusual, if quite advanced, and perhaps higher in precision than other definitions of genre which are based on key genre-defining works. The richness of milestone narratives, due to their sheer complexity, may lead to similarities between many different works, perhaps even

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with those in genres which the definition would itself exclude. A good example is the myriad attempts at different categorizations of genre in Shakespeare (Galbraith, 2001; McAlindon, 2003). In many instances, it may also lead them to be simultaneously intrinsically different from those the original genre definition would embrace when the chosen criteria as the focus of the categorization is changed.

In spite of the difficulties in reaching an agreement on what the term genre means (Buscombe, 2012, p. 12), and the fact that theoretical developments in the film studies have further destabilized more conservative understandings of genre (Grant, 2012, p. xix), definitions by the plot content as a whole are still often common. For example, the Action and Drama genres are commonly referred to in the literature in the field of Film Studies. The former denotes films with a high amount of corporeal stunts and spectacle whereas the latter suggests a high degree of psychological and emotional narrative material. As such, there are various genre groupings and works that can simultaneously belong to several genres or even have their place in a particular genre contested. Popular cinema currently is increasingly marked by 'levels of hybridity and intertextuality' where 'generic elements' from various forms of 'popular and high culture' converge and combine (Watson, 2012, p. 200). A similar phenomenon can be observed with contemporary literature. For instance, at a broad level, books can be grouped into Non-Fiction and Fiction and then more specifically grouped as Biography, Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction, or Speculative Fiction. Speculative Fiction can then be divided into further sub-genres, such as Horror, Thriller, Science Fiction, or Fantasy. Video games have also been defined in terms of genre. Common is the categorization through gameplay, such as First Person Shooter (FPS), Third Person Shooter (TPS), Turn Based, Real Time, Strategy, Puzzle, Role Playing, Fighting, Platforming, and Action Adventure. Also quite common is the further subdivision into thematic or plot content, such as a Horror Third Person Shooter, like the *Resident Evil* series (Capcom, 1996), or Science Fiction Real Time Strategy, exemplified by the *StarCraft* series (Blizzard, 1998).

As it is the case with film and literature, such various categorizations and subdivisions seem to point towards the difficulties of establishing a stable taxonomy and there have been calls for 'exploring alternative conceptualizations of genre'(Clarke, Lee, & Clark, 2015, p. 16). Yet, the concept of genre still can serve as a way of understanding a literary piece, film, or game without having to actually consume or participate in it; it also serves as a tool of

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aggregation, organization and comparison, forming one of the cornerstones of our expectations towards a particular instance of that genre. As such, they also serve as a form of archetypal image of sorts with whole narratives and/or games constituting particular instances. The relationships between archetypal images and particular instances guide expectations and orient interpretations through focused intertextual relationships often termed 'genre literacy'.

Genre and chronotopic setting, albeit being two different entities, can have several overlapping areas. Genre can depend on shared chronotopic material to be generated from an amalgamation of several different narratives. For example, the pastoral genre has as its main aspect the idyllic countryside and a slow highly depictive chronotopic flow. Bakhtin (1981, pp. 84–258) claims that genres are intrinsically chronotopic since time and space are the foundation of the human understanding of the universe and have a dialogical relationship with narrative subject matter, hence the classification of a work into a genre is linked to the chronotope in one way or another. While I believe that it is necessary to acknowledge their interconnected and even interdependent aspects, I find it is also important to not reduce one to the other or to mistake them as identical. To do so could lead to overlooking aspects that are intrinsic to each, such as the genre related material later mentioned in Section 3.2.1 which, while connected to the chronotope through expectation and used to signpost the chronotopic setting, is not, in fact, inherently part of it.

Genres can be played with and altered without altering the chronotope. However, doing so would almost always lead to a sense of estrangement. An example of such anachronistic estrangement is Mark Twain's (1976) *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which brings a nineteenth century American, complete with revolver and lasso, to a narrative set in sixth century England to great comedic effect. Although the Yankee protagonist brings both historical periods into dialogical relationship in the narrative, he does not change the overall setting of the tale as being Arthurian England. One of the common accusation's levelled at Bakhtin's definition of genre's through chronotope is that it can be reductive and 'imprecise' (Vice, 1997, p. 3), especially when dealing with playful works as the one mentioned above, hence my point that while a deep analysis of a narrative's chronotope may lead to an understanding of its genre, one is not equal to the other. Another important point to consider is that Bakhtin (1981, p.252) himself argues that no single particular narrative is a perfect

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example of its genre's chronotope because any given tale may contain several different chronotopes with the predominant one tending to determine the genre classification.

Chronotopic awareness, transportation, and flow

Although the discussion so far has been centred on setting, chronotope is more than only the background setting as it encompasses the whole perception of time and space in the narrative. This internalized chronic and spatial sense is what I call *chronotopic awareness*. In a normal state, an individual's chronotopic awareness resides in the here and now of everyday experience. However, when engaged with a narrative, that same consciousness is partially transported to the chronotope of the tale. Upon interaction with the narrative, part of the chronotopic awareness is opened to the space and time of the fiction so as to allow the reception of the narrative and the interpretation. For instance, when beginning to read and/or watch *The Lord of the Rings*, part of the person's chronotopic perception is shifted/ transported to the space and time of the Third Age of Middle-Earth, more particularly to a location within that world called the Shire, in time to celebrate Bilbo's 111th birthday. Narrative chronotopic awareness is thus the basis of all further interpretation of the events depicted in the said narrative. The understanding of its inner workings can lead to a better grasp of the modes in which different media attempt to bridge the leap of consciousness from the everyday experience to that of the fictional as well as to orientate and induce engagement with the fiction.

The initial movement of chronotopic awareness is what I call *chronotopic transportation*, in other words, the partial transfer of spatial and temporal awareness to that of the fictional world of the narrative. This initial phase of engagement with a narrative is of interest as it can highlight the chronotopic setting and also demonstrate a variety of techniques that can be employed by authors when creating this phase and help determine fundamental aspects of the narrative as a whole (Bridgeman, 2007 p. 57). These techniques ease the narrative recipient's chronotopic transportation and aid with narrative engagement. Novels begin in a variety of manners and, as such, this transportation phase is widely diverse. A classic example is *Pride and Prejudice* (Austen, 1813) which begins with a focus on the omniscient narration and then moves directly into the site of action in the main protagonists' living room. Conversely, other novels may begin with flashbacks or personal character recollections, as Pip's in *Great Expectations* (Dickens, 1861), and gradually move into the

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present time of action. Heroic Epic, on the other hand, often begins with a layering of the historical background to help the reader place the narrative (Section 3.3.1).

Video games, in particular, have interesting modes of chronotopic transportation due to their heightened capacity of generating fictional chronotopic awareness. This arguably greater chronotopic awareness is achieved through the agency of interactivity and varying degrees of presence made possible through their different gameplay, camera, and character focus configurations. Video games thus also introduce the setting in diverse ways. Some video games, may handle the initial transportation phase with short, mostly hands off, cinematic introductions, or intros for short, as it is the case with *Diablo III's* (Blizzard, 2012) where the intro lasts for 2:43 minutes. The Japanese RPG series *Final Fantasy*, on the other hand, has gained a reputation for having quite long cinematographic intros accompanied by music. The intro to *Final Fantasy XII* (SquareEnix, 2006)*,* for instance, lasts for 10:53 minutes.

The deeper the engagement with the narrative, the stronger the partial transportation of the recipient's chronotopic awareness becomes. This effect is a facet of what is usually termed 'immersion' (Wolf, 2014, p. 48). There seems to be a consensus among researchers in game studies (Sun & Hsu, 2014) that high levels of immersion in game environments can be found among players (Christou, 2014; King & Krzywinska, 2006; Przybylski, Weinstein, Murayama, Lynch, & Ryan, 2012; Wilcox-Netepczuk, 2013) with arguably a significant recent increase in such levels due to higher graphic fidelity and photo realism in games (Wilcox-Netepczuk, 2013). Transportation, however, is always partial no matter how deeply immersed the player is or how expertly crafted a narrative is. Nor would a 'total immersion' that completely transports consciousness be really desirable as part of the allure of narratives is their capacity for controlling, even if not completely, the levels of engagement and distance to the experience, which in turn allow for criticism and moralizing (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 4–40).

One of the great allures of narrative is its capacity for manipulating the time and space to present a shortened and or more engaging sequence of events. The manipulation of time and space takes different forms and degrees depending on the media and the particular chronotopic tense of the narrative. A distanced tense like that of Heroic Epic allows for greater malleability of the time-space continuum whereas greater realism in depiction, like that of film and certain video games, demands a more verisimilar approach to the

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representation of the time and space experience. Regardless of where the particular narrative resides in these spectra, a one-by-one experience on par with that of everyday life is unlikely, as narratives are by their very nature edited and compressed sequences of events deemed important for the generation of a story. This feature of manipulating the experience of time and space is what I term the *chronotopic flow*, which stands for the movement of time and space in the narrative. Part of the chronotopic flow can be understood from the chronotopic transportation phase, as the transportation is the initial point of contact and has to be careful on setting up immersion as well as guiding expectation making for carefully crafted chronotopic elements. Chronotopic flow is affected not only by the action in the story itself, but also by the technicalities of the narrative delivery, such as sentence construction and general structure of a novel, or the overall structure of a video game, such as the levelling up system and the general game structure (Newman, 2004, pp. 71–90). It is through these technical aspects that the sense of the passing of time and movement in space is generated in the narrative. For example, heavy description and still or slow panning shots highlight objects and give a heightened sense of space but stop or slow the passage of narrative time while quick cuts and change of camera accelerate it, as it happens in the *Diablo III* (Blizzard, 2012) intro.

The chronotopic flow in the WRPGs analysed in this study (Sections 3.5 and 4.5) is particularly interesting as the games sit in a position which brings tensions between the intertextual material and the medium of representation. Video games with a degree of photorealism like *Skyrim* and *DAO* pull the chronotopic flow to greater verisimilitude, while the highly fantastical material and strong relationship with Heroic Epic push for malleability and a condensed depiction of the time space continuum. Both games deal with these tensions in different manners which illuminate the different techniques available to the genre made possible by their dialogical and intertextual relationships.

2.5 Concepts and theoretical approaches in Game Studies

The fact that video games are arguably the most complex of all media, at least in technical terms, makes the task of producing scholarly work on the experiential aspect of them quite challenging. Pioneer studies on video games started back in the 1970s with a considerable body of research later developed in the 1990s and early 2000s. Most research on video games

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conducted in that period was devoted to the analysis of the game design and narrative structural aspects of the games and the game experience (Aarseth, 1997; Bogost, 2006; Howard, 2008; Juul, 2005; Wolf & Perron, 2003). As it is perhaps usually the case with the creation of any new academic field, much of the early academic work focused on attempts to define the medium (Newman, 2004; Type, 1972), on discussions of what it is and is not capable of doing (Juul, 2005; King & Krzywinska, 2006), and what it should and should not be (Bogost, 2009; Murray, 1998). There were even some attempts to import theories from other media wholesale into video game scholarship (Filiciak, 2003, p. 11).

Since its early stages, however, Game Studies have seen a variety of scholars from different fields adding their expertise to the ongoing academic debate thus enriching scholarship in the discipline. In particular, the discussion surrounding the narrative aspects of video games generated much controversy over what the core tenant of a video game should be. It prompted intense debate between narratologists (Simons, 2007), who supposedly championed narrative as the main aspect of video games, and ludologists (Frasca, 2003), who supposedly dismissed narrative and backed the ludic aspect – or gameness. In more recent years, this debate has been replaced with a growing acceptance that video games contain narratives and, in certain cases, even depend on them without being limited to being a narrative medium (Carr, 2006). In reality, the discussion was much more nuanced than initially perceived, with scholars on each 'side' of the divide having different, varied and – for the most part – balanced and illuminating points to add to the field.

Early in the 2000s, Kücklich (2003, online) already argued that playing a game was analogous to the experience of reading a novel due to the player's interaction with signs. He proposed 'the model of viability from the philosophical discourse known as "radical constructivism," or second-order cybernetics' to explain the player's experience by merging interactivity and narrative. Although Kücklich recognized that seeing both aspects as integrated and that players will 'find a way to interact meaningfully with the game', his solution was based on the premise that the game design and games systems are built to 'resist' the player's interpretation. In this study, I argue that although there is a dynamic tension between both system and interpretation − similar to the centrifugal and centripetal forces operating at discourse level (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 270) – the game elements in the

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WRPGs discussed here do not to intrinsically hinder interpretation but, on the contrary, open possibilities of interpretation and narrative construction due to their intertextual nature.

2.5.1 Time and space in videogames

The late 2000s and the 2010s have seen a considerable proliferation of studies in the field covering a wide variety of research interests. However, the studies that are more significant for this investigation are those related to the analysis of time and space in interactive media narrative. Various approaches to the analysis of time in video games have been adopted by different academics based on a range of theoretical backgrounds, including cinema theory, semiotics, and hypertext (Nitsche, 2009, p. 145). Such attempts are mostly divided into formalistic efforts to map the schemata of time within a video game, or experiential attempts to understand a player's perception of time in games (p. 146). For example, discussing ludic systems, Lindley (2005, online) refers to the concept of 'ludic space' as the imaginative space where the game experience happens and argues that it affects the way games are designed, the interactions that the game affords, the 'correlation between game elements', and how the game affects players 'in relation to their motivations, pleasures and play style preferences'.

Nitsche (2007) proposes space as a way of bridging formalist and experiential understanding of time. For him, space is a way of understanding time. Later Nitsche (2009) devotes an entire book to the discussion of space in video games through an interdisciplinary approach and analyses how spaces in video games can become meaningful. In particular, his analysis leads to an understanding that narrative and fiction add orientation to the game space helping the player understand it (p. 178). While his analysis hints at the synergy between narrative and game spaces, it does not specify how different narrative materials can help the meaningful population/creation of the game space. Instead, he examines several game spaces and their different layouts, such as *Half-life*, *Pac-Man* and *Zanzarah*. Nitsche (2008, pp. 15-17) proposes five different analytical planes for game spaces: role-based, mediated, fictional space, play space, and social space. If we consider these categories, this study would be seen as concerned with the mediate and fictional spaces since, according to Nitsche, mediated space is 'defined by the presentation, which is the space of the image plane and the use of this image including the cinematic form of presentation'(p. 16). Fictional space is, for him, the space 'that lives in the imagination, in other words, the space "imagined" by players from their comprehension of the available images' (p. 16). However useful Nitsche's categories

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are, I argue that from a dialogical point of view entirely separating the image from its interpretation is an impossibility. Therefore, the plane of analysis adopted here is the relationship between the mediated and the fictional space, as Nitsche defines them. These early studies laid the foundational stone upon which this study rests in terms of the understanding of how space and the perception of space affect player and design. However, they seem to lack a more in-depth and holistic understanding of the constant relationship between perception and artefact, time and space, narrative and gameplay systems and how they all combined construct the game playing event.

In his paper on mapping times on video games, Nitsche (2007) recognizes the interdependence of space and time in games, positioning his approach close to a chronotopic one while also making an attempt to combine formalist and experiential understanding of time and space in games. Formalists map time according to how it is spent and portrait in the game with little focus on the player whereas experiential approaches focus on the players' 'cognitive and emotional involvement' with time (p. 146). However, Nitsche falls short of a true dialogical approach as he does not consider the double-bond nature of time and space influencing and being influenced by each other. Rather, he argues that spatiality is the key factor in reconciling both formalist and experiential approaches to time in games and seems to propose that space influences time but time does not influence space to the same degree.

Ash (2009, p. 2106) uses video games to argue for the creation of spaces through images 'that have a spatialtemporality beyond that of their association with a referent'. In a way, he seems to be arguing for an understanding of the fictionality of the image that goes beyond mere representation and saying that images create their own fictional time and space. His insights come from his background in geography and reinforce my belief that chronotopic awareness derived from images and texts does not necessarily relate to 'real' space and time. The focus on the experiential aspect of time and space is also highlighted by Zagal and Mateas (2010) who attempt to create a hybrid approach of formative and experiential, which they call 'relationist'. They propose their four temporal frames as a flexible matrix to analyse all kinds of videogames: real world, game world, coordination and fictive (Table 2.1).

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Table 2.1: Summary of Common Temporal Frames (Zagal and Mateas, 2010, p. 852)

Frame	Definition	Relevant Concepts
Real world	Real-world time is established by the set of events taking place in the physical world around the player.	Cycle, duration, countdown, trigger
Gameworld	Gameworld time is established by the set of events taking place within the represented gameworld.	Cycle, duration, countdown, trigger
Coordination	Coordination time is established by the set of events that coordinates the actions of multiple players (human or artificial intelligence) and possibly in-game agents.	Rounds, turn taking, tick based, action points
Fictive	Fictive time is established through the application of sociocultural labels to a subset of events.	Temporal schemata, sociocultural labels, story time, discourse time

As it is often seen in Game Studies research, Zagal and Mateas (2010) attempt to create a taxonomy that encompasses the notion of time in all kinds of games. From their proposed temporal frame, fictive time is perhaps the one most related to the concerns of this study since it affects the 'temporal schemata in a player's mind' (p. 850) and refers to the 'narrated event sequences' (p. 851) in the game. However, their account of fictional time does not seem to fully account for the multiple aspects of the narrative time that co-exist in games such as the WRPGs discussed in this investigation. Neither do they seem to consider the double binding nature of the relationship between different narrative time frames (Section 3.2). The most interesting aspect of this particular framework is their recognition that 'video games commonly possess multiple temporal frames' (p. 852) and that 'temporal frames may appear sequentially, overlap, and coexist [and are] also often embedded in each other' (p. 854).

Similarly, Kirkpatrick (2011, p. 73) is concerned with how the experience of time and space in video games shapes the activity of playing. He argues that,

> [t]he structuring of time in video games is central to producing the feeling of pleasurable engagement that makes people play them (…) Similarly, when we analyse our experience of space it is never the same as the space described by physicists (…).This gap between the objective characterization of space and time and their lived reality is inelimimable and it means that just as all experienced space, is produced and shaped by our activity, so all experience of time has a rhythmic, aesthetic dimension .

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Kirkpatrick not only highlights the significance of time and space to the video game medium, but also the important notion that it is the internalized perception that space produces upon interaction with the game that is of great interest for analysis of the experience of playing a game. However, he sees time and space in games as mainly rhythmic and aesthetic in nature and seems to disregard the concept of meaningful interaction hinting that playing is intrinsically a pleasure bond activity devoid of deeper significance. He seems to take the openness of interpretation and the incomplete human understanding as licence to disregard narrative meaning. Structuralist-oriented work is perhaps the most frequent approach game studies research since game design is a structural affair. Wei et al (2010) work based on Herman's (2004) concept of storyworld, follows in this line and discusses how time and space are 'two important aspects in the '(re)construction' of a storyworld' (p. 3) which is dependent not only of 'textual, visual, auditory and haptic cues', but also of players filling of 'the gaps left in the computer-generated virtual world'. While interesting, their structural framework for the analysis of time and space remains largely at the descriptive level of the structures they can see but mostly fails to explain what these structures do beyond their basic effects and how they affect the player's reading of the game. Neither do they acknowledge that the various parts that constitute these structures deeply affect and are affected by each other.

Although most of the ideas discussed above have greatly contributed to our understanding of the temporal and spatial features of video games by themselves, they mostly fail to aptly provide an encompassing understanding of temporality and spatiality in WRPGs. As such, I found it necessary to draw upon and adapt literary theory in combination with game studies theoretical approaches−mainly the understanding of different temporal layers and the medium's strong spatial chronotopic construction − in order to investigate the generation of narrative meaning through time and space and the various narratives techniques employed in WRPGs. As such, I argue that the adaptation and use of the literary concept of chronotope is validated and of interest as it naturally encompasses both time and space while acknowledging their intrinsic correlation.

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2.5.2 Immersion, presence, and engagement

McMahan (2003, p. 68) divides immersion into two levels when referring to games, the diegetic level, or narrative level, and non-diegetic level, or ludic level. While this categorization can be useful, especially when adapting literary theory to the diegetic level, one must not forget that, ultimately, the player experience is a holistic one that encompasses both simultaneously. Murray's (1998, pp. 98–99) definition of immersion is one of the most widely accepted definitions of the term in the discipline of Game Studies. Unlike McMahan, when Murray comments on immersion, she describes both diegetic and non-diegetic levels simultaneously except when referring specifically to the participatory allowance of the digital medium. She argues that,

> the experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content. We refer to this experience as immersion. *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. (…) in a participatory medium, immersion implies learning to (…) to do the things that the new environment makes possible. (Murray, (1998, pp. 98–99)

The sensory experience of being in a different reality is what game study scholars tend to refer to as presence, as such, the terms immersion and presence are often linked and used interchangeably (McMahan, 2003, p. 68). In this study, I use the term *narrative immersion* to refer to the effect generated by the suspension of disbelief and/or secondary belief fostered by the verisimilitude of the fictional narrative whereas I use the term *presence* to refer to the heightened chronotopic awareness derived from both narrative immersion and the agency given to the players in the fictional world through the *gameplay* systems (Figure 2.1).

The sense of presence created through gameplay enhances fictional narrative immersion through the addition of a new layer of verisimilitude. Verisimilitude comes from *vero similis*, the Latin for real-like. In the human everyday experience, corporeal presence is a given, therefore even a crude simulation of it can add to the realism of the game world. For instance, a first person camera attempts to emulate human vision is likely to increase presence to a certain degree (King & Krzywinska, 2006, p. 3). However, this can also lead to cognitive dissonances as technological limitations may become highlighted by the failing to completely emulate such vision. In some games, for example, the players can see their hands but not the rest of their body. Even in a game like *Far Cry 4* (Ubisoft, 2014)*,* where the avatar

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body is visible in the first person camera, there is still a lack of peripheral vision that can potentially compromise presence. The shortcomings can often be overlooked through game literacy as the mind adapts and allows for a sense of presence to be developed despite the imperfection of the emulation.
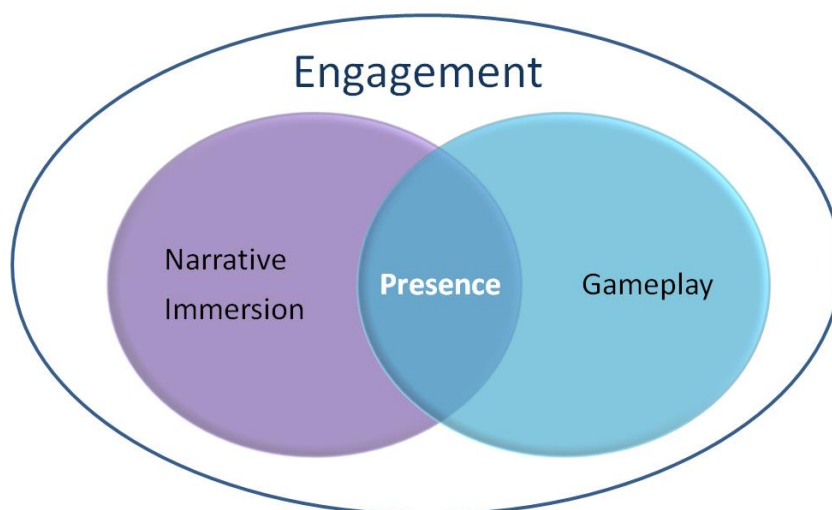
Figure 2.1: The relationships between narrative immersion, gameplay, presence, and engagement.

Additionally, presence is further intensified by the focusing of players' perception through a player-character, or avatar. This can lead to the common event of players referring to themselves as if they were the in-game character. This is unlike the identification observed in other narrative forms, such as books and films, where the protagonist's identity typically remains clearly separated from the identity of the reader or audience. The relationship between player and their avatars is extensively discussed by Boudreau (2012) who argues that although strong identification between player and player-character is an important aspect to create a state of 'flow' (Tronstad, 2008, p. 254), the player-character/avatar ultimately remains separated from the player creating a 'state of separate togetherness' she calls 'hybrid-identity'. Boudreau (2012, pp. 90–92) argues that the actions performed in the game, the decisions that player has to make, and the 'range of actions' afforded by the gameplay system result is a 'process of identity construction of both the player and the avatar'. She also argues that the 'desire to move forward' is unlikely to be driven solely by narrative curiosity' but depends on the development of the interactions and identification between player and avatar. I suggest that the kind of hybrid relationship that Boudreau sees is similar to the dialogical

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interactions Bakhtin sees as permeating all life relationships. However, I also suggest that in the case of the *Skyrim* and *DAO* the development of this hybrid-identity is achieved not only by the gameplay but also by the rich intertextual references and use of archetypal images that facilitate the identification of the player and their player-character with the Epic hero archetype. The state of 'flow' mentioned by Boudreau can be defined as the deep engagement with gameplay, often with the fictional element serving only as grounding for the player understanding of the systems while in this state. The allure of gameplay can thus be considered to some extent separately from the immersion provided by the fictional narrative content; however, their intertwined relationship must also be acknowledged especially when leading to the retention of players' engagement.

McMahan (2003, p. 69) uses the term engagement purely as the non-diegetic gameplay driven pull over the player. I choose to use the word *engagement* as a more encompassing and effective umbrella term to convey the idea that both narrative immersion and gameplay work together to hold the players' interest and focus. In this study, the term engagement refers to the state generated by the relationship between narrative immersion and gameplay (Figure 2.2) to signify the player's interest and willingness to interact with the game. As narrative immersion and gameplay work simultaneously to promote engagement, they also compensate for each other should one momentarily fail to maintain the engagement. For example, should narrative immersion fail due to a break in the belief of the verisimilitude of the fiction through ludonarrative dissonance (Hocking, 2007), the very pleasure derived from the gameplay can maintain the player' engagement until the narrative immersion reasserts itself or even possibly, in the case of very strong gameplay, maintain engagement independently indeterminably. This can be observed in games which are light in narrative, such as *Diablo III* (Blizzard, 2012). Although the narrative immersion in such games can be weak, the fun effect generated by the gameplay system may still maintain engagement for hours. The opposite can also be true since strong narrative and fictional immersion through compelling storylines might maintain a player's interest even if the gameplay is not particularly engaging. A case in point is the highly acclaimed *P.T.* (Kojima, 2014), a first-person horror videogame demo directed by Hideo Kojima in collaboration with Guillermo Del Toro. The only action allowed by the gameplay system to the first-person unknown protagonist who the player controls is to repeatedly walk along a corridor and look at specific objects. In spite of such striking gameplay limitations, *P.T* has been praised by game critics

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(Houghton, 2015; Tassi, 2015) for the high level of immersion and engagement it is able to produce due to its gripping psychological horror narrative.

More often video games tend to maintain a balance between the two, although WRPGs in particular tend to have a more prominent reliance on the narrative immersion side of the equation by providing rich worlds, backstories and characters with which the player can interact. In the case of the WRPGs analysed in this study, I argue that the use of intertextual and archetypal materials related to the Heroic Epic texts enriches the fictionality of the gameworlds leading to deeper verisimilitude and greater immersion and, through the immersion, engagement. The gameplay systems can also synergize with Heroic Epic tropes and structure to create more meaningful gameplay and thus lead to deeper engagement.

2.5.3 Bakhtinian informed game research

As for references to Bakhtin in Game Studies, Rockwell (2002) was perhaps the first to consider 'an adaptation of Bakhtin's work on the dialogue and the novel' as a theoretical framework for the criticism on computer games in general, but an analysis of how such concepts, including the chronotope, actually inform the game design and shape the player's experience is totally absent from his paper. Lemke (2005) answers to the call and looks at space and time in *The Sims* using Bakhtin's chronotope as his theoretical underpinning to analyse the complex simulated human activities in the game but, different from this investigation, his main interest lies in the 'human learning and behavior within, between, and across virtual attentional worlds' (p. 43). More recently, Wei et al (2010) discuss the importance of an analysis of time and space for the understanding of interactive storytelling in a series of popular video games in different genres. Although they explicitly mention Bakhtin's chronotope (p. 2), they clearly state that for their analysis they decided to 'adapt Herman's notion of *storyworld*' which is a much more stable and invariable idea of narrative generated space-time in the player's mind than the concept of chronotopic awareness I propose in this investigation.

Since the beginning of this investigation, in 2012, some attempts have been made to use Bakhtin to understand time and space in game studies. Gingrich (2013) posted a blog entry referring to Bakhtin's theory of chronotope when writing about 'encounters' in *Legend of Zelda,* however, there is no serious consideration of the theory, the concept of 'encounter' is not properly defined, and the piece cannot be considered an academic publication. Lemke

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(2014, p. 49), almost ten years after his paper on *The Sims,* briefly suggests Bakhtin's chronotope still as a 'promising conceptual approach' to conduct future research 'on the role space, time and artifacts in the mediation of culturally meaningful activities' in the context of video games. His major concern, however, is with how visual media demand multiple and simultaneous attention both in temporal and experiential terms. Another attempt was made by Guschwan (2014) who presented a conference paper where he proposes adopting the concept of chronotope to explore the notion of 'epistemic agency', identity, and 'knowledge creation' in role-playing games, but in spite of mentioning digital games, his study focuses on two 'serious games': one was a table RPG and the other a 'live action training simulation'. A short undergraduate paper by Fisher (2014) has appeared online where the author attempts to connect an analysis of time and space in *Skyrim* to the chronotope of the Chivalric Romance. However, to my best knowledge, to this date there have been no extensive, in-depth academic studies of WRPG videogames where Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and chronotope have been applied as the main analytical framework to investigate the generation of narrative meaning in this particular game genre in relation to Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives, as proposed in this investigation.

2.6 Forms of storytelling

According to Kearney (2002, p. 3), storytelling is the act that fundamentally defines the human species. Telling a story is a multifaceted mode of communication that makes use of a complex conjunction of signs (Barthes, 1977). These signs can be in the form of the written word, as in a poem or a novel; the spoken language, sounds and body language, as in oral storytelling and theatre; still or moving pictures, such as comics and films; or in a combination of all of the above with the added technological interaction of video games. As such, the following subsections deal with a chronological understanding of narratives in order to briefly outline the accumulated knowledge and scholarship on storytelling. Attempting to understand WRPGs without a solid theoretical foundation or an understanding of the extensive knowledge advanced through the study of older forms of narrative would prove a very challenging task as WRPGs combine not only technology and game narrative, but also a range of narrative elements borrowed from ancient oral storytelling to contemporary cinema and beyond. Therefore, this section looks into other forms of storytelling to help with the game analysis due to the contrast points they provide and their archetypal proximity.

2.6.1 The Heroic Epic

Even before the development of writing, human beings have engaged in telling stories that attempted to interpret our experiences and explain the world around us. Such creational myths, legends and oral traditions eventually led to the creation of collections of written stories we conventionally call Literature. According to Scragg (2013, p. 50), Old English Heroic poetry has its roots in the oral tales of Germanic tribes whose poems were 'composed, performed and passed on without the benefit of writing'. Among the body of early Western literature, the Old Norse *Poetic Edda* (Larrington, 2008) and *The Saga of the Volsungs* (Byock, 2000), as well as the Old English poem *Beowulf* (Heaney, 2007) have proved to have an enduring fascination over the Western collective imagination. Both *Beowulf* and the poems in the *Poetic Edda* are here treated as important texts in the history of Western European Heroic tradition (Lawrence, 1967) in spite of sometimes having their position within the genre contested (Tolkien, 2006, p. 13). In his seminal essay *Beowulf: The Monster and the Critics,* Tolkien (2006, pp. 8–9) makes an ironic inventory of how 'decades of critics' have defined and analysed the poem and found it wanting. He rebuts those critics' definitions of the poem and argues that,

> *Beowulf* is not an 'epic', not even a magnified 'lay'. No terms borrowed from Greek or other literatures exactly fit: there is no reason why they should. Though if we must have a term, we should choose rather 'elegy'. It is a heroic-elegiac poem (p. 31).

Tolkien's preference for the term 'elegy' over the term 'epic' may come from the way he saw the structure of the poem (p. 31) but also from his reservations towards applying Greek models and concepts to the understanding and evaluation of Anglo-Saxon literature since for him myths and legends 'depend on the language to which they belong' (Carpenter & Tolkien, 2006, p. 231). His argument for a detachment from Greek borrowed terminology may also be a reflection of his desire to create a mythology for English that was distinct from legends of other lands (p. 144). However, if Epic narratives are, by definition, those tales of heroic deeds that have shaped the culture of peoples and national histories (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 13), *Beowulf* seems to be entitled to be called so. As Tolkien himself argues, there has been no 'period in the North' were myth and heroic legend have been conceived as separate (p. 16) and *Beowulf* is among such legends with northern roots. Evidence for its 'epic' status comes chiefly from the deeds of its main protagonist since 'the prince of the heroes in the north, supremely

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memorable – *hans nafn mun uppi meðan veröldin stendr* – was a dragon-slayer' (p. 16), and such man 'faced with a foe more evil than any human enemy' is greater than any 'standard hero' for he is 'incarnate in time, walking in heroic history, and treading the named lands of the North' (p. 17).

Regardless of genre labels, *Beowulf* and the *Poetic Edda* have exerted strong influence on twentieth century medievalists and poets who set the foundations for the Fantasy genre, such as William Morris (Morris, 2008) and J.R.R. Tolkien (Carpenter, 2011). Moreover, not only is *Beowulf* a written version of the oral tradition of the Germanic peoples and the 'evolving culture of the Anglo-Saxons' (Bradley, 1995, p. 408), but also a tale that still 'meets our history', and the 'complexities and ambiguities' of our times (Overing, 2012, p. 309). Echoes of such stories can be found in popular culture, such as in comics (Arnold, 2011), music (Fisher, 2005), film (Branagh, 2011) and, eventually, video games. Being it so, it continues shaping the culture of Western societies to a significant extent. I argue that both *Beowulf* and the *Poetic Edda* display most of the features and the ethics that Bakhtin sees as the chief characteristics of the Epic (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 4–40) and I use the term Heroic Epic as an encompassing category in which both narratives − with their heroes, dragons, and absolute past chronotopic configurations − are included.

The Epic has long been solidified, if not categorically defined, as a literary genre. Centuries of scholarship have set its literary status as one of the most revered and well-established forms of storytelling. In his essay on 'The Epic and the Novel,' Bakhtin (1981, pp. 4–40) argues that the Epic occurs eternally in the distanced past: it is the time gone and unrecoverable. The Epic has the very nature of stasis as part of its core aspects. Therefore, by placing tales within this frame, they gain rootedness and verisimilitude within the inherited framework. It gives giants, dragons, hydras, beasts, and gods both literal and allegoric meanings. This fantastical material, alongside more 'believable' historical components, derives meaning from the fact that most Epic narratives, like Myth, precede the notion of history as separate from literature (Shippey, 2005, p. 34). History and fiction are, after all, both a type of story, the difference being that one is purportedly narrated as true whereas the other makes no claim on reality (Mendlesohn, 2008). Good examples of the mingling of history with fiction in Epic literature are the presences in *Beowulf* of Atli, or Attila the Hun, in the same narrative as Sigurd, the dragon slayer (Larrington, 2008), and the inclusion of

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Hrothgar, a likely historical Danish king, being terrorized by the monster Grendel. History and Epic share, to a certain extent, the same chronotope, as they are both necessarily set in the distant past. For an event to be historically reported, it must have inevitably already happened at some point in the past, whereas Epic's dependency on the past is due to its heavy reliance on chronotopic distancing (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 14–15) for its generation of suspension of disbelief.

The first chronotopic aspect to be considered is *time distancing* (Section 2.4.2). Bakhtin (1981, p. 13) defines the setting of Epic as being about the 'absolute past', 'beginnings' and 'firsts'. The 'reality' of the tale is thus unimportant since distance in time renders fact and fiction undistinguishable from each other. To a reader/listener, who has no possible ways of verifying the accuracy of a story so chronologically distant that it rests in the insurmountable past of its own narrator and which depends on largely inaccurate historical details, veracity becomes irrelevant. Since the plot is positioned in an 'absolute epic distance' from the author-narrator and from the reader/listener, the tale is all that matters.. The Norse family sagas (Smilely, 2005) exemplify such amalgamation between history and story. Tulinius (2000, p. 526) argues that they 'blend different modes of narration, mainly fantastic and more realist modes'. Dragons and other fantastical beast may have thus been perceived by the listeners of such tales as much facts of life as the passing seasons and the next harvest. *Beowulf* also begins evoking a supposed historical past by reminding its readers of the kings of the 'Spear-Danes in days gone by' (Heaney, 2007, p. 3). Similarly to *Beowulf,* the Eddic poems (Larrington, 2008) usually conform to the idea of absolute epic past by establishing their time setting in the prose introductions that precede the poetic dialogues.

Through making the subject matter unreachable through the absolute past enclosure, the Epic can generate a sense of value. Greatness is granted past the act, for only when something is finished, can it hold complete meaning. Time distancing creates fuller and more valorized signification (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 16). It is this chronic distancing that allows for the Epic to generate high archetypal and fantastic meaning while retaining links to the narrative of 'reality'. It positions itself as a form of distant social memory and from there allows the fantastical imagination to flourish creating 'greatness', an abstracted fantastic ideal to be used to measure against reality (p. 18). Not only does the Epic stem from cultural tradition, but it is also one of its makers by constantly dialogically reinforcing it.

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The second chronotopic aspect to be taken into consideration is *geographical distancing*. Although Epic poets name lands and countries, describe locations and give directions, the Northern Europe depicted in both *Beowulf* and the *Poetic Edda* is not a historical representation of those geographical locations circa 500 A.D but 'a description the realm of the Epic North: an idealised view, a self-consistent picture, a construction bearing clearly the marks of design and thought' (Tolkien, 2006, p. 27). Neither is the past depicted in the Epic the 'real' past; it is the 'heroic' past (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 18) represented in full idealization. This idealization seems to have a deep connection with the creation of national and cultural identities (p. 7). According to Earl (2006, p. 263), the Epic as a genre 'is involved with the task of superego construction at both the individual and the cultural levels.' This cultural aspect has not passed unnoticed to critics of *Beowulf* who have highlighted its importance in the process of shaping the English national identity (Georgiana, 1998, pp. 39–41). The poem opens equating 'courage and greatness', martial prowess and territorial expansion with being a 'good king' and saying that the 'behaviour that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere' (Heaney, 2007, p. 3). Such statements do not come across as the poet's personal opinion, but as established social view. The proclamation that Sigurd (Larrington, 2008, p. 142) 'was the most remarkable of all', 'the greatest of all men and the most redoubtable war-leader' shows that opinion and fact intermingle and become one through the social judgement of the ages. Cohen (2006, p. 365) argues that the 'process of projecting a history upon the land is the mirror image of the process of identity formation'.

This link between idealized meaning and the formation of a cultural identity has a close resemblance to the idea of archetypal meaning mentioned earlier. Arguably, the first to find archetypes in literature was Propp (1984) in his *Morphology of the Folktale* where he distils, from a hundred folktales, seven broad character functions and thirty-one plot functions. Among the seven character functions perhaps the most easily recognizable archetypes are the ones of the hero, the villain, and the magical helper. The hero figure in particular is of interest for this study due to its prominence in the Epic, Fantasy literature and WRPGs. According to O'Keeffe (2013, p. 101), 'the ethos of heroic life pervades Old English literature, marking its conventions, imagery and values'. The findings of this study, discussed in the following chapters, suggest that such values are also embedded in new forms of narrative, such as the WRPGs examined in study. However, for the hero character to work simultaneously as a particular and an archetypal function in contemporary narratives,

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distancing is necessary because everything that is brought into our realm of experience becomes to a certain extent tarnished by the comical or farcical (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 22). The hero archetypal function cannot exercise its full meaning in an everyday setting. It is precisely this isolation from contemporary reality that constitutes the basis for the generation of epic meaning (pp. 15–16).

2.6.2 Chivalric Romance

Although a more in-depth discussion of chronotope in the Chivalric Romance is beyond of the scope of this research, some considerations on the genre need to be made due to its importance as literary form that contains considerable material inherited from the Heroic Epic and which handed down such influences to Fantasy and popular culture (Ferszt & Bumo, 2017). Chivalric Romance as a genre chronologically sits between the Epic and Fantasy and as such this short discussion equally sits between the sections on those two genres that constitute the main focus of this investigation.

