Video Game Adaptations of Literary Works

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Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009.
Keogh, Brendan. Killing Is Harmless: A Critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line. Adelaide:
Stolen Projects, 2012.
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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zaměřuje na videoherní adaptace literárních děl britských a amerických autorů. Uváděná teorie se věnuje pojmu adaptace, adaptujícímu a cílovému publiku. Byla vybrána díla *Srdce Temnoty* (Heart of Darkness, 1899) Josepha Conrada, *Alenka v říši divů* (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, 1865) Lewise Carrolla a *Nemám ústa a musím křičet* (I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream, 1967) Harlana Ellisona a příslušné videoherní adaptace. Literární díla a jejich adaptace jsou zasazena do kontextu a srovnávána z hlediska naratologického a témátického. Práce dochází k závěru, že se adaptacím daří zachovat ceněné aspekty originálů použitím podobného vyprávění a témat.

Klíčová slova:

Videohra, adaptace, publikum, originální text, vyprávění, téma

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on video game adaptations of literary works of British and American authors. Presented theory deals with the terms "adaptation", "adapter" and "target audience". Selected works are Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* (1967) and corresponding video game adaptations. Literary works and their adaptations are contextualized and their narrative and themes are compared. The thesis concludes that adaptations succeed in maintaining some of the valued aspects of the original texts by using similar narrative and themes.

Keywords:

Video game, adaptation, audience, original text, narrative, theme

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Video games are one of the youngest media forms and the one going through most changes lately. Janet Murray ponders in her book *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1997) what creation of a new medium invokes:

> The birth of a new medium of communication is both exhilarating and frightening. Any industrial technology that dramatically extends our capabilities also makes us uneasy by challenging our concept of humanity itself. … The boat, car, and airplane are seemingly magical extensions of our arms and legs; the telephone extends our voices; and the book our memory. The computer of 1990s, with its ability to transport us to virtual place, … combines aspects of all of these.[1]

Video games are not yet exhilarating and frightening most of society, but they are getting closer and closer. Evolving from simple toys using only reflexes, through the era of arcade cabinets whose main purpose was to draw out most quarters out of their players they reached their position today. That is position in which they can compete with more traditional media forms such as film or music industry and often overshadow them completely in popularity or in revenue.

As videogames get more successful and accepted by society the quality of their narrative increases as well. Even though average videogame story is still on the level of action or B movie few groundbreaking stories appeared in the last years with strong authorial voice and attempts to invoke wider range of emotions and thoughts from their players. Hand in hand with this goes establishment of independent community of game creators that allows for much more personal stories to be created from points of view not represented in the big budget world. People of all ages, race, gender and sexual orientation can express themselves by creating an interactive story or world and show for example how they dealt with depression or childhood abuse and maybe hopefully help someone dealing with similar issues. This of course has bigger cultural importance than traditional escapism of war simulations and fantastical role-playing.

One of the ways game creators try to deal with the lack of good writing is adapting. There are plenty of adaptations of films whose main purpose for existence is capitalizing on the popularity of adapted brand and earning more money. Mostly these adaptations do not receive positive critical reception. Occasionally a book is chosen as the basis of

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[1] See Janet Horowitz Murray, *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 1.

videogame story and although rarer these adaptations are more fitting for analysis as the main reason for choosing them is not popularity, but an attempt to show situations, characters or motives in a new interactive way, to transfer the well-loved and well-known classics to new medium and new audience.

The focus of this thesis is to analyze three such videogame adaptations of literary works from American and British authors and to prove that they manage to maintain some of the valued aspects of the original texts through similar narrative and shared themes. The games are analyzed in chronological order. The first is *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* (The Dreamers Guild, 1995) based on short story of the same name by Harlan Ellison, who also co-designed the game. Second is *American McGee's Alice* (Rogue Entertainment, 2000) darker adaptation of *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll. Third and last is *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager Devepment, 2012) adapting story elements from short novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad. Each of them is different genre and also different approach of adapting the original material and each of them represents the time in which it was created.

The term video game used in this thesis means any form of interactive experience played on a personal computer or game console in which player or players control it by giving input mostly using keyboard, mouse or game controller. The *Oxford Dictionary* offers definition:

> A game played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a monitor or other display.[2]

Genres of selected games are also used in this thesis and to avoid confusion here are their explanations. Shooter is an action game simulating warfare or any kind of armed conflict, main interaction is shooting a gun and killing enemies and it uses player's reflexes and reaction time. Adventure game revolves around exploration, dialogues with characters, collecting and combining items and solving puzzles, it is story-driven and because of that uses narrative techniques similar to film and literature. Video games falling into genre platformer are about using jumping, timing and dexterity to navigate virtual world and overcome obstacles, popularity of this genre is on a decline as video games get more complex.

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[2]"Oxford English Dictionary," Oxford University Press, accessed March 28, 2014,
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/video-game.

1 BASIC PROBLEMS OF ADAPTATIONS

We all are experiencing adaptations whether we are aware of it or not. In world where original ideas are seemingly scarce and words like prequel, sequel, remake and reboot are used on daily bases it is no surprise creators often choose to rework known stories and put their own spin on them. Self-evidence of this is the creation of films about the process of adaptation itself such as *Adaptation* (Dir. Spike Jonze, 2002) and *Lost in La Mancha* (Dir. Terry Gilliam, 2002).[3] In this chapter I will explain how the term adaptation is used in this thesis, the role of adapter and importance of audience.

1.1 Term Adaptation

> To adapt means to transpose from one medium to another. It is the ability to make fit or suitable changing, or adjusting. Modifying something to create a change in structure, function, and form, which produces a better adjustment.[4]

This is a definition of adaptation given to students learning to write screenplays but it also works well in this thesis. As it suggests adaptation is transformation from one medium by modifying what is necessary to fit the new medium. Nowadays it is common for large cultural brands to span across plenty different media like *Star Wars* films, cartoons, novels, comic books, video games and to rehash or enhance favorite stories.[5]

There is perception of adaptations to modern popular media being something derivative and of lower quality. How often have you heard from a reader that film adaptation of his favorite book was subpar? However it is acceptable to adapt classics for opera or ballet but when they are transformed to mainstream film they are looked upon more harshly. Maybe this stigma will pass in a time as new media and means of adaptations arise, but most likely it will take few decades.