Chivalric Romance, as it is currently understood, comes mostly from French romances from the 12th and 13th centuries which narrated the adventures and courtly passions of knights and ladies. As a literary form, the Chivalric Romance is novelistic in its chronotope, containing high mimetic material concerning the description of action whereas in terms of content it tends contain quite unrealistic and fantastic material (Lupack, 2005, p. 83). Classic examples are the immortal Green Knight that challenges Gawain (British Library, 2017), Merlin's magical powers (Malory & Shepherd, 2003), and the monstrous Questing Beast (McShane, 2017; Spellmire, 2017)

One of the ways Chivalric Romance is capable of broaching such disparate and apparently conflicting material is the division it draws between its two main general spatial settings: the confines of the inside private spaces, such as the courtly halls and bed chambers, and the realm of the public and the wild outside where the fantastic tends to reside (Spearing, 1994). Unlike the spaces of Heroic Epic that have more fuzzy barriers due to the compression caused by the absolute past chronotope, the novelized chronotope of the Chivalric Romance resides in the 'miraculous now' (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 151−155), thus generating more defined spaces that are more mimetic as well as accommodating the fantastic in itself, the spatial breakdown into two major spatial archetypes − inside and outside − aids interpretation and helps maintain immersion despite the inherent tension of mimetic and fantastic through a

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form of genre and cultural literacy. Gawain's Green Knight, for example, comes from outside the court to issue his challenge to the knights of Camelot, this invasion of this indoors domain is what leads to the adventure that ensues with Gawain journeying outdoors to answer the challenge.

The fantastic abstract material is capable of resisting the more mimetic chronotope precisely due to the unknown nature of the still untamed wilds of medieval Europe (Melrose, 2017) and its link to the heroic epic past; the two of the main monsters in *Beowulf*, Grendel and his mother both lived in the wilds as does the dragon Fafnir in Sigurd's tale. The monsters connection to the natural world facilitates the inclusion of the fantastical in the Chivalric Romance stopping it from breaking immersion. The image of a monstrous, violent, and mysterious side of nature divergences and complements the idea of the open and unrestricting beautiful wonders of the natural world.

Religion is another aspect of the narrative that sustains this particular archetypal image of nature. Chivalric romance is a decidedly Christian narrative form and the Christian divine nature of all creation allows for the presence of saints, spirits and dragons in the same spaces. Just as devils and angels co-exist in Christian theology, so do the natural and the supernatural (Bartlett, 2008). For the medieval Christian whose national and individual identity had been shaped by the heroic epic tales as well as the narratives of the Bible, the spaces of the wild as well as the inner spaces of hall, castle, and church are links to their ancestors and the divine. The land itself has now a strong identity based on an archetypal image generated by those tales of heroes and saints.

Another facet that helps the co-existence of present tense narrative and mimetic courts with the fantastic is the genre's close relationship with the Heroic Epic itself, particularly in its heavy implementation of the quest format, the most famous of which is perhaps the quest for the Holy Grail that is so heavily present in Arthurian Romance. For almost a millennium, the genre has exerted influence on Western imagination and generated popular material, such as the various films and animations dealing with the legend of King Arthur, often inspired by that which is perhaps the most popular Chivalric Romance *La Morte D'Artur* by Thomas Malory (Malory, 2008). In video games, their presence is hard to understate, from straightforward references, such as the names of the Knights of the Round Table given to characters, to the inclusion of Excalibur as a powerful weapon to be used by the game hero.

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Most interesting, however, is that the spatial division of inside and outside observed in chivalric tales finds itself very much alive in video games, especially those of the RPG genre where the inside of towns and castles are often combat -free zones where the player-characters often partakes of social interaction rather than fighting whereas the 'wilds' are often full of monsters and perils to be overcome through adventurous action. The quest is also a main narrative component of the RPG genre and, as in the Chivalric Romance quests are often interlinked and conjoined in patterns to make for more complex adventures (Lupack, 2005, p. 92).

2.6.3 The Fantasy Novel

It is perhaps mostly through Fantasy that elements of the Heroic Epic have reached contemporary readers (Drout, 2004) and video game players (Pulsipher, 2012). The influence Old Norse and Old English Epic material has exerted on Fantasy Literature cannot be underestimated since Fantasy borrows from the Epic its symbolism and main tropes (Mendlesohn, 2008).

Fantasy as a genre (with capital F) has been growing in popularity for the past five decades, largely due to the influence of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R Tolkien, with an increasing number of popular fantasy novels being published every year (James, 2012). Nevertheless, reception given to Fantasy in academic circles has been less enthusiastic and the genre has been every so often met with scepticism by some literary critics (Attebery, 1992). For instance, when surveying the 'Western canon' in the late 20th century, Bloom (1995) completely ignored Fantasy as a genre and any mentioning of 'fantasy' in his book is, as a rule, related to Romance, Shakespeare, or the Romantic movement. Among the recurrent labels still sometimes attached to Fantasy are the ones of 'childishness' and 'escapism' (Tolkien, 2009, pp. 56–71). Although there are some noticeable links between children's fairy-tales and some Fantasy novels, such as monsters and magic, fantastic narratives are not necessarily child-oriented. Moreover, the previously discussed highly allegorical Epic texts, which also include such elements, are proof that a high density of fantastic elements does not equate with juvenile literature.

Discussing fairy-tales, Lang (Tolkien, 2009, pp. 39–40) states that children's 'tastes remain like the tastes of their naked ancestors thousands of years ago; and they seem to like fairy-tales better than history, poetry, geography, or arithmetic'. Tolkien reproaches such

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stance by arguing that we would not have those other things if our 'naked' ancestors did not like them too 'so far as they had yet separated the many branches of their general interest in everything' (p. 40). The answer to why fantastical tales appealed to our Western ancestors and still fascinate children while failing to entice some adults may be in the historically constructed perceived clear-cut division between imaginative/fantastical and logical/mimetic and their attributed value. Since the Renaissance, there has been a growing distinction in the Western social meta-narrative of perceived reality between the mimetic as 'real' and therefore valid, and the fantastical as 'unreal' and invalid (Swinfen, 1984, p. 2).

The 'unreal' is, therefore, associated with the idea of escapism, a term that has been previously used to disparage the novel (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 32). Such stance assumes that fantastical tales only serve as a diversion from the 'real', a childish and indulgent escape from reality. Furthermore, it presupposes a fixed and defined idea of what the 'real' is, making it then possible to departure from it into 'escapist' fantasy. Yet, since no work of fiction is strictly 'real' (p. 256), the criticism thus seems to be rather on the gap between the narrative of perceived reality and that of the Fantasy narrative. Such gap is undeniably wider than the gap found between highly mimetic-based fiction and 'reality'. The bigger leap necessary to bridge this gap is, however, one of Fantasy's greatest assets. Fantasy is a genre that embraces the impossibility of bridging the gap between what is 'real' and fiction and challenges the conventional notion that there is a single and stable reality. Fantasy thrives in the gulf between perception and interpretation, blurring distinctions between the fantastical and the mimetic. As such, the reading and analysis of Fantasy requires a different approach and mind-set from those used in the appreciation of mimetic fiction.

Frye's (2000, p. 312) draws a distinction between four forms of prose fiction (novel, confession, anatomy, and romance) and places Fantasy closer to Romance than to the Novel. He argues that, by portraying characters in archetypal forms such as the hero, Romance 'is intermediate between the novel, which deals with men, and the myth, which deals with gods' (pp. 305–306). However, it can be argued that Fantasy substantially differs from Romance in both characterization and setting. Fantasy employs a mode of characterization that is/was out of fashion and sets the narrative in an almost entirely unfamiliar and vastly unrealistic environment.

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As in the Heroic Epic, geographical distancing is also important in Fantasy; yet, such distancing in Fantasy occurs in quite a different manner. As historical narrative has become more developed through the centuries with facts being assimilated into our perception of the world (Swinfen, 1984), the technique adopted by the Heroic Epic of placing a highly fantastical narrative into a distant chronological past has become unfeasible and virtually unavailable to contemporary writers. Adopting such a narrative setting is likely to conflict with the narrative of perceived historical reality and cause a dismissal of the tale as impossible. Placing a highly fantastical tale in a purely realistic chronotope is likely to break immersion and fail to generate suspension of disbelief since the bigger the gap between the fictionalized and the mimetic narrative of perceived reality, the more fantastical imaginative effort is required from the reader to bridge it. Fantasy's answer to this problem is to set the tale in an alternative chronotope.

Unlike the Epic, where the action is frozen in the absolute past, Fantasy takes its chronological tense from the Novel. Being a novelistic genre, Fantasy tales are also told in the 'spontaneity of the inconclusive present' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 27) with the story mostly unfolding as the reader progresses through it. Time in Fantasy is never complete making it lack the absolute distancing of the past that characterizes the Epic in which the story is presented in its 'complete' form. Instead, the narrative tense in Fantasy resembles the one in the Novel, 'when the present becomes the centre of human orientation in time and in the world, time and people lose their completeness as a whole as well as in each of their parts' (p. 31). Fantasy, therefore, tends to set their narrative time in the absolute present. The action is thus in a continuous movement towards the future that is apparent and essential to the development of the story. As Bakhtin (1981, p.30) points out when discussing time in the Novel, 'the temporal model of the world changes radically as it becomes a world where there is no first word (no ideal word), and the final word has not yet been spoken.' Such drive towards the incomplete future is perhaps one of the reasons why, unlike the Epic, Fantasy tales find the necessity to expand the story through several volumes, with authors sometimes finding it difficult to bring the story to an end and expanding the number of volumes even beyond their initial planning (Ahlstrom, 2008, online).

Contrasting with the Epic and the other forms of Novel, Fantasy must achieve geographical distancing by employing a different strategy from the geographical remoteness

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adopted by the other two genres. In *Beowulf* and *The Volsung Sagas,* the action is set in the mythical North; in some novels that contain fantastic elements, such as *Dracula* (Stoker, 1998), the action is dislocated to the mystical East. Moving to the East was once a frequently used tool in the arsenal of Western writers (Said, 2003) and proved for a time a possible refuge for epic sensibilities (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 28). However, in times where the North and the East are nothing more than possible holiday destinations and news from such parts of the world are constantly available to Western readers via the newspapers and the internet, this avenue of distancing has become unlikely to be of any use to Fantasy writers. The answer that Fantasy and Science Fiction authors found was to create their own geographical location out of their imagination. This alternative plane in Fantasy differs from the ones found in Science Fiction, as in the latter distancing is achieved by setting the tale in alien worlds which, albeit improbable, cannot be entirely dismissed as impossible or inexistent. Fantasy achieves its distancing by placing the story in a dimensionally distant world (Clute and Grant, 1999, p. 738). What is required then from readers is perhaps better described as the aforementioned secondary belief (Tolkien, 2009, p. 53), rather than the willing suspension of disbelief required from the reader of the other genres discussed here.

Such dislocation into another dimensional setting, however, can never be absolute, as Fantasy usually keeps links to meta-narrative of other genres alongside links to perceived reality. Fantasy novels' entrance points tend to be more mimetic to ease the readers' transition into their fantastic worlds. For instance, in *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 2008), the initial setting, the Shire, is an idealized picture of the English countryside and can be easily associated with pastoral literature (Gifford, 1999), whereas Gandalf, the dwarves, and the journey into the Wilderland have links to the *Poetic Edda* and other medieval texts (Lee & Solopova, 2015, pp. 121−134) . In *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1994)*,* the English countryside and the heroic epic North give shape not only to the Shire and the land of Rohan, respectively, but also inform the whole design of Middle-Earth (Shippey, 2005, pp. 94–95).

It is usual for Fantasy novels set in such otherworlds to have a map of the fictional land in their very first pages. Besides helping readers with their imaginary creation of the setting, the map sets the text boundaries and gives shape to an otherwise formless topographic idea (Ekman, 2013). Moreover, such importance given to the geography of the fantastical world attests for the equally important symbiotic relationship between the setting

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and the hero, a trait that Fantasy shares with the Heroic Epic. However, in contrast with the Epic, where idealised values are impressed onto an already existing land, in Fantasy the values and concepts the writer brings into the text shape the creation of the fictional landscape.

2.6.4 Games, video games, and WRPGs

Games, in general, are possibly one of the oldest forms of entertainment alongside that of storytelling. Yet, games have long suffered from being associated with childlike behaviour. Even well-established games, such as football, tend to somewhat distance themselves from being associated with the word *game* by adopting the label of *sports* (Suits, 2005, pp. 129–33). Like most concepts, the exact definition of 'game' is debatable despite much work done towards it with varying definitions being offered, such as the ones proposed by Huizinga (cited by Rodriguez, 2006), Caillois (2001) and Gadamer (2004). Each definition has its strengths and adopters, but it is in the nature of concepts to be constantly challenged and re-evaluated. The definition I adopt in this study is the one offered by Suits (2005)*,*

> To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. I also offer the following simpler and, so to speak, more portable version of the above: playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles (pp. 54–55).

Based on this definition, it can be inferred that games are a form of unique experience generators that separate themselves from normal everyday life through the imposition of certain rules. In this sense, all kinds of games involve a certain degree of fictionality. Suits (2005, pp. 119–27) extensively defends his definition against possible objections and exceptions that would invalidate it, such as sport and make-believe games. The latter is of particular interest to this study since it introduces the concept of an open game: a game with a more abstract prelusory goal, such as to pretend to be cops and robbers. Role Playing Games (RPGs) can be understood as highly sophisticated offshoots of such make-believe games, combining them with the more precise rule systems often found in games with specific prelusory goals, such as most sports. It can be difficult to apply Suits (2005, pp. 54–55)'s definition of games to certain video games due to the fact that some of them can actually

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contain more than one game form. Much as an Olympic stadium where many different sport competitions can take place, some video games offer the player the opportunity of indulging in several forms of game playing in the same 'gaming space'. For instance, in some video games there may be the narrative goal, when the player engages in the story mode, and also competitive oriented gameplay, when the player engages in a multiplayer combat mode.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2016, pp. 203–204) argue that narrative in games exists when connections are established between the setting and characters in a fictional world hence allowing the player to interpret events and characters' motivations. Video games in particular are very good at presenting such settings and characters through advanced representational technologies which allow developers to create virtual environments and characters for the player to interact with on command. As it happens with Fantasy literature, video games can draw the player into the narrative by making use of other fantastical world settings which attempt to be coherent within themselves (McCarthy, 2004). However, differing from Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives, video games make these worlds visible and interactive through an avatar and, sometimes, even create storylines that adapt to the players' decisions – a common trait to many WRPGs. Players thus actively participate 'in the building of these worlds, shaping them and making them their own' (Wolf, 2014, p. 143). This tendency of the video game medium to incorporate other material with high cultural resonances was early noted by King and Krzwynska (2006, p. 168). They argue that video games create worlds that not only seem to exist outside our immediate sensory reality and which can be explored (King & Krzywinska, 2006, p. 3), but also, due to their responsive nature, simulate a universe open to interpretation and in constant motion. When attempting to generate belief in the unbelievable, certain Fantasy-oriented video games share some narrative strategies with the Epic and Fantasy literature, and it is thus hardly a surprise that such games also share with those literary genres other narrative elements, such as the hero figure, the quest and the monsters (James, 2012).

The WRPG video game genre, on which this study focuses, also has its narrative roots in the non-electronic games called Role Playing Games. After the sedimentation of the Fantasy novel genre brought about by Tolkien and his contemporaries in the mid-twentieth century, that particular mode of fantastic imagination made its way into another medium. In 1970s, a new type of game, the RPG, came into popularity as fully grown individuals and

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children alike gathered in groups in order to engage into a highly systematic form of make-believe (Holmes, 1981, p. 10) with complex sets of rules of engagement which enabled a form of communal storytelling. A player would invent and act out their character's dialogue while describing its physical actions, emotions, and thought processes, like actors in a kind of stationary play and narrators in oral storytelling. All this is informed by a highly numerical game system which usually depends on die rolls and numbered stats associated with a character. This complex interactional process is set to contribute to the creation of the story, which the Game Master (GM), as an author/editor figure, manages by giving general directions to the players. The most famous example of this type of pen and paper RPG is *Dungeons and Dragons* (Wizards of the Coast, 1974). Its system was developed to support the generation of a Tolkien-like Fantasy world setting for its players to engage with.

A recurring aspect of RPGs, regardless of setting, seems to be their ability to generate a sense of immersion and connection with the story at a different level from other forms of storytelling, allowing the player to perform as a protagonist of their own creation in an ever adapting heroic quest unique to their particular character. Engagement with the story in table RPGs comes thus greatly from the narratives that the GM and the participants create while playing the game in a form of communal storytelling that resembles a paracosm (Flood, 1994; Piaget, 1999). Besides the *authored narrative* already available to the players in the Playbook, new narratives emerge from participants in the act of playing. The creation of an *emergent narrative* is a feature that both table RPGs and WRPG videogames share as well as the fact that the game space is not delineated physically but rather is present within the fictional space.

As one of the earliest forms of games, war games are also worth considering because of their schematic spatial representation and are, in certain ways, predecessors of role playing games discussed above, especially when it comes to the ludic simulation of combat. War games can refer to many 'different activities' (Weiler, 1959, p. 1), but those discussed here are the ones that involve an abstract/fictional representation of space and troops. They can be centuries-old games, such as chess, later versions of war strategy games, such as those used by 19th Century militaries, or modern video game IPs, such as *Battlefield* (Visceral Games, 2002) and *Call of Duty* (Infinity Ward, 2003). The representation of space in war games has historically been an important aspect of their ludic composition. Older war games, such as the

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possible depictions created by military generals in the ancient world to represent battlefield action and strategy tended to have very abstract representations of space (Smith, 2010, p. 7). These representations became progressively more formalized until they were transformed into board games (Weiner, 1959, p. 5), such as Chess and Go, which are now well-known and unlikely to ever go out of circulation. To some extent, this form of spatial representation where the idea of a battlefield is stripped of any identifiable geographical nuances to simply present a space in which two or more 'armies' confront each other is the closest a particular instance can come to the full abstraction of the 'battlefield' archetype. More recent war games, used either for the strategic training of troops or simply for pleasure, have incorporated progressively more complex rules. An example of these is the introduction of umpires whose role is to conduct and mediate the game. In a certain way, such role is quite similar to the one performed by a Dungeon Master in a table-top RPG game. However, as far as this study is concerned, the most significant aspect of the evolution of war games is the fact that their spatial representations progressively moved towards more specific depictions of particular spaces (Weiner, 1959, pp. 6–7).

This change in the way space is represented mirrors the changes in spatial representation found in literature which moved from the more intangible and, therefore, more archetypal spaces of the Heroic Epic and Chivalric Romance to the highly mimetic spaces of the Realist Novel. These movements demonstrate how the understanding of space has changed and evolved alongside human culture from an abstract idea of space (i.e. the realization that space can be represented and played with) to a more formalized and mathematical abstraction, as observed in the boundaries and rules of movement of Chess and Go, to a push for more mimetic representations with the use of actual maps or sand tables to represent actual terrain. This process has eventually culminated in a dimensional change, which in the case of war games is represented by the adoption of 3D and VR technologies for an ever evolving attempt at a full simulation of a battlefield (Smith, 2006, p. 3). This tendency to create higher mimetic representations of both space and time in war video games is now also observed in video games in general and has led to richer game narratives that become an important part of the overall game playing experience, a fact most probably due to space and time being the cornerstones of the narrative experience itself (Wei, Bizzocchi, & Calvert, 2010, p. 1).

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Considering the dialogical relationship between authored narratives and emergent narratives (Kybartas & Bidarra, 2016), as well as the various modes of delivery from narration to depiction and gameplay – the last of which brings a whole new dimension of narrative experience – it is possible to appreciate why analysing a video game from a narrative standpoint can be a complex and challenging endeavour. Through the active participation of gameplay, video games, such as WRPGs, present to players myriads of variations of experience within their own set of parameters (Frasca, 2003, p. 227). These in turn can be internalized into diverse, variable (Bogost, 2006, p. 99), and branching narratives (Moser & Fang, 2015), the final internalisation of the chosen narrative path however is akin to what happens to readers/viewers when they enter in dialogical contact with other less variable media. As argued by Montfort (2007, p. 183), 'there are many modern-day video games' that 'present a space of possible narratives' and that are, therefore, 'more similar to text-based interactive fiction'. Good examples of such form of game narratives are *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010) and the various titles produced by Telltale Games (Telltale, 2017). However, the extra layers of variation that video games afford to individual players increase the range of possible interpretation even further (Elson, Breuer, & Quandt, 2014). Textual variations as minimal as a verb tense or punctuation might have extremely powerful effects in interpretation and the strength of an analysis of a written text. As Scholes (1990, p. 71) points out, a 'readers' choices in making meaning are in fact severely limited by the writers' previous choices of what marks to put on the page'. Similarly, video games have an incredible amount of information delivered to both visual and auditory senses to a degree that eclipses film, sometimes even utilizing the tactile sense through vibrations, thus making video games a more unstable and elusive form of narrative delivery in terms of analysis from a experiential reception point of view. This greater variation is true even of the earlier video games, albeit at a decidedly diminished level. Even those textual based adventure games, such as *Colossal Cave Adventure* (Crowther & Woods, 1976), and simple graphic games, such as the later graphic version of the same game for Atari 2600 (Atari, 1979), have variations on what is presented by responding to player input thus changing slightly what is to be read and interpreted.

Compared to more traditional forms of narrative delivery, video games are a quite recent invention, making their first appearance midway through the twentieth century. As a highly technological medium, video games nowadays tend to incorporate many components

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from other media (Grodal, 2003, p. 11), such as text, special visual effects, cinematography and acting through motion capture and voice acting. The element that is particular to video games though is interactivity, also frequently called gameplay. Although there is hardly consensus about the definition of gameplay, there is a general notion that it involves the interaction of the player with the digital programmed rule set, or lusory means (Fabricatore, 2007). Any given instance of interaction provides the player with a visual and/or audio feedback which, in turn, informs the future interactions between the player and the game. Moreover, most video games now have different versions, update patches, and downloadable content (DLC) that have transformed games into 'unstable objects' (Newman, 2012) and which may greatly add to the possibility of different interpretations. Most complex of all, however, is that they are inherently capable of delivering variation through interaction as an intrinsic part of the medium (Kybartas & Bidarra, 2016), thus making both the received and interpreted material potentially infinite in variation to a greater degree than what is found in other media.

Suits' (2005, p. 54) argument that 'to play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs', or prelusory goal, is particularly relevant to this study since WRPGs offer as a prelusory goal the completion of the embedded narrative (Jenkins, 2004). Video games where going through the story is the main goal are often called narrative-driven games and their completion may take any length of time from a couple of minutes to hundreds of hours. RPGs video games tend to lean towards lengthy campaigns, which in video game terminology means the duration of gameplay until the completion of the narrative. Some of them, Japanese RPGs (JRPGs) in particular, tend to feature an unchanging plot. This is also often the case in action adventure games whose narratives usually imitate the fixed format of other literary media, such as novels and films. Other games, however, attempt to emulate the adaptive nature of the paper-and-pen RPGs. Good examples of these are the interactive drama *Heavy Rain* (Quantic Dream, 2010) and IP series such as *Mass Effect* (Bioware) and *Dragon Age* (Bioware). The last two also allow players to create their own protagonist by choosing their background, physical appearance, and abilities. They make possible to generate a veritable 'hero with a thousand faces' (Campbell, 2008), with personalities and journeys to match each one. Frasca (2003, pp. 221–223) uses the term 'enabling simulation' to describe this particular form of variable narrative springing from gameplay and claims it to be a superior alternative to traditional narratives. Aarseth (1997), Frasca (2003), and Grodal

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(2003) argue for the supremacy of the simulation mode of story generation. Bogost (2006, p. 98), however, revises Frasca's definition arguing that simulation is 'a representation of a source system via a less complex system that informs the user's understanding of the source system in a subjective way'. Bogost (p. 99) deems that while 'interaction with simulation in games demands a critical approach slightly different than reading a traditional text,' its overall experience is not superior but 'in a manner similar to the literary text'. Brown (2012) also draws on literary theory and attempts to reconcile the idea of suspension of disbelief with this new layer of complexity generated by games with the *disavowal of presence*, a concept which has some resemblance to Bakhtin's concept of distancing. In this case, players distance themselves from their player-character through the observation of the medium's imperfect representation of the narrative, like a theatre-goer can observe the stage mechanics.

Although video games have come a long way since their inception and have greatly evolved their once meagre storytelling/narrative skills, there is still contention in the field whether video games should have stories at all. The early debates between Consalvo (2007), who claimed stories interfere with 'good gaming', and Murray (2004), who described computer games as a new medium for storytelling, has not completely died out in spite of more recent advances in the field, such as the branding of 'literary gaming', a hybrid creative media that combines ludic and literary elements (Ensslin, 2014). Bogost (2009, online) attempts to a conclusion on the ludonarrative debate by answering 'yes' to the question whether 'a game [is] a system of rules, like a story is a system of narration' and claims that both media can work in tandem; a position which I share in this study.

2.7 Research methodology

Research methods can be simply defined as the different ways and techniques employed to do research. A search for literature on research methodology in field of Game Studies reveals that little has been produced in the discipline with the notable exceptions of Järvinen (2009), who combines methods for the study and design of games, and Lankoski et al. (2015), who devote a whole publication to the topic. According to Lankoski et al. (2015, p. 1), game research is not yet established as a discipline on its own right and therefore game researchers tend to use methods borrowed from other fields of knowledge.

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As it happens with research methods in Games Studies, research methods in English Studies − the other discipline relevant to this investigation − are still not 'widely discussed' (Griffin, 2013b, p. 1). Although research training is now expected as part of postgraduate degrees in the field, research methods are still often 'understood as research skills'. She also argues that research methods should open 'up the possibilities of the kinds of research one might conduct' and help researchers 'to think divergently' (p. 5) about the ways they carry out their studies. The scarcity of literature in the field of English research methods seems to confirm Griffin's statement as most literature on research methodology in the discipline deals in fact with research methods in education and linguistics instead of English studies. Correa and Owens (2009) also attempt to fill in this gap but their work tends more towards research skills and the tools of the trade instead of providing a more principled discussion of different approaches.

2.7.1 Research methods

Research methods employed in literary studies may vary from archival methods, oral history research, bibliography research, to quantitative methods that borrow techniques from linguistics and corpus analysis and where texts are analysed 'numerically, applying the powerful, accurate, and widely accepted methods of mathematics to measurement, classification' (Hoover, 2008) of the textual elements. Most studies in the field of literature are, however, done by carrying out close reading (Lentricchia & DuBois, 2003) or some form of discourse analysis (Canepari, 2014; Wetherell et al., 2001) which are informed by diverse theoretical approaches to literature, from structuralism to deconstruction.

Brummeett (2009, p. 9) defines close reading as a 'mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings' which, he adds, is often 'shared with others in the form of a *criticism* or *critical analysis*' (his emphasis). Critical analysis then involves aligning yourself with particular lines of thought that make different assumptions about 'the nature of the text', 'the value of the text', and 'how we read the text' (Garrett-Petts, 2013, pp. 57–66). In this study, I have adopted a line of analysis that pays close attention to the 'text' of the selected literary works and games while taking into consideration theoretical concepts and ideas drawn from structuralism to post-structuralism/deconstruction (Section 2.3). However, all aspects of this research, from its theoretical underpinning to its design, are ultimately informed by a Bakhtinian framework

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(Section 2.4), which I see as crucial for an understanding of the dialogic relationships among the Heroic Epic, Fantasy literature, and WRPGs.

In this investigation, I adopt some techniques employed by researchers working with visual methodologies (Rose, 2013) as I seek to understand images in the chosen games from the historical and cultural perspectives embedded in them. However, I take into consideration Griffin's criticism of visual methodologies for largely ignoring that approaches to the analysis of images have 'firm roots in the study of language' (Griffin, 2013a, p.71). I draw on the analytical method that Griffin calls 'compositional interpretation' which examines 'the structure of an image' and 'how its elements combine together' (p. 72), while considering 'an image's possible effects on a spectator' (p. 73). This is particularly important for the analysis of the embedded Heroic Epic and Fantasy elements in the games and how they impact on the players' game experience. Such approach has informed my analysis of the selected screenshots in the following chapters, though I refrain from analysing the composition of the shots as a whole as they are merely interesting as representations of the 3D interactive media.

Bogost (2009, online) claims that while considerably extensive, the academic work that has been put into its analysis and definition of game is still meagre in comparison to literary criticism, a more well-established academic discipline. In his keynote speech at the 2009 Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) conference, Bogost proposes five different possible focuses for video game studies (Table 2.2). Of these proposed lines of investigation, the first two (Reception and Operation; Interface) are the most relevant to an analysis of WRPGs and their generation of meaning due to the focus I place on the players' experience, and their relationship with the game materials. However, the third line of investigation (Form and Function) also has its place especially when considered in tandem with the first two since layout and game systems are intrinsically linked to the possible emergent narratives through the variations they enable.

My examination of the selected WRPGs has also been informed by a formal analysis of the game. According to Lankoski et al. (2015, p. 23), formal analysis 'is the name of research where an artefact and its specific elements are examined closely, and the relations of the elements are described in detail'. Although the authors focus on the analysis of gameplay, in this study I draw on some of their insights and techniques to describe formal structures and combine them with an analysis of the gameplay and the visual elements presented to the player. As the authors point out, formal analysis draws on research approaches from other

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fields such as literary criticism (formalism, structuralism, and narrative theory) and anthropology studies (myth, religion, folklore) as well as close reading to analyse films and games as texts (p. 24).

Table 2.2: Focuses on videogame studies (Bogost, 2009, online)

Reception and Operation	Focuses on the experience of the user, including approaches like reader-response theory, psychoanalysis, and media effects studies.
Interface	Focuses on the user's relationship to the visible, operable part of a computer system, including the discipline of human-computer interaction, visual, filmic, and art historical approaches to the appearance of games, and methods like Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's notion of remediation.
Form and Function	Focuses on the operation and behavior of the program. This is where we find approaches to the operation of the program. Here is where both ludology *and* narratology live, by the way.
Code	Focuses on the way work is programmed and understood by programmers, including software studies and code aesthetics, as well as software engineering and other computer scientific methods for understanding how code works and is constructed.
Platform	Focuses on the abstraction layer beneath code. If code studies are new media's analogue to software engineering and computer programming, then platform studies are its version of computing systems and computer architecture.

2.7.2 Analytical stages

An important point to be made is that the current study is built upon my previous research on the Old Norse and Old English Heroic Epic and Fantasy Literature carried out as part of my BA and MA in Literary Studies. Such background greatly contributed to my selection of the literary texts for this investigation and granted me some familiarity with close reading and textual analysis techniques done in the field. *Beowulf* and the Sigurd Cycle in the *Volsung Saga* and the *Poetic Edda* were selected because they are the quintessential heroic narratives in North European culture and have highly influenced the 20th and 21st century imagination through Fantasy with strong echoes on WRPGs.

The next stage in the research process was to select the games that I believed could be representative of the genre I set up to examine. My familiarity with *Skyrim* and *DAO* also played an important factor in the game selection but other games were also considered. My

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sort list included *Baldur's Gate* (Bioware, 1998), *Icewind Dale* (Black Isle Studios, 2000) *and Neverwinter Nights* (Bioware, 2002). My decision of excluding such titles from this final research report was based mostly on the understanding that they are quite similar in style to each other and also to *DAO,* which could be considered a sort of 'spiritual successor' of these previous titles since Bioware is one of the developers that worked with Black Isle Studios, the publisher of *Baldur's Gate* and *Icewind Dale*. They also share with *DAO* similar features, such as party management, companion characters with rich backstories, hub spatial structure, and a branching story line. Instead of spreading the analysis through many different games I have opted for focusing on *DAO* and conduct a more in-depth examination of just one title that displayed the characteristics I was looking for. This was done by comparing and contrasting it with *Skyrim*, which unlike *DAO*, focuses on a single lone protagonist, is most flat in character development, is set in an open world, and has multiple linear plot lines. *The Banner Saga* (Stoic, 2013) was also considered due to a suggestion from a previous supervisor but it was eventually dropped because of the sheer scale of the two games already selected.

It is important to emphasize that although the analytical stages described below appear in linear order, this is done only for the sake of clarity in describing the analytical process. In fact, these stages overlapped and the analysis was done in various cycles that were repeated and criss-crossed (Figure 2.2). Most significant is the fact that at various stages of the research process, the analysis of the games informed the analysis of the texts and vice-versa. This seems to be coherent with the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue as I see it crucial that it should not only be applied to the analysis of the texts and games but also to the research design.

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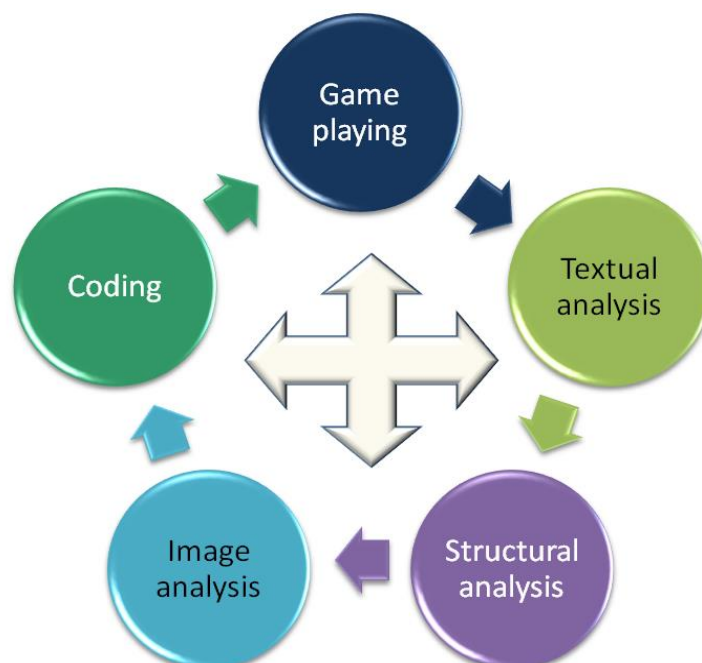
Figure 2.2 Analytical stages

In order to conduct the examination of the texts and games selected for this study, I adopted the following analytical stages:

*Game playing***:** Although I had already played both games for my own entertainment, I played them through again this time for research purposes. Throughout the various game playing sessions, I took notes and collected over 500 screenshots. I divided the game playing into three basic stages:

1. Play-through*:* the first analytical step was to play both games once again, from beginning to end, this time consciously searching for textual reference material, visual clues and images that could be related to Norse and Anglo-Saxon folklore and mythology, and Heroic Epic and Fantasy shared material.

2. Second Extended playing*:* the second stage was to play the introduction sequences of both games to analyse the transportation phase. This was then followed by playing particular sections of the game which I believed, based on the first playing through, could provide rich material for the analysis of the game chronotopic configuration.

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3. Selected playing: I returned to game playing after the textual analysis, described next, to collect further images that I felt were necessary to support particular aspects I wanted to discuss.

Textual analysis: this consisted in reading the selected texts in the light of the theoretical framework that informs my understanding of literature. Particular attention was paid to parallels with the game features and scenes selected with a focus on the chronotopic configuration of the texts, distancing, and use of archetypal and intertextual material. This was done after the play-through and extended playing stages and once again after the close reading of images, as described below.

Structural analysis: the third stage was to examine the spatial structures of the fictional worlds and gameworlds, such as their general shape and allowances. Other structuralist and formalist analysis were also conducted at this stage in order to understand the limitations set by the game rules in each particular game and their effect on chronotopic flow, as well as the patterns in the narratives and gameplay cycles.

Image analysis: the fourth stage was to go back to the screenshots taken and select the ones that fitted the textual and structural analysis and provided visual evidence for the arguments presented here, namely chronotopic configuration, archetypal material and intertextual references.

Coding: by coding I mean the process of the separating the content of the analysis of both texts and games into the two main categories, time and space, which reflect the dialogical and chronotopic orientation of this study as well as its interdisciplinary nature. The focus on time and space is clear in the organization of the two main chapters that deal with the data (Chapters 3 and 4), which are both subdivided to deal with these two aspects in the Heroic Epic, Fantasy Novel, and WRPGs. Other specific features of the games that are related to time and space and also serve as evidence of the dialogical relationship between Heroic Epic and the WRPGs analysed in this study, such as the characterization of NPCs, the hero and the quest, bestiary, and weaponry, are included in the discussion that follows in Chapter 5.

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Chapter 3 - Chronotope: Time in Narrative

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the time (*chronos*) aspect of chronotope − defined as time and space in narrative (Section 2.4.3) − while space (*topos*) is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. Time and space in narratives are often intrinsically bound and the separation of these two aspects of the chronotope adopted here is done for the sake of coherence and the organization of the work as a whole. It is important to emphasize that chronotope is a single concept and a clear distinction between time and space is virtually impossible since they are intrinsically linked: without time there can be no space and without space, no perception of time. Movement in space cannot happen without movement in time whereas movement in time will often have an effect on space. The artificial splitting of the analysis of chronotope is hence only intended to facilitate the examination of the considerable amount of material selected for this study.

This chapter starts with an analysis of the relationships between real time and narrative time. In it, I propose the concept of *gameplay time* and examine how it specifically relates to *narrative time* in WRPGs and the creation of what I term *emergent narrative time*. The discussion then moves to considerations of time in terms of transportation and chronotopic flow in the Heroic Epic and Fantasy to serve as points of reference for the analysis of time in WRPGs in general. These general considerations are followed by the analysis of time in *Skyrim* and *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)*.

3.2 Time in narrative

According to Bridgeman (2007, p. 52), 'temporal and special relationships are essential to our understanding of narratives and go beyond the specification of a date and location'. Consequently, time and space have 'always played an important role in theories of narrative'. She also suggests that 'temporal patterns' in the narrative have substantial 'effects on the reader' and should, thus deserve especial attention when considering 'the gaps between story-time and discourse time' (p. 54). Although Bridgeman is concerned with the 'reader' and the narrative in literary texts, the same attention to time needs to be given when discussing narrative in video games. The two important aspects that should be taken into consideration

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when discussing time in narrative are 'real' time and narrative time. They are here discussed in relation to each other and in relation to readers and players' experiences of time when engaging with the narrative in different genres and media. A discussion of their complex relationships is, therefore, crucial for the understanding of the particular chronotopic aspects of the Heroic Epic, Fantasy, and WRPGs discussed later in this chapter.

Narrative time needs to be understood in relation to *'real' time*. The term 'real' is used here between quotation marks due to the controversial nature of reality (Baudrillard, 1994). It should be understood as the time that is marked on clocks and is experienced by humans throughout their lives as the basis of their understanding of temporal flow (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 244–250). Unlike the ideal concept of 'real' time in everyday life that is conventionally measured in hours, minutes and seconds, *narrative time* has no unit of measure. Instead, what marks the passage of time in a narrative is plot action, even if that action is categorized as a form of inaction, such as waiting. This holds true even when the units of measure are inserted into the narrative, one hour in a narrative is not the equal of one hour outside of it. For example, when Robinson Crusoe (Defoe, 1719) tells the reader that his ship journey lasted a number of months; no such amount of time has actually elapsed in the act of reading the sentence. Similarly, when the day quickly slips into night in *Metal Gear Solid V* (Kojima, 2015), the player may in fact have just spent a couple of minutes of his/her real time. This presents a conundrum when dealing with video games since there may be instances while playing when the narrative time may not move at all, even if the player is actively in gameplay and, therefore, engaging with the game and performing actions with the characters (Ip, 2011a). In the literature of game studies, gameplay has been defined as,

> the particular set of non-real-world tasks, goals, potentials set for the players' enjoyment within an on screen arena, performed according to a set of pre-established rules and as a result of which a number of different outcomes are possible (King & Krzywinska, 2006, p. 9).

Gameplay is often measured in real time hours, minutes and seconds, 'circumscribed within limits of time and space defined and fixed in advance' (Caillois, 2001). To solve this problematic aspect of time in video games, I propose a third chronotopic approach to time in video games in order to bridge 'real' time and narrative time. I call it *gameplay time* in line of the time frames proposed by Zagal and Mateas (2010) and the general understanding of gameplay time in game studies.

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In chronotopic terms, gameplay time is the time zone which is achieved when a player is engaged in gameplay, i.e. actively performing the tasks set by the game. It cannot be equated to either narrative time or 'real' time chronotope. Instead, it creates a zone of action which, theoretically, is neither narrative per se nor conforms to everyday experience of time. For instance, when deeply engaged in a game such as *Tetris* (Pajitnov & Pokhilko, 1984) one can have their perception of time partially changed to that of the game as time flows at the pace that the pieces fall. Should the player pause the game, gameplay time is stopped and can be later allowed to flow again. This is different from 'real' time because humans are incapable of manipulating time outside of their own perception of it, it is also different from narrative time since rather than stop one instead disengages with it, the narrative action time has already flowed, it is just a matter of ones' engagement with the narration, whereas a game's action, however minor, is still to be decided. *Tetris* cannot be said to have an intrinsic narrative; although a player can arguably generate an emergent narrative based on the experience of playing the game, there is no intrinsic plot being delivered. Therefore, there is no discernible authored narrative time chronotope at work.