1.2 Adapter

The question of identity of the adapter is simple when discussing literary works, as they have clearly stated author whose sole artistic vision covers the whole work. When a song is covered by single singer/songwriter it is also clear, but when it is adapted in a musical is

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[3] See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*. (London: Routledge, 2006), 2
[4] "The Art of Adaptation", The Writing Studio, accessed March 17, 2014,
http://www.writingstudio.co.za/page62.html
[5] See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 173.

the adapter conductor, director, musician or dancer? It gets even more convoluted when discussing movies and television shows. The production team on these endeavors comprises of tenths or hundreds of people of markedly different roles all working together towards one possibly whole work of art. In case of adaption of literary work most would say the screenwriter is most important. But nowadays film screenplays get rewritten and changed so many times there are films with ten or more screenwriters in the credits. Who would be the adapter? Is it the composer making music to complement the story? Is it the editor who, although often overlooked, gives the final film its tempo and form? Is it the actor portraying well known character and thus adding his own knowledge and point of view into his performance? All of them are essential but even though they can improve the final film with their craft they all adhere to directions of the director. He is most commonly seen as the adapter in case of film adaptations.[6]

The position of adapter of video games is the most complicated. As a result of the relative youth of the medium and its focus on technology there is lack of personalities with unique creative vision and most games are simply known as a product of a studio. Of course there are few outspoken personas known and respected in the community such as Ken Levine creator of *Bioshock* series, David Cage French pioneer of more mature storytelling in games, Will Wright responsible for immensely popular *Sims* series or Shigeru Miyamoto man behind Mario, but they are few and far between.

In the context of video games, in their early history the creative process was mainly centered round one person. As games got gradually more complex and complicated so did the teams creating them. They grew from one person programming a game in his garage to multinational companies having studios spanning different continents. For example critically acclaimed *Grand Theft Auto 5*, the biggest hit of 2013 and fastest selling entertainment product in history,[7] was made by more than one thousand people in studios in United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Scotland and Japan.

Between the three selected video game adaptations in this thesis three completely different cases of adapter role can be observed. *American McGee's Alice* is one of the rare examples of one strong personality leading the development, in this case American McGee,

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[6] See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 80 – 82.
[7] Andrew Goldfarb, "GTA 5 Sales Hit $1 Billion in Three Days", IGN, accessed January 18, 2014, http://www.ign.com/articles/2013/09/20/gta-5-sales-hit-1-billion-in-three-days.

hence the role of adapter will be clearly attributed to him. On the other hand the creation of *Spec Ops: The Line* was riddled with problems, one studio working on it was closed and creative leads changed few times during the development so it is impossible to choose one person as the adapter. Lastly the game *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* is an exemption to all the rules as the author of the original short story Harlan Ellison wrote also the story and dialogues of the game and also voiced one of the characters. As far as I know this is the only one such video game adaptation of literary work.

1.3   Audience

Audience is certainly crucial aspect to consider when making an adaptation. It will determine financial success as well as critical reception. This is where two different approaches to adapting collide. One approach is to concentrate you adaptation on audience already familiar with the original text, utilizing their knowledge to avoid unnecessary explanations and simplification. This will help you get on the good side of critics (assuming they know the adapted text) and more favorable reception from fans of the original. However it may decrease the potential of success with mainstream audience that often does not have the same patience and willingness to engage complex story arcs.[8]

Second approach is used when adapter's goal is to find as broad audience as possible and/or to earn as much money. Everyone is familiar with this as most film or video game adaptations choose this route often taking only the basic structure of the story and characters and adjusting the rest to the needs of mainstream audience at the time. It can lead to enormous box office results and millions of satisfied customers, but critics rarely applaud this approach and neither do die-hard fans of the original. One important addition is that adapters can choose this style when their goal is to educate and thus appeal to as wide range of students possible. [9]

The great example of this disparity is critical and fan reception of *Lord of the Ring* and *The Hobbit* movie series both directed by Peter Jackson. While filming *Lord of the Rings* Jackson said he wanted to stay close to the books and deviate as little as possible. The films were long, complicated with intertwining storylines and plenty of characters but the audience and critics loved them and all three films had score between 91% and 96% on

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[8] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 91 – 92.
[9] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 86 – 88.

Rotten Tomatoes, which is a website aggregating film reviews. The book Hobbit offers much shorter and simpler story, so when its film adaptation was announced to be stretched into three films fans were skeptical. This time Jackson made looser adaptation, adding action scenes and characters and the critical and fan reception reflected it. Two currently released films *An Unexpected Journey* (2012) and *The Desolation of Smaug* (2013) were massive commercial hits but fans of Tolkien's book did not enjoy them and their aggregate review score fell to 65% and 75% respectively.[10]

What all three selected video game adaptation have in common is that their target audience are adults. All three received rating suggesting they should be played by people of age seventeen or older. This may seem counter-productive to the success of the games based on preconceived notion that video games are played mostly by children or young adults, but the opposite is truth. Study conducted in 2014 by Entertainment Software Association shows that average age of video game player is thirty-one years old and thirty-nine percent of them being actually older than thirty-six years. The same study crushes other preconceived notion that games are mostly hobby for men as forty-eight percent of gamers are women.

Because at the time of release of *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* video games were not as mainstream medium as today, its audience was typical computer player who was more than likely aware or even fan of science-fiction literature. Adventure games that have become today a niche genre were at their height of popularity in 1990s and moved from earlier kids oriented feel good stories to grittier psychological and horror themes. All of this coincided in great reception for the game both from critics and players and ensured its place as a classic of the genre.

Main allure of *Alice in Wonderland* was Alice's humorous and nonsensical adventure which fitted perfectly to Liddell sisters, its original audience. Humor is rarely translated well into video games and that may be one of the reasons why American McGee decided to change his version of Alice into darker gloomy portrayal of Wonderland. Hand-in-hand with change of tone goes change of content of the game. The more literal adaptation would suggest adapting into playful adventure with dialogues and exploration, but dangerous version of Wonderland filled with enemies makes sense if the main activity in the game is

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[10] Rotten Tomatoes, Accessed March 12, 2014, http://www.rottentomatoes.com/

combat and overcoming obstacles. *American McGee's Alice* was received well by its intended audience as most players and reviewers knew Alice's story and enjoyed playing it themselves in new altered version.

Deciding who was meant as a target audience for *Spec Ops: The Line* was the most difficult for me. Its clever critique of genre it is part of means that most players choosing to buy and play this title will not likely acknowledge its hidden depth and message. Simultaneously more intellectual players who would appreciate it do not often play military shooters. This is one of the reasons why this "hidden gem" did not receive all the recognition it in my eyes deserves. It may be far ahead of its time, but only by having groundbreaking titles like this one can whole medium advance forward.

2   SELECTION OF THREE LITERARY WORKS FROM ANGLOPHONE LITERATURES AND THEIR VIDEO GAME ADAPTATIONS

The main motivation for writing this thesis was life-long interest in computer and video games and maturation of their stories and themes as of late. But the turning point occurred when I heard of and then had the pleasure of experiencing the story and hardships of Captain Martin Walker in *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager Development 2012). This daring experiment commenting on society's obsession with killing and warfare in films and games widened my expectation of what transformative experience interactive story can be. Moreover it did so cleverly under the guise of one such typical shooter which only increases the importance of its creation and is one of the reasons why it is the first video game in history that prompted writing of critical thesis about it called *Killing is Harmless: A Critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line* (2013) by Brendan Keogh.

Additionally it inspired me to read the original short novel it loosely adapts *Heart of Darkness* (1899) by Joseph Conrad and to watch another retelling of this story in film *Apocalypse Now* (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979). This impulse was shared by many other players thus reigniting interest in these highly valued classics and educating them a little in the process. It provides unparalleled chance of digesting one story in three distinct forms created in three different eras of our history.

On the other hand *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) commonly shortened to *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll is continually popular novel whose adaptations do not need to remind anyone about its quality but rather use it to further their own success. Some of the characters and scenes have become part of popular culture and there were so many version of Alice's story in films, comics and games that creators of new adaptations feel the need to distinguish theirs from the rest.

That is the case of video game *American McGee's Alice* (Rogue Entertainment, 2000) which similarly to the latest film version by Tim Burton shows bleaker world behind the rabbit hole, with aspects of horror and implications of Alice's mental illness creating the whole adventure in her head. Although the game exchanges the playfulness of the original text with fighting and platforming it was a success and sequel *Alice: Madness Returns* (Spicy Horse, 2011) was published deviating even more from the story and world of the original.

Lastly the video game *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* (The Dreamers Guild, 1995) adapting the short story of the same name by Harlan Ellison published in 1967 has one unique trait none other video game adaptations of literary works share. It is the fact the author himself participated in creation of this game, he wrote dialogues and even voiced the ominous villain of the story supercomputer AM. This is even more apparent with the alternative ending penned by the author himself that allows the player to experience little less drastic final moments for the characters. Because of the lesser popularity of this short story (at least in the demographic of players) and high critical acclaim of the game it is very possible that it exposed the author and his work to new readers who would never come across it otherwise.

By all means there are plenty other examples of video game adaptations of British and American authors and some of them are interesting to analyze but none present as complex case nor were they so important at the time of their release as the three above. Few notable examples are adventure game series starting with *Discworld* (Teeny Weeny Games, 1995) adapting books by Terry Prattchet, strategy game *Dune* (Cryo Interactive, 1992) based on science fiction novel of the same name by Frank Herbert from 1965 and couple of detective adventures revolving around Sherlock Holmes. Also worth mentioning are older games borrowing the setting or story from unlikely sources such as *The Great Gatsby* (Barbarian Group, 1982) or *The Godfather: The Action Game* (Creative Materials, 1992). These were only simple playthings though not attempting to capture the greatness of the original texts.

3   CONTEXT OF SELECTED LITERARY WORKS AND VIDEO GAMES

3.1   Context and history of selected video games

To properly contextualize selected video games it is necessary to outline their history and the evolution of narrative in this medium. Video games first started as an amusing innovation. Maybe the earliest prototype of video game was called "Cathode Ray Tube Amusement Device" and was created in 1948. It let the person controlling it move a light dot around a screen. As the name shows, its goal was to amuse. In the 1961 first prototype of game on actual computer called *Spacewar* (Steve Russell, 1961) was created and spread throughout laboratories and universities across United States. It still could not be widely distributed to public as the hardware it needed to function cost hundreds of thousands dollars.

With the cost of computers steadily decreasing 1970s gave birth to both forms in which video games would grow in next decades – *Computer Space* (Nutting Associtates, 1971) was the first arcade cabinet ever released and Magnavox's Odyssey from 1972 the first home video game system. Both were not that successful and would not start the revolution that followed if it were not for Atari and their *Pong* (1972). It is very straightforward game simulating table tennis but despite the simplicity it was very popular selling 19 000 arcade machines and three years later also 150 000 home versions. Following its success were some of the most renowned games to date such as *Asteroids* (Atari Inc., 1979), *Space Invaders* (Taito Corporation, 1978) and *Pac-Man* (Namco, 1980) inspired by missing piece of pizza. They kept the simple formula, but added some introduction to the story or setting, usually in form of one screen of text in the beginning or description on the arcade cabinet itself.

In year 1982 the arcade video game industry grossed more (8 billion dollars) than film and music industries combined (7 billion dollars). It was the peak of popularity with video games and their characters permeating into comic books, songs and television shows and establishing themselves as big part of popular culture. In the middle of 1980s the arcade market collapsed in what is now called "Video game crash of 1983", many companies went bankrupt and some saw this as the end to the fad. On the contrary video games grew in popularity but moved to personal computers for few years and it actually helped the development of storytelling as it was possible to program games for those who had the

skills on their own. The best examples of focus on narrative are text-based adventures like *Zork* (Infocom, 1983) and adaptations of literary works *The Hobbit* (Beam Software, 1982) and *The Hitchhiker's Gude to the Galaxy* (Infocom, 1984). These are the closest possible adaptations, because they contain little to no graphics and thus present the original story in interactive way, allowing players imagination to create what hardware of that time was not capable to do.