However, this separation between the three different concepts of time discussed above is not absolute. They are all linked: 'real' time is spent to move narrative time and gameplay time; conversely gameplay time may also be spent to move narrative time. Hence their separation is a feat of abstract cognition in order to aid analysis, not a true separation per se. That being said, each of these aspects of the time experience has its own unique attributes. 'Real' time when compared to the other two is inescapable, inflexible and is always experienced in the present. Consumed or past 'real' time is turned into narrative time by the human perception, in other words, it is turned into memory and history. Future or projected 'real' time is also a form of narrative, a prediction or prophecy. That does not mean, however, that the chronotopic perception of 'real' time is constant like a clock, since the very term suggests it is partial to the mental state of the subject, as any of the other layers of the chronotopic perception are. Time is thus always experienced and remembered as narrative time when outside the realm of the present (Figure 3.1.)

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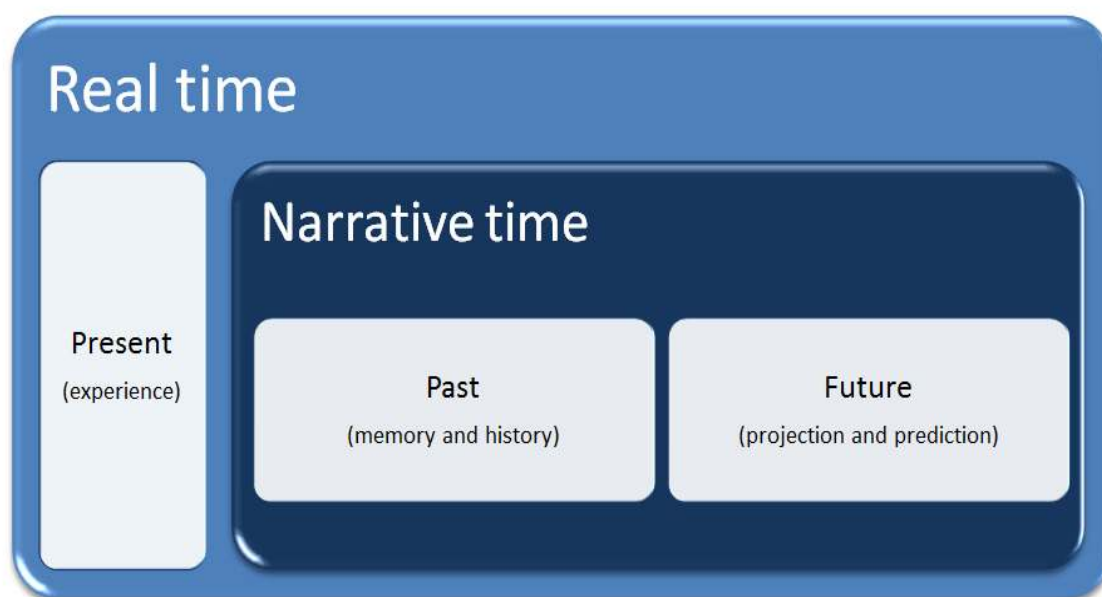
Figure 3.1: A framework for the human experience of 'real' time.

Fundamental to the discussion of the human understanding and perception of time is Ricoeur's (1990) extensive treatise titled *Time and Narrative* where he cites Augustine (354–430 AD) to introduce the idea of the 'three-fold present'. In the passage, Augustine argues that while, for example, in the process of reading a psalm 'the scope of the action [he is] performing is divided between the two faculties of memory and expectation', the former looks back at the part already read and the latter to the part that still needs to be read. Augustine then argues that 'as the process continues, the province of memory is extended in proportion as that of expectation is reduced' until 'all has passed into the province of memory' (Augustine, cited in Ricoeur, 1990, p. 20). As Bridgeman (Scragg, 2013, p. 50) summarizes, '[a]ll reading is a combination of memory and anticipation'.

The understanding of the effect of the internalization of time is something that has preoccupied philosophers since classical antiquity. In the early Middle-Ages, the Christian theologian and philosopher Augustine of Hippo espoused a view that fits well with the internalization of chronotope and the understanding of past and future as narratives. Augustine sees past and future stretching from the divine present through which all temporal dimensions should be understood (Ravicz, 1959, p. 546); past and future are thus experienced respectively as 'remembrance or anticipation'. He also sees time and space as bound by the

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divine creation and thus the notion that Christians should live their life as in a pilgrimage through time rather than space (Kelly, 2009, pp. 44–45). The Augustinian association between time and space may in some ways foreshadow the Bakhtinian chronotope; however, for Augustine this tempo-spatial connection comes from the realm of the divine rather than from a dialogical relation between perceptions of both. Augustine's understanding of learning and memory also has some commonalities with my proposed concept of archetypal image, since, for him, learning depends on memory (i.e. internalisation) and memory exists in both the present and the past which is to say is affected by what was and what is, while also not necessarily depending on visual cues such as highly abstract ideas (Teske, 2001, pp. 149 − 154).

Augustine also talks about an interior trinity of thought that has some resemblance to my understanding of archetypal imagery where it concerns the relationship between the sign and the interior 'archive' humans hold of these signs. He proposes 'a trinity of the outer man, which consists of a memory of the external object once seen, an internal vision of its likeness, and the will directing our internal vision to the memory of the object seen' (Teske, 2001. p. 155). The memory of the object would correspond to the archived archetypal image; the internal vision would correspond to the perception brought by stimuli, such as a visual sign; whereas the will would be the act of interpretation of the perceived image in relation to the archived archetypal image. However, in a dialogical approach to the reading of a sign, the interpretation linking both signifier and signified is affected by personal and cultural circumstances which in turn alter the facets of the archetypal image and rendering it prominent in the process of understanding of the particular image.

Similarly, *gameplay time* is also always experienced in the present, since it depends upon participation of the player. As it happens with Augustine's reading of the psalm, past gameplay time is also turned into narrative when, for instance, a player has finished a story driven game and the experience of playing the game is turned into a narrative memory upon plot recollection. Future gameplay time is also a prediction or assumption, and it happens when a player is planning their next action within the game's allowances. Yet, unlike 'real' time, gameplay time is malleable; it can be stopped, skipped and jumped (Juul, 2004), slowed down, sped, spent in waiting (Van Meurs, 2011) and even escaped.

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To help in the separation between *authored narrative time* of particular plotlines embedded in the WRPGs, and the narrative that is formed from gameplay time outside of the present, I propose the term of *emergent narrative time* (Figure 3.2). The term emergent refers to the use of emergent narratives to signify the narrative that is born out of gameplay systems, and is thus a personal experience of the player, from their interaction with the game, much like how memory and prediction narratives emerge from 'real' time. Narrative time is the most abstract concept of the three as it is also flexible and escapable but, unlike the other two, it is never present: it has either happened and is thus being reported or narrated, or will happen and is thus being predicted or prophesized. In any case, narrative time is always an abstract image of experienced time (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 81).
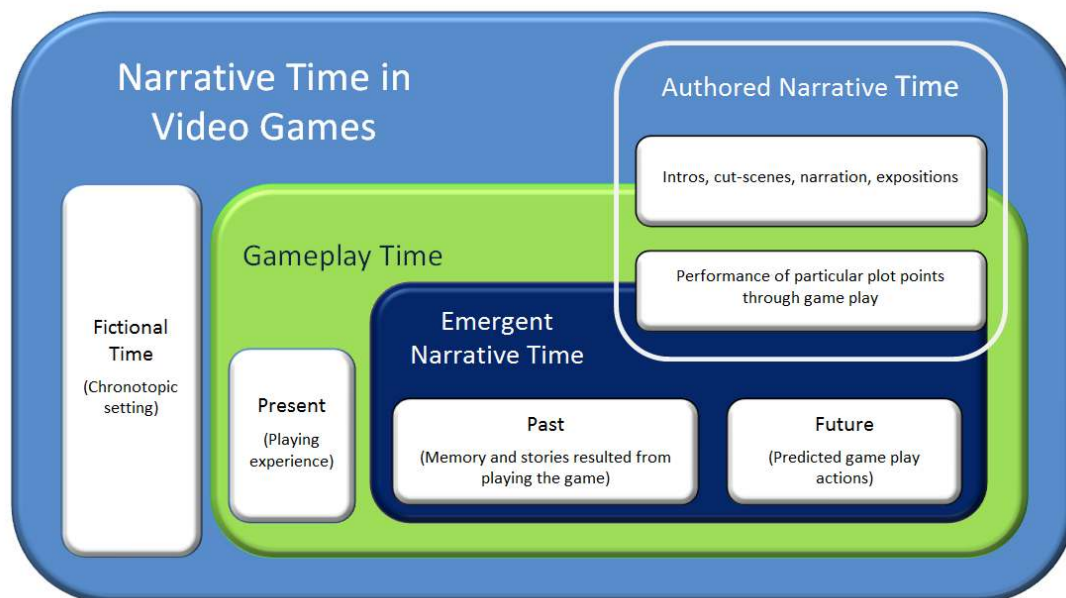
Figure 3.2: A framework for the relationships between narrative times and gameplay time.

The considerations above are crucial for the following analysis of time in the material selected for this investigation. Due to the connections between the Epic and Fantasy material and the WRPGs examined in the study, a discussion of transportation and time flow in the chosen texts can potentially illuminate the subsequent analysis of the same aspects in the WRPGs. It is also worth mentioning that although the starting point for discussion of time in the two subsequent sections are the Heroic Epic and Fantasy literature, as in the previous chapter, connections with WRPGs in general, and *Skyrim* and *DAO* in particular, are made throughout the text.

3.3 Time in the Heroic Epic

This section briefly looks at the compression of time in Epic and its effect in characterization, with a critical discussion of the often termed 'flat characters' (Stevick, 1967, pp. 223–225). This is followed by an in-depth analysis of time in *Beowulf* (Heaney, 2007) and the Sigurd Cycle in the *Volsung Saga* (Byock, 2000)*,* paying special attention to transportation and flow in the stories. The analysis of the time flow in the Sigurd Cycle will provide most of the material for the discussion; this is due to the fragmentary nature of the *Poetic Edda* (Larrington, 2008) poems, which is, however, an aspect worthy of consideration in itself.

The time setting of Heroic Epic is the far distant past, an insurmountably remote time from before the narrative recipient's time, as the Seeress proclaims in the mythic opening lines of the *Poetic Edda*,

> Attention I ask from all the sacred people,
>
> greater and lesser, the offspring of Heimdall;
>
> Father of the Slain, you wished that I should declare
>
> the ancient histories of men and gods, those which I
>
> remember from the first. (Larrington, 2008)

Bakhtin (1981, pp. 4–40) determines that this absolute past, emphasized in the *Seeress' Prophesy* mythical beginnings above, is the predominant feature of the Epic. Frye (2000), on the other hand, defines Epic through its subject matter – human, heroes and demigods - contrasted with other narrative modes, such as myth, which deals solely with the divine and supernatural. Both definitions are valid in their own right, but for the purpose of this study the emphasis is placed on the chronotopic view of genre. A case can be made that the subject matter of both epic and myth are dialogically linked to their chronotopic time. Distance (Section 2.4.2) is what allows for the higher degree of abstraction that is present in myths and epic. Similarly, if one desires to portray entities, such as gods and heroes, in a mode that allows for reverence and idealization, distance becomes a necessity. Which of them is predominant, either time setting or subject matter, and which of the two should be used as basis for definition, is of little relevance as both are intrinsically linked. The heroic subject matter of the WRPGs here analysed is also intrinsically linked to the miraculous and open present of the gameplay; a present that mirrors the one Bakhtin deems to be part of the

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Chivalric Romance, which according to him is a novelization of the Epic. Chivalric romance relies in the openendedness and incomplete aspect of the present to deliver the sudden turn to the magical and fantastic as a possibility that is just around the corner of the probable, a technique that is also used in intrusion and liminal fantasy (Mendlesohn, 2008, pp. 114–245) with varying degrees of success, as seen in the *Harry Potter* series (pp. 63–64). That is an unstable form of distancing that constantly flirts with incredibility and breaking of immersion much more so when the reader does not share the cultural and religious ideas of the probable original medieval audience, as mentioned in Section 2.6.2. In the WRPGs here analysed, however, the distancing is stabilised by the spatial aspect of their chronotope which borrows from more traditionally immersive Fantasy genres, as discussed in Chapter 4.

In his essay 'The Epic and the Novel', Bakhtin (1981, pp. 3–40) argues that the Epic is the literature of forefathers and founders and the basis of national identity. This definition of the Epic's subject matter is to a certain extent in line with Frye (2000)'s, who also sees the Epic as the first genre to concern itself with humans and their mastery over their environment. What distinguishes both positions is that for Bakhtin, the hero figure and the archetypal time and space that the Epic inhabits are crucial for the generation of archetypal images of the higher degree. These can be extremely powerful and suggestive concepts with strong moral and idealistic content which makes them key material to create a sense of socio-historical identity. As Cobley (2014, p. 36) argues, 'narrative structures, with their repetitions and stock devices' have 'enabled early oral cultures to remember key points about their present and their history' thus contributing to the 'formation and maintenance of their self-image' both in individual terms and in terms of their 'large-scale' national identities'. Although the whole narrative structure of the Epic performs this identification function, the hero character of the epic is perhaps still one of the most powerful factors in the creation of such sense of shared history and identity.

As Margolin (2007, p. 66) argues, 'characters can be approached from different theoretical perspectives' and 'depend for their existence on both physical objects (texts) and individual states of mind' of the narrative recipients. The concept of 'flat and round characters' was arguably first proposed by Foster (2005, pp. 73–81) when discussing 'people' in the novel. His argument is that 'flat characters', also known as 'types' or 'caricatures', are 'constructed round a single idea or quality'. Although Foster is preoccupied with characters

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in the English novel, from Defoe to Dickens, his definition could well encompass the characters in the medieval English drama (Twycross, 2008, pp. 33–34), such as the Vice, as well as characters in epic narratives. He argues that flat characters have 'no existence' outside the single idea that defines them, they have 'no pleasures', 'none of the private lusts and aches' that distinguish round characters. The latter, Foster implies through his discussion of Austen's writing techniques, are characters who are able to give the reader an idea of an 'extended life' (p. 79) and who are capable of 'surprising [the reader] in a convincing way' (p. 81).

While some fictional characters may be considered simple − or flat, to use Foster's terminology − due to their lack of detail, their abstract and shifting nature itself may still make them difficult to clearly grasp or envision. As Foster (2005, p. 74) himself admitted, two great advantages of flat characters are that they are 'easily recognized' and 'easily remembered'. In this sense, some flat characters may perform an archetypal function. The hero, for example, is the everyman and conversely no-man; for no single person can be representative of all humanity, as all individuals have diverse characteristics and unique traits that differentiated them from the rest. Hence the 'flat characters' found in the Heroic Epic are, in fact, a product of their high archetypal nature, which is, in turn, closely linked to the chronotope of the genre. The perceived lack of personality development in the characters in the Heroic Epic character can thus be linked directly to the absolute past setting of the epic narrative. As the events are seen from such a distant time, the characters' development and personality, their point of origin and their ending position, become compressed or 'flattened'− to keep using the current term − mingling their past and final characteristics into a single temporal narrative entity that simultaneously *was* and *is*.

Similarly, many WRPG characters' features are determined by their function and chronotopic position in the gameworld. Because games are played in the present/future tense, the spatial position of an NPC is intrinsically linked to their temporal position. For example, a character placed near the beginning of the game area is likely to be one of the first characters the player meets and thus more likely to perform the character function of a guide, thus being linked with the archetype of the magic helper and or the archetypal image of the guide/teacher, such as Duncan in *DAO* (Section 4.5.2). The fact that their function is partially determined by chronotope, leads to chronotope configuration having an effect on their

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characterization: the guide character will limit itself to its function and then allow the player to move on and explore the gameworld, in a process similar to a child leaving school, giving the player a sense of freedom and responsibility. The fact they leave the narrative and gameplay while being intrinsically linked to a particular space of the gameworld is what leads to their characterization being generally flat. Consequently, while still being a separate issue, the characterization in WRPGs is deeply related to the chronotope and its configuration.

As previously mentioned, Heroic Epic works have had their narrative time setting in the absolute past extensively analysed by Bakhtin. Therefore, the initial analysis of *Beowulf* and the Sigurd Cycle carried out here does not focus on the time setting itself but on the chronotopic transportation phase (Section 2.4.3) in both works. To consider the transportation phase it is necessary to begin from the basis that the narrative recipient has, as their starting position, their 'real' time and space chronotope and are then transported into the narrative chronotope when first engaging with the narrative. This transportation may be almost immediate, when the recipient is initially placed into the main time zone of the narrative chronotope, as it occurs at the beginning of the *Vafthrudnir's Saying* poem where the reader is thrown right in the middle of a domestic conversation between Odin and his wife,

> Advise me now, Frigg, I intend to journey
> To visit Vafthrudnir;
> I've a great curiosity to contend in ancient matters
> With that all-wise giant. (Larrington, 2008, p. 40)

Conversely, the transportation may be more progressive, in cases when the recipient is moved towards the time of main action through different narrative time zones, such as flash forwards or flashbacks, as it happens with the poem that marks 'the beginning of the heroic poems in the *Codex Regius* manuscript' (Larrington, 2008, p. 114),

> It was a long time ago that the eagle shrieked
> the sacred waters poured down from Himinfell;
> then Helgi, the man of great spirit,
> was born to Borghild in Bralund. (p. 114)

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Regardless of how gradual the transportation is, the initial movement from one's own chronotope towards that of a narrative can be understood as the movement from the perceived towards the unperceived, and hence to a certain extent into the unknown. It can and will almost inevitably lead to disorientation (Grodal, 2003, p. 130) if the movement is too abrupt; such as beginning the narrative in mid-action (in media-res) or with sequential flash forwards and flashbacks. The real world equivalent of a sudden transportation into an unknown fictional chronotope would be the sudden awakening in a dark room where even the sense of gravity is indefinite. There is then a complete alienation from the anchored experience of the reality to which one is accustomed with the added effect of most senses and means of autonomously gathering information being taken away. This sense of disorientation caused by transportation may be used to generate a sense of curiosity, estrangement and/or wonder in the recipient facilitating and promoting engagement with the narrative. However, it can also lead to considerable loss of orientation, such as in the 'dark room' example above, and thus to disengagement with the narrative as the reader would rather return to the chronotope and escape the confusion and chaos of the unknown. This is especially true if the narrative already contains a high degree of material outside the recipient's experience and understanding, such as the fantastic. On the other hand, a more subtle transportation can generate in the recipient a sense of grounding and familiarity and, therefore, diminish the disorientation derived from the chronotopic transportation. Yet, excessive familiarity may lead to disinterest and can also slow the movement of the narrative (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 224–236) as there is no reason to go through the trouble of engaging with a new chronotope if the experience is similar to the one already found in the narrative recipient's original chronotope.

This idea connects well with video games in general and their propensity to allow the player engagement with activities either impossible or very dangerous, like playing the part of a soldier at war, a warrior hero of old, a space robot, or a hungry yellow ball that runs away from ghosts. In spite of the growing photorealism in video games − irrespective of its positive and possible negative effects on players (Wang & Doube, 2011) − as well as their capacity to portray human emotions (Besmann & Rios, 2012; Jarvinen, 2009), video games still largely tend to depict the fantastical and improbable more often than not, focusing on gameplay and stories that largely simply cannot be found in the real world. This is due to the allowance of a partial chronotopic presence in a completely fictional environment often depicted in great detail that is unique to the medium, leading developers and authors to focus

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on delivering experiences that most people would never be capable of undergoing with such level of presence in other art forms.

Beowulf's initial transportation phase conforms to the more progressive mode, with a gradual movement towards the time of action. It does so by presenting the reader with a historical chronological movement through the line of the Spear-Dane kings from Shield Sheafson to Hrothgar (Heaney, 2007, pp. 3–7). This initial movement focuses on Sheafson but then speeds up moving through four generations, thus presenting a summarized bird's eye view of the history of their people. Upon reaching Hrothgar, however, the movement slows and we are given the details of the building of the golden hall of Heorot and the assaults on it by the monster Grendel, which sets the stage for the first main section of the story (Heaney, 2007, pp. 7–15), before skipping twelve years to introduce the reader to the eponymous hero protagonist. However, it is also in the section that concerns Grendel that time fluctuations can be found that refer back to the past time of Christian creation. At first, these fluctuations are presented within the context of a bard or skald within Heorot telling the story, as 'the clear song of a skilled poet / telling with mastery of man's beginnings, / how the Almighty had made the earth' (p. 9, lines 90–95). This is done to demonstrate the reason of Grendel's offense and the first real break in the time continuum of the narrative is presented upon the description of the monster Grendel,

> Grendel was the name of this grim demon
> haunting the marches, marauding round the heath
> and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time
> in misery among the banished monsters,
> Cain's clan, whom the creator had outlawed
> and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel
> the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
> Cain got no good from committing that murder
> because the Almighty made him anathema
> and out of the curse of his exile there sprang
> ogres and elves and evil phantoms
> and the giants too who strove with God
> time and again until He gave them their reward. (Heaney, 2007, p. 9)

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As can be seen, the narrative momentarily moves backwards in time to the supposed time of the biblical tale of Cain and Abel (*Genesis*, 4.1–16). It is in the biblical story that *Beowulf* grounds its supernatural, and hence fantastic, aspects. The sudden movement backwards in time, while potentially disorientating from a chronotopic perspective, serves the purpose of creating a stronger dialogical link between *Beowulf* and the Christian mythos, thus connecting the narrative recipient's beliefs and expectations of *Beowulf* unto the biblical narrative (Tolkien, 2006). The disorientating effect of the time fluctuation is also lessened by the framed flashback of the skilled poet song found before it. Thus the chronotopic transportation phase in *Beowulf* (Heaney, 2007) sets the tone for the rest of the tale by grounding itself on both the Nordic royal history and the biblical narrative that supposedly predates the local history. This grounding comes through the chronotopic movement of the narrative that also foreshadows the rather erratic flow of the remaining of it by slowing and accelerating at different intervals and sometimes skipping large amounts of time altogether, such as the 'twelve winters, seasons of woe,' (p. 11).

Skyrim does not approach its narrative in the same manner as *Beowulf* since its chronotopic flow is almost completely under the control of the player. *DAO*, however, emulates *Beowulf* in the transportation phase by utilizing a back narrative that deeply resembles the biblical one in a move that simultaneously approximates and distances the narrative. Although it refers to a past unknown to the players, it nonetheless presents them with a religious narrative thread familiar enough to provide orientation and guide expectations.

Another aspect of interest in *Beowulf*'s transportation phase concerns the narration itself. By actively engaging the reader/listener, *Beowulf* generates another zone of time within the narrative time which can be understood as the narration time as opposed to the action time. *Narrative narration time*, as the term implies, is the time in which the supposed narration takes place whereas *narrative action time* is the time in which the narrated action takes place. In the case of *Beowulf,* there is a clear demarcation between narrative narration time and narrative action time, which can be ascertained from the very first lines of the poem,

> So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
>
> and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
>
> we have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns. (Heaney, 2007, p. 1)

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The first and third lines in particular sign that the time of narration is far in the future in relation to the time of action, the effect this has on the narrative should not be underestimated as it shows that the recipient is being told an already revised version of the story. It is this insurmountable gap between time of action and time of narrative that gives Heroic poetry, in this case *Beowulf*, a very different narrative aspect from that which can be found in other literary genres. The tale is not meant to be taken into investigation and moralized, as these have already been done and judgement already passed. The narrator is only telling the recipient what 'we have heard' already. This creates a 'phantom' audience that is complicit to this version of the tale and that accepts its values, inducing the recipient to understand the narrative from the lenses of this projected audience. Time has judged the tale, society has accepted it, and now it is narrated to the recipient/reader. There is no space here for the reader to judge but only to receive the story. The effect generated is that of an audience in awe of the ancient tale. The ideals projected are to be longed for but not imitated; their time is, quite literally, in the absolute past (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 14–17).

DAO borrows from the Heroic Epic by also framing the narrative through a narrator in an indeterminate time zone thus grounding the chronotopic flow through an intermediate time space that is similar to the one in *Beowulf*. Both games analysed in this study, however, lack the absolute past as a distancing buffer to present highly archetypal material. This is partly due to gameplay being the closest chronotope possible to that of real life experience which dialogically approximates the narrative experience even when the setting is that of a distant past or is framed by a narrator. Instead, they focus on a distancing through space (Chapter 4) and the use of intertextual material to help in the generation of narratives rich with archetypal meaning.

To a certain degree, the remaining flow of *Beowulf*'s narrative mirrors that which is found in the transportation phase. Having summarized the hero's background and the circumstances that led him to Heorot, it then continues forwards rather smoothly by focusing on Beowulf's interactions with others and slowing down from time to time for more detailed description of apparel, scenery, and action. This is interweaved with fast skipping moments, such as the sea travel to Denmark (p. 17) or the travel from shore to Heorot (p. 23). Possible major fluctuations on the action time continuum, either flash forwards and predictions or flashbacks and recollections, tend to be from this point onwards framed in character dialogue

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instead, such as Beowulf's prediction of his possible defeat at the hands of Grendel (p. 31) or the various recollections that populate the poem, such as the song of 'the saga of Finn and his sons' (p. 71). These stories within the story have similar effect to the historical summary at the beginning of the poem as they also serve to ground the tale in the lore of the region. Another good example of this grounding is Wiglaf's prediction of war with the Swedes after Beowulf's death; he bases this prediction on their past conflicts with the Swedes, which he narrates to some detail (p. 197). The distance between action and narration is reinforced and the recipient is made to keep wholly aware of the narrated, and presumably already socially accepted, aspect of *Beowulf*'s narrative. The narrative sporadically pulls the recipient out of action time and into narration time, often for moralizing, such as in,

> Past and present, God's will prevails.
>
> Hence, understanding is always best
>
> and a prudent mind. Whoever remains
>
> for long here in this earthly life
>
> Will enjoy and endure more than enough. (Heaney, 2007, p. 71)

The task of analysing Sigurd's tale is relatively more problematic as, unlike *Beowulf,* there is no one single text that can be turned to for reference (Larrington, 2008, pp. xviii–xx). In this study, I make use of two source materials to support my analysis. The first source is that of the poems concerning Sigurd that can be found in *The Poetic Edda,* an early collection of poems on Old Norse mythology and heroic deeds of mighty warriors. The poems concerning Sigurd, while enlightening, represent only fragments of what was supposedly a larger narrative. This leads to the need to resort to the second source material, the later compiled *Saga of the Volsungs,* also known as *The Volsung Saga,* which covers subject matter that goes beyond just the tale of Sigurd to encompass the story of the whole so-called Volsung line. While both sources deal with more than only Sigurd's story, for better focus and contrast with *Beowulf,* I focus almost solely on the parts that concern the heroic dragon slayer's tale, since this is also a recurrent theme in Fantasy and the WRPGs examined later. Therefore, an analysis on the remaining material in *The Poetic Edda* and in *The Volsung Saga* is only conducted where I deem it to aid the understanding of the main areas of concern in this investigation.

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The Poetic Edda begins its collection with tales of the Nordic gods only changing its subject matter about half way through the collection, marked by the first Helgi poem (Larrington, 2008, pp. 123–140). The material concerning the Sigurd Cycle properly speaking only begins with the prose tale 'The Death of Sinfiotli', which serves as an introduction to the Sigurd poems that follow. Much like the initial stanzas of *Beowulf,* 'The Death of Sinfiotli' (p.142) lays the 'historical' background for the Sigurd Cycle and grounds it on previous lore, it also makes a clear separation of narrative narration time and narrative action time as can be seen in its final lines,

> Sigmund and all his sons surpassed all men in strength and size and courage and all accomplishments. Sigurd, however, was the most remarkable of all, and in the old tradition everyone says he was the greatest of all men and the most redoubtable war-leader. (p. 142)

This paragraph makes it clear that the narrative action time predates the narrative narration time by a great margin. As the subject matter is 'old tradition', it also emphasizes the already socially accepted nature of the tale with the phrase 'everyone says' used to create a similar effect found in *Beowulf*'s transportation phase. As for *The Saga of the Volsungs*, similar claims can be made about the effect generated almost at the very beginning of the section dealing directly with Sigurd's cycle, 'The Birth of Sigurd',

> The child was sprinkled with water and named Sigurd. All say one thing about him: that none was his match in conduct and size. He was raised there with King Hjalprek, and all showed him great affection. And when all the most renowned men and kings in the ancient sagas are named, Sigurd must be counted the foremost in strength and accomplishment, in zeal and valour. Of these qualities he possessed more than any other man in the northern world. (p. 55)

Once again the great gap between narrative narration time and narrative action time is demonstrated: this is an 'ancient saga' as far as the narrator is concerned and 'Sigurd must be counted the foremost' as it is what 'All say' about him. The idealization through distancing in the absolute past is in full display here, to the point that there is very little of the character left as it almost wholly embraces the archetypal function of the hero (Campbell, 2008) − greatest and foremost of all renowned men and kings. The grounding of the tale in regional lore is something I will return to later in Chapter 4 when dealing with the space aspect of the chronotope, though it is again present here with the mention of other 'ancient kings' and the

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northern world. Besides that, both *The Poetic Edda* and *The Volsung Saga* begin by dealing directly with Odin, the mighty god of the Norse mythos and by doing so ground their respective tales solidly in the vein of that mythology thus using a narrative strategy that is similar to *Beowulf* 's association with the biblical tale of Cain and Abel.

As for the chronotopic transportation and flow, both works concerning Sigurd present a persistent movement through time, moving almost solely forwards in a sequential manner. Any flash forwards or backwards are often framed in dialogue and hence do not truly affect the chronotope since dialogue keeps the action time stable; the recipient is being told of someone who was being told. Most poems of *The Poetic Edda* are, in fact, dialogue poems, with the general setting often explained in a prose introduction to each.

Similarly, framing through a narrator chronotope can be used in WRPGs to help stabilise chronotopic flow movements outside gameplay, as it happens in *DAO*. However, this is not truly necessary during the gameplay itself as the player is often left in charge of the character's movement and actions. The agency given to the player serves as orientation and thus as stabiliser for any erratic chronotopic movement. This is why a game like *Skyrim* that has close to no cut scenes and/or chronotopic movement outside gameplay does not need narrative framing like those found in many other WRPGs, such as *DAO*, *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt RED, 2015), or *Baldur's Gate* (Bioware, 1998). As for grounding the player with previous knowledge of the work, for renowned WRPG IPs, such as *Skyrim* and *DAO*, it is unlikely that a player would enter the game without any prior knowledge of its setting and/or premise. Current practices in the game industry make the amount of information developers and publishes tend to make available to the general public and potential players prior to the release date of a prominent game quite remarkable, as it has recently been the case with *Final Fantasy XV* (SquareEnix, 2016). Genre also plays a considerable part in the pre-rounding of a player into the fictional setting. That being said, it is worth mentioning that WRPGs in general and games with strong narratives and/or much lore brought in from previous games and/or other media, such as sequels and tie-ins, will tend to have highly explicative introductions and/or helpful NPCs to help settle the player into the fictional world.

The fragmentary nature of *The Poetic Edda* makes it difficult to access its flow as a whole, but it is fair to say that the story fragments generally move forward in time, especially when one considers their prose introduction as part of the narrative whole, as in the case of

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'The Lay of Regin' (p. 143). While both narratives move almost solely forwards, the action time will often skip years, as it does with Sigurd's growth from baby to child and then to man in *The Saga of the Volsungs* (pp. 55–60), or from poem to poem of those concerning Sigurd in *The Poetic Edda*. In *Beowulf*, however, the separation between narrative narration time and narrative action time keeps the narrative time from unravelling. This is because the narrative narration time never fluctuates and stabilizes the narrative as a whole, which would otherwise be highly disorienting due to the greatly uneven narrative action time. While *DAO* does not fluctuate greatly in narrative action time per se to the same degree of *Beowulf,* it does compress travelling time and space between different parts of the gameworld, hence the narration frame. Although this is not overtly present, it serves a similar purpose to that of *Beowulf's* in stabilising and anchoring the player's chronotopic awareness.

3.4 Time in Fantasy

The internalization of the Epic distance and its role in creating a dialogical association with the epic material, as well as the archetypal image used in the Fantasy genre, are particularly important for the examination of the WRPGs. However, in order to facilitate an understanding of time in the modern WRPGs, the chronos of the Novel − as Bakhtin (1981) defines it, with its movement towards the present − must also be taken into consideration. The effect of the open ended present on archetypal images, or its resistance to them, and the 'rounding' of characterization are important for further discussion and are thus analysed in this section. In the Novel, the different flow of time when the action is more immediate is of note: more details become the norm, thus increasing the amount of information provided to the reader; the narrative and the story become more divergent in format. Both *Skyrim* and *DAO* belong, in a certain way, to the Fantasy genre. Moreover, outside the video game medium, Fantasy novels have the closest chronotopic configuration to the WRPGs selected for this study.

With the advent of the Novel, the norm for storytelling changed from that traditionally found in the Heroic Epic and Myth. According to Bakhtin (1981, pp. 4–40), the change is largely due to a chronotopic alteration from past to present. While there are possibly many more equally significant divergences between the Epic and Novel, the change in the chronos (the narrative time) should not be underestimated. Novels have a tendency to present

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narratives in the present tense, in other words they commonly depict action as it happens. That often makes the gap from narrative narration time and narrative action time so short as to be almost non-existent. Although this gap is minimal, it is still existent; the time gap cannot be fully bridged in the written form since an event needs to have happened to be narrated (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 256). For example, in 'I got on the train and the doors closed', the act of entering the train has already happened in the narration time, whereas the sentence 'I am entering the train and now the doors are closing' is a form of prediction since the event has not fully happened yet; I have yet to enter the train and the doors have yet to close. This opens the narration to the possibility of failing, such as 'Oh, the doors are not closing'. Even when there is a large gap between narration and action time, such gap is not insurmountable as that in the Heroic Epic and the action is narrated closely in a style similar to the quasi-simultaneous narration/action of the present tense novel. That is to say, the action depicted is more detailed and generally moves more slowly due to the greater amount of information provided. The rather large time skips, so common in Heroic Epic, are less frequent in novels also adding to the greater load of information. This is doubly true for the WRPGs examined here where large time skips are almost non-existent and high levels of depiction lead to almost an excess of information.

The effects this change in time has on the reception of the narrative are various. Gone is the absolute ancient past buffer gap between the narrative narration time and narrative action time which allowed for the greater idealization and moralization that can be found in the Heroic Epic. As such, the Novel is generally more hostile towards highly archetypal material. Furthermore, the strategy of grounding fictional narratives on the narratives of history, mythology, and religion becomes more difficult to employ (Swinfen, 1984, p. 2), adding another layer of resistance to the Realistic Novel opposition to fantastic material in general. Since the novel 'was born at the same time as modern science', novelists can 'no longer rely on the paradigms offered by custom, mythology, Nature, antiquity, religion or community' (Eagleton, 2005, p. 7). Social changes in human society have made it difficult for a novel writer to situate a fantastical story in a closer period because the wide spreading of general and scientific information leaves little space for fiction or fantasy to intrude upon an intended realistic narrative without seriously undermining its fictional nature. For example, any story involving a dragon or magic in the 21st century is quickly categorized as either fantasy or simply nonsense since the hypothetical average informed reader knows there

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are no dragons in the kingdom Animalia. Similarly, a changed understanding of history due to better record keeping makes it hard to place that kind of tale in the storied past for similar reasons. Lastly, different contemporary stances in relation to mythology and religion in general, due to also scientific advancements and the secularization of societies (Stewart, 2016), would make the moralization found in the Epic sound indoctrinating and pedantic. Therefore, the closer chronotopic distance of the Novel makes it more aligned with particular instances than with archetypal images, whereas in the case of the Heroic poetry, including *Beowulf* and the Sigurd Cycle, the opposite is true as the absolute past distancing blurs the particular instance and highlights the archetype. Games, as will be further discussed in the following section, are even further linked to the particular instance through gameplay and its chronotopic approximation to real life experience within a fictional universe.

Despite its pull away from history, myth, and religion, according to Bakhtin (1981, p. 33), the Novel is capable of novelizing all other genres by incorporating them within itself, by adjusting their chronotope to a novelized form. In his essay on chronotope, Bakhtin gives several examples of such novelized genres. Writing at the beginning of the 20th century, Bakhtin argued that the only novelized form of Heroic Epic is the Chivalric Romance, which also soon found itself out of fashion much to the same reasons that Epic did and also due to the Novel's intrinsic resistance to its subject matter (pp. 28−29). While Heroic Epic relies on absolute past distance, narration/action time gap, and historical/mythological grounding to deliver its highly archetypal and fantastic material in a coherent narrative, Chivalric Romance uses similar methods with a chronotope that is closer to the Novel. It relies more heavily on the religious grounding and regional lore, such as is the case of *Le Morte d'Arthur* (Malory, 2008) – arguably the most famous and influential work in the genre (Lupack, 2005, p. 133).

I here argue that another novelized form of the Heroic Epic is the Fantasy novel, which has risen in popularity since the advent of Tolkien in the middle of the twentieth century (Shippey, 2011). Such popularity has been renewed at the beginning of the 21st century with Martin's (2011) book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* and the hit television series based on it, *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011). The chronotope of Fantasy is of great interest to this study since the chronotope of WRPGs closely resembles that of Fantasy due to their similar attempt to deliver Heroic Epic material in new forms of storytelling and the fact that the base chronotopic setting is almost identical in both.

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Unlike the Heroic Epic and the Chivalric Romance, which ground their narratives on history and mythology/religion, Fantasy novels tend to avoid any direct link to narratives of the human perceived world, opting instead to position themselves inside an entirely fictional universe of their own creation, the so called 'secondary world' as described by Tolkien (2006) and previously discussed in Section 2.2.3. Therefore, while most narratives are set at different time zones inside the dimension of our perceived reality, such as the absolute past of the Heroic Epic or the historical past/present/possible future of the Realistic Novel, Fantasy of the epic kind, such as a *Song of Ice and Fire* and *The Lord of the Rings,* are set in a time dimension outside or parallel to the realm of perceived reality. This is a feature that both *Skyrim* and *DAO* share with Fantasy: the worlds of Tamriel and Thedas have no direct relationship to our perceived reality in spite of their strong resemblance and dialogical relationship with Old Norse and Arthurian England, respectively.

While allowing the Fantasy novel a high degree of fantastic material, this chronotopic shift creates problems of its own. Considering that the absolute past of Heroic Epic is the absolute unknowable; the past of Chivalric Romance is the unknowable; the present of the Realistic Novel is only partially knowable; and the future of Science Fiction the tentatively predictable but ultimately unknowable; the different dimension of Fantasy is the absolute unknown. Unknowable is understood here as what can be linked to human experience but not understood, whereas the unknown is completely outside the realm of experience. Although any narrative is in part unknown territory, the Fantasy novel is much more so due to its chronotope, which leads to an unbalance in the dialogical relationship of imagination between fantasy and mimesis as there is no basis for mimesis when there is no 'reality' to measure against. For instance, upon reading that 'Mil was attacked by Kazarkus tora on tatoeba at 10,000 tempos', the reader's imagination would try its best to attempt to fill this almost nonsensical piece of information with some kind of interpretation based on previous experience, possibly his/her familiarity with Science Fiction. However without some kind of further reference it is ultimately impossible to imagine anything specific. This dialogical unbalance can and will lead to a failure of engagement as the narrative content becomes too fantastic to be imagined properly. Different Fantasy novels attempt to deal with this problem in different ways, but a recurring strategy is the strategy of grounding the narrative in other fictional narratives. Rather than history or mythology/religion, Fantasy grounds itself in the archetypal images found in other fictional genres, such as the Heroic Epic and Chivalric

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Romance. One particular aspect is of interest for the examination of time in this study: the internalization of the Heroic Epic chronotope within the fictional world of the Fantasy novel, which can also be found in the selected WRPGs.