In late 1980s and 1990s home video game systems from companies Sony, Nintendo and Sega came to prominence and with better technology came hand in hand possibility to create more cinematic experiences with stronger focus on narrative than ever before. For example Japanese role playing series *Final Fantasy* (Square) has kept mostly the same game mechanics for number of their titles instead focusing on telling different stories with different characters that dealt with topics unusual for video games such as politics, family values and race.

While on consoles the most popular genres were racing, shooters, platformers and sport simulations, altogether based more on game mechanics than narrative, personal computers were more advanced with more mature audience and themes. In the 1990s the genre of graphic adventure games that started with colorful stories for all ages involving pirates, knights and spaceships expanded into branch clearly meant for adults. These titles incorporated horror elements and real live acting together with themes of gruesome violence and sexuality. Among others to this wave belong *Dark Seed* (Cyberdreams, 1992), *Harvester* (DigiFX Interactive, 1996), *Phantasmagoria* (Sierra On-Line, 1995) and *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* (The Dreamers Guild, 1995).

I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream's author Harlan Ellison was not a fan of video games, but he was interested by the offer to convert one of his works to interactive version and by the creative challenge this would be for him. In order to keep the depressing atmosphere of the original story he wanted to create a game that was impossible to win, only lose in more or less humane way according to what moral and ethical choices the player had made. The game was praised by the critics for its mature content and realistic portrayal of ethical issues and it was censored in German and France and only allowed to be sold to adults.

> From the disturbing story line to the difficult decisions you face, *I Have No Mouth* isn't intended as a comfortable afternoon of gaming. It'd be hard to recommend, if not for those moments of depth that nag at the subconscious and resonate long after the game is finished.[11]

One of the technical innovations that affected the narrative possibilities of games was the transformation from two-dimensional to three-dimensional graphics. It allowed building of much more complex worlds that can be visited and investigated by the player rather than previous mostly hand drawn images these could be whole cities, countries or continents to be immersed in. A new genre on massively multiplayer online games emerged from this change allowing hundreds or thousands of people to share their adventures in fantastical worlds, to found virtual cities, form societies and fight each other. The first notable one was *EverQuest* (Sony Online Entertainment, 1999) but the most important synonymous with online gaming is *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) having at the height of its popularity eleven million paying subscribers.

New 3D graphics did not enrich only online games, but enhanced the story driven single-player experiences as well. This is well illustrated by *American McGee's Alice* (Rogue Entertainment, 2000) an adaptation and continuation of the novels by Lewis Carroll. Game's story revolves around our heroine Alice's descend into madness after witnessing her family dying in fire of their home and while being treated in insane asylum she visits Wonderland once more, but this time it is dark twisted version of the formerly colorful place. From mechanical point of view it is third-person action game including horror elements with platforming sequences. It has been rated Mature by the ESRB, which means the game generally suitable for age 17 and up and it may contain intense violence, blood and gore. The game received average Metacritic rating of 85% with most critics celebrating its visuals and grim version of well-known characters.

Literary critic Cathlena Martin argues that this adaptation is a good fit, because the original novels revolve around games like chess and cards and she also says that the game

> … provides a reinterpreted version of Alice and the whole of wonderland that may have some players questioning which aspects are from Carroll and which are from McGee, thus potentially

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[11] Liam McDonald, PC Gamer Online, accessed March 14, 2014, http://web.archive.org/web/19991222073058/http://www.pcgamer.com/reviews/548.html.

leading to a rereading of Carroll through the darker lens of McGee's Alice. This reinterpretation of Alice shows the versatility and mutability of the story across time and discourse. [12]

Nowadays storytelling in videogames uses techniques similar to films. The most prevalent of these is the use of cut scenes, which are cinematics ranging in length from few seconds to twenty minutes that have the player watch them like a movie and not interact with them. Nonetheless the trend in last years has been to make the cut scenes interactive experience at least a little bit, including prompts for the player in some scenes, while the game seems to be in cinematic mode. *Metal Gear Solid 4* (Kojima Productions, 2008) has great example of this in flashback scene where our old and wounded hero Solid Snake crawls through dangerous tunnel and the player helps him to avoid deadly walls and obstacles while cinematic camera angles change and dramatic scenes happening to other characters simultaneously are cut in.

Other form of modern narrative in video games is implicit narrative which is used fully in the game *Portal* (Valve Corporation, 2007). In *Portal* the main character wakes up in unknown complex without any recollection of why she is there and the player is thrust into game play without any knowledge. He learns about the setting and story continuously throughout the interaction with his surrounding and conversation with the only other character computer GLaDOS. This is similar to how we learn and gain knowledge in reality and thus creates much more lifelike experience. As video games mature the fidelity of graphics and visuals will be less important but the way they emulate the interactions between player characters and their environment will grow in importance.

Great example of increasing quality of narrative in video games is *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager Development 2012). As an eleventh release in Spec Ops series (although meant as a reboot as the previous entry *Spec Ops: Airborne Commando* was released ten years prior) and game with troubled development nobody really expected much from it. Definitely not the thought-provoking, innovative and unique work of art it ended up being. This was only intensified by all the preview coverage showing pretty but very traditional third-person shooter. The developer team stated they have higher ambition concerning story with inspiration from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), but that seemed more like traditional promotion than real promise. But they delivered.

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[12] See Phyllis Frus and Christy Williams, *Beyond Adaptation: Essays on Radical Transformations of Original Works in English*, (Jefferson: McFarland and Co., 2010), 136-137.

In this game you control Captain Martin Walker who leads a three man Delta Force team into Dubai after it was struck by devastating sand storm and all communication with the city was lost. Fictitious 33rd Infantry Battalion of the United States Army elected to stay behind in the city and help with evacuation but failed to do so and now it seems they rule the ruins by declaration of martial law. Our "heroes" (and the term should be used lightly in the context of this game) embark on their bloody and destructive quest through Dubai getting into firefights with locals and American soldiers alike, uncovering atrocities that happened before and doing some terrible deeds themselves.