Both *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire* internalize the Heroic Epic distance within their world building. In Tolkien's work, this internalization takes the shape of the two previous ages that predate the current Third Age of the narrative (Tolkien, 1977). The events and crisis to be resolved are directly linked to this internalized heroic ancient time through the ring of power, an ancient magical object and its creator, the monstrous Sauron, a returning vanquished evil from the previous ages. The same can be said about *A Song of Ice and Fire* where the Epic internalization takes place in the shape of the appropriately called Age of Heroes (Martin, Garcia, & Antonsson, 2014) from whose legendary figures most of the main characters' noble houses directly descend, such as the main protagonists of House Stark. The central crisis of the story is also linked directly to the ancient age with the reappearance of the Others who, like Sauron, are returning monstrous figures from a previous age.

In terms of the heroes themselves, however, the novelized chronotope with its resistance to archetypal images and higher focus on particular instances makes the Fantasy character unable to have such a strong archetypal presence as the hero figures of Beowulf and Sigurd. Instead, as time is brought to the realm of the present experience, despite it being in a dimension differing from our own, the effect is that character's detail and progression become the norm. The character is then imbued of 'enduring traits and dispositions to action' and such mental constructions interact and 'overlap' with the 'storyworld and its existents and the narrative facts crucially influenc[ing] the dynamics of the action and its consequences' (Margolin, 2007, p. 74). Gone is the Heroic Epic flattened character that simultaneously was and is and in comes the 'rounded character' who more closely resembles a living person or a Realistic Novel character. As the focus turns to character progression, characterization is altered, the novelized character is one that is becoming, who is constantly in the process of change, or as Bakhtin puts it, is in the 'openendedness' of the present (Bakhtin, 1981, p.19) .

3.5 Time in WRPGs

Building on the previous discussion about time in narratives in general and more specifically in the Epic and Fantasy, this section focuses on the analysis of time in the selected WRPGs. The video game chronotope is probably, in many ways, the most complex of all artistic chronotopes as it builds and adds to the chronotopes of other genres and media while being unique in its own configuration. The WRPGs tendency to incorporate various forms of chronotope, such as the ones of the Novel and the Epic, generates interesting effects on game narrative, characterization, and engagement with archetypal images (King & Krzywinska, 2006, p. 54) that are all explored in this section. The analysis of *Skyrim* (Bethesda, 2011) and *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)* (Bioware, 2010) also focuses on the transportation phase, setting, and flow. Both WRPGs examined in this study contain, to varying degrees, highly archetypal Heroic material akin to that found in *Beowulf* and the Sigurd's Cycle and attempt to deliver it in their own medium. Therefore, the previous analysis of these texts (Section 3.3) serves as a guide to identify similarities and differences between the WRPGs and the Heroic Epic as well as between the treatment individual WRPGs give to the Epic material.

Establishing a contrast between the 'novelized present' and the 'game present' is also particularly important. As discussed in Section 3.4, the chronotope of WRPGs is closer to the Novel since their narrative action tends to develop nearer an open-ended present, like those of Fantasy novels. The open-ended present of the Novel is where the action takes place as it is reported and its implications are yet to be felt whereas the performance present of games is where the action is yet to take place and occurs at the discretion of the player, albeit still confined by the limitations of the game. That does not mean, however, that the chronotope of selected WRPGs is identical to that of the Fantasy novel. One of its key differences comes in the form of the similarities between the medium of video games and the medium of film, an understanding of which may further illuminate this facet of the WRPGs chronotope.

Films, unlike novels, are not necessarily narrated through language (Stam, 1986). While there certainly are a number of films that are at least partially narrated, such as classic film Noir with their 'slow, reflective tone' voice over narrators (Luhr, 2012, p. 12) or even the first scene of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001), film narratives are not usually narrated through reported language. Instead, events are depicted. This difference could perhaps be considered minor as films still are essentially narratives, but such a difference is

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nonetheless important for this study. The reason for that is that when reading or listening to a story being narrated − whether the narrator is a first person character, a point of view third person or an omniscient narrator, reliable or less so − the reader/listener is always being given filtered information (Abbott, 2007, p. 42). This occurs even in novels, where the details are much more abundant than in Heroic Epic tales where the information given is a much smaller part of what is imagined by the reader when internalizing the narrative. The case of the video game is even more complex and builds on top of the narrative effect of both the novel and the film by being capable of incorporating both media within itself through in-game text and cinematic cut-scenes while also adding the further layer of complexity derived from the interactivity.

The film viewer, in comparison to the novel reader, is to a certain degree closer to being a witness to events. Films are previously recorded and closely authored by the director and editor so the information given to the recipient is still carefully chosen. The amount of information selectivity, however, does not reach the same degree as in the written narration since in film there is an enormous amount of details, such as the misè-en-scene and the characters' appearance, expression and pitch of voice (Monaco, 2009), which are virtually impossible to fit in a narrative that fundamentally uses a single mode of delivery, such as the written text or the oral narration. Most of this extraneous information found in films is not part of the core narrative. When the viewer internalizes what is perceived from the images and sound, most of this information is lost. What is left, instead, is a memorized selective and interpreted narrative summary, which in turn is further distilled into the ideal form of a story, as discussed in Section 2.2.1. A similar process can be found in the internalization of life experiences into memory. Day to day life contains, after all, the highest amount of information any possible experience can provide since it utilises all the human senses of perception. In this sense, films deliver narratives that are sensory closer to everyday experiences making their narratives more analogous to the chronotope of the 'real' present than novels since narration time is often non-existent and therefore there is no 'buffer' between action time and the narrative recipient.

In general, video games are, in regards to depiction, similar to films (McMahan, 2003, p. 8). However, video games have the capacity of bringing the narrative experience even closer to that of everyday human experience since players can be more than just witnesses to

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events and, to a certain extent, participate in them (Simons, 2007, p. 2). As far as crafted narrative artefacts go, video games are among the most complex, not only in terms of technology but also in terms of delivery (Ip, 2011a; Jenkins, 2004). This complexity can be both a blessing and a hindrance: a blessing for their sheer entertainment value and potential as a narrative mode; a hindrance for the academics who attempt to understand its inner workings at the reception end of the spectrum where the relations between player and game add further complexity to an already multifaceted artefact. Even when analysed only in terms of narrative delivery, WRPGs often contain both oral and written narration, as in Heroic Epic and Fantasy novels; depiction and sounds, as in films; and their very own gameplay dimension.

As alluded earlier in this chapter (Section 3.2), one way of seeing gameplay time is as time between 'real' and narrative time. Gameplay time is the perception of time that a player has when engaged with a game. Similarly to what happens with 'real' time, gameplay time has the capacity of transforming the experiences a player has within its time zone into narrative. Players who have played video games for a certain length of time will have probably experienced memorable moments of gameplay which they could recount in an anecdotal story format (Ip, 2011a, p. 107). Like narrative time, gameplay time is malleable since the structure within which it happens is a created environment over which the player has partial control in terms of their own engagement. While the whole of gameplay time has the potential to be turned into narrative through the player's experience, it is important not to mistake such emergent narratives as identical to the main narrative of the game itself (King & Krzywinska, 2006, p. 65). For example, in *Skyrim* the player can disregard the urge to contact the region's Jarl to warn him about the dragon that has destroyed a city and simply decide to go hunting for deer instead. Doing so will lead to an emergent narrative about deer hunting and the gameplay involved in it, but that will have little to almost no effect on the dragon narrative should the player ever decide to talk to the Jarl, except for the delay, a couple of extra antlers on the character's inventory, and the player's own memories. Such emergent narratives, at their best reinforce and aid the narrative experience of the game as a whole. Yet, some games, such as the WRPGs analysed in this study, have authored narratives of their own that serve as the main thrust for narrative engagement with the game and often impact the gameplay itself. The time of these authored narratives can indeed be moved forwards or backwards through gameplay, but also through narrative methods that do not

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include actively playing the game, such as written text, voice-over narration, or depiction through cut-scenes.

Gameplay also has the added effect of distancing through extreme approximation of the present/future tense, in the same way an object becomes partially obscured by being brought too close to one's eyes. That means that the narrative action is distanced during immediate performance by the act of performing itself. It is only after and before performing that the narrative is evaluated and suspension of disbelief through distancing comes into play. For example, during the act of swimming with a fully armoured character, the player is unlikely to disbelieve the physical possibility of doing so while performing the action; incredulity and break of immersion only becomes a part of gameplay while planning to do such an action or on considering having done it.

3.5.1 Time in *Skyrim*

Skyrim is the fifth game in the acclaimed WRPGs *The Elder Scrolls* franchise from developer Bethesda. As most games do, the very first screen presented to the player in *Skyrim* is the main menu screen and, as far as comparison goes, this is not functionally different from what a title page is for a novel. As when opening a book, it is from the pressing of the 'New Game' prompt that the player enters the gameplay and narrative. However, *Skyrim*'s intro does not come in the more traditional form of the cinematic cut-scene, but neither is it truly gameplay. Rather, it straddles the middle ground as a player is presented with a first person camera view from the perspective of your playable character, who is literally being transported on a cart through a mountainside road along with other prisoners (Figure 3.3). The only form of control available to the player is the camera movement, which is explained in-game by the imprisonment of the character. This forces the player to listen to the dialogue exposition of their cart companions. Although *Skyrim* is not unique in having such an opening, I argue that such structure is likely to lead the player to a particular engagement with the game that establishes connections with the Epic and Fantasy literary traditions. This initial dialogue lays the foundation for the secondary world the player has entered in a manner that is similar to how *The Poetic Edda* dialogue poems ground the narrative through extensive exposition in the character's lines to each other. You, as the player, learn from the conversation between the other prisoners that the cart's destination may well be your character's execution place.

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Figure 3.3: *Skyrim*, the cart intro scene (Angle 1)

While the narrative time transportation is immediate, with the player thrown in mid-action, the disorienting effect is lessened in two different ways: the previously mentioned gradual transportation into gameplay, and a gradual sensory transportation through the initial sound of carts and horses and a dark credits screen followed by a gradual brightening of the black screen to present the players with their character's point of view camera as it supposedly wakes from slumber. The player is then also literally allowed to look around to locate him/herself and there are clear visual clues to the setting of the secondary world as a heroic/medieval Fantasy-like world, such as the rustic cart and horses, the beaten down road and the other characters' apparel. The exposition dialogue which accompanies the act of observing the surroundings further helps the player position him/herself inside the fictional world (Figure 3.4).

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Figure 3.4: *Skyrim*, the cart intro scene (Angle 2) and exposition dialogue.

The dialogue exposition is followed by a character creation phase that is framed as a prisoner's registration and where the player is free to craft their character to their liking from the several races, both genders, and various other options (Section 4.5.1). Only after such a closely authored sequence, the player is gradually given more control over the character's actions.

In terms of gameplay time chronotope, this introductory experience takes place in the immediate present of the player with actions being performed by the player and responded by the system. However, in terms of narrative, this form of control brings a new layer of time to the narrative experience since the player is forced to predict action so as to perform action. For example, to move the character forwards and open a door, which are basic actions that can be taken very early in the game, the player has to have decided to do so before pressing the button that will result in the character performing the action. It requires the player to think, however briefly and sub-consciously, 'I will move forward and then open the door.' This is an internalized predicted narrative and, as far as narrative goes, this action has already happened to the player. It is literally only a matter of having the action performed and depicted. This process can be seen as analogous to what authors usually go through when writing a story: the narrative is already in their minds and it is only a matter of having it

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written down for others to read. The authorial comparison still holds when concerning the narrative mode of thought, even though one must then consider that every game possesses a somewhat different language to be mastered. Although almost all predictions and actions are performed by the player in the form of button prompts on their controller, this interaction is not too different from the use of a very limited type of sign language. The awareness of the use of the buttons in narrative thought processing becomes lessened with a higher degree of mastery over the game controls (Grodal, 2003, p. 144). This is similar to the progressive decrease in awareness of the graphemes in reading and writing that occurs when the reader becomes more literate.

Through its interactive aspect, gameplay opens the narrative time not only to the immediate present but also to the possible future. In the case of simple actions, such as opening a door, the process can be as simple as predicting and then performing. However, part of the joy of video games is their reactive nature to input and so often a game such as *Skyrim* will make the player predict and then adapt their running internalized narrative to the reaction the game provides. The straightforward act of opening a door then may become something like this,

> *'I will move forward and open that door to leave the room. The door is locked, I must find a key. I will look around for a key or a different path; some of the guards are coming this way; should I hide or fight? My prisoner companion says to hide. They are too close; no place to hide now; I must fight.'*

This example of thinking and adjustment to the in-game situation, while perhaps a little too refined to be an accurate portrayal of the thought process while engaging in gameplay, is presented to the player in the closely authored introduction to *Skyrim*. In this initial section, the possibilities are very limited, but it exemplifies how even this constrained scenario can lead to very different internalized narratives from player to player, depending on their own intentions and predictions. The overall plot in this example is perhaps unaltered if the player's predictions and intentions vary from the example above, since being in a locked room with their prisoner companion and with guards approaching conflict is generally inevitable. However, the player's overall internalized narrative does change with a slight change in context depending on the details depicted in each situation, such as the layout and contents of the room, and the characterization of the companion since, depending on a

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previous choice, the player is either accompanied by another prisoner or one of the guards, in which case the enemies become the fellow inmates. The player's own unique predictions and intentions towards the gameplay in dialogue with the game presentation affect the internal narration emergent from gameplay. This should not be underestimated as, ultimately, over the course of the game, these variations pile upon each other changing the player's view of the game narrative as a whole and can eventually lead to an altered archetypal story image, as further discussed in Section 5.5.3.

Another powerful tool that *Skyrim* presents the player to author their experience is the capacity to pause time. While most WRPGs, such as *DAO*, allow players to pause the gameplay without having to turn off their game, *Skyrim* gameplay allows the player a higher degree of control to retain this suspended time state. *Skyrim* possesses two menus that allow the player to pause gameplay time at any moment. The first is the options menu, which gives the player a degree of control over technical aspects of the delivery, such as subtitles and screen brightness. This main menu, also gives access to a quest log journal so that the player can keep track of their progress within the game through different playing sessions. This quest format is a clear reference to Heroic Epic that most WRPGs contain (King & Krzywinska, 2006, p. 49) (Section 5.2.1).

The second menu is of greater interest to the analysis of gameplay time. It allows players to instantly change their character's equipment (Figure 3.5), replenish their status through potions which effectively prevents looming fail states if used when in danger, select from various powers and magic spells, and increase their character's power through levelling up. All these actions can happen at a moment's notice while gameplay action time is suspended. The effect this suspension and clear distortion of time can have on the flow of emergent narrative and gameplay time is jarring: a sense of disorientation brought about by a time continuum breakdown. However, when combined with an understanding of how the authored narrative time flows in *Skyrim,* the experience as a whole can be reconciled, even if only partially.

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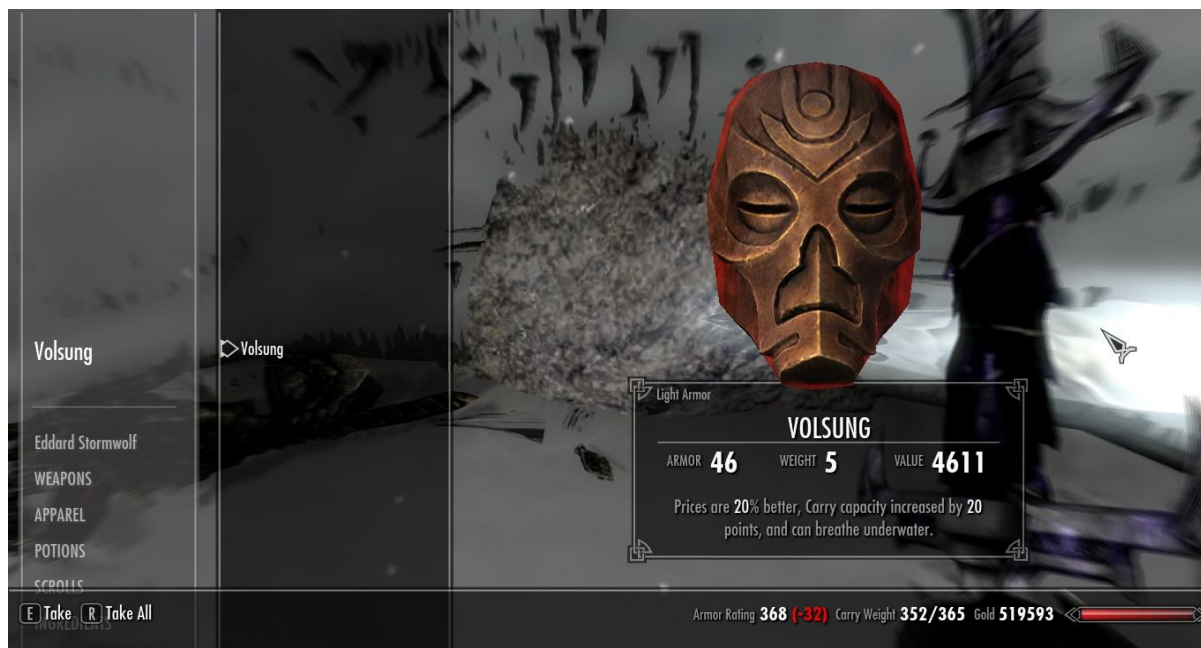
Figure 3.5: *Skyrim*, paused time equipment menu and the Volsung mask item.

As discussed in Section 3.2, although authored narrative and emergent narrative borne of gameplay are not identical, they can and often will overlap, even though their chronotopic flow is not one and the same. The *emergent narrative chronotope flow* is linked to the progression of gameplay time whereas the *authored narrative chronotopic flow* is more akin to traditional narratives found in Heroic poetry, novels, and films and progresses according to narrative narration time and narrative action time. An instance of this can be extracted from the previous tentative example of *Skyrim*'s emergent gameplay narrative: both your character and his companion are in a room; your character is bound and unarmed and the companion beckons you to approach him so he can cut off your bonds. In terms of gameplay time and emergent narrative, time continues to flow even if you decide that rather than approaching your companion and be unbound, you would rather have your character run laps around the room for no other reason than your own entertainment. The authored narrative time, however, will not continue until you perform the necessary action, to approach your companion and be freed from the constraints. Only then will the enemies approach and the rest of the narrative continue to develop. Until those events come to pass, the authored narrative time is effectively frozen. In other words, the authored narrative time of *Skyrim* will wait for the player regardless of how much gameplay time is spent pursuing other experiences within the

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game world. The player-character is unescapably predestined to approach the other character and have their bindings cut, creating a forced similarity in future narrative time with predicted emergent narrative. As far as the overall plot goes, this event has already happened and it is up to the player to simply perform it like an actor reciting their lines.

While being positioned on the inverse sphere from the Heroic Epic's absolute past, the effect this 'predestination' has on chronotopic flow is similar to the Epic's flattening as the-time-that-will-be-and-is becomes compressed and a sense of inevitability and suspension of time is generated. Hence it becomes to some degree acceptable that the player can pause time and alter the *Skyrim*'s fictional reality to an extent, as, by and large, the events to be performed and depicted have already happened and the player is simply making them come to pass in their own unique enactment. Furthermore, while *Skyrim* provides the player with the capacity to speed forward the game's day and night cycle by waiting or sleeping a certain amount of in-game hours, this passage of time is, from a narrative chronotope perspective, mostly subtle. It does not have a real disorientating influence since the narrative effect it has is not critical−with the exception of a few quests that require a certain amount of in-game hours or days to pass. This manipulation of the passage of in-game time can affect the player's internalized emergent narrative by giving the game world vibrancy through the slight changes it creates, such as lighting, non-playable character (NPCs) locations, and shop's opening hours. Yet, the fast forwarding of in-game hours does not generally have an effect on the authored narrative since the fictional world is content to wait for the players and their characters to recommence their narrative performance (Murray, 1998, p. 42) to only then again continue to move forward.

Both *Skyrim* and *Dragon Age: Origins* have within their own narratives an internalized Heroic past in the same manner that Fantasy novels, such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *A Song of Ice and Fire,* do. This dialogical relationship between the game and the Heroic elements helps reduce the chronotopic disorientation caused by breaks in the time continuum of the experience by guiding expectations and predictions of the chronotopic flow through the said relationship with the Heroic Epic. The cause and effect of this internalization are also similar to those found in both Tolkien and Martin's novels, as they link the present situation and crisis in their worlds to a higher level of fantastic/archetypal material. In *Skyrim* the assimilated epic distance and material comes in the form of the time of the Dragon War,

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when humans rose up against the tyranny of dragons and great heroes defeated their lord, the black dragon Alduin, the World-Eater. The playable character is linked to those ancient times for being Dragonborn, a mortal with the power of dragons and the hero of prophecy, who becomes capable of witnessing those heroic times through the power of the time bending elder scroll artefact and learn how to fulfil her/his destiny. Yet, this powerful player-character hero is once again limited to being simply an observer whose only control is the camera angle (Figure 3.6), much in the same way as it happens in the game intro. The heroic past of *Skyrim* can be told of and even shown, but not interacted with thus maintaining its distance and with that distance, its highly archetypal effect.

Gormlaith: Let those that watch from Sovngarde envy us this day!

Figure 3.6: *Skyrim*, witnessing the heroic past.

3.5.2 Time in *Dragon Age Origins*

Unlike *Skyrim, Dragon Age: Origins (DAO)* presents its internalized past through the religious discourse of a messiah figure: Andraste, bride of the Maker – the game's God figure – and the Chantry, the religious institution that follows her teachings. This internal distancing is made known to the player at the very introduction of the game with an exposition cut-scene. The player is shown a verse of what looks like a religious text and images that mimic medieval scroll illustrations alongside a voice-over narration that tells of the arrogant mages who attempted to enter heaven and were cursed by the Maker to become the monstrous

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darkspawn (Figure 3.7). This serves a very similar purpose as the Dragon War, which is the internalization of the absolute Heroic Epic past in *Skyrim.* It provides a point of reference for grounding through an estranged but still familiar narrative line that guides the players' expectations and helps them orient themselves in the fictional gameworld.
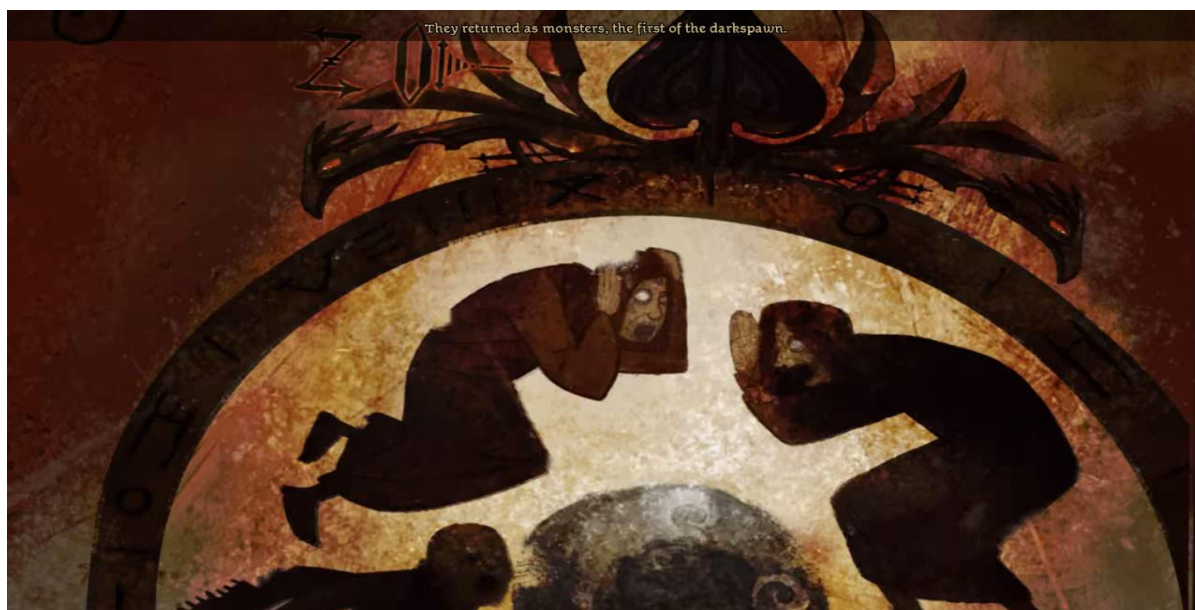
Figure 3.7: *DAO*, illustration in the intro scene.

The player is also introduced to the heroic Grey Wardens who rose up to defeat the darkspawn. When talking about these mighty heroes, the images show a change from illustrations to game 3D graphics (Figure 3.8). The return of the darkspawn links the present crisis to the epic past of the game world much in the same way as the Others do it in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Besides that, the voice-over narrator, the Grey Warden Duncan, alongside the whole order of the Grey Wardens, is what links the player-character to the past and gives the player heroic license, in a similar way as being Dragonborn in *Skyrim* does. The time of glory of the ancient Grey Wardens is what passes as the game's own internalized heroic past alongside its mythic and religious backstory.

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Figure 3.8: *DAO*, the heroic Grey Wardens from the intro.

The transportation phase in *DAO* takes, to a certain extent, the opposite approach to that of *Skyrim.* Instead of being thrown into mid-action, the player is gradually brought closer to the action time by the narration and the images. The movement from text to 2D illustrations and finally to 3D graphics accentuates the effect of progress through time and helps the transportation. Once the intro finishes, the player is prompted to create their character and choose an origin. This helps the player predict the future narrative from the brief textual descriptions of each character's origin background.

The effect of this prediction is the active engagement of the player into generating the authored narrative through their choices, which also aids the transportation as it is more difficult to feel disorientated when the destination is of your own choosing. Consequently, even though the movement towards the gameplay time is rather brusque (from the moment the character creation is finished, gameplay begins almost immediately), the disorientating effect is greatly diminished by what precedes it. It is even further reduced by the initial gameplay section which takes the form of dialogue and dialogue choices, which like *Skyrim'*s introductory exposition, also helps the player locate themselves within the fictional narrative.

Dialogue in *DAO*, however, is unlike that in *Skyrim* since it opens to the player opportunities to influence the direction of the authored narrative through their conversation

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choices, creating a greater emphasis on the performance aspect of role-playing games and bringing emergent narrative and authored narrative closer to each other.

The chronotopic flow of *DAO* is similar to that of *Skyrim* in both aspects of the narrative, being it emergent or authored, with the exception that the pause menu in *DAO* does not grant as much altering control as the one in *Skyrim*. Nor does *DAO* allow the player to move in-game time at command. Unlike *Skyrim*, *DAO* does not have an in-game night and day cycle. Instead, each area of the game world is frozen in a certain time of day or night; time in *DAO*'s world only truly moves forward through the player's narrative action. This leads the in-game time to generally correspond to the authored narrative time regardless of player movement and/or gameplay actions outside those that pertain to the authored narrative. Also the time flow in *DAO* is often dependent on the player's decisions and relatively under their command. For example, should the player decide to take their time to choose a dialogue line, the game will await until that choice is made. The same can happen in combat when the player utilizes the tactical menu to pause combat and line up actions for their characters to take. However, unlike *Skyrim,* no time bending instances, such as the consuming of potions while gameplay action time is paused, are present in *DAO*. The differences in chronotopic time flow are directly linked to the spatial differences between the two games. Such differences are examined further in the following chapter alongside the archetypal genre related imagery.

3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I argue that a chronotopic analysis of WRPGs can highlight certain aspects of the games narrative makeup and the dialogical relationship between gameplay and narrative. Although the analysis of particular games is the main focus of the chapter, an initial discussion of the chronotopic structure of time in different literary genres, namely the Heroic Epic and the Fantasy novel, helps the understanding of the differences and similarities between time in those narrative genres and WRPGs. When applied to the WRPG narrative, the absolute past of the Heroic Epic facilitates the inclusion of highly fantastical material and provides the distancing necessary to aid in the willing suspension of disbelief while playing the game. On the other hand, Fantasy also helps illustrate the importance of the narrative tense to the chronotopic structure of the game narrative by shifting the distancing effect from

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time to space and affecting characterization. Films were also briefly discussed since visual depiction brings the narrative tense even closer to that of the present (Nitsche, 2007). They bridge the understanding of the novelistic present narrative tense with the present future tense of gameplay time (Kucklich, 2003), which not only has the narrative witnessed by the player but also has the player internally predicting action in a chronic configuration that is closer to that of 'real' experience than in any other medium.

The concept of chronotope (Section 2.4.3) can be thus a powerful analytical tool to helps us understand fictional time in video games (Rockwell, 2002) and its interaction with other layers of time in the medium. Chronotope affects the player's perception of time and space at a multi-layered level and more accurately represents the complexity of the event of playing a game. Chronotope does not refer to the time and space per se, but to the internalized perception of time and space that is born out of the dialogical relationship between player and game. Perhaps more than in any other media, scholars in the field of game studies (e.g. Ip, 2011a; Juul, 2004; Kirkpatrick, 2011; Zagal and Mateas, 2010) realise the importance of time and space in video games, but still very few researchers have attempted to thoroughly apply it to an investigation of particular games. Important starting points for a discussion of chronotope are the general considerations of how 'real' and 'narrative' time differ, the examination of the intrinsic existence of a fictional chronotope to any narrative, and a discussion of how genres depend on shared chronotopic material taken from several different narratives combined (Bakhtin, 1981). However, this discussion needs to move towards an examination of some particular aspects that I consider fundamental to the analysis of the generation of meaning in video game narratives: chronotopic awareness, chronotopic transportation, and chronotopic flow (Section 2.3.4).

Chronotopic awareness refers to an individual's whole perception of time and space when engaged with a narrative. It affects and alters all other elements present in a narrative. Chronotopic awareness changes from Heroic Epic to WRPGs hence having different effects and calling for different methods of narration and presentation. The analysis of these changes is one of the main aspects of this investigation. Heroic Epic narratives and WRPGs could be seen as standing at the far side of each other in terms of narrative strategies and historical development. The Heroic Epic is one of the oldest narrative forms recorded in history whereas WRPGs are one of the newest forms of storytelling made possible due to the

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advancements in technology in the 20th century. Yet, this investigation shows that there are some significant chronotopic similarities and overlaps between the two, including the WRPGs internalization of the Heroic Epic past. In Heroic Epic, chronotopic distance highlights the positive use of highly archetypal material, with the absolute past adding value and meaning to the narrative action and emphasizing the difference between narrative action time, i.e. the time in which the current actions in the story are taking place, and narrative narration time, i.e. the time in which the narration occurs. The reader of Heroic Epic poetry is aware that the time of the action belongs to a distant mythological/historical past (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 13) while the narrator is separate from it. For instance, in *Beowulf* the narrator's voice is 'frozen' between the past, as a witness of greatness and as the storyteller who reaches out through time and addresses the present reader. This gap between narrative action time and narrative narration time can generate layers of meaning and affect the interpretation of a tale. The importance of chronotopic awareness cannot be underestimated since narrative interpretation depends on it. Narratives are a series of events that happen at a particular time in a given space (Scholes, Phelan, & Kellogg, 2006) and without being able to imagine such spatiotemporal setting, a reader or player cannot make sense of it.

When readers and players have their first encounter with the narrative, their consciousness is partly taken from their real/physical chronotope, for instance their living room at 8 o'clock in the evening, to the narrative chronotope, i.e. the time and space where the narrative happens. Such movement is quite abrupt (opening the book; turning on the console) and the transition between the two chronotopic settings is thus very important to facilitate understanding and interpretation. As such, the initial chronotopic transportation phase, i.e. the phase that accounts for the beginning of the narrative and gameplay, accounts for the movement of the consciousness from the chronotopic awareness of the outside of the narrative into that of the fiction. The dialogical relationship between narrative time and gameplay time leads to the understanding of a third time borne out of their interaction with the player's narrative imagination: the emergent narrative time (Kybartas & Bidarra, 2016). This is the narrative the player creates while playing the game and it is closer to a narrative of real time experience. For example, while playing *DAO* and asked, *'What are you doing?'* the player may answer, *'I am on the road, going to Orzamar.'*

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The effect of all three fictional layers of time‒ narrative action time, narrative narration time and emergent narrative time – as well as their influence on engagement, immersion and presence are the subject of analysis in this chapter. It became clear that while all three are almost invariably part of the complex event of playing a narrative-heavy video game, their chronotopic flow, i.e. the perception of their chronic movement, can be considerable malleable. It is worth to note that thus authored narrative time in WRPGs, which are admittedly ultimately an authored product, is composed in part of all three layers but mostly the first two, narrative action time and narrative narration time, which combine to generate the bulk of the authored narrative with emergent narrative time often overlapping into it, such as in the gameplay completion of a narrative event, and complementing the remaining aspects of it.

Time in *Skyrim* highlights the fact that authored narrative and the emergent narrative time flow can be separate from gameplay time and even from each other while still maintaining a dialogical relation. While in gameplay and outside of the time pausing menus, *Skyrim's* in-game time passes constantly regardless of narrative time. For example, the players can leave their character inactively standing in their house for several in-game days with very little of emergent narrative and no authored narrative time progress. Conversely, they can also have some considerable emergent narrative out of the use of items and levelling up system without gameplay action time moving due to time stopping in the use of menus. Alternatively, players can engage in several in-game activities, such as free exploration and combat, therefore creating rather lengthy emergent narratives without engaging with the authored narrative. They can leave the author narrative time stopped while both gameplay time and emergent narrative time still flow. In this case, key NPCs will be on standby awaiting for the player to once again engage in the authored plot rather than, for example, going around the vast *Skyrim* wilderness hunting animals and monsters. The overall chronotopic effect thus generated is that while the world time seems to move on regardless of player action, the performance aspect of the player's role becomes more prominent, with a sense that the authored narrative is largely already decided with just the actual details of how it comes to pass to be decided by the player's gameplay. In similarity to the dragon-slayers legendary heroes Sigurd and Beowulf, the character-player in *Skyrim* is the legendary Dragonborn who is destined to kill the final dragon. From a chronotopic point of view, this

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action is already lore and myth – the great predestined deed is just waiting to be performed by the player.

In contrast with *Skyrim*, *DAO* shows that in-game fictional gameplay time can be made coincide with the authored narrative time, in a position outside the flow of emergent narrative time born of gameplay. Without a night and day cycle nor any other method of marking the passage of time within the game, world time in *DAO* does not pass with gameplay activity in general; only the player's emergent narrative time flows throughout gameplay. The in-game time in *DAO* moves forward together with the authored narrative. A good example of this is the destruction of the village of Lothering, which the players are led to understand, happens in one of the nights after they left the village to continue their journey. However, should the player decide to remain in Lothering, with its constant evening time setting that destruction will never come to pass, no matter how many actions and hours of game playing time is spent there. Yet, while having a different chronic configuration from *Skyrim,* the chronotopic configuration in *DAO* also exacerbates the performance aspect of the narrative, perhaps to even greater degree than that of *Skyrim*, with time literally standing still awaiting the continuation of the plot by the player. However, this effect is mitigated by the fact that the plot is reactive to player decision, instilling a certain sense of agency over the narrative.

Understanding how the different configurations of flow work with each other and other narrative aspects, such as immersion, engagement, agency and presence (Section 2.4.2), is what the chronotopic juxtaposition of both games highlights. It also brings to the fore the similarities between the time aspect of the chronotope in the two games and the time aspect of the chronotope in the Heroic Epic and Fantasy. This method of investigation continues in the next chapter where the focus is on the spatial (*topos*) aspect of chronotope.

Chapter 4 - Chronotope: Space in Narrative

4.1 Introduction

Space in narratives is often intrinsically bound to narrative time and motion (Stamenkovi & Jacevic, 2015, pp. 178–180) and, therefore, the separation of the sections devoted to the analysis of time and space is, as mentioned in Section 3.1, simply a manner of giving prominence to the analysis of each aspect in the process of writing up the findings of this study. This chapter discusses how the space setting in the narrative works similarly to an archetypal image that dialogically permeates all imagery and action in the narrative. This is followed by a discussion of how space flow is intrinsically bound to narrative time, with the analysis focusing more closely on the nature and effect of the distancing aspect of the chronotopic movement. That is to say, how the readers/players' narrative perception of the fictional space and the movement within this space affect their interpretation and engagement. This becomes particularly relevant when examining video games where the fictional space is often more 'tangible' in a sense, as it constitutes a large part of the playing experience, especially in games that allow for exploration of such virtual spaces, as the ones selected for this investigation.

Theories of immersion and engagement (Section 2.5.2) suggest that the player's positioning inside the world is fundamental for the game experience and the 'evocative narrative element' (Nitsche, 2008, p. 42). Therefore, the 'assembled images' of spaces in games 'create a supportive context for the necessary interpretation' of the playing experience and 'prevent a chaotic and meaningless explosion of possibilities' (p.43). Video game spaces are still only 'assembled images' and remain a matter of abstract perception, but this is much closer to the perception a person has of real space than that afforded by other media in terms of generating a sense of spatiality and movement within the abstract space. This proximity is likely to become even greater with the advent of video games created for virtual reality (VR) technologies that allow for greater sensorial stimulation. As such, while the transportation phase, as discussed in relation to time (Section 3.5), is still significant and a good starting point for analysis of space, it becomes less important than the analysis of the setting and the narrative flow.

4.2 Space in narratives

As discussed in Section 2.4.3, space and time are two facets of the concept of chronotope proposed by Bakhtin (1981, p. 84), who was profoundly influenced by Kant's views on the matter. For Kant, space and time are inseparable forms of intuition and appearance (Gardner, 2003, pp. 84–85) and while space is the most visible and tangible of the two, and hence the more easily perceived in real life experience, this higher perception may lead us to take the dimension and importance of space in fiction for granted. Fictional space is neither concrete, nor necessarily visible; it is a concept, an idea of a constructed space that is brought to the reader/player's mind by the fictional creation. King and Krzywinska (2006, p. 76) argue that the 'exploration of game-worlds and the creation of a sense of presence in the virtual on-screen environment' are closely linked to narratives and generic connotations. The concept of space, as it happens with any other object or abstraction, can, therefore, be summoned to the mind through language and/or image; it can be directly based on our shared perceived reality, or be an aliened construct of fantasy (Ricoeur, 2016). In any of these cases, the point remains that fictional space, as opposed to 'real' or virtual space, is wholly imaginary and, as such, falls into the dominion of the imagination (Warnock, 1978, p. 39), be it from the understanding of the creator and/or the player/reader's point of view. Therefore, fictional space belongs to the same realm of mimesis and fantasy (Wolf, 2014, p. 2), of archetypal images and particular instances (Booker, 2005).

Particular instances are any individual examples of an archetypal image in use, such as the specific person that Beowulf is as opposed to the other myriad encompassing archetypal images of the hero. In terms of narrative, the chronotopic setting is also a particular instance of a higher archetypal image and being so, space plays an integral part in informing all the action, characters, and objects in the narrative which the reader/player imagines. Space, especially in the form of narrative setting, is intrinsically linked to a culturally formed archetypal image, and like any other archetypal image, it informs and is informed by the particular instances that it engages with it. An example of this is the historical narrative of the human species with its geographical related concepts − such as nationalities, East & West, North & South − all of which are loaded with cultural images and perceived identities linked to the narratives told to have occurred in those spaces (Said, 2003). As archetypal images, these spatial identities are always evolving by being reinforced,

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challenged, and altered by particular instances. Although they are culturally shared, they are also deeply personal to an individual's own internalized version of the archetypal image and can thus inform narrative reception and expectation beyond the mere setting. For example, consider the reader presented with the sentence, 'The American tried to make himself comfortable on the chair.' While the chronotopic setting is obscured, the linking of the subject with the word 'American' may bring to the reader's mind an archetypal image connected to the space which constitutes the state nation known as the USA. The word 'American' may lead the reader to fill in some of the missing information of the particular instance, such as the character's appearance, the type of chair, and even a possible background setting constructed with data from the reader's own archetypal image of 'American'. Through this imaginary exercise of geographical association, the reader becomes capable of picturing the narrative action. With a single change in the sentence, the whole mental construction may change dramatically, as in 'The *South* American tried to make himself comfortable on the chair.' With the addition of the spatial referential 'South', the archetypal image referenced is moved to Latin America and the whole picturing, associations and expectations might change to those the individual reader may see as the particular archetypal image related to that specific geographical location. The lack of further information in these example sentences highlights the effect of space in narratives and leads to a greater reliance on the reader's previously acquired schemata (Cook, 1995). In a prolonged narrative, the effects of such archetypal images may not be so visible at first; however, their presence and impact should not be overlooked since the dialogical relationships among space, action, and interpretation are almost always at play at one level or another of the narrative. In this study, I argue that the cumulative effects of textual and visual references present in the game space profoundly affect the player's response and the game experience.

Philosophical understanding of space has advanced in a similar way to the movement of narrative that is to say from more heavily abstract (i.e. fantastic) to the highly mimetic (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 1–2). However, as it is often the case, the movement rather than being a continuous straight line is more akin to waves that go back and forth with the occasional full cycle and/or simultaneous branches of thought competing and complementing each other. Lefebvre's ideas of space are of particular interest to this study as he followed a historical and multi-faceted approach to the understanding of space. Lefebvre generally divides space into

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three aspects: the physical, the mental, and the social. According to Lefebvre, "the physical – nature, the cosmos" is a concrete space that exists outside perception and is the origin of that which is perceived. "The mental, including logical and formal abstraction" would be the absolute idealized space of Cartesian thought in which space 'exists', has contours, geometrical forms, etc. as well as an internalized space where knowledge itself resides (i.e. the location of the mental 'archive' and philosophical debates). On the other hand, for Lefebvre, social space is "concerned with logico-epistemological space, including products of the imagination, such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias" (p. 11). The social space that Lefebvre proposes is where chronotopic awareness (Section 2.4.3) would reside whereas the archetypal image (Section 2.2.1) would theoretically reside in the mental space. The perceived space – constructed out of a perception of a physical space, an interpretation of a literary passage, or any other personal experience and/or cultural stimuli – is constantly influencing and being influenced by what is found in the social space. Therefore, Lefebvre's understanding that time and space are ultimately inseparable (p. 12) and that one cannot be truly perceived or even imagined without the other resonates well with the Bakhtinian chronotopic understanding of space that I adopt in this study. Also resonating with Bakhtinian thought is Lefebvre's acknowledgement that each aspect of space (physical, mental, social) 'underpins and presupposes the other' (p.14). As such, Lefebvre provides an argument that both counters and validates this study since his idea of rhythm, which is derived of everyday action, repetition, and variation within the repetition (Lefebvre, 1991, 2013, p. 6) also matches well with the concept of chronotopic flow I propose in this investigation.

The above is especially the case when considering the chronotopic flow derived from gameplay frequent repetitions. These repetitions, often referred as 'gameplay cycles', are a product of the system bound player-game interaction. An example is the cycle of exploration and combat in WRPGs followed by social and economic interactions in a town. Such cyclical actions and repetitions generate the overall feeling of gameplay chronotopic flow as well as the flow of time and space in the emergent narratives that . Although it is correct to affirm that Lefebvre's work interconnects well with the chronotopic approach of this study, it is important to emphasize that the conclusions reached by this study come from a different philosophical starting point rooted in Literary Criticism rather than Geography and or Social Sciences. While certainly useful from a theoretical point of view, Lefebvre's separation and

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categorization of space are not readily applicable to the analysis of the games and literary texts which are at the heart of this research. This is mainly because Lefebvre's number one interest is in the social everyday space and the fact that his considerations contain a political vein that is not of particular relevance to the present discussion. Perhaps more problematic is Lefebvre's dialectical understanding (Harvey, 2005, p. 213) of space which presupposes some kind of discernible truth residing in a mental realm, as well as his idea of an absolute concrete physical space outside perspective. Instead, this study focuses more specifically on the players' mental constructions and the creation of perceptions of reality rather than on reality itself.

Harvey (2005, pp. 213−214) claims that processes create their own spaces instead of happening in a space which is already there. In the process of spatial representations in a narrative setting which comes first, process or space, is ultimately irrelevant as both are intrinsically bound to each other through their chronic link. An action or process can only happen within a particular space-time whether that space exists before the process and is altered upon becoming the site of the process, or is created by the process itself so that it can exist. Time, therefore, is what makes the space of one process intrinsically different from the space of another process, even if the geographical coordinates are the same and the process virtually identical. The archetypal space, however, has no coordinates; it exists in relation to all spaces that make use of its image to create their own particular instances. This is partly due to the fact that an archetypal space is mostly generated by a compression of time. For instance, the Orient archetype found in English literature is not China 1500 BC, or Japan 1600 AD, or Turkey 1903 AD; it is all of them and none of them simultaneously; it is every particular mention of Eastern countries and their cultures in literature and other cultural artefacts. That is the reason why Bakhtinian understanding of chronotope with its constant flow, push and forth as well as the recognition of its role in dialogically altering all that it comes in contact with makes it a more appropriate tool for the analysis of games and literature conducted in this investigation.

Harvey's (2006, pp. 117–148) matrix to understand space is very useful to catalogue and understand spatial characteristics but less applicable to the analysis of the effect of such special characteristics or their formations in relation to each other as well as their overlapping natures. Harvey's matrix is a helpful and suitable tool for a description of spatial

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arrangements and for a chronological analysis of the development of a particular IP, such as the one conducted by Huber (2009) on *Final Fantasy X* (SquareSoft, 2002) and *X-2* (SquareEnix, 2004). However, I argue that it is less appropriate for an analysis of players' cognitive responses to the game space and the effect spatial arrangements may exert on players' multiple interpretations and readings.

As time, space analysis in narratives can be divided into flow and setting. The spatial flow is intrinsically bound to time flow, since without the passing of time movement through space is not possible. Both are so fundamentally connected that the archetype of the journey (Murray, 1998, pp. 137–140) – a character's spatial movement through the fictional world − has also the connotation of a person's movement through time, i.e. life and history, such as in the novel *The Road* (McCarthy, 2009) and the *Mad Max* movies (Miller, 1979, 2015). An analysis of the chronotopic flow focusing more closely on topos can demonstrate the importance of the fictional space in the genres discussed in this study. It can further our understanding of how fictional and game space interact to generate a sense of spatial movement in the complex event of playing a game by elucidating the impact of spatial structuring in the creation of narrative, immersion, and presence.

Spatial setting in narrative is always multi-layered (Ryan, 2010, cited in Hones, 2011, p. 687) (Figure 4.1). The first layer of the narrative space is the *narrative narration space*, which is where the narration itself occurs. In *Beowulf*, the narrative narration space is where the narrator of the tale addresses his phantom audience, as discussed previously when considering the narrative narration time (Section 3.3). Narrative narration space is always existent, even when it is a highly non-defined place occupied by a hypothetical narrator addressing a hypothetical recipient. An example of this is the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings – The Fellowship of the Ring* (Tolkien, 1994, p. 21) where the omniscient narrator tells the novel reader that Mr Bilbo Baggins will be 'shortly celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence'.

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Figure 4.1: The multi-layers of the narrative space

The second layer is the *fictional background setting*: an encompassing space within which the whole narrative takes place, such as Middle-Earth. The overlapping layer is the *setting of the immediate action*, which is the space being described at any particular point of the narrative, such as Hobbiton, where Bilbo's party will take place, or the inside of the main hall of Heorot, where Beowulf fights Grendel, as described in the passage below.

> …The iron-braced door
>
> tuned on its hinge when his hands touched it.
>
> Then his rage boiled over, he ripped open
>
> the mouth of the building, maddening for blood,
>
> pacing the length of the patterned floor
>
> with his loathsome tread,..(p. 49, lines 721–726)

In general, the fictional background setting, by being a distanced, that is to say abstract and contextualizing image, is more akin to a higher form of archetypal image as it influences the understanding of the narrative without ever being fully realised within it. On the other hand, the setting of the immediate action is closer to being a particular instance that helps advance the narrative, as in the *Beowulf* extract above. These layers of the chronotopic space, as well as what I term the transportation phase (Section 2.4.3), highlight the fact that narrative space is always separate from 'real' world experience even when it is based on it. The 'real' has no

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intrinsic layers since it is only upon perception and internalization that chronotopic awareness is formed and layers catalogued. A narrative space based on an individual's real physical location is the result of the teller's chronotopic perception of that location that was internalized. When narrated, it resonates with the internalized layered perceptions the narrative recipients have of that space. For example, when talking about my last trip to London, my spatial and temporal consciousness is partly transported into the narrated event. However, the London described is never the place of the real experience but my perception of that space transformed by my current perceptions and memory of it while my listeners' understanding of the London I visited is filtered through their own internalized concepts of what the space 'London' is. Moreover, space, by being dimensionally linked to time, is also in constant transformation. The same physical location today and yesterday constitute, for chronotopic purposes, two different spaces despite their same geographical coordinates. Add to this the fact that the narrative space is not an actual place but an idea of space, and it can be inferred that the spatial transportation of the narrative receiver is always immediate to a certain extent. That is to say, upon the initial moment of engaging with the narrative, the receiver's perception passes into the space of narrative and the myriad possibilities of fiction.

As discussed in relation to time (Section 2.4.3), immediate movement of chronotope flow can lead to disorientation (Grodal, 2003, p. 130). In terms of space, this disorientation can be dealt with by a movement through familiarity, such as the use of common or recurring settings (Nitsche, 2008, p. 244). Alternatively, the disorientation effect can also be heightened so as to induce wonder by using an unfamiliar setting or obscuring the setting altogether, as much as to turn them into 'an ongoing nightmare' (p. 47). Too much disorientation, however, can lead to disengagement since reference points are necessary for the recipient to locate themselves within the narrative or even to imagine the setting altogether. Failure to do either will lead to a break in the imaginary conception of the fictional world and a failure of the narrative as a whole. Different modes of narrative and genres (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 2–40) have different strategies to keep engagement even when dealing with highly fantastical locations or when rapidly moving through space, aspects that can, otherwise, work against a successful narrative.

While not strictly necessary for the understanding of a fictional setting or of a narrative in general, engagement (Section 2.5.2) is necessary to prevent the breakdown in the

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dialogue between the narrative and its recipient. In some cases, engagement is crucial for a clear imagining of the current action since without it, the act of receiving a narration becomes a consciously willed exercise and thus much like a smile too complex to be completely willed into being. Coplan (2004), when discussing the roles of empathy, 'emotional contagion', and sympathy in the reader engagement with narrative fiction, conducts a comprehensive review of the research on engagement and its importance for narrative processing and the reader's ability to connect with the characters' experiences. Such aspect is particularly important when considering that in the WRPGs the connection between player and character is a crucial aspect of the game experience. As Kirschner and Williams (2014) argue, 'the purpose of game design is to create meaningful play'. They also refer to numerous studies that attest to the importance of 'meaning and player engagement'. They then propose a modified model for understanding of engagement based on Whitton's (2011) work on the ability of games to create learner's engagement and on Csikszentmihalyi's (1997) seminal work on flow. Kirschner and Williams (2014, p. 595) argue that to engage, digital games need to provide 'challenge, control, immersion, interest, and purpose'. These studies in both textual and game media highlight the importance of the concepts of transportation and flow to avoid disorientation and disengagement with the narrative, being it in the Heroic Epic, Fantasy or WRPGs.

As in the previous chapter on time, a discussion of space in the selected WRPGs is preceded by sections on space in Heroic Epic and Fantasy texts since such examination can highlight the connections between the literary texts and the games investigated in this study. As in Chapter 3, throughout the sections on space in the Epic and Fantasy connections with WRPGs, in general, and *Skyrim* and *DAO,* in particular, are regularly made.

4.3 Space in the Heroic Epic

As other narrative aspects, such as characterization (Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2), space in the Heroic Epic is much closer to an archetypal image than space in other genres. In Heroic Epic narratives, the setting becomes an abstract ideal upon which a dialogical presentation of the action both imbues and is imbued by the ideals associated with the space (Skempis & Ziogas, 2014, p. 3). In a sense, the spatial setting becomes the image of the tale as a whole. Space in Heroic tales is also often a main point of interest due to its relation to the creation of national

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identities since such tales are often the basis for some cultural-historical distinctiveness of the regions involved in both the narrative and the making of such a narrative (Anlezark, 2013, pp. 70–74). For instance, the North of *Beowulf* and the *Poetic Edda* are not so much physical spaces but ideal spaces that are formed by those tales and, in turn, enrich them with meaning (Howe, 2006, pp. 49–89). The narrative space becomes thus dialogically associated with and highly dependent on the archetypical material of the tale. The north of Sigurd, as well as the Geatland and Denmark of *Beowulf*, work less as fictional locations, like those found in realistic fiction, and more as an abstract cultural and moral arena for the heroic action (Earl, 2006, pp. 259–285).

Like almost everything else in Heroic literature, the level of abstraction when it comes to spatial depiction is high despite its supposed relation to 'real' space. There is very little detail of the general landscape of the setting in either *Beowulf* or the Sigurd's Cycle and what is described is often the bare essentials to the depiction of the immediate action. Even Heorot, one of the main sites of action in *Beowulf* is hardly described. All that is told is that it was 'a great mead-hall meant to be a wonder of the world forever;' (Heaney, 2007, p.7) and adorned with works from 'many peoples.' Any detail is left for the readers/listeners to fill out themselves. This is doubly true of the *Poetic Edda* poems, which being mostly dialogue, leave most of the setting up to the reader's imagination, such as in The Lay of Fafnir, where the setting of Gnita-heath is made known to the reader in the prose preface - 'Sigurd and Regin went up onto Gnita-heath and there they found Fafnir's tracks, where he crawled down to the water' (p. 157) - but never truly described with the exception of the existence of water, dragon tracks and Fafnir's iron lair (Larrington, 2008, p. 164).

The lack of detail in the background setting, together with the minimalistic description of the site of immediate action, are what makes the reader of Heroic Epic have to rely upon their own internalized images. This effect is further enhanced by the chronotopic distancing through time (Section 3.3) that grounds the narrative in archetypal genre images. Due to the placing of the narrative in the absolute past, the distancing by space from the reader/ listener's chronotope does not become as necessary in the Heroic narrative as time distancing. However, space distancing is also present in *Beowulf* where the setting of the action is away from its targeted English audience thus allowing for the fantastic material to flourish in the unknown space of the Other and the foreign (Said, 2003, pp. 31–73) while still

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maintaining a circumscribing mimetic aspect in the form of the Norse culture which would be familiar to the contemporary Englishman.

The boundaries between the Heroic tale itself and the space in which it is set become blurred as space and narrative feed into each other. This aspect of Heroic Epic literature is especially interesting for the analysis of the settings and imagery in Fantasy and WRPGs since both genres tend to rely heavily on the imagery found in heroic tales in terms of direct references and/or in the use of tropes and archetypal images. This blurring between setting and the tale itself is something that particularly resonates with WRPGs, such as *Skyrim*, where the gameplay space and the fictional background setting almost perfectly overlap and enhance each other. It is important to note that, as mentioned before, the space of Heroic Epic is, however, directly related to that of human experience. While the north of *Beowulf* and Sigurd may be highly fantastic, it is still supposedly the north of our planet and so it shares, to a certain degree, its dimension with that of the space of historical narrative, even if to the modern readers both modes of narrative may seem to contradict each other.

Another spatial aspect of Heroic poetry one encounters when analysing the chronotopic transportation phase is what I see as a form of 'narration limbo'. *Beowulf,* for example, has the narrator talking almost directly to the readers to bring them into the narrative (Heaney, 2007, p. 1). While not a device unique to Heroic Epic, this direct narration (Cobley, 2014, pp. 41–42), when coupled with the absolute distanced past, creates a buffer space that is outside of both the narrative and the real experience chronotopes. I call this narrative narration space (Figure 4.1). Hence, considering the recipient's original spatial chronotopic position as being outside the fiction, this direct addressing of the readers pulls their perception to a kind of in-between space that is not quite in the ancient Denmark of Seaf Sheafson, the initial narrative place of action, nor in their original position outside of the narrative, as it can be experienced in the opening lines of the poem (Heaney, 2007, p. 3, lines 1–3).

The narrative receivers find themselves in a space that is inhabited by the narrator and all those to whom he narrates, a fact emphasised by the narrators use of 'we' in 'We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.' This intermediary narration space has the effect of easing the spatial flow of the narrative action, allowing for fast and constant movement in the fictional space by anchoring the chronotopic perception in this steady and unmoving

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communal narration zone. This effect can also be found in the *Volsung Saga* (Byock, 2000), which has a similar beginning in 'Here we begin by telling of a man who was named Sigi…', and to a lesser degree in the *Poetic Edda* prose prefaces to each dialogue poem which establish the absolute past setting and summarize the situation of the following dialogues for the reader, letting the authorial narration voice shine through. An example of this occurs in The Lay of Sigrdrifa, which also depicts the setting to a degree and the character's movement within it, as in the extract below,

> Sigurd rode up onto Hindarfell and headed south towards the land of the Franks. On the mountain he saw a great light, as if fire were burning, and gleaming up against the sky. And when he came there, there stood a shield-wall with a banner flying over it. (Larrington, 2008, p. 166)

While this narration zone can be found to differing degrees in other forms and modes of storytelling (Cobley, 2014, p. 11), what is of interest when regarding Heroic Epic is its capacity for aiding the flattened movement through the narrative space. In the previous chapter regarding time, I analysed how the distancing in the absolute past is achieved so both the beginning and end of the tale became compressed by blurring the distinction between start and finish, origin and end (Section 3.3). Similarly, the spatial flow of the narrative thus becomes flattened, with space moving rather fast, following the main points of the action, with Beowulf crossing the ocean in a sentence, arriving in Heorot in less than a page (Heaney, 2007, pp. 17–23), and arriving back in Geatland almost as quickly as he left Heorot (pp. 129–131). Space becomes almost plastic, passing almost as if being moulded by the narrative action's needs, such as in 'With high hearts they headed away along footpaths and trails through the fields, roads that they knew,…' (p.113). Economical as this passage is, it is actually one of the more descriptive passages of movement through fictional space found in this version of the poem. Along with the previously quoted preface to 'The Lay of Sigrdrifa', these passages serve as examples of the spatial flow of Heroic Epic and can aid in the understanding of the different spatial flows in other genres and media.

This is especially true when chronotopic settings and narration tenses are modified from Heroic Epic while still maintaining a highly archetypal fantastic narrative, as it happens in Fantasy and WRPGs. Since the variation in the time scheme has powerful influence on the understanding of space, the narrative presentation of a space in the present tense naturally

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leads to a higher degree of spatial grounding. Space is hence experienced in a more detailed manner being more in alignment with the idea of a particular instance rather than the archetypal effect of the distanced space of Heroic Epic. This, in turn, leads to any considerable change in spatial flow to have greater disorientating effect. Therefore, understanding how spaces in different genres are set and work in contrast with each other can be a helpful analytical technique to later examine *Skyrim* and *DAO*.

4.4 Space in Fantasy

As with the examination of time, understanding space in Fantasy is an important step towards understanding space in the WRPGs. An analysis of the similarities and differences between the Fantasy genre and the representation of space in the WRPGs in general can illustrate how the spatial flow in both becomes more verisimilar due to its proximity to the novel format and the present tense time chronotope. It also shows how the flow through space almost always mirrors the flow through time, so much so that the passing through space, as in a journey, can also come to symbolize the passing through time in a more metaphorical sense.

Due to its novelized time, distancing in Fantasy often relies almost solely on the spatial setting, frequently by eschewing any relation with real space and generating a whole fictional world as the setting for the narrative (Attebery, 1992). Although much of the fantastic material remains the same, this is a stark contrast with the absolute past and settings linked to real space in the Heroic Epic. It produces its own set of problems for engagement, as the fantastic material can overwhelm and derail any engagement with the text, creating a kind of out-of-control dream experience with which a reader may automatically disengage. In games in general, control is a crucial aspect in creating engagement as it affects the players' perception of the 'fairness of the activity', gives them some level of choice over types of action available in the environment', and a greater sense of the 'speed and transparency of feedback' (Kirschner & Williams, 2014, p. 595). However, such sense of control, and thus engagement, can be seriously compromised by the reader/player insertion in a fantastic world completely alien to his or her experience. As Wolf (2014, p. 17) points out, for the imaginary world to be successful, it needs to contain 'a mix of familiar and unfamiliar' elements capable to 'invoke the imagination of the audience'.

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As discussed in Section 2.4.2, distancing is an important facet when tackling a fantasy heavy narrative. Heroic Epic achieves this effect mostly through a distancing in time with its absolute past, which in turn allows it to position itself spatially within the supposedly familiar realm of real world geography, be it Ancient Greece in the case of Homer's works or the Old European North found in *Beowulf* and the Sigurd's Cycle (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 4–40). Fantasy, however, by being a novelized genre cannot distance itself through time, as the chronotope is very much that of the present and the time flow closer to that of the personal experience of the reader. In the Novel, the narrative time is in the present and the actions are narrated as they happen or very close to it (Bakhtin, 1981, p.256). For instance, although in some readers' imagination the Shire (Tolkien, 1994) may evoke the idea of an idyllic medieval English countryside, for the reader the time is perceived as the present. Frodo did not leave the Shire in a remote past, as Beowulf left Geatland; he is leaving it as the narrative flows and the reader progresses through the pages. Thus for Fantasy, the role of distancing falls upon the spatial aspect of chronotope, as their general background setting is often removed from the world of real experience, presenting a different dimension to that of the reader's experienced reality. This different dimension can coexist on varying levels with that of the 'real' world, such as in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis, 2002) and the *Harry Potter* series (Rowling, 2014); or be completely cut away from experienced reality, such as in Tolkien's Middle-Earth and the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 2011). The further the distancing the more open for fantastic material the fiction becomes, though some degree of mimesis must always be present so as to contain and give shape to the world in interpretation. For example, the spatially and dimensionally distant worlds of *Skyrim* and *DAO,* with their monsters and magic, still present human characters that need to perform recognizable mundane everyday acts in their fictional world, such as eat and sleep, even if that is not particularly present in the gameplay itself.

Due to the immediate spatial chronotopic transportation, even the writer of a book whose setting is completely removed, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, must be careful not to disorientate the reader with a setting too fantastical right from the start, hence Tolkien readers find themselves confronted with the pastoral-evoking setting of the Shire and the common earthy folk that are its hobbit inhabitants (Tolkien, 1994, pp. 27–54). While intrinsically fantastic, both the Shire setting and its inhabitants base their mimetic thrust on the familiar narrative of the English countryside which lessens the disorientation, even if this particular

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countryside is not actually that of rural England. Other highly fantastical fictional genres have different mimetic techniques to circumscribe their fantastical material. Science Fiction, for example, has as its mimetic thrust in the myriad possibilities of the future/alternative futures and the far unknown distances of outer space. As such, Science Fiction relies on the realm of science and its surrounding narrative to make what is generally thought as impossible into a possibility and hence ground the reader and contains the fantastic from overloading the imagination and hampering engagement.

The spatial flow in Fantasy is often based on the familiar archetype of the journey and its Heroic Epic origin, allowing for the tale to gradually present more and more fantastic material as the journey moves forward in the narrative. This is so much the case that Fantasy fiction, such as *The Lord of the Rings,* is often called Quest Fantasy (Senior, 2012, pp. 190–199) due to its reliance on the quest format borrowed from the Heroic Epic and the Chivalric Romance (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 151–158). Because of the different chronotope in general, the spatial flow of Fantasy tends to be more gradual with the movement through space becoming more and more detailed as the narrative progresses. Therefore, the Fantasy world tends to feel like a full and living location with fictitious maps being a recurring feature in the preface of most Fantasy novels in order to aid the imagination and ground the reader on the fictional spatial setting. In some ways, space in Fantasy, while heavily reliant on Heroic Epic archetypal imagery is the opposite of it. Space in the Heroic Epic forms an archetypal image abstracted from an actual location whereas space in a Fantasy narrative is a particular location born out of fantastic and archetypal imagination.

4.5 Space in WRPGs

According to Fernández-Vara (2011, online), space works as a bridge 'between narrative and games' since stories 'take place in a spatial dimension' that serves as an organizing principle to 'the series of events that [it] makes up'. Space in WRPGs is extremely complex, with each of the examples analysed in this section presenting different spatial arrangements that players 'explore and navigate' in particular ways generating different cognitive and 'emotional' experiences (Carr, 2006, p. 59). Carr had previously based her analysis of survival horror games on Murray's spatial models arguing that differences in the games she examined were underpinned by dissimilarities in how the player-character navigates through the space.

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Murray's (1998, pp. 129–130) work has been crucial for the understanding of how spatial navigation in video games allows for particular experiences derived from the space exploration and the understanding that each space configuration 'carries its own narrative power'. Carr (2006, pp. 62–65) examines the 'rhizome' spatial arrangement where multiple paths entangle and also makes literary connections between the rhizome and postmodern literary narratives. She sees the puzzle game and maze-based single path spatial arrangements as 'derived from a heroic narrative of adventure whose roots are in antiquity', more specifically in the Greek myth of Minos's labyrinth combined with fairy-tale components. Although Sheldon (2004, pp. 275–295) does not present a theoretical based explanation of how different chronotopes in different literary genres shape narratives, he similarly sees game storytelling as having its roots in literary and virtual narrative forms. He argues that modular or episodic games are based on literary classics, such as Homer's *The Odyssey*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* and Dickens' serialization of his novels, as well as TV series and episodic films.

Game space and navigation are here understood as being crucial to the game experience and are also linked to literary tradition, in this case that of the Old Norse and Old Anglo-Saxon Heroic Epic possibly mediated by the Fantasy novel. In this study, I propose to look at the spatial configuration of WRPGs from a chronotopic perspective and argue that from a narrative viewpoint such configuration is at the same time similar to both the Heroic Epic and the novelistic chronotopes. The choice of fictional space in which the game narrative happens, both in *Skyrim* and *DAO*, establishes a dialogical relationship between the game narrative and the Heroic Epic/Fantasy narratives. Such relationship guides the player to expect situations similar to those found in the Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives, such as the slaying of monsters and the encounter with the magical. It also leads the player to interact with the fictional space in accordance to the generic expectations derived from the dialogical relations between the game and the genres it evokes. Although it could be argued that players can play games without prior conscious knowledge of the genre, the intertextual fabric of the cultural references across media (Allen, 2011, pp. 201–209) – literature, film and, especially, other games, including those in the same franchising – has greatly contributed to the creation of 'more engaged consumers who also have access to a greater number of texts' (Hernández-Pérez & Rodríguez, 2014, p. 46) and are able to actively create connections among them. Decades of exposure to table-role playing games (Byers & Crocco, 2016; Cover, 2010) and

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Fantasy literature (James, 2012) may make the creation of such spaces seem obvious; however, the familiarity through reoccurrence should not derail the understanding of the complexity involved in the construction and consumption of such fictional environments.

Martin (2011) recognizes the importance and expressiveness of the landscape in *Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (Bethesda, 2006) which 'emphasizes an incomprehensible largeness and expanse' and a certain 'epic grandeur'. However, instead of seeing the spatial aspects the human realm of Tamriel and that of the demonic realm of Oblivion as intrinsically related in dialogical relationship, he argues that they reflect 'a Manichean moral framework that is at the game's heart'. On the other hand, Ash (2009, p. 2105) argues for 'a dual conception of the "space" of screened images' that consists of the 'an existential space constructed through the background context of a user's relation with an image; and an ecological space constructed through the expressive relationship between body and screen'.

The spatial design and programming of a game is thus the basis of the gaming experience, delineating gameplay and informing action. Although players of a WRPG, such as *Skyrim,* cannot alter its spatial configuration, they are given the power to alter the spatial flow. Players can either skip straight to the next place of the narrative action or somewhere close to it, thus flattening of the spatial flow as the Heroic Epic tends to do; or to have a more novelistic step-by-step journey to the next destination in the story. It is important to emphasize that spatial flow does not necessarily relate to the character movement, although there is often serious overlap between the two. Instead, spatial flow refers to the movement of the perceived spatial position of action. When moving from point of view characters, for example, the perceived spatial flow of the narrative does not correspond to character movement but rather takes an abrupt movement from one position to the other, even if both characters are theoretically standing still. In many video games, especially those with a single playable character, the character movement and spatial flow coincide for most of the gameplay, as the player's perspective is tied to the main character. For example, even when not in first person view, the ability to change camera angles and explore the space is often linked to the idea of the player-character (PC) surveying the area before moving ahead. The narrative focus point is still that of the PC (Juul, 2005, p. 166). That, however, is not necessarily always the case and often games show shifts in their spatial flow that can be paralleled with those found in other media. *The Banner Saga* (Stoic, 2013)*,* for example, for

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the most part presents a very constrained spatial experience. Movement in this game is always limited, be it in its 'exploration' mode or in the tactical board-like combat mode of gameplay. Considerable spatial shifts in *The Banner Saga* only happen when switching point of view characters, as it happens in some novels that have chapters written using different point of view narrators. The analysis of the selected games later in this chapter focuses on the impact these factors have on the game narrative and experience.

To understand the space aspect of chronotope in WRPGs, an analysis of how space works in games in general, such as board games, card games, and sports is in order. This is meant to pave the way for a better understanding of the interaction between game space and narrative space. Conventional games impose very physical delineations to the game space, be it the board, the table where the cards are being played, or the field in which the sport is taking place. In all these cases, there is a clear area within which the game happens. Caillois (2001) terms this space 'the magic circle' as this is both within the realm of real space and outside of it. Within this designated space, the rules of the game apply and make the act of participating in the game possible. As such, the game space delineates the boundaries of play, for example in ball games/sports this space is usually determined the field and when the ball leaves the perimeter it is out of play. Without this cut out space, the game would not be possible or the free form play would be indistinguishable from other activities. As such, a game is in many ways defined by its spatial limitations and can be considered a controlled activity.

Video games, while also being controlled activities with various limitations, have a different relationship with the magic circle compared to more traditional games (Juul, 2005, p. 166). Whereas there certainly is the aspect of the physical location of the video game enabling devices, such as a console, controller and screens, that physical space is not really the space within which the games take place. Video game devices are much like a football field when a game is not being played: the space becomes only a large patch of grass surrounded by stalls. It is the rules of football when applied to that physical space that generate the game space of a football match. To a certain degree, the video game hardware can be seen as the space where the games are depicted. They have a similar function the pages of a book and the cinema screen have for the written and visual narratives but with the added effect that it is capable of altering the quality of the experience. Game consoles and

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PCs thus would be more akin to Olympic stadium complexes rather than a single football field, as they allow for the playing of several different games within their premises. However, the space in which the games themselves occur in video games is not a cut-out of real space within which resides an imaginary game dimension. Instead, the video game chronotopic 'game space' resides inside a fictional space and is depicted through the code that enables its existence as a space of performance and variation. This is true even if that fictional space is a digital simulacrum of a chess board or football field, or an abstracted space in which magical geometric pieces fall into and mysteriously disappear when properly aligned into a neat row by the player. Yet, this double fictional game space is perhaps particularly true when dealing with a game that presents itself within a rich narrative space, as it is the case with most WRPGs.

In videogames, 'our experience of space is never the same as the space described by physicists' in that 'all experienced space is produced and shaped by the player's activity' (Kirkpatrick, 2011, p. 73). Unlike traditional games/sports in which both the allowed actions within the game rules and the game space are very restricted, many modern WRPGs tend to present various levels of game interaction within large spaces and gameworlds. From a purely architectural standpoint (Nitsche, 2009, pp. 159–189), the game space in various WRPGs − either presented as a sandbox, labyrinths, mazes, or arenas − is still technically similar to boxes in shape (p. 178). *Skyrim,* for example, is basically one big box with several smaller boxes within it whereas *DAO* consists of several interconnected boxes within a larger world which is presented through the fictional narrative and the game map. That, however, is not a fair description of what it is to play either of these games nor what either game is as a whole. If one were to consider both games in such a purely structural format, gameplay would be rendered almost nonsensical and hardly playable as a loss of direction would possibly overwhelm the player. For example, in the case of *Skyrim,* if one takes away the fiction and leaves a purely abstracted game space, it would resemble a large and uneven box with no visual cues to its limitations and directions with small holes leading to other smaller boxes equally misshapen; the sheer size and lack of reference points being enough not only to make the space hard to navigate but utterly uninteresting. Unlike traditional games that are less complex in their rules and goals, WRPGs are hardly so since the movement and allowances are much freer. The immediate objective shifts as gameplay progresses, as does the direction of movement, and the necessary gameplay actions. It is through the narrative fictional content

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that the WRPG game space gains meaning and direction with the experience of that meaning being dictated by the rules and mechanics of what makes it a game space rather than just a fictional space. As such, the WRPG space which is often an unknown space to the player, as all fictional space ultimately is is often rich in content precisely due to its fictional narrative aspect which uses the content itself and their dialogical links to familiar images and genres to help orient players.

Modern video game space is almost always represented in a computerised 3D graphic space in which the player can be given a heightened sense of presence (Sections 2.5.2 and 5.3.1). Presence in computer game experience can be defined as 'the experience of being or existing in one environment even when one is physically situated in another' (Soutter & Hitchens, 2016, p. 1031). Also according to Nitsche (2008, p. 203), presence is 'the mental state where a user is subjectively present within a video game space as the result of an immersion into the content of the fictional world' and adds that 'it is a mental phenomenon based on a perceptual illusion.' Drawing on previous conceptual views, Seung-A (2011, p. 117) points out that physical presence, i.e. 'the sense of interacting with, touching, or controlling virtual objects as if they have actual, physical properties', and spatial presence, i.e. 'the sense of being physically located in a virtual environment', needs to be differentiated from each other. She proposes an approach to presence that accounts for the 'non-mediated sense of virtual objects (physical domain) and that of a virtual space (visuospatial domain)'. For example, while playing *Skyrim*, although the players do not feel touching the objects they collect around the camp or village − as it would happen were they real (physical presence) − they still feel as if they were inside the fictional location (visuospatial presence) performing the act of collecting such objects. The player is inside the fictional space by inhabiting a player-character avatar which, through player interaction, can move inside the designated game area. The sense of presence and flow (Soutter & Hitchens, 2016) is thus achieved by the creation of physics that allow this movement, as well as the several actions that the character(s) can perform in response to player interaction. However, I argue that the system creation that affords the players the possibility to sense as if they were located inside a virtual space (Tamborini & Bowman, 2010) is not enough to create meaningful interaction with the game environment because this might still leave a space in which the character moves aimlessly and meaninglessly if no cultural and/or intertextual landmarks were provided.

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Video game space is commonly further developed by the visual depiction of environmental detail, which draws from imagery derived from other fictional works, such as the Heroic Epic and Fantasy in the case of many WRPGs, and from perceived reality, such as forests, lakes, roads, houses, buildings, mead halls, and mountains (Fernández-Vara, 2011). These environmental elements give the game space logical and meaningful boundaries, for example, it is not possible to cross here because there is a mountain, precipice, or wall. These elements can also inform the direction of gameplay, such as a road or marked path that leads from one zone of interest to another. The depiction of the space also helps manage the player's expectations. For instance, cities in WRPGs typically promise interactions with other characters, while caves promise combat with monsters. While the fictional environment goes a long way to considerably reduce the sense of disorientation by contextualizing gameplay and help positioning players, it does not and cannot entirely negate it (Wei, Bizzocchi, Calvert, et al., 2010). The impossibility of entirely eliminating disorientation is due to the fact that, upon first contact, the player has had no previous experience of the game space since this is ultimately a creation of the developers' imagination. This is similar to what happens with the reader of a Fantasy novel when entering a new secondary world (Section 4.4). Due to their common use of other world settings, like those of Fantasy and other highly fantastical fiction, WRPGs are particularly prone to generate the disorientation effect, especially to those not familiar with those genres.

Developers thus make use not only of narrative techniques to mitigate disorientation but also game design and mechanics that aid in orientation and the generation of meaning. According to Burgun (2012, p. 24) 'good design' has four features: it is 'useful', in the sense that it 'solves some problem'; it is 'beautiful'; it is 'easy to use and learn'; it is 'efficient'. However, besides being incredibly vague, such features do not account for individual and cultural understandings of what these broad general features really consist of when translated into the design of a game mechanics. Adams and Dormans (2012, p. 2) argue that although to 'a certain extent games should be *unpredictable*' (their emphasis), such unpredictability should be 'harnessed' through well-designed mechanics, which in the case of role-playing games should include the game physics, the internal economy, the progression mechanism, party tactical manoeuvring and social interaction (p.8). Well-designed games would, therefore, impart to the players what is necessary to know in order to understand gameplay, and would 'often count on the ability of players to intuitively understand how to play their

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games' as long as clear instructions are provided (Mitchell, 2012, p. 6). The loss of direction in games can often also be mitigated by the presence of tutorials to familiarize the player with allowed game actions, thus helping the player come to terms with the allowances and limitations to their in-game presence. Yet, some tutorials might also be jarring in their own way. By conflicting with the narrative side of the experience and overemphasizing the gameplay side of the activity, tutorials do not necessarily contribute to give the player a better sense of location, or more importantly, a better sense of what the location *means* in terms of the game narrative, that is to say in its narrative interpretative value in relation to the whole,.

Game world maps (Chądzyńska & Gotlib, 2015) thus tend to be the most used method to diminish the loss of spatial orientation in WRPGs, especially in those games with vast areas open for exploration (Röhl & Herbrik, 2008), such as *Skyrim* and *DAO*. According to Wolf (2012, p. 156), 'maps relate a series of locations to each other, visually unifying them into a world' and 'as such, they are one of the most basic devices to provide structure to an imaginary world.' It is worth noting that the use of maps is also often found in the first pages of Fantasy novels, where they are used to familiarize the reader with the particular fantastic fictional universe in question prior to initiating the narrative. Moreover, the reader can also at any point interrupt the reading and go back to the first pages to consult the map if the flow of the narrative generates some new instances of disorientation. In WRPGs, however, the map tends to be present inside the game menus and/or action screen when players are already within the game, allowing them to constantly situate themselves if necessary while playing.

As it is the case of *Skyrim* and *DAO,* the map can be an intrinsic part of the game itself by allowing quick movement from point A to B without the need of step-by-step traversal by the player-character. As game objects, in both table-top and video game RPGs, maps are 'important means of communicating the imaginary' and help players situate themselves in the game (Röhl & Herbrik, 2008). In video games, maps can also allow for the bending of the space continuum of the game, since by manipulating them, the player can effectively skip the site of action from one point to another as quickly as one would when pointing at different places in an atlas. I further examine their effect on spatial flow in the analysis of the particular games below.

4.5.1 Space in *Skyrim*

The narrative setting of *Skyrim* is the fantastical continent of Tamriel. The game area of *Skyrim* roughly corresponds to this northernmost region, from which it takes its title. The region is a huge open space within which other smaller areas can be accessed. The game space of *Skyrim* is thus an arbitrarily cut out chunk of the fictional narrative setting of Tamriel, making the chronotopic space of Skyrim exist both as a game enabling space and a narrative setting. Like most Quest Fantasy settings, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, the world of Tamriel is an otherworld that has no point of contact with that of perceived reality and, as such, it tends towards the fantasy end of the fantasy/mimesis imagination scale and hence more prone to archetypal images. This also means that much more care must be put into the chronotopic transportation. From a spatial point of view, it is of interest to note that as soon as players start a new game, they are presented with the game world and their player-character which anchors their presence into the fictional world. That character itself is also thus awaking and finding itself being transported (see Figures 3.3 and 3.4).

In *Skyrim,* the battered road, mist, snowy trees, and rocky roadside convey the sense of rugged northern mountainous countryside, giving the player a feeling of the overall setting of the game. The fur and chainmail outfit of one of your fellow prisoners and the rustic peasant like attire of the other add a further sense of time and location to the character's awakening scene. The initial imagery thus conveys the picture of a medieval-like north setting (Figure 4.2) which, in turn, directs the player's expectations of what to anticipate from the game by association with other similar fictional settings, such those of *Beowulf* and the Sigurd Cycle, even when the player is not consciously aware of such associations. The final destination of the prisoners is the rustic village of Helgen and its stone fortress, which further cement the association. It is there that the player is asked to create the appearance of their own player-character.

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Figure 4.2: A typical village in *Skyrim*, medieval and Nordic imagery abound.

An aspect that firmly establishes the intertextual and dialogic relationship between the WRPGs studied here and the Heroic Epic material happens at the moment the players have to create their characters. I argue that the character creation not only helps to establish presence and potentially generate identification inside the video game (Boudreau, 2012; Soutter & Hitchens, 2016; Trepte & Reinecke, 2010), but also bonds the narrative and the character-player to the game fictional space thus helping shape the players' expectations and attitudes towards the game. In his analysis of types of players and their identification with characters, Thomet (2013, p. 188) argues that 'role-playing is the desire to craft a persona for the character the player is playing'. Describing her choices in terms of avatar construction, Boudreau (2012, pp. 15–16) states that when first '[e]ntering the game of *EverQuest'*, she 'opted for an avatar that bore some resemblance to [her] physical self, and embodied characteristics that [she] possessed or admired' as well as reflected her 'affinity for Nordic culture'. It is interesting that although some freedom of creation is given to the player in terms of the actual appearance and gender of the player-character, the options in WRPGs are still very often limited to character types that are the stock of Heroic Epic and Fantasy literary traditions. Perceiving this as an obvious point is to ignore the fact that a multiplicity of other options could be offered to the player, for instance a guard, a farmer, or a troubadour.