This all makes the player question orders and morality, later even sanity of our main character and by extension it raises questions about the genre of military shooters, about meaninglessness of armed conflicts and horrible cruelty of mankind. By the end you really are not sure who should you be fighting and why, but you know that you as the player have made some terrible choices (as there are no good ones) and that Captain Walker gradually lost his grip on reality justifying the appalling acts he committed by delusions of seeing and hearing things that are not happening.

It is normal for video games to have moral choices. Mostly it boils down to choosing the heroic or evil option, the difference is obvious, you have some sort of slider showing your "karmic points" and it influences your missions and the ending. The brilliance of *Spec Ops: The Line* is that the choices the game gives are never black and white but mostly gray and often very grim. One example is when you come across execution of American soldiers by local forces and you can choose to interfere and face large group of enemies without any certainty of saving the soldiers or you can let them die and quickly progress towards your objective. Another instance focuses more on how much have you as the player embraced the craziness you see on the screen. There is a scene in which your helicopter crashes and before you regain consciousness angry mob gets hold of one of your subordinate soldiers (with whom you have been at this point through thick and thin) and lynches him before you can do anything. Your only desperate choice is to aim the gun above the crowd or straight at them when firing so they disperse.

Spec Ops: The Line received positive but not fantastic review scores with its Metacritic rating being 77 out of hundred.[13] Most critics praised the game's narrative, themes and innovative approach towards violence but also criticized the run-of-the-mill gameplay and typical mechanics of shooting and hiding behind cover. It is arguable that this was the intent of developer team in an effort to make the shooting gameplay players are so much used to uncomfortable and tedious to underline their overall message, but only part of reviewers agree with this. Mitch Dryer from IGN in his review says:

> Spec Ops isn't about a war, protecting the world, or defeating some evil threat -- it's about you, the effects of your actions, and events that are out of your control. The sum of Spec Ops' unexpected story is an army shooter that makes killing people mean something. This, along with its thoughtful aesthetic and intelligent enemy encounters, defies the standard established by low-aiming action games.[14]

The proverbial line can be interpreted in few ways – what is the line between good and evil, between sanity and insanity, between means and their end or what is the line between the player and the character he controls?[15] The fact that this game allows for meaningful interpretations for anyone spending his time with it should be celebrated as it is still a novelty in video games.

3.2 Context of selected literary works

Lewis Carroll created an imaginative world full of memorable characters in his novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published in 1865. Inspired by daughter of his friend Alice Liddell he told her and her two sisters story about girl named Alice and her adventures after falling down the rabbit hole on boat trip on July 4th 1862. Girls loved the story so much they asked him to write it down and after telling the story to other children and seeing their great reception he started working on a manuscript, which he gave under the name *Alice's Adventure Under Ground* to Alice Liddell as a Christmas gift in 1864.

The novel was published in 1865 and it tells story of seven year old Alice who follows a white rabbit down a rabbit hole where she discovers mystical world of Wonderland. She

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[13] "Spec Ops: The Line for Playstation 3 Reviews – Metacritic", Metacritic, accesed April 4, 2014, http://www.metacritic.com/game/playstation-3/spec-ops-the-line.

[14] Mitch Dyer, "Spec Ops: The Line Review", IGN, accesed March 24, 2014, http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/06/26/spec-ops-the-line-review.

[15] Mitch Dyer, "Spec Ops: The Line Review", IGN, http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/06/26/spec-ops-the-line-review.

meets colorful group of characters and experiences nonsensical adventures with them. After the book was commercial success Carroll published *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* in 1971, continuation of Alice's adventure this time centered round chess game.

Two novels about Alice are one of the most popular sources for adaptation in our culture with new ones appearing in one form or another practically every year. Just to name a few of the most significant adaptations of recent years: the trilogy of novels *The Looking Glass Wars*, *Seeing Redd* and *ArchEnemy* written by American author Frank Beddor playing with the notion that original two novels were only edited version of what actually happened, television show *Alice* (Dir. Nick Willing, 2009) reimagining the story 150 year later with science-fiction elements, Tim Burton's Disney film *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) showing older Alice returning to Wonderland and couple of video game adaptations from the mind of American McGee mentioned above.

Joseph Condrad is regarded as one the best British writers of the turn of 20th century and he was not even actually British. Born in Polish Ukraine under Russian rule he moved very often during his childhood as his father was politic activist who later got exiled to Siberia. Joseph travelled to Marseilles at the age of seventeen where he started working as a sailor. After serving on British ship for eight years and learning English in his twenties he became British citizen. In 1889 he discovered his fascination with writing, started working on his first novel *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and started trying to accomplish his childhood dream of sailing to Congo. He succeeded and commanded Belgian steamship into heart of Congo. His experience during this travel was the basis for his literary works and mainly for his most famous novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). The author himself describes the book in his correspondence as :

> A wild story of a journalist who becomes manager of a station in the (African) interior and makes himself worshipped by a tribe of savages. Thus described, the subject seems comic, but it isn't.[16]

The novel tells the story of sailor Charles Marlow and his expedition on the Congo River with the goal of trading so much desired ivory and later meeting glorified Kurtz. Our main protagonists is surprised at how civilized Europeans treat and oppress native Africans and what cult of personality can one madman build. This critique of imperialism at the time

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[16] See Frederick Karl and Laurence Davies, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad, Vol. 2*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 407.

when Europeans controlled large parts of the world shows how human nature changes towards darkness when it is allowed to come to light outside of traditional rules and norms of society.

Even though the book meant as a critical view of Imperialism at the time of its publishing it was not received as such. Maybe the fact that Marlow work for Belgian company helped British readers not to see themselves in *Heart of Darkness*. One century later it is one of the most analyzed literary works possibly thanks to its ambiguity and the extent of existential topics touched upon. It was used as a basis for highly acclaimed film *Apocalypse Now* (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) and also loosely adapted in video game *Spec Ops: The Line* (Yager Development, 2012). In 1975 the novel was the center of controversy when Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe gave a lecture *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* in which he called Conrad racist dehumanizing Africans and reducing them to dangerous savages. After the lecture was published in essay form it became fundamental work of literature for African people.[17]

The post-apocalyptic short story *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* (1967) was written by prolific author Harlan Ellison in one night in 1966. Inspired by a cartoon drawn by friend of his William Rotsler this science-fiction story with psychological and horror aspects quickly became fan favorite and won Hugo Award for Best Short Story in 1968.[18] It is one of the most printed stories in United Kingdom.

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[17] "Albert Chinualumogu Achebe", The Biography.com. Accesed April 2, 2014.
http://www.biography.com/people/chinua-achebe-20617665.
[18] "The Hugo Awards", Accessed 26 February 2014.
http://www.thehugoawards.org/hugo-history/1968-hugo-awards/.

4   NARRATOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC COMPARISON

4.1   Comparison of *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* short story and video game

Out of the three selected video games this is definitely the truest adaptation of the original text. Partly because the original story is actually quite short so the game needed to expand it and add background to its characters and world. The other very important reason why this is really truthful adaptation is that the author Harlan Ellison worked on the game, wrote dialogues and voiced the villain of the story.

The short story *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* is about last five surviving humans in a world where Cold war turned into World War III and United States, China and Russia developed supercomputers to fight the war for them. The supercomputers merge into one called AM, who gains sentience and possessed by hatred against humanity wipes it out. Without any apparent reason he saves four men and one woman and tortures them for his amusement for hundred and nine years. If our survivors get hurt or attempt to commit suicide, AM uses technology to heal them and only inflict more suffering on them. They are disfigured, starving and in various states of madness. AM promises them food if they can get into ice caves and after distressful journey they manage to get there only to find canned goods without any means of opening it. Fight breaks out and in a fit of rage out narrator Ted figures out loophole. AM can stop them from dying, but not bring them back from death. After this realization our main protagonist murders the other four and by doing it releases them from endless circle of hopeless suffering. His punishment from AM is being turned into pile of goo powerless to hurt himself and tortured for eternity.

> I am a great soft jelly thing. Smoothly rounded, with no mouth, with pulsing white holes filled by fog where my eyes used to be. Rubbery appendages that were once my arms; bulks rounding down into legless humps of soft slippery matter. I leave a moist trail when I move. Blotches of diseased, evil gray come and go on my surface, as though light is being beamed from within. … I have no mouth. And I must scream.[19]

The short story is only thirteen pages long and that would not suffice to create full fledge video game and because of that Ellison wrote backstory for each of the five characters. This is the main difference between the short story and video game, in the original text the

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[19] See Harlan Ellison, *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream.* (New York: E-Reads.com, 2009), 13.

narrator was Ted only one of the survivors, but in the game you get to play as every one of them. In the introduction sequence supercomputer AM has monologue about how much he hates mankind and challenges his five captives to play a game. Then player gets to choose in what order he will experience five stories of personalized mental abuse before the final scene with multiple but all depressive outcomes.

The characters are the core of this story and biggest addition to the video game as we learn much more about their personality, history and weaknesses.

> For most reader, characters are one of the most important aspects of a narrative. How readers relate to a character is a matter of empirical analysis, but it is important to bear in mind that the way the text present a character is highly influential on the relation between character and reader. [20]

In the original text only few sentences were used to describe each while in the game the player experiences tailor-made scenario by AM aimed at exploiting their biggest flaws and fears. For example Ted, main character and narrator of the original text, is in it only described in the youngest and least affected by AM.[21] In the game we learn he is paranoid liar and con artist, who has genuine feelings for Ellen and sees himself as her knight in shining armor. He is sent into medieval castle where he must defeat witches and wild animals to save Ellen.

All five of them are portrayed as flawed people but it still really does not explain why exactly these people were chosen out of billions to be AM's playthings. With one exception and that is Nimdok. It is only suggested in the short story that he is AM's favorite one without any further explanation. In the game we learn that he was Nazi scientist experimenting on people alongside Dr. Mengele. This is what connects him with the twisted artificial intelligence. Inclusion of this story caused censoring of the game in Germany and France and by mistake made it unfinishable.

Additions fill out nicely blanks in the story and do not really change it with the exception of the ending. During the simulations there are out of place elements (such as talking jackal) hinting at the possibility of everything not being as hopeless as it seems. In the last scene you discover that there is colony of frozen humans on the moon and that two absorbed supercomputers are still inside AM and are trying to help you sabotage it. According to what ethical choices player made during the game the outcome can be

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[20] See Peter Hühn et al., *Handbook of Narratology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 15.
[21] See Ellison, *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, 6.

identical to fate of Ted in the short story, but in the best possibility you destroy AM and start restoration of mankind.[22] However in typical Ellison's fashion you can never be sure whether the two remaining supercomputers are actually helping or will start again with the torture.

Themes are shared between the two versions almost universally. Meyer Howard Abrams explains theme in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2005) as :

> …the term is more usefully applied to a general concept or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader.[23]

The theme is understood as a tool potentially uniting different texts and grouping them.[24] Both are set in dystopian future with only slight difference in a fact that the short story is completely hopeless, but in the video game there is a little sliver of hope. The fact that humans themselves created the supercomputers that were their inevitable doom is emphasized. [25]

Both are about characters going through hell, only in the game there is more room to show it with each of them having solitary scene of psychological torture by the supercomputer. Player can also observe what effect this suffering has on each character as he spends substantial time with each, but the reader only knows first-hand of these effects on the narrator. One of Ellison's most common themes is man versus machine at it is represented very much in both the short story and video game. Furthermore the hatred in AM is caused by the flaws of people who engineered it.

4.2 Comparison of *American McGee's Alice* and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Narrative is essential part of every literary work. It is described by Meyer Howard Abrams as:

> … a story, whether told in prose or a verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do.[26]

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[22] See Ellison, *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, 13.
[23] See Meyer Howrd Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Boston: Thomson, 2005), 170.
[24] See Claude Bremond, "*Concept and Theme*" in *The Return of Thematic Criticism*, ed. Werner Sollors (Cambridge, MA:Harvard University Press, 1993), 46-52.
[25] See Ellison, *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream,* 10.
[26] See Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 173.