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Moreover, such character type options bring in themselves strong interrelations with the idea of the fictional in-game space such characters can inhabit. For example, the warrior/mage/rogue trio have strong links with Heroic Epic, Chivalric Romance, and Fantasy: the warrior archetype brings to mind heroic figures, such as Beowulf and Sigurd; the mage evokes mentor figures, such as Merlin and Gandalf, or even somewhat antagonistic ones such as Brynhilda; the rogue brings up not only some heroic figures, such as Sigurd himself and Odysseus, but also more secondary characters, such as the cup thief in *Beowulf* whose actions lead to the confrontation with the dragon. These examples show how much the character creation, the fictional spaces and the game narrative are dialogically dependent on each other and on the genre material they evoke, generating and being generated by genre expectations and guiding the player's anticipation of the game and the gameplay.

Almost immediately after the character creation phase, the player is exposed to the main antagonist of the game, and perhaps the second most important character, the dragon Alduin (Figure 4.3) which completes the association through both setting and characterization with the dragon slaying Heroic Epic and Fantasy heroes regardless of the kind of character that has been created by the player.
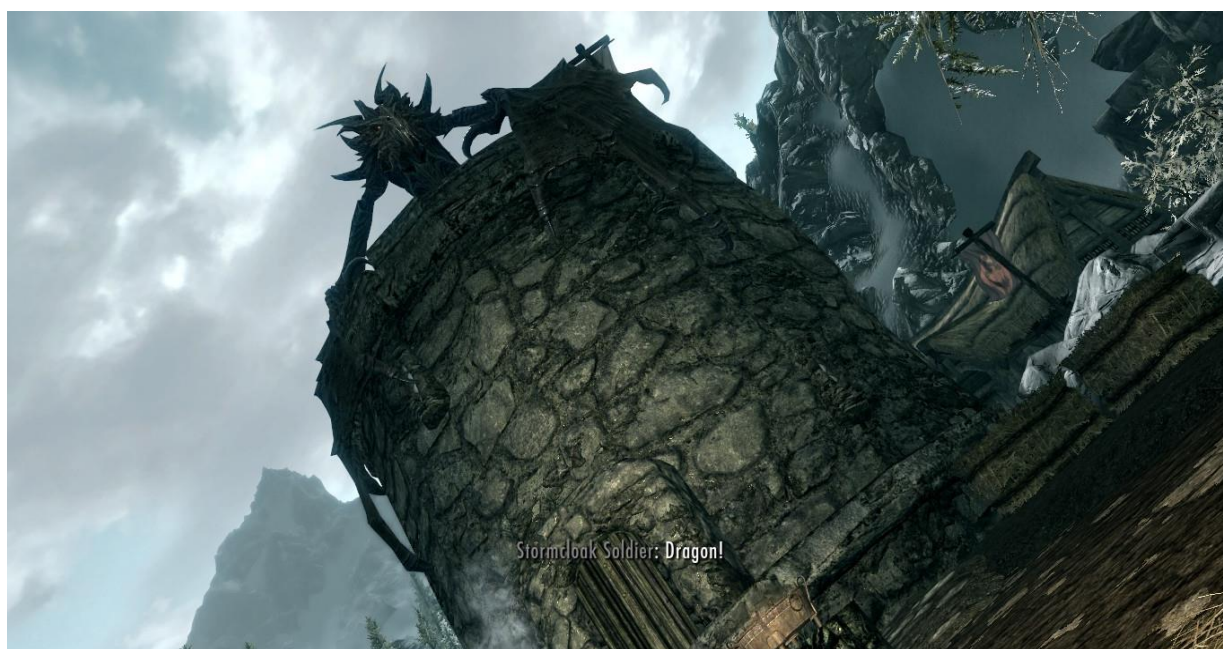
Figure 4.3: Alduin appears to usher the protagonist from imprisonment into the game world.

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In *Skyrim,* the very early exposition to such legendary creature could be seen as a simple question of random authorial decision. Although this could well be the case, it does not change the fact that such exposition immediately creates association with the dragon-slayer archetype derived from Beowulf and Sigurd. From this point on, both the player-character and the dragon will share the same fictional space and are destined to confront each other. While the player can eventually choose whether to follow this narrative thread to its final confrontation or not, the game expects and guides the player to do so. Both player-character and dragon are bond by narrative and genre expectation; none can slay the dragon but the heroic protagonist and the game world will 'perpetually' wait for the player to do so.

From the initial confrontation with the dragon onwards, *Skyrim* gradually allows more spatial freedom to the player, with a scripted maze-like corridor to escape from the dragon, where a failure to move where prompted leads to death. This leads to a constricted exploration of the fortress and its underground dungeon and cavern (Figure 4.4) where the player-character combats giant spider enemies, a staple of Fantasy WRPGs which can be traced back to the spiders in *The Hobbit* (Tolkien, 2008, pp. 178–217) and *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1994, pp. 701–710)*.*
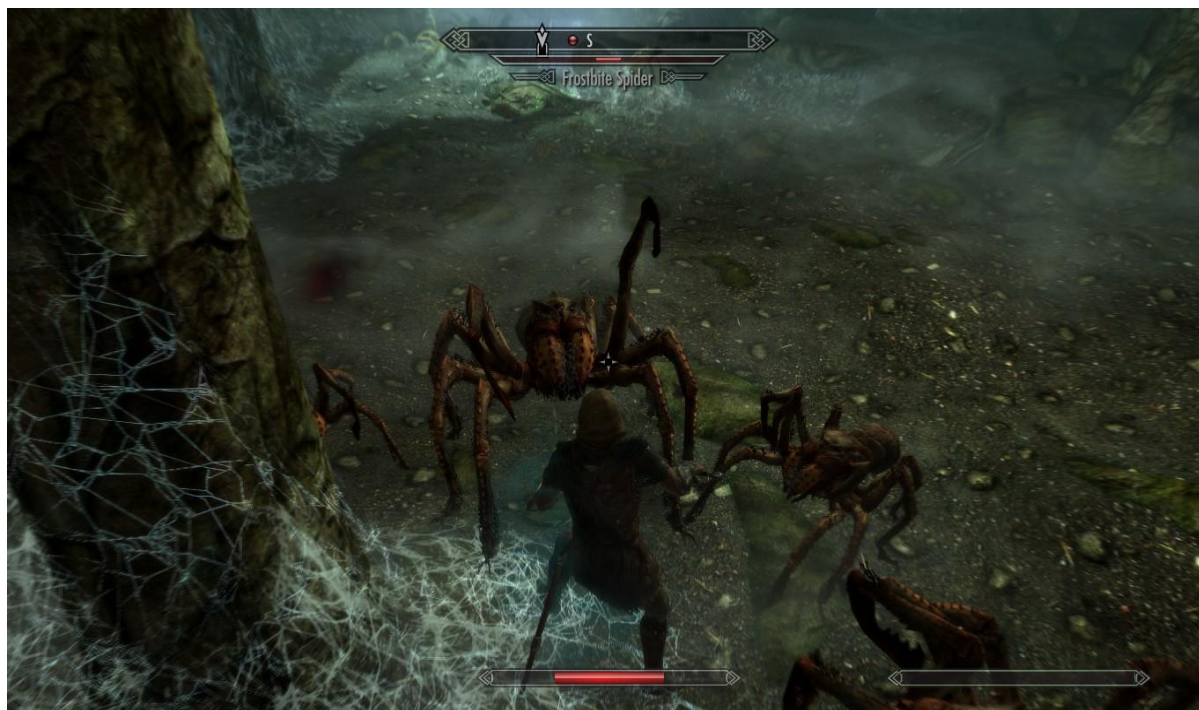
Figure 4.4: The underground cave of Helgen with its limited exploration options.

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In this study, I argue that such visual allusion is more than just a direct intertextual reference to Tolkien's work; it also creates a dialogical relationship between the player-character and Tolkien's characters. It is noticeable that such confrontation happens at the initial stages of the game when the player-character is still at the beginning of their journey and supposedly incapable of confronting such a foe. This establishes a relationship between the player-character and both Bilbo and Sam, who in spite of still not being legendary heroes at the moment they confront the spiders in Mirkwood (Tolkien, 2008, pp. 178-217) and at Torech Ungol (Tolkien, 1994, p. 938-951), are predestined to 'level up' though their trials and become capable of heroic feats at the end of their respective novels. In this way, the inclusion of the spider infested dungeon in the game creates a powerful link to Tolkien's Heroic Epic inspired Fantasy world.

It is only after having being thoroughly familiarized with the actions allowed, movement controls, and general setting of the gameworld through these initial constrained sections, which allow limited spatial movement, that the player is given free rein to roam the gameworld at large. Yet, even then the player is given the option of following a narrative thread set by the character that guides the protagonist in the heavily scripted escape from Helgen. Although allowed free exploration and mode of conduct, the narrative still guides the player in terms of places to go and in mode of behaviour. Here 'honor and glory', the martial values of the Epic North, are extoled and made to seem desirable (Figure 4.5). The standing stone in the screenshot is a feature of the game space that works as a landmark in the narrative with the double function of serving as a reference to the standing stones found in the Epic north at the same time that it has a playing function. Narrative is thus used to guide the player through the game space, fleshing out the fictional setting beyond the imagery, situating the protagonist's place in the fictional world and offering the player possible goals in the game space.

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Figure 4.5: Narrative and gameplay landmarks.

The heroic north setting of *Skyrim* is embedded in game narrative and made visible through the landscape and the presence of visual references, such as the iron armour set and its horned helmet commonly associated with the Vikings in legend and popular culture (Williams, Pentz, & Wemhoff, 2014). The iron armour is one of the game's many different combat items to have a Nordic theme (Figure 4.6). These elements create such deeply rooted associations with Heroic Epic narratives that should a player decide to ignore the narrative prompts with their immediate association with dragon slaying heroes and choose to the play the game as a sneaky thief, an assassin killing people for money, or even live the life of a farmer managing his/her homestead, the player does so as an answer to what they have already being exposed. The narrative and the heroic north elements, regardless of the player's decisions, are already part of the dialogue and inform the understanding of the game space of *Skyrim*.

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Figure 4.6: More of the heroic north setting and visual prompts in *Skyrim*.

The spatial flow of the gameplay experience of *Skyrim* is mostly stable, as the point of view is always fixed unto the player-character and the movement is regularly controlled by the player. Although the camera can be switched from first person to a disembodied over-the-shoulder third person view, the focus point is always that of the playable character, thus having little effect on the spatial flow and creating a degree of disorientation that is mostly low. One possible exception to this highly stable anchoring in the space is with the map-prompted 'fast travel' function (Section 4.4) that bends the spatial flow to immediately deposit both player and character on the chosen destination (Figure 4.7). To lessen the disorientation effect that the fast travel may generate, the system mostly requires the player to have already visited a location before he or she can fast travel back to it. Besides that, in-game time is also spent so as to simulate off-screen travel thus minimizing disorientation and increasing verisimilitude. Like a change of setting in a theatrical play, the player is invited to imagine that the trip has been undertaken, not only saving playing time but also processing that would make for longer loading times. Ultimately, the effect is similar to that of Heroic Epic's flattened but not disorientating space, such as Beowulf's quick journey's to and from

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Heorot, though this effect in *Skyrim* and other similar WRPGs is achieved through the means of player agency and time simulation of travel. The objective of this skip in spatial flow is also the same as the one in the Heroic Epic narratives as it glosses over uneventful or undesired information allowing the narrative receiver/player move to the next site of action and/or place of interest.
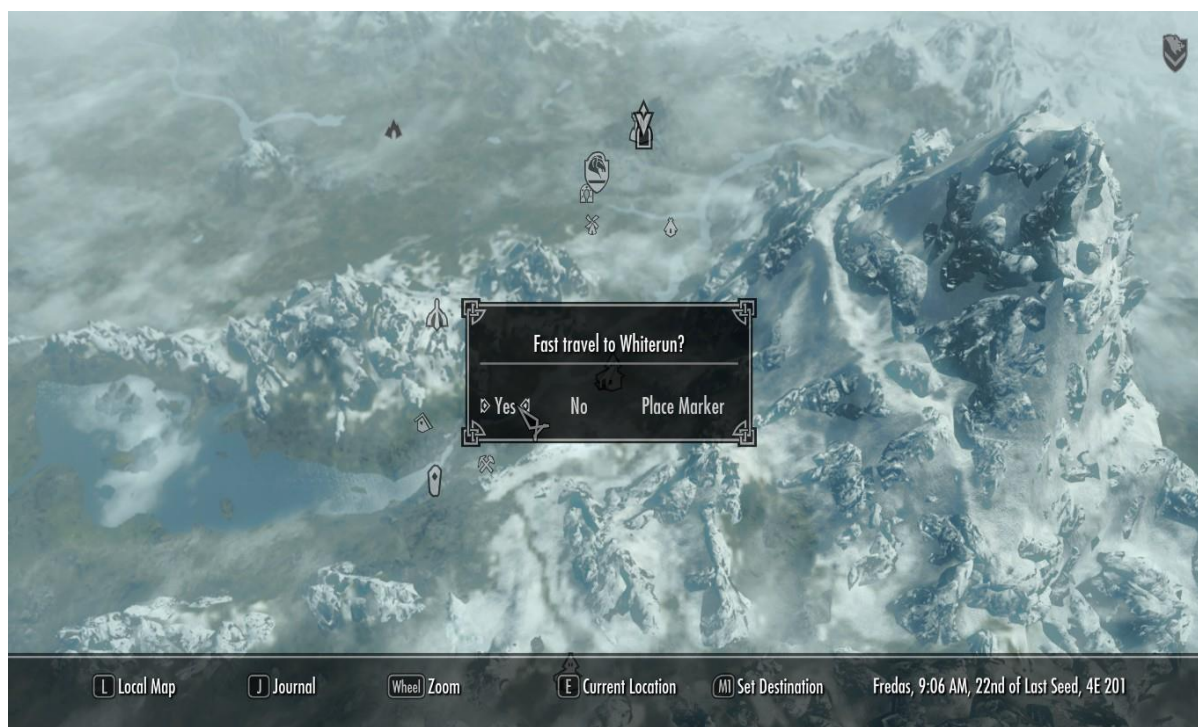
Figure 4.7: *Skyrim*'s world map: a bird's eye view of its mountainous terrain and the fast travel system.

As previously discussed in Section 2.6.1, in the Heroic Epic of Beowulf and Sigurd there is a sense that the morals and identities of the heroes are intrinsically bound to their space, in a form of mixed archetypal image. This binding is so strong that the terms "Beowulf's/Sigurd's North" or "the North of Beowulf/Sigurd" are not unheard of. In *Skyrim,* this binding of character and place is literal, as the player-character cannot go outside the boundaries of Skyrim, Tamriel's geographical North. However, players can freely move and act within it and this ability to move in the fictional space ultimately shapes the players' experience of the game setting as much as the setting shapes the players' understanding of their character.

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4.5.2 Space in *Dragon Age Origins*

Dragon Age Origins (DAO) is also a WRPG set on a medieval like Fantasy otherworld and, also like *Skyrim,* utilizes that mode of spatial distancing to allow its use of more fantastic and abstract content in its world of Thedas. In similarity with *Skyrim,* the narrative setting of *DAO* restricts action to a particular section of its wider fictional world, in this case, the country of Ferelden. However, *DAO* does not possess a large sandbox game space encompassing all the country but instead has hubs, smaller boxes within the space designated as Ferelden, centring on and around particular points of interest for the narrative, such as the city of Denerim, the Mage's circle tower, and the dwarf city of Orzammar (Figure 4.8). Effectively, the game space takes the structure of several boxes of various sizes; bigger ones interconnected with several smaller ones but mostly without a direct connection to each other. For instance, the large box that allows entrance to the Brecilian Forest is interconnected to smaller boxes that represent other locations inside the forest but, on the other hand, there is no connection between the large boxes that represent the main locations. For the player to move between those spaces, from Orzammar to Denerim for example, it is necessary to interact with the map and choose a destination. The disorientating feeling of being lost in the fantastical nature of the fictional game world is severely diminished by the constant presence of a mini-map on screen and a more detailed map in the main menu thus reducing the disengaging confusion created by exacerbated disorientation.

Figure 4.8: The map of Ferelden and its 'box' locations.

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Unlike *Skyrim,* there is no in-game clock and time only passes with the progression of the narrative. In order to simulate the idea that there is travel over an actual space happening, the game depicts a gradual red line crossing from one area to the next rather than the skipping of in-game time as done in *Skyrim*. Moreover, as the in-game fictional time of *DAO* does not flow outside of authored narrative time, i.e. through the forwarding of the plot by certain prescribed player actions so as to heighten the sense of movement, the game needs to employ another strategy to create the illusion of meaningful movement through space. It does so by adding the chance that while crossing the map, a limited number of unique random mid-travel encounters may occur. These can be plot unrelated, such as chance meetings with bandits, monsters, or merchants; or plot related, as when assassins are sent by one of the main antagonists to ambush the player's party. These mini-events take the player and character to a non-descript gameplay zone associated with the particular narrative event inserted between the point of origin and the destination. This particular place then cannot be revisited by the player after the completion of the event, giving the sense that the whole country of Ferelden is in present time and that the fast travel map artifice is in order to summarize uneventful character travel within the fictional space by just showing movement on a map. Therefore, from a narrative perspective, the setting of the whole of Ferelden is made present within the player's narrative imagination and is thus part of the game experience as a whole. From a game space design perspective, the gameplay areas are used to reinforce the idea of a larger space than what is actually presented for player interaction.

Unlike *Skyrim,* which first transports the players to the game world to only later give them ability to anchor their perspective within the game world in the form of the player-character creation, chronotopic transportation in *DAO* takes the opposite approach by having the players create their character immediately after the introduction scene. It is also important to note that the introduction, besides setting the history of the world (see Section 3.5.2), gives a brief geographical sense of place through the point of view of a non-playable character (NPC), Duncan (Figure 4.9).

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Figure 4.9: The character narrator Duncan, the first focus point of *DAO*'s narrative.

Since in *DAO* the figure of the dragon is just presented much later in the game compared to *Skyrim*, the anchoring in the epic narrative in terms of characterization falls on the figure of the 'protective figure' or 'wise guide' (Campbell, 2008, pp. 57-64), which is often found in Heroic Epic and Fantasy literature. Its Epic equivalents to Beowulf and Sigurd are Hrothgar and Regin, respectively, while Gandalf (Booker, 2005, p. 78) and Merlin (p. 288) arguably constitute the most famous mentor figures in Western literature and popular culture. Such mentor characters in the WRPGs discussed in this study also bind players to the fictional game space and the game narrative in a way that shapes their expectations, helping not only to guide the player through the gameplay in tutorials but also set them unto the narrative path to be followed. Such characters may be seen as just an authorial expedient or even as a gameplay device, rather than actual characters with personalities, going as far as only having a tutorial function (Salmond, 2016, pp. 208–210). While that view has its basis, I argue that their function and presence is also profoundly related to literary narrative traditions and reinforces the dialogical relationship between the different modes of narrative and their related archetypal images. By bringing the player character under the wing of the guide figure of Duncan, one of the last remaining heroic Grey Wardens, *DAO* gives heroic licence to the

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player-character. This relationship with the NPC shapes the player's understanding of the narrative that is to follow, which in turn helps determine player's narrative actions but also their gameplay interactions within the allowances of the game system.

Interestingly, both *Skyrim* and *DAO* make use of the mentor characters throughout their campaign, but especially so in the beginning, in what I term the transportation phase, in order to aid orientation. *Skyrim* allows the player to choose between two different guides in the initial area, one from each of the game's conflicting main factions: Ralof, from the Viking-inspired Stormcloaks, or Hadvar, who sides with the Roman-looking Imperials. *DAO*, on the other hand, while allowing the player to choose their origin and starting point, only has one mentor in the figure of the Grey Warden Duncan. Both games are quick to dispatch these initial mentor figures from early in the game after their tutorial and narrative duties have been completed. Duncan, however, remains a much more prominent figure in *DAO*'s narrative experience than *Skyrim*'s Ralof and Hadvar, as he is periodically evoked throughout the narrative through flashback and dialogue among characters. Duncan's background presence perhaps is fitting since the player meets him as he narrates the initial cut-scene, even before the player creates their player-character.

The initial focus on a different character from the main playable protagonist gives *DAO* a whole different dimension to player presence within the game world from that found in *Skyrim,* as the narrative experience becomes mediated through the perspective of the character narrator. In fictional terms, this positions the narrative chronotope of the player as a listener to the narrator in an unidentified space at some point in time after the narrative has already been completed, as it happens with Heroic Epic narratives (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 17). In *Skyrim*, the player's perspective is constantly linked to one playable character, connecting the player and character into almost exactly overlapping chronotopic dimensions and, as such, having the same narrative presence and consciousness. *DAO,* on the other hand, does not give the player such a close link to their created protagonist, allowing the player consciousness to exist separately from that of the character and view the action from the point of view of other playable characters, and also that of antagonists, by intersecting cut-scenes throughout the game and thus expanding the plot. Instead, the main link between player and protagonist in *DAO* is forged through gameplay and character creation. The plot decisions throughout the game as well as the player's choice of the character's appearance, skills, and their moral

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make-up on dialogue upon creation are the devices that establish the link between the player and the player-character. It is also through those choices that the disorientating effect of the transportation to the place of beginning of play is diminished as the player, by choosing the race and class, effectively determines his/her character's background story and thus the initial area of gameplay (Figure 4.10).

Exploration in *DAO* is also less daunting than that in *Skyrim* as the game play areas, the boxes available for exploration, are much smaller in size than *Skyrim*'s huge sandbox. Add to that the familiar imagery of Fantasy, which borrows so much from Old Norse and Old English Heroic Epic and Chivalric Romance and *DAO* actually has to attempt to innovate so as to keep itself interesting enough to be explored.

Figure 4.10: *DAO*'s character creation screen

4.6 Summary

Video game scholarship (Section 2.5.1) emphasizes space as an important aspect of video game medium seeing it as a vital component in the creation of a sense of presence and agency within the game. It is argued that video game narratives more often follow space configuration rather than time configuration with space thus playing a very prominent role in the game experience. There are illuminating discussions on how the 3D representation of space creates a hightened sense of spatiality and, through that, a sense of presence that combined with gameplay gives the players a sense of control over the game narrative.

Game study scholars have also greatly contributed to a better understanding of the dynamics of the player-character movement and the exploration of the game space and even its centrality to the narrative experience (Section 2.5.2). In fact, navigation and exploration are terms frequently used in tamdem in discussions in relation to player control and movement within the game space. Spatial movement through game spaces can also usually be found under the term 'navigation' (Carr, 2006, pp. 59–71; Juul, 2005; Murray, 1998; Newman, 2004). However, this navigational understanding of space often tends towards the description of the various forms of spatial configurations present in video games, such as Murray's maze, rhizome and labyrinth structural descriptors − based on Aarseth's (1997) seminal work. The elusive pleasure derived out of navigation has also been the subject of analysis (Murray, 1998, p. 129).

Yet, in spite of these important contributions to the understanding of space in games, more in-depth analysis underpinned by an epistemological understanding of space is still largely missing in the literature related to video games. A notable exception is Nitsche's (2008) discussion of images in relation to space in video games. Nitsche calls for 'an interdisciplinary approach' that focuses on a discussion of space through cross-referencing and also draws on Semiotics to discuss the role of signs in the creation of game spaces basing his analysis largely on Lefebvre's division of space into 'representations of space' and 'representational space' (Nitsche, 2008, p. 6). Although Nitsche recognizes game interaction as a 'conversation' between game and player (p. 31) and the 'manipulation of elements within that space' as well the use of 'evocative elements' that 'encourage players to project meaning onto objects and spaces' his conceptual framework does not allow for a view of such interactions as a two-way relationship between players and the game input. The

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theoretical basis of how previous encounters with these elements come to influence interactions is not fully explained; neither is how players' encounters in the game may affect future perceptions of these same elements. In other words, the dialogical reciprocal element is not really accounted for. Although Nitsche's analysis is insightful and covers some common ground with this investigation, his analytical material comes from a larger range of games and genres instead of focusing on specific connections between the sources of such spatial elements and their literary origins and connections, as done in this study. As a whole, the review of the literature in the field shows that although theoretically based explanations for the effects of spatial configuration on the overall consumption of the game and on the relationship between the game space and the fictional space in which it resides have lately been attempted by game study researchers (Ash, 2009; Carr, 2006; Lemke, 2014), there is still room for epistemological advances in the field. By adopting Bakhtin's views on narrative time and space this study aims to give its contribution towards filling this gap. Such gap is also noticeable when considering interdisciplinary studies and particular genres as to my best knowledge no comparative study of space in the Heroic Epic, Fantasy, and the WRPGs has so far been conducted.

In this study, I draw on Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of chronotope and dialogue, which he employs to discuss the Novel, to conduct an analysis of the space setting, flow and navigational issues in *Skyrim* and *DAO* to show how spatial configurations affect the players' narrative experience and how different space configurations lead to different narrative flows. In this perspective, I propose to see narrative and the spatial flow as intrinsically linked due to the present-future tense chonotopic configuration. My analysis of the games indicates that WRPGs with open spatial strutcture, as the one found in *Skyrim*, may lead to a wide narrative berth that allows the player to exercise some greater degree control over the narrative flow and direction. Wide open spatial configurations make for narratives that are similarly focused more on breadth rather than depth, which translates into less authorial narrative control from the part of the game creators and developers. On the other hand, a more closed narrative stucture, such as that of *DAO*, allows for greater narrative depth at the expense of breadth. By controlling the spatial movement and flow, such spatial structure allows for a higher degree of authored content at the expense of player agency on the narrative configuration. I, therefore, argue in this chapter that there is a direct relationship between space structure and the player agency/authorial control balance as spatial openesss generates greater narrational

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agency through a control of the spatial flow whereas spatial limitation allows for greater authorial control over the narrative as the spatial and narrative flow can be predicted/controlled.

The chonotopic and dialogically informed analysis of *Skyrim* and *DAO* conducted in this investigation also suggests that there is a direct relationship between the employment of intertextual references, imagery and allusions (Section 5.2) and the construction of space. Game space does not really exist; it is a representation created upon perceptions and depends on the players' understanding of relationships between the signifier – created by pixels – and the signified – objects and places in other narratives and the sensory world. Until the game is played and the player actively engages and 'reads' the game, the signs have no real meaning, as meaning is constructed upon the dialogue between the player and the video game artifact as text. In this way, going for narrative breadth rather than depth also affects what is needed to create a meaningful game space. WRPGs like *Skyrim* require the open space to be populated by more referential signs in order to the gather narrative meaning. The game fictional space gains depth through and largely depends on intertextual relationships to convey meaning, create immersion and guide the player's actions and expectations.

An example of such dependence on the reading of the signs is the case of the lake in *Skyrim* (Figure 4.11). When players see a sword coming out of a lake what they are really seeing is just the digitalized image of a blade jotting out of a body of water. However, through the dialogical reference, such digital construction not only gains meaning by association with Arthurian legends (Lupack, 2005, pp. 16–33) but also adds meaning to the understanding of Arthurian legend by being one particular instance added to that archetypal image. In other words, next time when thinking about King Arthur, the player may remember not only Excalibur but also the sword in the lake in *Skyrim*. By this association, the player's perception of the blade, as well as the whole world of Skyrim where the sword is present, changes and gains further meaning to which the player responds. The skeletal nature of the arm and the small size of the lake leave the positive or 'negative' interpretation of the Arthurian reference open, perhaps hinting that Arthurian myth pales in comparison to the archetypal depth of older Heroic Epic tales, for example.

It could be said that such analysis implies that all *Skyrim* players have previous knowledge of the Arthurian myths, which would be clearly a gross generalization. Yet, I argue that the referential images that populate the space of Skyrim are generally so deeply

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engrained in the Western cultural milieu, as well as in the WRPGs game genre conventions, that there is a high likelyhood that players have already come in contact to other intertextual particular instances of the archetypal image associated with the myth via other games and/or other media. Either consciously or sub-consciously, the developers of the two WRPGs examined here seem to a certain extent rely upon such intertextual dialogical relationships when populating the game space.

Figure 4.11: A reference to Excalibur in *Skyrim*.

Spatial structure has thus an almost direct bearing on how many intertextual references are necessary to create meaningful spaces through its influence on narrative flow and depth. An open space structure with higher player agency needs more dialogical references to add depth to the the story as a whole. This is why we find more references closer to archetypal images in *Skyrim* than in *DAO*. Narrower spaces with higher authorial density, as in *DAO*, need fewer archetypal references because narrative depth can be achieved by the game's own narrative. Yet, it is worth noting that *DAO* still relies on spatial references, as discussed above, and genre images and conventions to build the world of Ferelden and guide the player's expectations and responses.

Through chronotopic comparison I found that the spatial narrative setting in the WRPGs discussed in this study follows to considerable extent the ones found in the Heroic

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Epic and the Fantasy novel. From the Epic comes most of the imagery that populates and shapes the space alongside a propensity towards bending the spatial flow. On the other hand, both games in this study share with Fantasy the chronotopic otherworld dimension with no point of contact with perceived reality, which allows for higher degrees of fantastic material and archetypal associations while keeping a highly novelistic chronotopic narrative tense. The WRPGs spatial flow can thus be equally novelistic when demonstrating movement in the space in a continuous manner, and similar to that of the Heroic Epic when presenting a more compressed sense of space with semi-instantaneous movement to the next point of interest in the game. This capacity for being concurrently capable of harbouring aspects of two different chronotopic flow configurations is possible through the factors of gameplay and player's sense of agency. This is also partially achieved by allowing the players to choose where to move their character when bending the space continuum.

Another important aspect related to space discussed in this chapter was disorientation. The spatial disorientation effect can be lessened with maps and their abstracted representation of space being a key part of this endeavour. Maps can be seen as gameplay devices which reaffirm the illusion of a space in which the game resides by mimicking our use of maps to understand real spaces. Maps, however, can be more than pictorial representations of ways of seeing and imagining a physical space and can be loaded with fictional resonances (Wolf, 2014, pp. 156–164). I here argue that in the case of *Skyrim* and *DAO*, maps are fundamentally related to Western cultural perceptions of space that come to us through Fantasy literature. This is not a simple matter of adding a map to help the player navigation or to give the game a *Lord of the Rings* treatment. Instead, maps are employed to orientate the players' response and expectations to the game's fictional world and often emphasize the otherworld nature of the setting performing thus at the level of narrative distancing and immersion. The use of maps which also make use of familiar imagery and icons, such as the tree, tower and tent icons in Ferelden's map (Figure 4.8), helps direct player expectations and aids in the orientation process by generating a centripetal effect to counter the centrifugal nature of a highly fantastic and completely fictional setting. Spatial disorientation is also severely diminished by linking the player's perspective and camera angle to that of point of view characters, be it the perspective of several characters, such as in *DAO,* or the more stable single character focus in *Skyrim*

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To conclude, dialogical relationships, according to Bakhtin (1981), are those in which two or more individuals or elements intrinsically depend on each other to be fully meaningful. In this study, I argue that besides having a direct effect on gameplay and the pleasure of navigation, the spatial structuring of *Skyrim* and *DAO* also guides and changes the narrative experience of their players. Similarly, the player's previous experiences with the game genre and possibly, albeit not necessarily, a certain degree of familiarity with Epic and Fantasy topoi, guides the player's response to the gameworlds presented to them, informing gameplay and dialogically altering their experience of and response to *Skyrim* and *DAO*'s worlds and narratives in profound ways.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how players draw from gameplay, embedded narratives (Jenkins, 2004), and dialogical/intertextual relationships (Bakhtin, 1981) to construct a story as they play the game. It is important to mention that in order to aid the analysis of time and space in narratives, they were so far mostly considered separately. General considerations about the time aspect of the chronotope in the different genres and media covered in this study as well as an analysis of time awareness, transportation, and flow in the selected games were made in Chapter 3 while Chapter 4 presented a similar discussion in relation to space. In this chapter, I join the time and space aspects of chronotope to generate a more encompassing view of their effects on the narrative experience. Furthermore, besides the broad-spectrum considerations made in the previous chapters, time and space also affect some particular features of the game construction, such as the choice and customization of the player-character, the characters with whom players interact, the characters that populate the games but with whom the player has no interaction, and the beasts and objects present in the game.

The first section of this chapter expands the discussion on the dialogical relationship between the Heroic Epic, Fantasy and the WRPGs by examining how the chronotopic structure of game world works as a narrative frame thus shaping the construction of such world and informing the design of its elements, such as the hero-character, the non-playable characters (NPC) that populate the game, its beasts, weaponry and other various items. I argue that the visual aesthetics of the game, its building elements derived from different forms of storytelling, mainly the Heroic Epic and Fantasy, create signposts that shape and define the WRPG as a game genre, help create meaning, and guide the player's experience.

The second section deals the mechanics of *Skyrim* and *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)* and how such mechanics, narrative architecture, and spatial storytelling impact on the way the fictional time and space are experienced by the player (Kirkland, 2009). I discuss how the game systems, rules and controls affect the chronotopic narrative aspects of the games, shaping the player's interpretation and experience. The section also focuses on presence, immersion, engagement, the concept of dissonance (Hocking, 2007), and orientation through intertextuality and imagery.

5.2 The dialogue among Heroic Epic, Fantasy, and WRPGs

As discussed in Chapter 2, this investigation of the generation of meaning in WRPGs has as its main theoretical foundation Bakhtin's concepts of chronotope (time-space) and dialogue. They are here employed to examine the relationships between the games and the Old Norse/Old English Heroic Epic as well as the Fantasy Novel. I argue that by analysing the connections between different modes of narrative and media which share particular temporal-spatial features with the WRPG can illuminate our understanding of this video game genre. Critical concepts that are often employed in the discussion of works of literature (Section 2.2), such as mimesis, fantastical imagination, suspension of disbelief, and secondary belief are also considered fundamental in the exploration of the different forms of storytelling. Understandings of time and space in the field of game studies (Section 2.5) are discussed in relation to game design and narrative construction. Although such conceptualizations have been fundamental to advance the understanding of time and space in video games, Bakhtin's discussion of chronotope (Section 2.4.3) in the Epic and the Novel is adopted in this study to provide a theoretical framework that helps understanding how narrative meaning in the WRPG is generated through its dialogical relationship with the Heroic Epic and Fantasy.

Chapter 3 dealt with the time aspect of the chronotope. Perhaps more than in other video game genres, time is crucial to the WRPG narrative as it determines the setting and greatly impacts on the player's perception of the narrative. In terms of time, the general chronotopic tense of most video games, including WRPGs, is that of the present-future. This means that the player acts in the present and plans future actions accordingly. From a narrative standpoint, the action can be depicted and almost immediately interpreted or it can, in an aspect unique to video games, develop in the player's mind before being depicted on screen. This time zone is the closest to everyday experience and thus the most natural for humans. I have argued that while the general chronotope tense of video games is present-future, WRPGs such as *Skyrim* and *DAO* incorporate in themselves the chronotopic past distance of the Heroic Epic. The different relations between narrative time and gameplay time generate narrative effects similar to the epic narratives, such as *Beowulf*, albeit through different means.

In Chapter 4, I argued that the spatial configuration of the games studied here has an impact on how the authored and emergent narratives develop. By nature, video game space

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resides within a fictional space. While a predicted action in the 'real' world unfolds fictionally in an individual's mind and then projects itself in 'real' space, game action is predicted in the player's mind translated into commands and then acted in a game space that resides within another fictional space. In the case of most WRPGs, such as *Skyrim* and *DAO,* this fictional space corresponds to highly fantastic otherworlds (Wolf, 2014). Thus when both chronotopic space and time are taken into consideration together, the cumulative effect WRPGs can have on players is to allow for the closest chronotopic experience possible while immersing them in a completely fantastical environment. While this argument may sound rather natural to those who are familiar with video games and the WRPG genre, before this investigation the theoretical background behind how this effect is achieved had received little attention from game researchers in spite of Rockwell's (2002, pp. 353–355) suggestion of adopting Bakhtin's chronotopic dialogical point of view to the understanding and the designing of games and hypermedia. The effect of each game's unique chronotopic structure on other facets of their narrative elements is here explored in more detail.

5.2.1 The hero and the quest

The hero and the quest are perhaps the most recognizable aspects WRPGs and the Heroic Epic have in common. Both features are intrinsically linked to each other as the hero is the one who undertakes the quest, be it to save those in distress, kill a dragon, stop a catastrophe, or simply go back home (Booker, 2005, pp. 21–106). The word hero has its etymological roots in Greek and Latin and basically means *protector* or *guardian*, a servant of society (Harper, 2016). The hero is thus the central figure of most WRPGs and can also be seen as the central figure of a journey into our perceptions and views of the world. According to Campbell (2008, pp. 15–16), the hero is ultimately born out of the changes in society as a device to deal with the problems and questions it faces. By fighting monsters, the hero is also fighting the inner demons of his society and therefore becomes the very embodiment of the human psyche (p. 337). To this extent, the heroic figure is the quintessential archetypal image since its fluidity and immutability epitomize the fact that individuals and societies both change over time and nevertheless, in some aspects and to various degrees, remain unchanged. Heroes, hence, change through time and space ever adjusting to reflect and conform to the values and ethics of the cultures and societies which bore them (O'Keeffe, 2013, pp. 101–119). However, the hero is not an isolated product of such societies since its

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existence is linked and sometimes even dependent on other heroes of older and distant cultures with which their creators have been in contact. It is also important to emphasize that the relationship of the hero with the cultures in which he/she is inserted is profoundly dialogical since the hero is also likely to influence, destabilize and change the society's very views of itself as well as the concept and image of what a hero is, as various studies in different countries and different media have attested (Wright & Kaplan, 2004). As a form of high archetypal image, the hero needs to be distanced so that it can come into its full potential as a form of abstract signification. The most basic way of creating distancing is through chronotope (Section 2.4.3). In the Heroic Epic literature, the distance that allows for highly archetypal heroes comes from the absolute past setting and the compression of time and action that derive from it. As such, the Heroic Epic hero is bound to the past and cannot come into contact with the approximating zone of the present of experienced reality. The spatial setting of the tale is determined by the hero's actions in the narrative and their movement in the world. The hero of WRPG, however, is different since the WRPGs are presented in the closest chronotopic tense of all, the present-future of experience (Section 3.5). Therefore, unlike the Heroic Epic hero, the WRPG hero is highly approximated in terms of tense. Even if the setting of the action is dimensionally distanced from the players themselves, this distance is diminished by the sense of presence and agency allowed by the gameplay and its chronotopic tense. Yet, although perhaps not as much as in the Heroic Epic, the hero of the WRPG is still rich in archetypal meaning. This meaningfulness results not only from the dialogical and intertextual relationship between them, but also from the distancing through the performance aspect of gameplay and the suspension of disbelief that comes from playing a role. The most important aspect, however, is the decompression that the present-future chronotope brings to the hero figure. Instead of the compressed *was* and *is* of the Heroic Epic hero, the WRPG hero is in a constant state of becoming, the hero that *will be*.

The hero figure creates another strong symbolic link between Heroic Epic, Chivalric Romance, Fantasy and the two WRPGs selected for this study. The protagonist in these games is the dragon slayer hero regardless of its background, appearance, skills or origin of the created player-character. The protagonist is directly linked to the old heroes, like Beowulf and Sigurd, through the fact that he/she is predestined to fight and kill a dragon. The symbolism serves not only as a narrative goal to work the game around, but also to direct player expectations and actions within the gameworld. The protagonist of *DAO* is expected to

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save Ferelden from the dragon Archdemon (Figure 5.1), which brings the Blight upon the land and which the player's character, as one of the knight-like Grey Wardens, is sworn to slay. Whether the player chooses to follow Beowulf and Sigurd and have their created character do the deed or to have another of the playable characters to do so, and in so doing that emulate Regin and Beowulf's followers. Ultimately, the particular player's choice is not important since what matters is that the task *is* given to the player and must be performed for completion of the narrative and of the game itself, whether the player links their character directly to the dragon slayer archetype or not. Nonetheless, the choice and the consequent produced narrative are a dialogical response to the image of Old Norse and Old English Heroic Epic, regardless of whether the player is consciously aware of the reference or not.
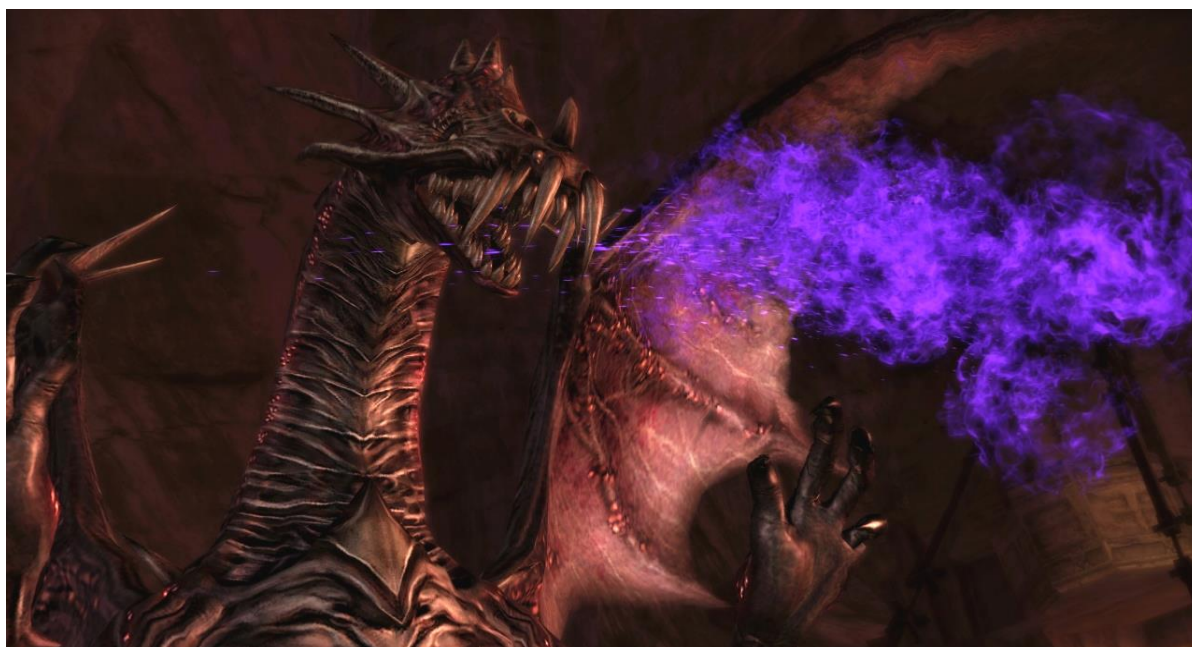
Figure 5.1: The draconic Archdemon, *DAO*

As Brooker (2005, p. 69) argues, 'no type of story is more instantly recognizable to us than the Quest.' The Quest as a narrative action and structure is characteristically 'the stepped journey' (Senior, 2012, p. 190) and thus often takes both time and spatial movement for completion. It serves as a challenge to the hero to whom the mastery of it brings reward, be it material or otherwise. As such, the Quest is at the core of most heroic narratives, either Norse/Germanic Epic tales, Greek Epic, Chivalric Romance, Fantasy, or WRPGs. The Quest serves to establish or reinforce the character's position as hero both in the narrative, i.e to the

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reader/player, and in the fictional world as a whole. The Quest is the call to adventure and serves as the impetus for many parts of the narrative or even its entirety. As such, its prominent use in video games is, understandably, a natural fit for fantastical action due to 'its protean quality' and 'its ability to subsume and reflect varied purposes and narratives' (Senior, 2012, p. 199). The progression of quests and their rewards empower the player-character giving him/her the identity of the-hero-that-will-be, bringing together the WRPGs gameplay systems and the characterization through chronotope into a powerful synergy that is rich with archetypal meaning.

Beowulf's narrative is broken down into three main quests with lulls in between that lead to framed mini-narratives within the larger arch-narrative frame and which are positioned after the killing of each monster. These side narratives stand chronotopically outside the time and space of the main narrative. This is interesting when contrasted with the side quests available for completion by the player in both *Skyrim* and *DAO* which also seem to stand outside the chronotope of the other quest lines, including the main narrative thread. It holds especially true in the case of the side quests in *Skyrim* which have from almost none to very little overlapping, with the game waiting for their completion at the pace and order of the player's choosing. On the other hand, although certain side quests in *DAO* disappear after key events in the main narrative if you have not done them before proceeding with the authorial narrative thread, they still remain largely unconnected to the rest of the arch-narrative. Unlike *Beowulf,* however, in both games these side narrative threads are still within the chronotope of the main narrative as far as their setting is concerned since to be outside the game's gameplay spatial chronotope would render them impossible to be performed. Their separation comes not in the form of chronotopic setting but from the division between the chronotopic flow of the different narratives available in the game as a whole since they are not necessarily synchronized to each other. The emergent narrative is what connects these different narrative threads and creates a more cohesive whole. The malleability of the gameplay time, however, leads to the feeling that time is somewhat suspended in the fiction until a particular section of a quest is completed and the authored narrative time moves forward. Even then, due to the allowances to player control and agency, the different threads feel mostly detached. For example, the return of the dragons waits for the player to complete a particular side quest and so does the civil war for the control of Skyrim. Both continue to remain in a standstill even if the player decides to pursue any number of other side quest

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narratives available within the gameworld. In most WRPGs then, quests seem to be the most basic units of narrative action: the completion of one leads to a limited progress being logged in the game and can lead to another quest directly related thus creating a 'quest line'. Other quests, however, may remain inactive and await activation. This programmed aspect of most WRPG video games fits well with the quest structure provided in *Beowulf* thus adding even further meaning to the close relationship between the old Heroic Epic quest narratives and the WRPGs.

5.2.2 Characterization of NPCs and intertextual references

To begin with, the characterization of non-playable characters (NPCs) and that of supporting characters is directly influenced by the chronological and spatial format of both *Skyrim* and *DAO*. In *Skyrim*, the spatial freedom that is given to the player in exploring the game world comes at the expense of the temporal verisimilitude. This means that due to the fact that players are free to move around the world space and interact with several plot lines simultaneously at their own discretion, the narrative time of each plot line is made independent from each other. This means that if plotline B is advanced while plotline A is left for another time by the player, the narrative time of plotline B moves forward while plotline A is left stagnant. For instance, in *Skyrim,* the player-character is asked to help the city guard kill a dragon that has attacked the watchtower close by (A). If instead the player chooses to help a disgruntled family man recover an heirloom sword first (B), both city guard and dragon will be left waiting for the player to arrive so that the dragon-killing plotline (A) may proceed and its narrative thread time flow again.

Besides the effect on plotlines, chronotope also has a profound impact on the development of NPCs. The connected nature of the open-world sandbox game space makes the psychological development of any NPC character almost impossible because such characters are tied to narrative development as a whole. In *Skyrim,* due to the large number of simultaneous plotlines that would be expected to derive different reactions from the player and any other characters involved, NPCs become tied to a particular plotline and tend to have shallow development and lack any real personality. Rather than being characters in the novelistic sense of the word, that is to say characters with a rounded, distinctive, and developing narrative personality (Forster, 2005), NPCs in *Skyrim* tend to have caricature personalities and be confined to their role as game plot and mechanic devices, such as being

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quest givers. This flat characterization, however, gains an extra layer of meaning when considered in the light of the heroic narrative that ties the game and its fictional world to a recognizable structure. The flatness of the NPC characters is analogous to flattened secondary characters in the Heroic Epic, such as the great hall retainers in *Beowulf.* Instead of hindering the narrative experience of *Skyrim* and being a weakness, flat characterization rather adds to the accumulated effect of the dialogical relationship between *Skyrim* and the Heroic Epic material gaining meaning through the relationship and enriching the game archetypal narrative.

DAO, on the other hand, has a different approach to its NPC characterization which is significantly influenced by its spatial arrangement. Each location hub is largely independent from the others as the player needs to exit from a hub at a particular exit point if they wish to access one of the other hubs. Since each location tends to have its own narrative thread to be followed through, the player is compelled to focus on each hub at a time. For example, the werewolf narrative surrounding the Daelish Elves in the Brecilian Forest (Figure 5.2) is directly linked to the exploration of the areas surrounding it and the NPCs found there. Its narrative plot does not develop outside the areas directly linked to the particular group of locations associated with the forest and the Elvish encampment. This more spatially focused approach allows for the narrative of each location to unfold semi-independently while still being tied to the main narrative. This spatial arrangement restricts the player movement through the world of *DAO* at a degree much higher than that which can be found in *Skyrim*. Because different hubs are only accessible by the use of the world map, the player is more likely to perceive space and movement in the more abstract form of the map and thus outside of the dominant mode of gameplay interaction with the world. With the player movement and experience being more predictable, NPC characterization becomes easier to author and, as such, it allows *DAO* to have more rounded characters then those in *Skyrim* and which fall in line with novelistic expectations (Jørgensen, 2010, p. 327).

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The Brecilian Forest – Map legend

Dalish Camp (arrival point when travelling via World Map to the Brecilian Outskirts)

West Brecilian Forest (arrival point when travelling via World Map to the Brecilian Forest) / East Brecilian Forest

Upper Ruins / Lower Ruins

Figure 5.2: The Brecilian Forest hub and its associated locations.

Gameplay interaction with the world provides the player controlling the character more mimetic feedback since it is the player who controls the body movement of the character through a figurative depiction of space. In *DAO*, there is a constant character movement between hubs due to the structuring of the space, the organization of the sequence of the sub-areas in each hub, and how the main hubs are connected to the World map of Ferelden through a single exit point. On the one hand, this spatial structure can be highly undesirable, not only because of the loading times and backtracking, but also because of its potential to generate disorientation through the disruption of the narrative chronotopic flow created by fading from one sub-area into another at a greater rate thus making for more breaks in the continuum. On the other hand, from a game design point of view, the internal chronologic order of each location's plotline can be more easily foreseen by the developers/authors, which, as a consequence, leads to greater authorial control over characterization and richer development of the NPCs, as mentioned above

These differences in characterization between *Skyrim* and *DAO* are derived in part from the chronotopic structure of each of the two games. The effect such a structure has on their narrative thread distribution and chronological ordering also has an effect on their different levels of reliance on more direct referencing to other narrative material. *Skyrim,* with its flatter characters and wide rather than deep narrative disposition, has to rely more on adding meaning to its location and world through intertextuality (Allen, 2011) and referencing. Hence, the numerous naming references found throughout the game, such as a boy named Sigurd (Figure 5.3), a mountain fortress refuge called High Hrothgar (Figure 5.4), and several others similar instances.

These direct references bring the dialogical relationship between *Skyrim* and the Old Norse/Old English heroic material to the forefront adding meaning and some depth to a world that, otherwise, would possibly be found lacking in complexity at the narrative level and failing to resonate with its audience. To be a Dragonborn only has meaning because dragons themselves are a rich image full of significance. Conversely, *DAO*, with its more novelistic approach and the more closely engineered player experience, can afford to let its characters and world stand more independently with direct references being rare. Yet, more veiled allusions still populate the world, such as the semblance between the witch Morrigan's name with the character of Morgan le Fay of the Arthurian legend (Malory, 2008).
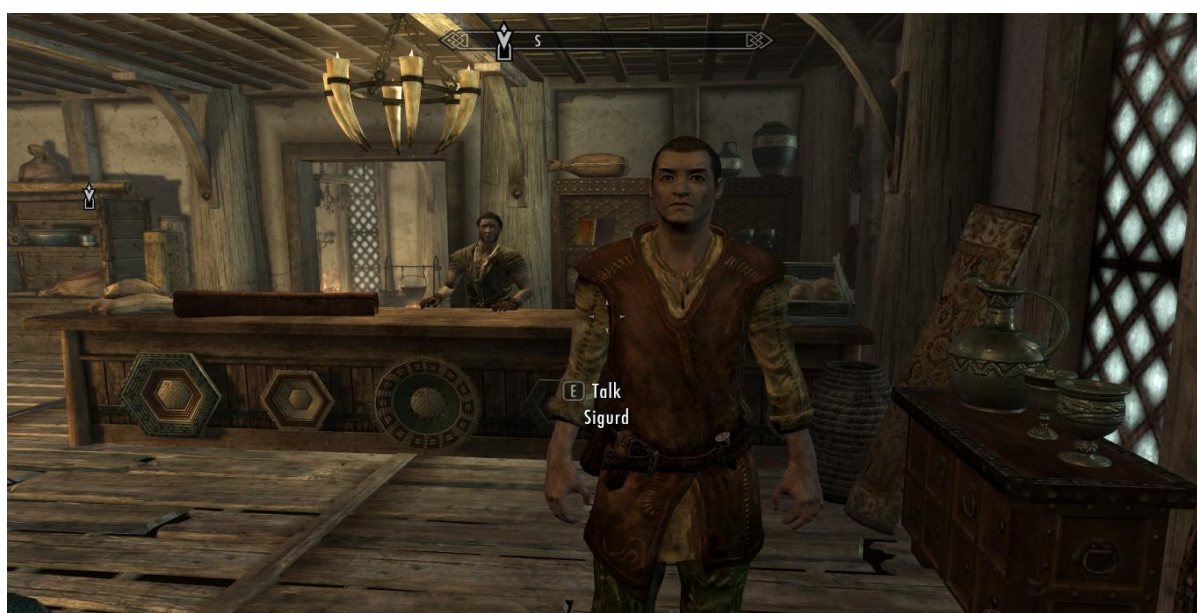
Figure 5.3: An NPC called Sigurd in *Skyrim*.

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Figure 5.4: A mountain fortress called Hrothgar in *Skyrim.*

It can be argued, and fairly so, that *DAO* actually sides more closely with Chivalric Romance than with Heroic Epic. This is especially true due to its imagery of knights and the Chantry (Figure 5.5), with its Christian religious connotations, which are very a prominent in *DAO*'s fictional world. However, it is important to note that Chivalric Romance itself can be considered a novelized form of the Heroic Epic (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 151–158) and, as such, as being in deep dialogical relationship with it. For example, there are indirect connections between *DAO*'s religious background narrative and imagery and *Beowulf* which are mediated by the Chivalric Romance due to the poem's Christian overtones (Heaney, 2007; O'Keeffe, 2013; Orchard, 2013). As Gaunt (2000, p. 46) points out when discussing the medieval romance, genres are constantly 'transformed through textual productions and new texts' and 'this perpetual dialogism means that a genre is always in the processes of becoming something different'. This permutation of texts and influences can be seen here extending beyond old religious and secular narrative forms into the new video game narratives.

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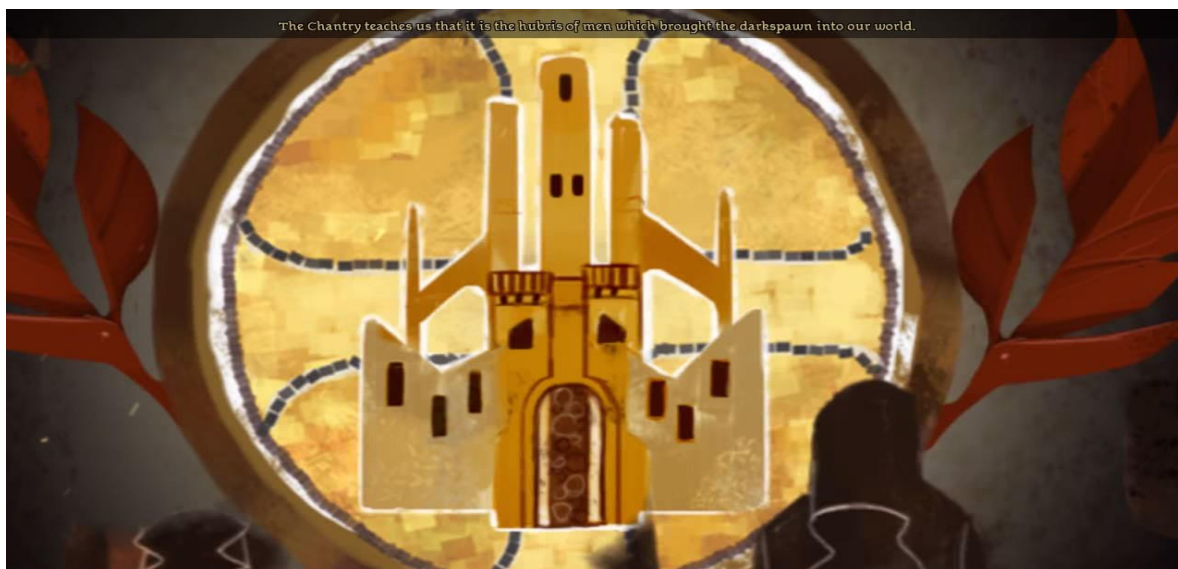
Figure 5.5: The Chantry and its medieval Christian imagery.

5.2.3 Bestiary

The extra depth derived from the more prevalent spatial limitation found in *DAO* affects more than just the name of its characters and locations. The whole fictional universe as a whole is thus capable to lean more heavily on the particular instance side of the instance/archetype equation. This translates most prominently into its bestiary. Monsters, as highly fantastical creations, are rich in symbolic meaning and have a long history in literature making them ripe for embedding a larger mythos into a particular work by their mere presence (Tolkien, 2006). The existence of a dragon, a troll, a draugr, a hydra, and /or a Cyclops in a fictional universe is enough to create strong links between that universe with the larger archetypal images with which they are associated, namely those borne of the Heroic Epic and mythological narratives from which these monsters originate. In a study on the lore and textual richness of *World of Warcraft*, Krzywinska (2008, p.124) argues that the inclusion of 'intertextual features' is a way of including the expert reader or viewer as a game insider and 'provide the context for and of gameplay'. Besides that, both the characters' races, such as the night elves, and their homelands draw on myths and Fantasy roots with such connections helping define the identity of the races. These strong links reinforce and highlight the dialogical relationship between different cultural artefacts − in this case, *Skyrim* and *DAO* − and a larger literary body. The archetypal images become strongly related, enriching the games with extra layers

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of meaning through intertextuality serving the dual role of adding archetypal material but also constraining fantasy with a mimetic strain of genre familiarity.

Skyrim relies heavily on intertextuality especially due to its highly archetypal modus operandi. As such, the bestiary present in Bethesda's WRPG is very conventional in existence. It contains dragons, trolls, draugrs, werewolves and giants and makes it clear the game's relation to Old Norse and Old English Heroic texts, such as *Beowulf* and the *Volsung Saga*. However, it is important to mention that *Skyrim* does not rely solely on Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon Heroic material since it also contains monsters from other modes of literature. The continent of Tamriel, of which Skyrim is part, is also home to vampires and its own unique bestiary creations, such as the automatons found in the dwarven ruins doting the world and the demon-like Daedra that come from its hellish other dimension of Oblivion (Figure 5.6).
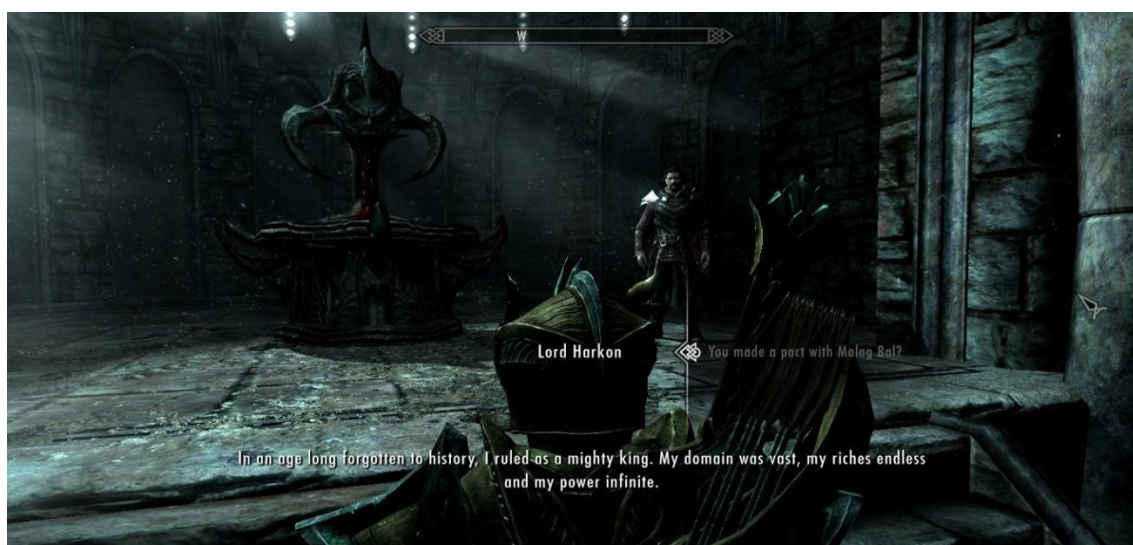
Figure 5.6: Daedric shrine in *Skyrim.*

DAO instead, as it does with its name referencing, can afford to be more inventive with its bestiary by modifying and renaming its creatures to create a catalogue of beasts and foes that while still resembling the archetypally rich monsters of Heroic Epic and myth, have their own unique existence and peculiarities, as it is the case of the undead/orc inspired darkspawn and their troll-like darkspawn ogres (Figure 5.7). Even the game's great nemesis, the Archdemon, which while drawing inspiration from the Heroic Epic and Fantasy classic dragons (Rauer, 2000), is a dragon with its own unique spin of corruption and immortality.

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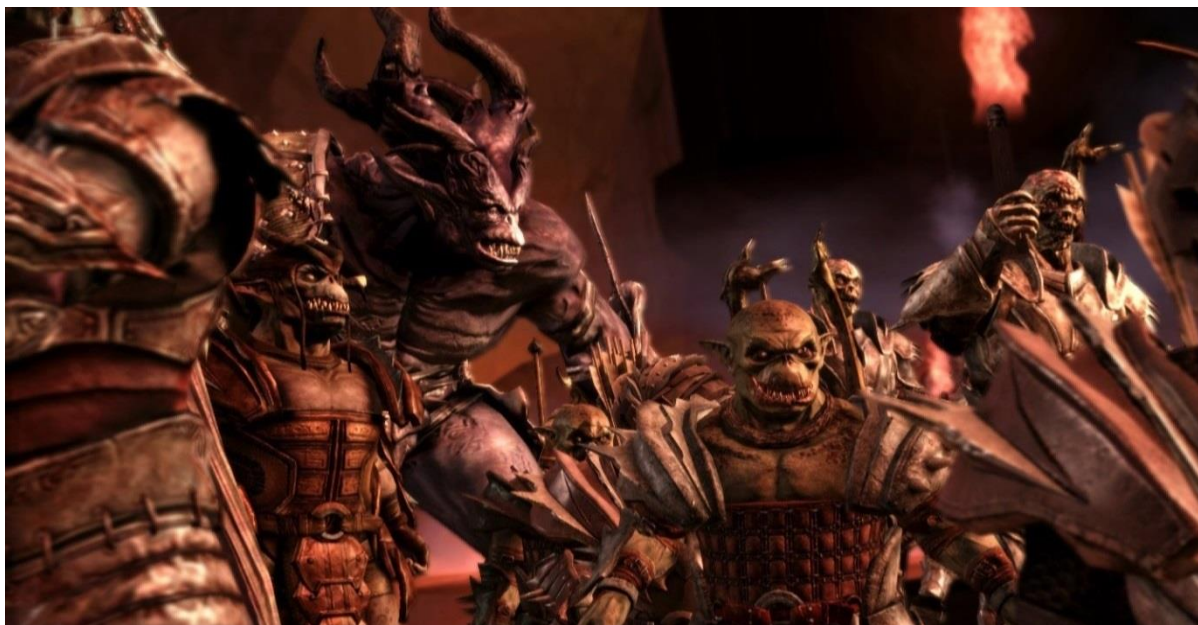
Figure 5.7: Darkspawn in *DAO*.

Yet, like many other games, *DAO* still relies on direct use of intertextual material, including that related to its bestiary since the game's very title has 'dragon' in it. Moreover, there is at least one more classical dragon in the game, the female High Dragon found in the quest for the miraculous Urn of Sacred Ashes (Figure 5.8), the game's equivalent to the Holy Grail (Lupack, 2005). Besides that, the presence of dwarves and elves in the game world strongly place its fantastical universe in the Old English and Old Norse mythos, even if that relation may be mediated through Fantasy and Chivalric Romance. Another aspect that approximates *DAO* to the Heroic Epic material is the presence of a narrator. Such presence distances the player/listener from the more novelistic world of *DAO* and by doing so aids the fantastic material to flourish, thus generating an over layer of narrative to wrap the fantastic game world and its semi-independent narrative threads.

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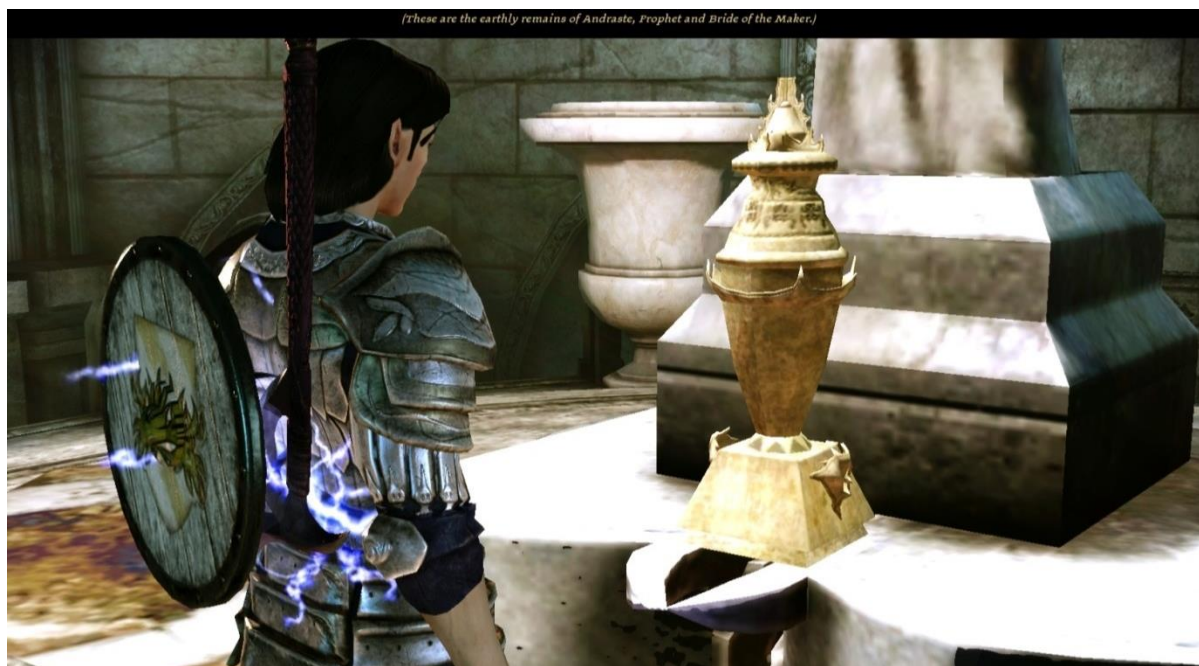
Figure 5.8: The Urn of Sacred Ashes in *DAO*.

5.2.4 Weapons and other items

A staple of most WRPGs, of which both *Skyrim* and *DAO* are no different, is the presence of the levelling and equipment systems that determine the capabilities of the characters under the player's control. However, when viewed through chronotopic narrative lenses, weapons and items acquire particular relevance for the understanding of how the Heroic Epic and the WRPGs analysed in this study are interwoven together in an intertextual fabric. They are discussed here due to their link to the creation of emergent narrative, since they populate the world and generate a sense of progress for the player while also emphasizing the character's journey into becoming a hero like those of Heroic Epic and some Fantasy narratives.

Levelling up constitutes the development of the character as it overcomes obstacles (Carr et al., 2006, p. 33) and progresses in the game world. Progress is a main concept in WRPGs as the staple levelling system is engineered to give the player a sense of progression and a sense that every activity and action is linked in a continual sum that determines the character's prowess and power. Unlike the great heroes of Epic, such as Sigurd and Beowulf, who give the impression of having been born greater than their peers and demonstrate an equal level of prowess throughout their tales, the heroes of WRPGs are in a constant state of becoming, improving, and growing as they accumulate experience points and progress

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through the levelling system. One of the main manners of acquiring the said experience points is the completion of quests, narrative goals upon the completion of which WRPG progression hinges (Howard, 2008). In other words, the more developed or storied the WRPG character, the greater and more resembling of the Heroic Epic heroes they become as their greater level allows the performance of greater and greater feats by completing more and more challenging narrative actions which in turn allow the upgrading of the character base stats, such as their health, strength and or charisma, and their skills, such as proficiency with weapons or magic, or grant powerful magical items and/or money which help add to the character's prowess. In general, feats in combat are similarly rewarding, with the slaying of enemies also presenting the player and their characters with experience and loot. As a rule, tougher enemies provide greater rewards and better equipment, thus ensuring that the non-authored narrative borne out of only gameplay is also rewarded and creates a sense of continuity, progress, and wholeness to the game.

Equipment in general has an equal impact on the character's combat capabilities as levelling (Carr et al., 2006) and a search for better and better equipment lays at the heart of many video games' gameplay pull (Gazzard, 2011), either WRPGs or not. Yet, in WRPGs such as *Skyrim* and *DAO*, equipment upgrading contributes to greater narrative internal coherence that echoes the Heroic Epic plot development. For instance, while Beowulf (Heaney, 2007) slays Grendel with his sheer physical strength; Grendel's mother can only be slain with the sword of giants that he finds in her aquatic lair. This suggests that although Beowulf is consistently 'great' from the beginning to the end of the narrative, he depends on his superior armour and weapons to keep him from death from her attacks. In much the same manner, in both *Skyrim* and *DAO* the equipment is the other most important factor determining a character's capabilities. In a Fantasy setting, such as those of *Skyrim*'s and *DAO,* mundane objects, such as leather boots and an iron dagger, are at the bottom of the power scale while fantastical and magical items, such as swords and armour made out of dragon bones, are the most powerful. Typically in any kind of RPG, both the levelling and equipment game systems make use of numbers to symbolically determine their simulation of greater power and prowess with a level 1 character being weaker than a level 10 character and so on. Yet, especially powerful items not only have a higher numerical value, but are also differentiated by the narrative that surrounds them since often the factor determining an item's power seems to be its particular story. Named magical items with a story background,

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even a short one, are often more powerful than the normal variety of the same level and often contain unique magical powers, such as extra fire damage or a blessing of some kind that increases a character's particular status, such as strength or intelligence.

Skyrim's levelling system, however, while not entirely original, differs from that described above in many crucial ways. Unlike *DAO*'s more traditional levelling system, *Skyrim*'s does not make use of experience points earned from quests and combat to gain levels and then upgrade character skills. Rather, it takes the opposite approach by upgrading player's skills by usage, being it a weapon, armour, or particular skill, such as magic or sneaking. From this skill growth derives the experience points to level up the character, which then allows the player to increase one of the base stats (health, magicka and stamina) and spend a 'perk point' in choosing to boost a particular facet of a skill (Figure 5.9). For example, the more the player character uses a one handed weapon and light armour in combat against enemies, the more skilful that character becomes with that type of weaponry and equipment.

Figure 5.9: Levelling up screen on *Skyrim*

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Once the sum of the character's skills upgrades have reached a certain threshold, the character will be considered as having levelled up and the player given their options to customise that growth further to match their own play style. The effect that this different approach to levelling has from a narrative reception perspective is that it equalizes all actions within the gameworld, regardless of whether the player is raiding an ancient tomb filled with draugr to locate an ancient heirloom for a local lord or simply spelunking out of their own desire for exploration. Their experience gain is thus the same, unlike what you find in more traditional levelling systems that emphasize the authored content over emergent behaviour by granting more rewards for the completion of a narrative quest over a freer paidia approach to the game (Newman, 2004, pp. 20–21).

This kind of levelling system then frees the player to engage with the more open gameworld in their own terms within the constriction of the allowed actions, being rewarded even should they ignore authored narrative altogether and the guidance/instruction of the quest system to simply focus on responding to the gameworld and its lore in whichever manner suits them best. Such freedom may result in players more easily creating their own personal narrative within the Heroic Epic, Fantasy-like world of *Skyrim*. It can be argued that any game has the ability of generating emergent narrative through its systems and gameplay. *Skyrim*'s spatial configuration and systems, however, make it easier for richer narratives to emerge and, in fact entices, the player to do so through its freer exploration, myriad of items and lore references spread throughout the world as well as through reactive systems that respond to player's action to generate content.

Story can thus be said to be the currency of greatness in WRPGs, with the development of narrative threads, such as the aforementioned quests and feats, rewarding the player with both experience for levelling up and equipment or wealth, which is mostly used for the purchase better equipment from the gameworld's shopkeepers. The association between wealth and superior equipment with greatness may sound straightforward; however, it acquires a particular significance in this study due to the connections between particular items and their literary equivalents. In the case of *Skyrim* and *DAO*, some of these items can be traced back to the Heroic Epic tales discussed in this study. For instance, Sigurd's slaying of Fafnir and his taking of the dragon's treasure hoard alongside a magical 'helmet of terror' (Byock, 2000, p. 64) would sound like a familiar gameplay moment to a WRPG player, as

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would his fabled sword Gram (p. 65). Yet, the backstories and names of weapons and items found in WRPGs often contain references to other tales outside their own fiction, such as *Beowulf* and the *Volsung Saga* or Arthurian legend, so as to enrich their world through intertextuality and justify the storied-power of the item in the game world by making use of the cultural resonances.

5.3 Forging the player's experience

The mechanics of a WRPG are just as important as any narrative device (Juul, 2005, p. 121) the game may employ since it is through the mechanics that the game time and the fictional time and space are experienced, traversed, and their obstacles overcome. Game systems, rules and controls have a direct impact not only on the enjoyment of a video game as a playing activity but also on the narrative aspects of the game, especially on the emergent narrative, thus on shaping the player's interpretation of the game as a whole, both ludic and story wise. As systems allow for variations in experience each time a game is played by any given player, an analysis of game mechanics (Consalvo & Dutton, 2006; Dutton, Consalvo, & Harper, 2011) must deal with the allowed possibilities and produced effects in general rather than focusing on specific instances of gameplay, as it was done with the levelling and equipment systems discussed above.

Highly emergent narratives generated by game systems, such as that which *Skyrim*'s levelling system stimulates, are sometimes called ergodic (Aarseth, 1997; Newman, 2002) or simulation (Frasca, 2003), which Frasca deems to be a different and higher form from traditional literature. I here make no case for the inferiority or superiority of either emergent or authored storytelling. However, I do acknowledge the uniqueness of emergent narratives as a dimension of storytelling that only games can truly possess. WRPGs in particular tend to have emergent narratives to go alongside their more traditional authored ones. Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency, as video games evolve, for emergent storytelling to become more and more common as the narrative driving force in some games; the great commercial hit *Minecraft* (Mojang, 2011) being one example of such. It is unlikely, however, that authored narratives will cease to have their place in the medium or genre. For instance, the existence of the highly authored *Minecraft* spinoff, called *Minecraft: Story Mode* (Telltale Games, 2015)*,* may serve as evidence of the pull and power of authored game narrative.

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Nonetheless, the rise of emergent storytelling in games such as *Skyrim* and *Fallout 4* (Bethesda, 2015) stresses the academic need to analyse how the systems that lead to emergent narratives can be understood from various different narrative points of view.

5.3.1 Presence and immersion

The sense of presence generated in video games (King & Krzywinska, 2006, pp. 119–120) can be at least partially understood by the interaction between the time and space aspects of the video game chronotope. Time and space interact with each other and with the gameplay enabling mechanics. In other words, the present-future time allows for as close a chronotopic experience of the fictional space as possible. The exploration of the fictional narrative space is hence enabled through its game space over layer. The game space is that in which the system's mechanics allow the player to exert their limited control over the action which, in turn, leads to exploration and a sense of presence. For example, the player plans a character's action, such as moving forward, translate that into the control commands and then he/she is presented with the screen depiction of the character moving forward (Juul, 2005, pp. 141–145). As such, the game space both enables and is enabled by the narrative chronotope. The game space and the fictional space overlap. The game space exists because the player-character can move within it under the command of the player. However, that command can only come to the player though the fictional references of direction and character presence within the fictional space. The directional button movements would make no sense without the notion of the fictional space, no matter how abstract that fictional space is, since the subject moves towards certain fictional points, such as a character moving towards a door or an NPC.

As discussed in Section 2.5.2, presence, immersion, and engagement are not necessarily the same though they do show some interconnection with each other. Immersion is a term often linked to narrative and denotes a state of deep mental involvement in an activity and or fiction. In this study, I consider immersion to be linked to the narrative of a WRPG and involved in its fictional world building which in turns enable for the game space to reside within it. The idea of immersion is traditionally linked to Coleridge's (2000) notion of suspension of disbelief and Tolkien's (2009) secondary belief. Both concepts were born out of an attempt to understand the reader's engagement with literature and, hence, narratives. In this study, I argue that being immersed is to temporarily accept the fiction as its own truth

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distinct from the truth of reality but true within the chronotope and duration of the fiction. In games, there is always a certain level of immersion even if the game does not present much in the way of narrative. Since the rules that make possible to play a game are themselves a fiction, to accept them as true as to allow the game to take place is, in fact, already a form of immersion.

However, immersion does not necessarily equate to gameplay or the state often regarded as game flow (Ermi & Mayra, 2007). Game flow happens when the player becomes focused on the gameplay side of the equation, performing the actions for the sake of the actions themselves, entering a state of pure play. As discussed in Section 2.5.2, literature in the field of game studies provide numerous and sometimes competing definitions of presence (Lombard et al., 2015, pp. 13–17). In this study, presence is understood as the feeling of heightened chronotopic awareness from within the video game chronotope so as to temporarily and partially overshadow the corporeal chronotopic awareness from outside the game. Presence, thus, stands, in a sense, between both immersion and game flow (Soutter & Hitchens, 2016). A game with almost no narrative, or even a story, such as *Minecraft*, cannot be truly said to deeply immerse the player through the richness of its fictional world. Yet, its mix of a coherent world within itself and good consistent gameplay linked to a single character's perspective creates a very strong sense of presence for the player despite the lack of authored narrative or background to the fictional world, which in turn makes it possible for it to achieve both immersion and game flow more effortlessly thus leading to very strong emergent narrative borne out of the gameplay experience.

Like most WRPGs, both *Skyrim* and *DAO* have their gameplay revolving around two pillars: exploration and combat. *Skyrim's* exploration and combat are indistinguishable in terms of gameplay allowance for the player. That is to say any action that the player can perform can be carried out at any given time of the game, be it while exploring a city or battling a dragon. By making the palette of offered actions constantly available, the game reinforces the idea of the player populating the main character and determining all its actions, thus increasing presence. This form of configuration aims to mimic that of a person's corporeal experience where the actions available and point of view are constant. Also, since the commands available hardly change, players only need one internalized controller scheme to translate their intended actions into gameplay, thus avoiding having to switch the

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'language' in which they communicate to the game in the middle of action. Having to adapt to a different controlling scheme while still commanding the same character or even changing characters, for example, temporarily highlights the fictionality of the action and the fact that one is playing a game. This affects immersion, though not necessarily breaking it, but still diminishing presence nevertheless. This association of player and player-character was also previously noted in relation to the game camera (Section 2.4.3).

As image is the main medium of delivery of video games, the camera that depicts the action (Section 4.4) is also of great importance on how the game is received by the player. The camera in *Skyrim* allows the player to choose from a default first person view and a third person view over-the-shoulder perspective. The use of the first person camera where the player sees through their character's eyes is emphasized by the mechanics of gathering items which are organically spread throughout the game environment. The player is thus capable of picking and adding items to their inventory regardless of their value and/or usefulness, such as a great axe from a wall, a particular book from a shelf, or a coin purse left on a cluttered dinner table (Figure 5.10). Therefore, the closer view of the first person camera becomes preferable to the third person distance when determining what to add to the rather limited inventory space.

Figure 5.10: Item collecting system in *Skyrim.*

The restricted third person camera angle and the personal first person view bind the player's perspective to that of a single character, limiting the player's awareness of the game space to the immediate surroundings of their main character. Combat then, the main obstacle present in the game, has a very immediate and reactionary nature, with players determining their course of action within the limited perception of their character. Action can be either a reflex-based rush into combat or a more measured stealthy/scouting approach, with a choice of melee or ranged attacks, both magical and physical, depending on the player's particular play style and the character's equipment. Regardless of the player's choice of approach, a certain degree of prediction and reaction constitute the core of the combat gameplay *in Skyrim*, compelling players to be constantly mindful of the capacity and limitations of their character so as to overcome the obstacles the game world presents at any given time. As such, the emergent story borne out of combat gameplay becomes a very complex dialogue between the player, the player's character, and the gameworld that unfolds simultaneously in the reactionary present, the predictive future, and the past preparation involved in making the character capable of overcoming the combat in the player's chosen manner (Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.11: Combat scene in *Skyrim*.