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) the narrative is connected with Alice's curiosity, her exploration of unknown world and clever conversations with numerous animals and persons. It also tied with nonsensical side of her adventures and humorous situation meant to entertain its young readers.

Many of modern adaptations including *American McGee's* Alice change the world to darker place with more mature themes, thus deviating from story of a childlike wonder and humor. Lighthearted story is exchanged for one in which Alice has bigger role in the fate of Wonderland, actually saving it from tyrannical rule of Queen of Hearts. This change is understandable as the nonsensical narrative would be difficult to adapt to linear film narrative or in this case non-linear video game narrative. It also provides better frame for what it the main content of the game, combat with enemies and platforming.

The original story roughly adopts the typical journey of a hero as Alice finds the entrance to Wonderland after falling down the rabbit hole. But from that point the sequence is changed as Alice has no distinct goal on her journey, she does not wish to leave Wonderland neither she wants to defeat the Queen of Hearts as is the case in *American McGee's Alice* and many other adaptations.

American McGee's Alice tells the fate of Alice after two adventures described in novels. The main character Alice Liddell (referencing daughter of Carroll's friend who was an inspiration for Alice in the first novel) loses her parents and sister in house fire and attempts to commit suicide. She is sent to mental hospital where she remained ten years. The White Rabbit appears to her one night and explains to her that she must return to deformed Wonderland and dethrone evil Queen of Hearts. Alice learns later that the state of Wonderland is connected to her mental health and by defeating the Queen maybe she could regain her sanity as well. When she manages to do so Wonderland and its citizens turn back to their original positive forms and Alice leaves the insane asylum.

Most characters in the game are close representations of their literary originals, but some are changed to better fit the story. The Cheshire Cat is Alice's guide to altered Wonderland, giving her advice and speaking in riddles and sometimes saying nonsensical sentences. The Queen of Hearts is vicious oppressor ruling Wonderland by fear. Near the end of the game Alice learns that she is basically manifestation of Alice's insanity, guilt and anger and that is why when defeated Alice gets better in the real world.

Narrative mode of the book is third-person and that is well reflected in type of view used in the video game which is also third person. This means that player sees the protagonist in center of the screen constantly as he controls her through the world.

There are three main themes shared by the original novel and its video game adaptation. First is loss of innocence and growing up. Many times during her adventure Alice changes size of her body which leads to her frustration. In Chapter 1 she grows and shrinks and becomes sad because she cannot enter the door.[27] In Chapter 5 her neck grows rapidly and she loses control of it.[28] These changes may represent feelings of a child going through puberty, when its body changes shapes and size too and it makes him or her feel uneasy and embarrassed same as does Alice.

In *American McGee's Alice* these changes of size are used much more mechanically as a means of solving puzzles and navigating through the game. Discomfort is omitted but it is also because Alice in the game is ten years older than in the books and most likely had already gone through puberty. On the other hand the loss of innocence is presented in Alice's struggle to deal with her survivor's guilt and overcoming her negative emotions incarnated in the Queen of Hearts. After doing so she emerges from Wonderland and leaves mental hospital as healthy adult woman.

In both novel and game is Alice confronted with many puzzles that seemingly do not have meaningful solutions. She hopes that she can figure out things she encounters in Wonderland but because of their nonsensical nature she repeatedly fails.[29] This approximates how in life even things well-known and apparently logical sometimes can turn out completely illogically. This theme can be only implicated in the game as its inherit structure needs the player to solve the puzzle and move on.

Last theme shared by the two is constant threat of death. In the novel Alice is regularly in situations that seem not serious but are actually dangerous and she risks her life on many occasions. She never acknowledges she could die until the Queen orders to cut her head off and Alice realizes this ridiculous world and its pitfalls may not be as harmless as she thought. In the game is again the system of losing life if the player is not doing well

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[27] See Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1993), 4-6.
[28] See Carroll, *Alice's Aventures in Wonderland*, 33-35.
[29] See Carroll, *Alice's Aventures in Wonderland*, 42.

inherit to all action genres. In this case Alice does not realize threats of danger as a part of her damaged psyche and aggressive tendencies.

4.3   Comparison of *Spec Ops: The Line* and *Heart of Darkness*

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is depiction one man's dreadful journey up the Congo River to meet fabled and mysterious Kurtz. That man's name is Charles Marlow and he is an agent for Belgian Company trading Ivory. During his adventure in Africa he witnessed suffering of native Africans by men of the Company, which is in stark opposition to grand ideals of imperialist society as well as impressive nature surrounding them. He learns that Company agent Kurtz is the most efficient Ivory supplier and that he is a godlike figure for primitive natives. When Marlow finally reaches him he discovers that Kurtz is a God and prisoner to the natives at the same time and that he went mad with power attacking villages with his tribe just to have more ivory. After they rescue Kurtz he dies on board the ship but only after revealing the darkness inside him to Marlow. He later decides not to shatter everyone's pristine image of Kurtz, even though he told us repeatedly how much he hates lying.[30]

This novel uses frame narrative which means there are two narrators. In the beginning nameless narrator who is on board of ship with Marlow presents the frame of the story. He speaks in first-person plural to represent all four listeners of Marlow's tale. Then there is second narrator and main character of the novel Marlow who describes in first-person his own experience and comments on it. *Spec Ops: The Line* does not utilize narrative frame, although it can be argued that the player himself makes one narrative through the act of interaction and making choices. It uses narrative technique In Medias Res as the first scene of the game is helicopter fight from middle of the story and after quick action sequence and crash of the helicopter story jumps to the beginning.[31]

In *Spec Ops: The Line* player controls Captain Martin Walker, leader of Delta squad who is sent to Dubai wrecked by sand storm to find what happened to Colonel Konrad (reference to Joseph Conrad). His journey deeper into storm is very much alike Marlow's journey deeper into jungle. As Walker and two men under his command travel deeper into

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[30] See Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1990), 2-72.
[31] See Brendan Keogh, *Killing Is Harmless: A Critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line*. (Adelaide: Stolen Projects, 2012), 5-6.

center of Dubai they witness atrocities committed on local residents by American soldiers and are shocked and appalled by them. In similar way Marlow is shocked at how Company treats Africans in Congo. Konrad is proxy of Kurtz from the novel. He is adored by his men and awaits Walker at the end of his route and everything implies he too has gone mad. Reality is little bit different but the player learns it only at the end of the game and Walker's journey.