DAO's gameplay has several differences from *Skyrim's*. While *Skyrim*'s exploration and combat are blended into a single mode of gameplay, *DAO* has separate gameplay stages for exploration and combat, with the actions allowed inside combat differing from those

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outside it. Most attacks and skills are locked and can only be used when the characters encounter hostile NPCs. Unlike *Skyrim*, it is simple movement and dialogue choices that are at the core of exploration gameplay in *DAO*. Moreover, the variety and quantity of items to be collected are few and far between when compared to Bethesda's game, but every item is useful in one manner or another. By doing so, *DAO* takes away from player control and suggests that the character chooses only to pick that which would be useful for its journey, thus filtering the player interaction with the gameworld through a layer of character autonomy.

Another key aspect that keeps a certain distance from player and protagonist is the camera. *DAO*'s camera is locked into a third person perspective which follows the currently selected character in the player's party/group. In this way, the player's view is constantly filtered through a character which is not necessarily their main protagonist. An exception to this is when in combat. During combat, the player can move the camera freely while accessing the game's tactical view/mode, surveying the battlefield, and/or giving commands to all party members while time stands still. Pausing the time flow and giving the player a semi-omniscient perspective of the situation leaves the player not linked to any particular character but to all and none of them at the same time, standing squarely outside the immediate action as a disembodied force which directs all their actions simultaneously if the player chooses so. Therefore, a greater perspective and control of the game world and its chronotopic flow outside a particular character's perspective comes at the expense of a sense of corporeal presence within the space of action. *DAO* also diminishes presence through its cut-scenes which often set the player as a disembodied observer of action outside the perspective of their controlled characters (Domsch, 2013, pp. 32–34), hence breaking chronotopic flow to prioritise narrative exposition.

It can be said that the sense of presence in a WRPG does not come only from the player's impact upon the gameworld, but also from their association with a single character's perspective within that world. Presence in the gameworld is hence both a product of gameplay and of fiction. Gameplay helps build it largely due to the present-future chronotope and the sense of agency generated by the player's choice and action. Presence is also generated by fiction due to the necessity of a narrative anchor to explain the player's action

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within the world, such as a character's perspective, in order to keep verisimilitude and immersion.

5.3.2 Dissonance

Narrative and gameplay in WRPGs do not, however, blend perfectly in tandem with immersion, presence, and game flow as if working together in harmony. Video games often suffer from instances of incongruity or discrepancy (Juul, 2005, pp. 177–183), and in this aspect WRPGs are no different from other video game genres. Because such incongruences can cause cognitive dissonance, in this study I use the term *dissonance* (Hocking, 2007) to refer to the uncanny effect derived from the juxtaposition of gameplay and narrative in a video game in which conflicting aspects emerge. A common example is how a character is subjected to an inordinate amount of punishment during gameplay with little or no consequence but dies or becomes hindered by a single wound in a narrative cut- scene thus breaking fictional consistency and creating dissonance. This is the case in *DAO* with the execution of a traitor late in the game, the unfolding of which depends on the player's choices. One of the possible outcomes is the death of the character with a single sword strike while another possible outcome leads to combat gameplay where several such blows are traded before the same character's death comes to pass. This leads to incongruence as either the character is capable of surviving several seemingly mortal blows or he is not. The inconsistence would shatter any narrative immersion in other narrative media. While it sounds very disapproving and certainly detracts from the game as a whole, dissonance does not necessarily detract from the appreciation of a video game as much as one might expect (Seraphine, 2014).

There are two reasons why dissonance, to a limited extent, does not necessarily break engagement with a game. The first is a form of genre literacy as players become accustomed to the trappings of a video game narrative and tend to overlook its inconsistencies much like theatre goers ignore the stage mechanisms and accept the fictionality of the play in the form of a willing suspension of disbelief. The second reason is of greater interest to this study as it explains dissonance from a chronotopic perspective. The possibility of sustaining engagement in spite of cognitive dissonance lies in the chronotopic change that occurs between the performance of gameplay and the watching/witnessing of a narrative cut-scene. This shift in chronotopic perspective positions the player far from the action and

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simultaneously changes his/her various modes of engagement from agent to recipient (King & Krzywinska, 2002). This is more than just removing player agency; it changes player's expectations and their understanding of the fiction being depicted in a fundamental manner. A world shown and a world being inhabited naturally have different rules of engagement and expectations for those involved and changes levels of presence. It is precisely because of the shift and change in chronotopic perspective that the player becomes capable of navigating the dissonance between gameplay and narrative without necessarily losing immersion or presence. However, in cases when dissonance is recurring or too glaring, stretching the limits of both immersion and presence, it will be likely to shatter engagement nonetheless.

5.3.3 Orientation through intertextuality and imagery

According to Domsch (2013, pp. 29–30), player agency, is the ability to affect the game world through interaction and/or the ability to move throughout the allocated game space at their own decision. Both player agency and the degree of presence generated out of it are part of the present-future chronotopic time of gameplay. However, when coupled with the otherworld fictional settings of *Skyrim* and *DAO,* this combination of agency and presence can lead to disorientation as players find themselves transported into a close encounter with a previously unknown environment upon first engagement with the game. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, chronotopic disorientation is mostly dealt with in the initial transportation phase. The transportation phase (Section 2.4.3) helps acclimatize the player with the game world and the allowed actions within it by gradually guiding the player to understand their degree of agency and managing the distancing and expectations towards the fictional and ludic aspects of the game. While the initial transportation phase is extremely important, it may not be enough to lessen disorientation. WRPGs such as *Skyrim* and *DAO* are very long affairs, involving often close to or well over a hundred hours of gameplay, if not hundreds. Besides that, they are also interrupted affairs where the player will stop gameplay and return to it at different times, possibly even months or years after their initial engagement. Therefore, although the transportation phase is crucial for engagement with the game and to determine the player's expectation and interest, a WRPG must also be capable of diminishing disorientation upon returning contact. The journal quest logs in both *Skyrim* and *DAO* are game features provided to remind the player of completed and ongoing narrative threads, while the maps aid players orient themselves inside the game world.

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Expectations, however, still have to be managed by constant referencing through depicted imagery and their intertextual associations. *DAO* keeps the player focused and on rails due to its spatial constraints whereas *Skyrim* has a much greater need of making use of cultural and intertextual references for the management of expectations due to its greater freedom of movement and choice of engagement. In a way, referencing and allusions serve as signposts. They indicate, rather than attempt to dictate, what is expected of the player and how to best engage with the content provided by the game through their intertextual connotations (Jenkins, 2004, p. 127). Imagery and textual associations in *Skyrim* aid players by guiding their expectations and directing them within the narrative and gameplay possibilities, thus reducing the disorientation inherent to greater freedom. The dragon slayer trope derived from Heroic Epic, from example, is a very strong and familiar archetype which guides players to follow the main quest and help their character fulfil their archetypal journey. *Skyrim* also taps into other tropes, such as the mystical mentors found in the Greybeards (Figure 5.12), and finishes with a final fight between the player-character and the draconic antagonist from the game's introductory sequence, Alduin, in Sovngarde, the game world's equivalent to the Nordic Valhalla (Figure 5.13).
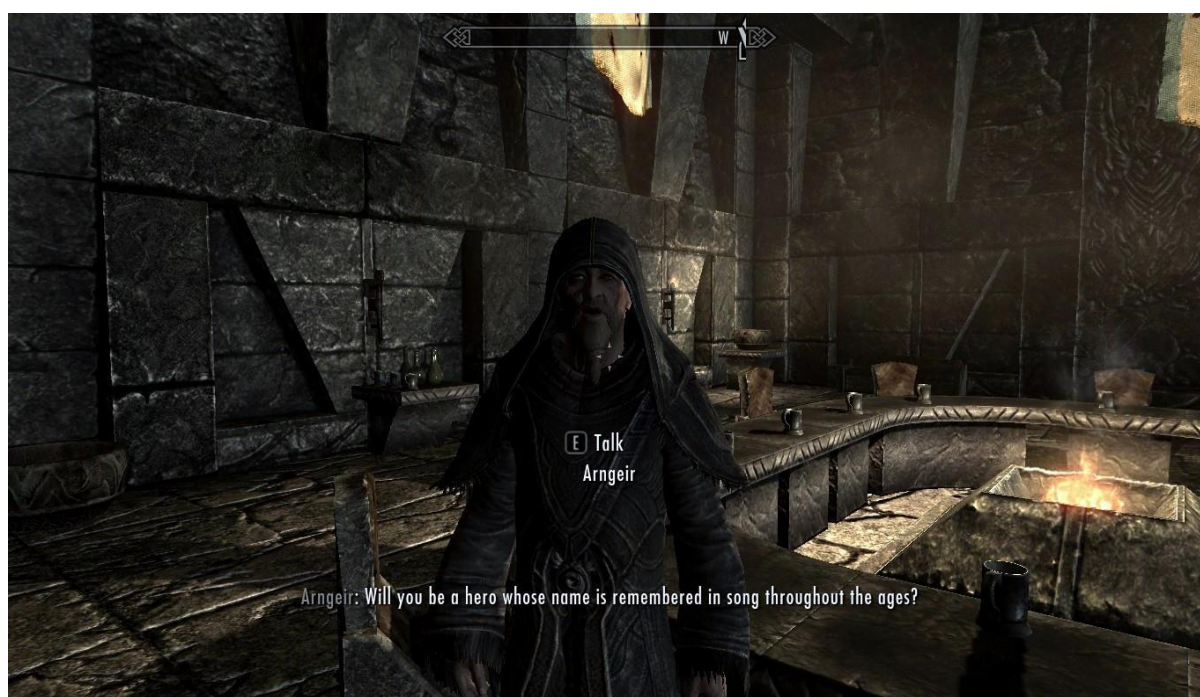
Figure 5.12: The mystical mentor figure in *Skyrim*.

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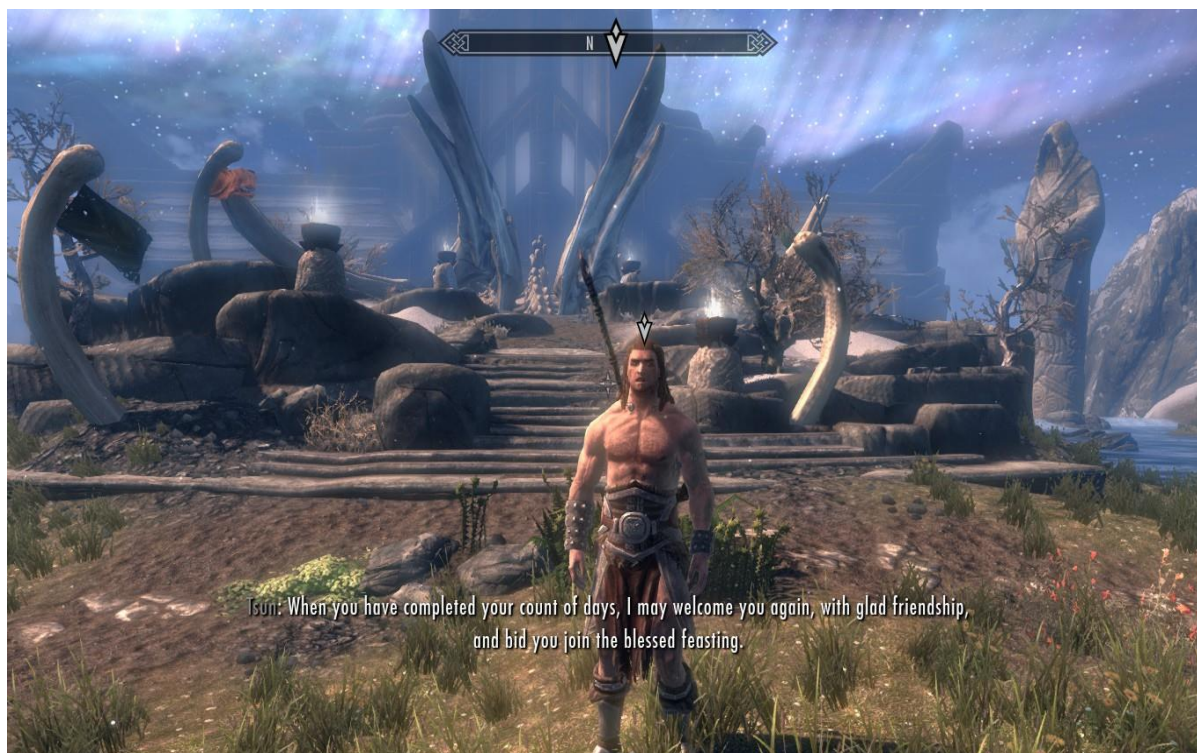
Figure 5.13: *Skyrim*'s version of the Nordic Valhalla.

The significance of a final fight with a dragon ties well with Beowulf's own final confrontation with the wyrm, this association enriches the players' encounter giving it greater meaning as a culmination of all their heroic efforts. The setting itself is a congratulatory touch to the players' achievements as their feats are deemed to be worthy of admission into the hall of the ancient heroes aiding the sense of triumph and giving a touch of finality to the authored narrative thread even if the player decides to continue engaging with the open gameworld after the main narrative content has been completed.

5.4 Summary

In this chapter the concept of chronotope is used to illuminate particular aspects related to the game design in the analysis of *Skyrim* and *DAO*. The present-future chronotopic tense of WRPGs (Section 3.5) reinforces presence through its mimetic relation to the chronotopic tense of everyday experience that is akin to the Novel as a literary genre. At the same time, the epic and the fantastical are present in both games in the form of the spatial setting and the internalized absolute past tense narrative chronotope of the Heroic Epic.

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Narratives are inherently chronotopic since to occur they are dependent of a time and space setting. Looking at video games, in this case two WRPGs, from the chronotopic point of view can help us understand how the chronotopic flow has an important role in the generation of presence, maintenance of immersion, and player engagement. Games can acquire further layers of meaning through the insertion of chronotopic narrative elements in the game design that establish a dialogical relationship between the video game and specific literary genres, which in the case of this investigation are the Old Norse and Old English Heroic Epic and the Fantasy Novel. A stable chronotopic flow is apparently optimal to the maintenance of immersion and presence whereas an unstable chronotopic flow can lead to disorientation and highlight the fictionality of the playing activity thus possibly breaking or reducing immersion.

The hero characters, and thus the whole heroic aspect of the narrative, are intrinsically bound to the land they inhabit. It is by coming into Skyrim at the beginning of the game that the protagonist character enters the path of becoming the legendary Dragonborn, whereas the Grey Warden protagonist of *DAO* is conversely known as the Hero of Ferelden, the country that serves as the place of action for the game. The development of NPC characters can also be seen as closely linked to the spatial configuration of the game. In the case of *Skyrim*, the sandbox configuration of the space, which the player-character is virtually free to explore, reduces the authorial control and the possibility of having NPCs that are able to develop side-stories and meaningful interactions with the player-character. Otherwise, the programming would need to account for hundreds of possible variations depending on a myriad of possibilities that would account for players roaming around the map of *Skyrim* engaging with particular events at their own pace and chosen sequence. One of the results of using a sandbox space configuration is the creation of NPCs that are basically flat characters thus emulating the flat characterization of the Heroic Epic where secondary characters exist for the sake of providing the hero with the spatial and social background for the plot to develop towards the final confrontation or goal. In *DAO,* this flat characterization is diminished partly due to its hub configuration that permits more authorial narrative control over the characterization, thus allowing certain secondary characters to grow alongside the protagonist and comment more credibly on the actions depicted in the game narrative.

The bestiary in both WRPGs analysed in this study are also profoundly connected to the chronotope of the games since their nature highlights their intertextual imagery, linking

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them to the Heroic Epic and Fantasy while still allowing for the development of the games own fiction. The two levelling up systems, based on the acquisition of weaponry and other items, are also intrinsically connected to the narrative and, therefore, to the chronotopic setting of the stories in the game. The weapons and other items dialogic relationship with the literary genres is the measure of greatness and prowess in the WRPGs here analyzed which reinforce the player-character's journey into acquiring heroic archetypal meaning.

The analysis of *Skyrim* and *DAO* conducted in this study indicates that by strengthening the dialogical relationship between the games and the Heroic Epic narratives and the Fantasy genre, game developers can potentially enrich the game's fiction, give further meaning to its action, guide the players' expectations towards the game play and the narrative development, and orient the player within the game world fostering engagement and meaningful action.

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Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This study explores the narrative aspect of WRPGs by comparing *Skyrim* and *Dragon Age Origins (DAO)* to Old Norse and Old English Heroic poetry and Fantasy literature through the use of chronotopic analysis (Section 2.4.3), archetypal and genre related material (Section 2.2.1), and a dialogical understanding of the imagination (Section 2.2.2). This investigation was carried out to understand the effects of different spatial arrangements and the chronotopic transportation and flow of gameplay in the shaping of the narrative experience afforded to the players of the selected games (Chapters 3 and 4). It also explored the role of intertextual material (Chapter 5) in shaping and affecting the ludonarrative harmony of each game. This led to an analysis and reference to not only the Heroic Epic material but also to the Fantasy genre, also stretching to a brief chronotopic exploration of the Chivalric Romance, the Realistic Novel, and films in general. Such analysis was done by breaking down the concept of chronotope into its two main constituent parts: chronos (time) and topos (space) (Bakhtin, 1981). Both time and space were then subject to further subdivision into three different aspects: setting, flow and tense (for time) /structure (for space) (Section 2.4.3). To the best of my knowledge, there have been no studies conducted so far that applied all such sub-categories to the analysis of time and space, either in the field of literary studies or game studies. The creation of these subdivisions can be considered a unique contribution of this study and a refining of chronotopic analytical tools, which can potentially be of use in further chronotopic investigations of different games, genres and/or media by other researches who may wish to apply them.

It is paramount for this investigation for chronotope to be understood as the *perception* of time and space derived from the narrative (Bakhtin, 1981) instead of time and space per se; as such, chronotope is highly dependent on the narrative itself for its generation in the reader's mind. Time and space are the cornerstones of the human understanding of experience and form the basis of any interpretation of that experience. Chronotope, however, by being the perception of time and space derived from the narrative is double-bound to the narrative by dialogically forming it and being formed by it. Therefore, much of the analysis conducted focused on the generation of chronotope through different narrative techniques and

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media specific traits while also focusing on the effects chronotope has on the narrative material. Although the Heroic Epic's chronotope and the chronotopes of the WRPGs examined in this study are different, they also share similarities in effect (Sections 3.3 and 4.3). To a certain extent, the chronotope of the games emulates the chronotope of Fantasy (Sections 3.4 and 4.4) by being set in an otherworld and narrated in a present tense, though through gameplay it gains the added element of the predicted future. Also like Fantasy, their chronotope internalizes the absolute past of Heroic Epic by often having the fictional world's backstory set in an absolute heroic past of its own mythos. Both forms are full of fantastical and archetypal material within their time and space even if ultimately their chronotopic configuration is different.

6.2 Findings

The main question posed by this study was *how the shared and differing chronotope configurations of the Heroic Epic, Fantasy and WRPGs help generate narrative meaning and shape the players' game experience.*

Through the analysis of *Skyrim* and *DAO,* I make a case for the role of intertextual and genre material in shaping the WRPGs narrative expectations. Such material also has a profound dialogical effect on the games' ludonarrative harmony through their interaction with the gameworld and gameplay systems. It affects all the narrative aspects of the selected games and generates different reactions depending on different design choices in each game. This relationship is most visible in the chronotopic aspect of the games since, as mentioned above, time and space are the foundation stones of both narrative and gameplay experience, thus making the analysis of time and space a rich field for the investigation of such deep and complex dialogical and intertextual relationships. The overall narrative experience of the player has remained a point of focus throughout this study as this experience is the after product of gameplay and where the narrative elements of a game intermingle with the ludic aspects into a single subsequent experience.

Although both *Skyrim* and *DAO* belong to the WRPG genre, and can be further sub-categorised as Fantasy WRPGs, their analysis has shown that even in such a highly specific genre niche, the video game medium demonstrates great variation in gameplay and chronotopic configurations. Such variations affect the overall narrative experience of each

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particular game and their relationship with both the WRPG genre, the Heroic Epic, and Fantasy to which both often allude and depend upon for much of their archetypal material and meaning generation.

Although much indebted to previous research on games (Section 2.5), especially studies with a particular emphasis on video games at a narrative level, as well as its internalized dimensions of time and space, this work furthered the investigation into those fields with the adoption and adaptation of the literary concepts of chronotope and dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981). While chronotope is the main mode of analysis used in this study, it is dialogue (Section 2.3.3) that serves as the theoretical backbone to understand the various simultaneously conflicting and enhancing structural and experiential layers of the video game experience, be they narrative, gameplay, and/or chronotopic. For instance, the understanding of game space gains new depth with the addition of chronotopic and dialogical thought, as the dialogue itself between the abstract/theoretical rule-bound space and the actual space of action is what essentially corresponds to the more traditional understanding of game space. As such, the dialogical understanding of centripetal and centrifugal forces lays at the heart of understanding the ludic and narrative marriage, with its often shifting harmonies and dissonances found in many video games, especially the RPG and WRPG variants.

Through the use of a comparative analysis between the Heroic Epic, Fantasy and WRPGs – which also includes other intertextual material related to both forms – this study is aligned with Bogost's (2009) proposed comparative video game criticism. This form of criticism attempts to understand 'what videogames do, what happens when players interact with them and how they relate to, participate in, extend, and revise the cultural expression at work in other kinds of artefacts'. Such questions strongly resonate with the user end experience focus and the analysis of the intertextual makeup of the selected games that are at the heart of this study. At first, the choice of Heroic Epic and WRPGs was made due to the readily apparent archetypal material shared between the two forms as well as the Quest narrative format which is also central to both. However, as the analysis progressed, the comparative analysis became of special interest because of the Heroic Epic and WRPGs shared narrative thrust and the opposite chronotopic spectrums on which both stand, not only through their distance in time and culture, but also due to their divergent chronotopic configurations. From a chronotopic point of view, Heroic Epic (Section 2.6.1) strives for an

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absolute distance through its absolute past and the use of archetypal landscapes whereas WRPGs (Section 2.6.3), and sometimes narrative-driven video games in general, strive for an immediate chronotope close to real experience through their performance present-future time tense, as well as highly detailed and explorable 3D landscapes. Their closeness from a narrative material point is then almost incongruous to their great distancing in other aspects and a prime example that when a centripetal or centrifugal force reach its pinnacle, it reverts, in a sense, into its opposite. As such, the highly technological and experience-like WRPG reverts to the past aiming for a narrative that strongly recalls the old heroic tales of monster slayer while simultaneously being at the opposite end of the spectrum in their chronotopic narrative format.

Therefore, although many of the chronotopic comparisons made throughout this study relied on in-between chronotopic narrative configurations, such as the Chivalric Romance, Fantasy and films to better understand the unexplored chronotope of WRPGs, the comparison with Heroic Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry remains the most pertinent to this investigation as a whole. In many ways, these Heroic tales are the closest to a source of the archetypal images employed in the WRPGs in question than any other genres even that of Chivalric Romance, in the same way that Beowulf is closer to the archetype of the questing hero than closer to being an individual. The fact that the chronotope of the Epic and its interpretative effects were deeply analysed by Bakhtin in his essay 'The Epic and the Novel' was a great contributing factor to this analysis of the games. Bakhtin's analysis provided a solid background for the narrative interpretation effects of different narrative chronotope configurations as well as a good contrasting point. By highlighting the similar archetypal thrust between the Heroic Epic and the narrative experiences provided by *Skyrim,* and *DAO*, this study shows the changes from the ancient material in design and narrative structure essential to keep these WRPGs a cohesive and immersive experience. This is done while demonstrating that the Heroic Epic and the WRPGs present considerably different chronotopes, which are derived in great part from their very different media. It also demonstrated how different game chronotopic configurations change and are changed by the content and gameplay presented.

In *Beowulf* and The Sigurd Cycle, the gap between narration-time and narrative action-time is made explicit creating, in part, the insurmountable barrier of past time that is

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necessary for a narrative to be considered Epic in Bakhtinian terms (Section 2.4.3). *DAO* partially recreates the effect by having the character-narrator Duncan tell the tale from an indeterminate time, possibly posthumously. However, the effect in *DAO* is severely diminished by the present-future time of gameplay. *Skyrim,* on the other hand, foregoes the narrator angle and focuses instead on having a large open space that seems to wait for the player to explore it. Narrative time is to a certain degree divorced from gameplay time as it waits for specific player actions to be performed, giving the game a heightened feeling of predestation and thus grounding the distancing in the future rather than the past. This predestation creates an effect similar to the time compression in the Heroic Epic where action is already lore and myth. Conversely, the predestined action and completion of the quest simply await performance by the player and their character.

The initial chronotopic transportation – a term that emerged from my analysis of the games in this study – is integral to understanding how the two media work differently in moving the player/reader awareness to the chronotope of the narrative while creating a similar effect of immersion and engagement, with the added effect of presence in the case of WRPGs (Section 2.5.2). This additional effect of presence through the illusion of player positioning in the gameworld, together with the agency afforded through gameplay, generates a new chronotopic time zone that I call emergent narrative time, which intersects with and influences the authored narrative time, but is not necessarily the same as its authored counterpart (Section 3.2). This creates two simultaneously contrasting and complementing narrative chronotopes coexisting in the same artefact, which leads to interesting chronotopic adjustments in distancing as to maintain immersion and engagement. The differentiation between immersion and engagement (Section 2.5.2) is necessary due to the fact that, unlike more traditional narrative media, a breaking down of immersion does not necessarily break engagement as a whole in video games. This is in part due to presence and the allure of gameplay as its own form of entertainment holding the player's engagement through temporary breaks of immersion, most of which are caused by the ludonarrative dissonances. The proximity of gameplay time also creates a reverse distancing effect during the act of playing. The action's narrative quality is obscured during the act of performance as it is only before and after performance that narrative quality is considered instead of the fiction as a whole. Player agency also grants verisimilitude to the action during performance, i.e. *'I am doing it, therefore, it is possible to be done.'* Dissonance (Section 5.3.2) often only comes

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into play when gameplay action conflicts with depicted narrative, such as cut-scenes of background stories. Both distancing through extreme proximity and agency coupled with the pleasure of play help keeping engagement, even at moments when ludonarrative dissonance threatens to break immersion.

Great part of the ludonarrative dissonance is borne out of the different chronotopic flows of the four main layers of time involved in the complex event that is a WRPG (Section 3.2). Narrative time, narrative narration time, gameplay time, and emergent narrative time are all capable of flowing in both different and equal frequencies in relation to each other as can be seen in the analysis of both *Skyrim* (section 3.5.1) and *DAO* (Section 3.5.2). Gameplay time may be paused in a cut-scene but narrative time then resumes or continues to flow. Emergent narrative time can also continue to flow incorporating the cut-scene into itself if it is depicted as being concerning the player's current actions and/or changing the state of the player-character in the gameworld. All the while, the narrative narration time, as opposed to narrative and gameplay time, can remain separate and 'un-flowing' thus binding the action as a whole. This can often be seen in the time scheme of other WRPGs, such as *The Witcher 3* (CD Projekt RED, 2015) in which the narrative is supposedly being narrated by the bard character Dandelion long after the events have concluded. This demonstrates the complex relationship between the different threads of time present in the game at any given moment. With such a multifaceted time scheme constantly flowing and moving in different frequencies and even directions, it is understandable that different chronotopic flows will sometimes conflict with each other thus creating a form of dissonance. A deeper understanding of how those work, such as the discussion carried out in this study, may help developers avoid unnecessary conflicts between the different chronotopic flows thus creating more seamless game experiences.

Time in *Skyrim* (Section 3.5.1) demonstrates that authored narrative and emergent narrative time flow can move separately from gameplay time and even from each other. The gameplay fictional time and gameplay action time outside the time pausing menus of *Skyrim* move constantly regardless of narrative time. Players can also have some considerable emergent narrative out of the use of items and levelling system without gameplay fictional time moving since it does not flow while the player uses the menus, in a move similar to a sudden narrative changing authorial intervention. *DAO* (section 3.5.2), on the other hand,

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highlights well how in-game fictional gameplay time can overlap with authored narrative time and be outside the flow of emergent narrative time. As the game does not have any visible marks that demonstrate the passage of time during gameplay, the fictional time stands still in its fictional world, regardless of gameplay action or real time spent playing the game. The only movement of fictional time in *DAO* comes together with advancement of the authored narrative that changes the state of the world, such as the destruction of the gameplay area of the village of Lothering. Performance thus becomes even more prominent as time literally stands still in the fictional world while awaiting player interaction with the main narrative; all side gameplay activity happens in a kind of temporal limbo that also resembles the compressed time of the Heroic Epic.

Space was analysed in Chaper 4. The spatial aspect of video games is one that has drawn much of the attention of scholars in the field (Section 2.5.1). However, most of the work done on space in games still seems to focus on the structural and formalistic aspects of spaces available in the medium as a whole. Although, purely architectural frameworks are useful when categorizing or attempting to understand video games at a formal level, they fall short in dealing with the player's experiences when engaging with such spaces. There are, however, some researchers concerned with the experiential aspect of time and space who propose frameworks for the analysis of how time and space structure affect the player's responses to the games. Yet, they still largely fail to recognise the dialogical narrative value that comes with such forms being used and read by players in view of the game genre and the intertextual material presented in such spaces and the actions that are allowed by the game system. Also generally missing is a consideration of the evolving nature of our perception of fictional settings where each iteration adds to the general archetypal image they are associated with. Considerations of how archetypal images interact with the structural form of specific gameplay spaces are equally largely missing in the game studies literature.

Therefore, in order to fill this gap in the current knowledge, I propose the use of dialogical chronotopic configurations to understand WRPGs space on both experiential and narrative levels. The analysis of *Skyrim* (Section 4.5.1) and *DAO* (Section 4.5.2) demonstrates that the spatial flow and time flow are very much linked. This is especially true for the flow of the emergent narrative as movement through space becomes almost simultaneous to the movement through time in the present-future tense configuration of

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gameplay. The analysis also shows that, from a chronotopic perspective, different structural spatial configurations lead to different narrative flows and can even affect characterization.

The analysis of the selected games demonstrates that WRPGs with open-world spatial strutctures, such as *Skyrim* (Section 4.5.1), allow the player control of the narrative flow and direction to a larger degree as the free movement through the whole space of the gameworld greatly diminishes authorial control. To a certain degree, such configuration leaves the frequency and even the sequence of events up to the player. The break of verisimilitude in the spatial flow is also left to the player who can choose to warp between points of the world or simply walk to their destination. However, in the case of *Skyrim* this leads to breadth rather than depth when it comes to narrative plots or characterization. *DAO's* (Section 4.5.2) more restricted spatial structure of hubs makes for greater narrative depth at the expense of breadth. Spatial movement and flow in *DAO* are more controlled since the player is allowed to move between hubs and zones only at particular locations thus forcing player movement to follow a certain pattern and sequence. This allows for more authored content at the expense of player agency as the flow is often determined by the configuration itself and the player's only option is to either engage with it or not and perhaps choose which hub sequence of areas to engage with first.

To conclude, the greater player control observed in games with open structures comes from the chronotopic flow being almost solely in the hands of the player, thus making most of the engagement derive from the emergent narrative borne of gameplay choice. Conversely, more limited structures focus on authorial content, as the flow is controlled by the structure itself with player agency being accounted for by narrative choices within the restricted spaces and by the gameplay choices within the allowances of the system. In both structures, the chronotopic spatial flow emulates simultaneously that of the Novel and that of the Epic. This is possible through the player agency's effect of keeping orientation by allowing the choosing of the timing and direction of time-space continuum manipulation as well as the use of maps as spatial referential systems that stand in for more detailed space upon quick movement in the world.

The analysis of the selected WRPGs also showed that greater or lesser freedom lead to more or less use of direct Heroic Epic and Fantasy referential material (Section 5.2). Archetypally rich Epic material dialogically orients the players and adjusts their expectations

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and understanding of the fictional world. *Skyrim* thus abounds with direct references to aid the players in understanding and guiding their own actions whereas *DAO* almost never makes use of direct references rather focusing on the estrangement of familiar tropes and archetypes to enrichen its own narrative. The effect of these references and intertextual material (Section 5.3.3) is still potent even should the player not be familiar with the original content as such references are intrinsically linked to the Western cultural milieu. Heroic Epic referential material dialogically influences our understanding of the games even if mediated through other content, such as Fantasy novels and films. As such, the use of such material by developers, either intentionally or not, has a profound effect on the design and interpretation of the games in question.

If the spatial structure helps determine the chronotopic flow of WRPGs, then the Quest structure (Section 5.2.1) is what allows it to have authored narratives. It is through the Quest structure that gameplay, emergent narratives, and authorial narratives mingle as the quest provides action checkpoints for player performance through gameplay, which in turn lead to advancement in or completion of the quest. A particular quest can then lead to other quests creating questlines that are intrinsically the mode of delivery of the authorial narrative content. Both *Skyrim* and *DAO* depend on the Quest structure to orient the player within the gameworld and guide player action. However, *Skyrim,* due to its more open structure, relies almost solely on quests and their reward based system to provide the narrative and gameplay thrust of the game. On the other hand, while still using the Quest structure mainly for its side quests, *DAO* uses spatial restrictions to focus the action to its main narrative and justifies this restriction by providing background and story-based orientation to the more limited player action. The monsters and beasts populating the world space, as well as the presence of magical items and equipment, directly link both games to Heroic tales, such as Beowulf's and Sigurd's. The determination of status and power through narrative also links to the idea of the Heroic Epic, as the hero is greater for having performed heroic deeds. The more and the grander the deeds performed, the greater the hero is. The same rule applies to the protagonist characters of *Skyrim* and *DAO* who become heroes by levelling up and acquiring experience points as they perform actions within the fictional space through gameplay and are rewarded for the completion of quests. Heroic Epic references also give power status to the items (Section 5.2.4) and monsters (Section 5.2.3) that populate the gameworld. Named items and monsters with narrative backgrounds are more powerful than their generic counterparts. Not

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only do they make reference to Heroic tales through their names and background but also through their very existence in the game.

Characterization was also shown to be linked to the chronotopic configuration as a whole. While both WRPGs share the archetypal thrust towards more Epic archetypal meaning in their narrative and characters that emulate Old English and Old Norse Heroic Epic tales, as well as Chivalric Romance, their chronotopic configurations lead to very different levels of characterization. The hero figure (Section 5.2.1), by being brought to the proximity of the present, cannot be the complete Hero archetype but rather becomes more akin to the hero-to-be of Fantasy. However, the sense of predestination generated by varying chronotopic flows of the different layers of narrative leads the player-character to become the-hero-that-will-be, as their role is already decided and is only waiting the player's performance to come to pass. *Skyrim*'s player protagonist serves as a blank slate for the player to project themselves into and, as such, is closer to the hero archetype than *DAO*'s more rounded protagonists with their own different backstories. In *DAO*, the personality of the player-character is determined by a combination of the developers' and players' choices as the player selects from predetermined dialogue options to react to the narrative. However, in both games the player-character is in a constant movement towards becoming the Epic hero, which also translates into gameplay as the character gains more and more power and mastery as play progresses.

The characterization of NPCs (Section 5.2.2) and secondary playable characters is also determined by the different chronotopic configurations, especially through their spatial positioning and movement in the game world. Static characters have their interaction with the constantly moving player-character diminished and thus demonstrate flat personalities performing more as narrative functions and being closer to archetypes, such as the guide figures often found in the Heroic Epic and Fantasy. This is especially true of *Skyrim* as the vast open world and greater player freedom of movement, coupled with the blank slate protagonist, leave little room for deep characterization. NPCs thus gain most of the narrative meaning through the dialogical relationship with Heroic Epic and Fantasy narratives. *DAO,* however, can demonstrate more rounded characterization akin to that of characters in the Novel due to its more limited space and the presence of secondary characters that join the protagonist's party, moving around the gameworld in conjunction with the hero. NPCs

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outside the party and main narrative as a whole, however, remain bound to their spatial positioning which determine their function and personalities with some showing only caricature-like simple personality traits.

6.3 Limitations of this study

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of this study is the the number of works considered for investigation. Although there are numerous and varied WRPGs published, I have decided to consider only two of the relatively recent, most popular, and critically acclaimed games in the genre. The advantage of this is that a closer and more detailed analysis could be carried out. On the other hand, this excluded a number of other games that could provide some basis for contrasting and enlarging the scope of the investigation. This is true not only in terms of quantity but also in the nature of the games; a look at some independently developed games that more or less fall in the category of WRPG, such as *The Banner Saga* would have provided some material to consider the extent to which the features observed in the two mainstream games developed by big studios with access to cutting edge technology can also be observed in games of the same genre created by developers in the independent section of the industry.

The analysis of a large number of literary works, possibly including the whole text of the *Volsung Saga* and more recent works of Fantasy beyond Tolkien that have been experimenting with the boundaries between Fantasy and the Realistic Novel, such as Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, could have also enlarged the scope of this study. However, due to word count and time limitations, a decision had to be made regarding how much could be achieved in a single study. Nonetheless, this is an aspect that would deserve further consideration in the future.

6.4 Relevance, implications, and further research

A deeper understanding of how chronotope and intertextual material can influence narrative and the generation of meaning can potentially help game developers better enrich the game fiction and give further meaning to gameplay action. Such understanding may help developers design game features in ways that lead players' expectations concerning the gameplay and narrative development by providing orientation within the game world, and

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limiting ludonarrative dissonance through the understanding of the movement of the different layers of the chronotopic flow.

For scholars in the field of game studies, the Bakhtinian informed investigation of time and space in WRPGs carried out here may serve as a springboard for deeper understanding of the perception/experience of time and space in the medium of video games as a whole and in other video game genres. Bakhtinian chronotope may also be applied by researchers who seek to understand the relationships between time and space and the formal structures already categorized in other studies. Moreover, the investigation of the influence of intertextual material on video game narratives through dialogical lenses can hopefully better encompass the ever evolving nature of cultural perceptions associated with narrative tropes and imagery that are often found in the medium as well as the narrative value and interpretational effect of different gameplay systems. Lastly, the use of chronotope together with the core concept of distancing may help researchers to better understand the complex event of player engagement and narrative immersion in video games in general.

There are a number of possibilities for further research that could use the material and ideas presented in this study. In the field of literary research, the sharpening of the chronotope into different layers and stages/sections (awareness, transportation, and flow) coupled with the understanding of narratives in new media could be of use for any researcher interested in the time and space dimension of narratives as well as the constant dialogue between old and new stories and forms of storytelling.

In the field of game studies, the understanding of distancing, chronotope, and the dialogical intertextual relationships between Old English and Old Norse Heroic Epic, Fantasy, and WRPGs could be extended to older Fantasy WRPGs, such as the acclaimed *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights* and also newer titles, such as *Dragon Age Inquisition* and *The Witcher 3*. It could also be extended to the relationships between other literary genres and games, such as Greek Heroic Epic and adventure games like *God of War,* or Science Fiction and WRPGs like *Mass Effect* and *Deus Ex*. It could be applied to investigations of the relationships between film and games, such as Film Noir and games like *L.A. Noire* and *Max Payne,* or the 1980s action hero movies and games like the *Uncharted* series and *Tomb Raider*. Investigations on the relationships between WRPGs and JRPGs, such as *Dragon Quest*, would also be welcome. Besides that, other Bakhtinian concepts, such as heteroglossia

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and the carnivalesque, could be explored in relation to gameplay, multiplayer interaction, and paidia.

6.5 Dissemination

Some aspects discussed in this investigation have already been published in related journals. The chronotopic relationships between the Heroic Epic and Fantasy is the subject of an article published in the *British Fantasy Society Journal* (Lima, 2016) whereas a discussion of the hero in Quest Fantasy is the subject of an article published in a journal dedicated to Fantasy research (Lima, 2017). An article on the chronotope analysis of *Skyrim* and *DAO*, which constitutes the core of this investigation, is under preparation for submission to relevant journals. The other findings and further considerations on this study will be submitted to relevant academic publications in the field of game studies and literary studies, as well as presented in conferences.

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