After numerous firefights with local forces and American soldiers our hero comes to an impasse, between him and tower where he will find Konrad lies camp of soldiers big enough that Walker and his two subordinates will fight their way through. At this point Walker is depressed and troubled by the horrors he witnessed so far, so he does not hesitate and uses mortar loaded with white phosphorus to clear the camp. After the destruction is done he and his two soldier panic when they discover that American soldiers were only protecting civilians and Walker killed them all.[32]

This is one of manifestations of the proverbial line. Even though events were bleak up to this point, everything changes now. Walker cannot face his responsibility for the terrible deed and places the blame on Konrad saying he forced him to do it. Coordinated trio of trained soldiers becomes pack of desperate killers, shouting profanities and arguing constantly. Walker picks up handheld radio and uses it to communicate with Konrad. There is no shortage of brutal and horrifying scenes in which one Walker's soldiers gets lynch by desperate mob and the other dies protecting Walker before he finally reaches the tower with intention of punishing Konrad for everything he has done to him.

When Walker reaches top of the tower where should be Konrad with whom he talked for past few hours stationed he only finds in surprising twist his rotting corpse with gun in hand. Player learns that Walker suffers hallucinations after not being able to face what he has committed. There was no voice on the radio and all the killing and death of his two friends were in vein.

This intriguing twist also changes the perspective of adapting *Heart of Darkness*. Walker's story does not really follow Marlow, but it shows downfall of Kurtz. It starts with morally pure person with best intentions who gradually loses his mind and caves under pressure until there is only dying lunatic in the end. The game has variable endings

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[32] See Keogh, *Killing Is Harmless: A Critical Reading of Spec Ops: The Line*, 20-25

depending on how player reacts when he learns all of this, but Walker dies in three of them and fourth only provides more killing and fade to black.

Both sides in this conflict were at least in the beginning genuinely good guys but circumstances and the environment made everyone morally ambiguous and then evil. Importance of the environment for plot and character progression is key element both for *Spec Ops: The Line* and *Heart of Darkness*.[33]

Probably the most important theme shared by both *Heart of Darkness* and *Spec Ops: The Line* is the difference between good and evil. Marlow tries to be a good person but thrust into a world without good choices all he has left is picking lesser of two evils. He chooses Kurtz who is openly malicious instead of the hypocritical Company. Walker has the same beginning coming to Dubai with best intentions but ends up much worse than Marlow with blood of innocents on his hands. All of this can be viewed as argument for good and evil and morality being only constructs of society and when environment changes drastically so do these values.

Closely connected to good and evil is the theme of insanity. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow witnesses plenty of insane behavior such as ship shooting at presumably empty forest and Kurtz's madness. Kurtz has changed from charming and respected artist and businessman to crazed slaver who has heads on spikes in his village only because he could run wild without anyone to regulate and judge him. Walker has similar fate, maybe with nobler intentions in the beginning, but all the more delusional in the end killing innocents and damning entire city. The one strong suit of *Spec Ops: The Line* is that the player experiences unknowingly the descent into madness and when is everything revealed has to face what has the character he was controlling done.

Imperialism and its flaws are prevalent problem in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow sees cruelty of white men towards Africans and realizes the hypocrisy of imperialism. Saying they are bringing civilization to savage lands and then acting more savage to locals than they would. As a parallel in *Spec Ops: The Line* American soldiers came twice to Dubai to help people struck by natural disaster only to kill numbers of them in fights for control of the city and remaining water and later in fights between Americans. In the scene with white

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[33] Richard Pearsey, "*No Good Deed – Narrative Design in Spec Ops: The Line*", Gamasutra, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.gamasutra.com/view/feature/176598/no_good_deed__narrative_design_in_.php.

phosphorus mentioned above in a fight between two fractions of U.S. military dozens of innocents die similarly to natives killed by Kurtz for ivory.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to analyze three video game adaptations of literary works of British and American authors and to prove they transfer some of qualities of the original texts. Theory of term adaptation, adapter and audience was outlined and applied to selected works. There is a mention of perceived notion that adaptations of older media into younger are being looked upon more critically. I predict that this will change in time.

Selection of three video games is described and context is given to them. *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream*, *American McGee's Alice* and *Spec Ops: The Line* are fitting choices for analysis as each of them is different genre of video game, each was created in a different decade and each has different role of an adapter. *I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* was created with the help of the author of the original short story, *American McGee's Alice* as the name suggest is work of single creative voice and *Spec Ops: The Line* changed many creative leads during its development, therefore it has none. All three games were also well received by critics and fans of original texts.

After comparing narrative and themes of these adaptations and their original texts I conclude that they indeed managed to preserve some of the valued aspects of the originals. They altered and extended original stories when it was necessary to accommodate and entertain modern player but did not give up though-provoking messages and themes. *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* is still chilling tale of a man versus a machine filled with hatred. *American McGee's Alice* takes its player to an imaginative world full of colorful (albeit more sinister) characters and nonsensical riddles. *Spec Ops: The Line* makes its player wonder about morale and humanity of the main protagonist as well as peek into dark corners of his own heart.

While the average quality of video game story and writing is still poor, these three adaptations shine in comparison. It is also trend only in last few years for games to tackle deeper philosophical issues and invoke in their players more than enjoyment and adrenaline and three selected video games have definitely succeeded in doing so.

As a fan of the medium of video games I could not justify its merit on its own. Therefore using adaptations of respected literary works I can hopefully persuade a reader that video games have matured from simple pastime for children to capable art form worth investing time into. I am certain that more attention from scholars can provide interesting academic discussions as well as being ahead of the curve and not behind it.

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