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WOMEN, BLOOD, AND DREAMS: GENDER, DREAM SPACES, AND  
MONSTROSITIES IN *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*  
AND *BLOODBORNE*

By

AMBER APPLEBY

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Arkansas Tech University  
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Permission

Title: Women, Blood, and Dreams: Gender, Dream Spaces, and Monstrosities in *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Bloodborne*

Program: Communications

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## Abstract

Video games exploded in popularity in the 80s and have been a staple in many people's lives since. Because video games are popular and different, critics tend to ignore them beyond simple analysis like the sexist portrayal of women. Video games, like films, can be read and analyzed using different methods of theory. This is evident in the similarities in Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and FromSoftware's *Bloodborne*. Both media feature overtly gendered imagery and spaces, the monstrosity of women, the blurring of dreams and reality, and Gothic elements that tie them together. Though *Bloodborne* also manages to add elements to the genre that have been less explored, such as the perilous relationship between women.

## Table of Contents

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iv
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. THE NIGHTMARE.....	2
III. THE BLOOD.....	14
IV. THE DREAM.....	30
V. CONCLUSION.....	37
WORKS CITED.....	38

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Freddy’s Glove .....	3
Figure 2: Freddy’s Slit Abdomen .....	4
Figure 3: Blood Shooting from Glen’s Bed after his Murder.....	5
Figure 4: Freddy Reaching up from between Nancy’s Legs in the Bath.....	6
Figure 5: Little Girls Jumping Rope .....	12
Figure 6: Gehrman .....	18
Figure 7: The Doll from the Hunter’s Dream .....	18
Figure 8: Vicar Amelia before her Transformation .....	25
Figure 9: Vicar Amelia’s Beast Form.....	26
Figure 10: Rom, the Vacuous Spider .....	27
Figure 11: Queen Yharnam.....	27
Figure 12: Amelia and her Great One Child.....	29
Figure 13: TV Freddy Grabbing Jennifer .....	34

## **I. Introduction**

Video games are much like films in that they are made to be consumed visually. Of course the difference is that video games do not just presuppose a viewer, they also presuppose a player. Since the viewer of the game is also directly involved with the story line, it stands to reason that the way s/he consumes the media would be slightly different. However, it is much the same, so much the same that film theory can be used to read video games in the same way it is used to read film.

Horror games and films both primarily serve to reinforce the idea of a patriarchal society in their use of monstrous women. This is relevant because men are not the only perpetrators of violence against women. Women often have far more agency and a much larger capacity for violence than most horror media give them credit for. This is significant for gender studies as this form of media has yet to be incorporated into critical discourse.

## II. The Nightmare

*A Nightmare on Elm Street* was written and directed by Wes Craven and premiered in 1984. Craven pitched the idea for *Nightmare* to several studios before New Line Cinema finally picked it up. At the time, New Line Cinema was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. *Nightmare* saved New Line Cinema from shutting its doors; now New Line is often referred to as “the house that Freddy built.” But Freddy didn’t just stop with one movie. In fact, there are seven *Nightmare* movies plus *Freddy vs. Jason* and Michael Bay’s attempt at a reboot film. There was also a television anthology, and Freddy has been featured in several video games. Wes Craven did not just create a slasher film; he created an entire universe. Though I will be primarily dealing with the original 1984 version of *Nightmare*, I will draw on other parts of the world to inform better the arguments and thoughts presented.

*A Nightmare on Elm Street* follows the story of Nancy Thompson. Nancy’s friend Tina (whose point of view begins the film) has been having vivid nightmares about a man with a burned face and razors for hands who she believes wants to kill her. Nancy sort of believes Tina, or at least believes she is having horrible nightmares, and she and her boyfriend Glen agree to stay over with Tina that night. Before bed, the trio are surprised by Tina’s on-again-off-again boyfriend, Rod. That night, Tina is killed in her dream while she is in bed with Rod, who is ultimately blamed for the crime. Nancy is obviously shaken by her friend’s brutal murder but believes that Rod did not do it. While Rod is in jail, he is also murdered. It is around this time that Nancy herself begins having dreams about the man with the burned face and razors for fingers. Nancy realizes that he can only hurt her in dreams so she cannot sleep anymore. She then begins the long,

exhausting process of figuring out who Freddy Krueger is and, once she knows, how to defeat him. The film closes with Nancy “defeating” Freddy and then being swept away in a convertible with a red and green striped top. This coloring of the car top mimics Freddy’s signature sweater, leaving the ending ambiguous as to whether or not Nancy has actually and completely defeated Freddy or if he has simply tricked her.

When the film opens, viewers watch someone (later identified as Freddy Krueger) making a glove with razor fingers (see figure 1), jumping right in with the phallic

imagery. If that was not enough, the film immediately drives the phallic point home when the razors literally penetrate and slash a canvas hanging in what appears to be a boiler room. The one notable



Figure 1. Freddy's glove.

exception to the generally masculine imagery of Freddy is his face. Freddy’s burns have twisted and distorted his skin. He is left with pockmarked, ridged pink flesh that is vaguely vaginal. However, this small bit of marginally feminine imagery is largely overlooked because Freddy is so entrenched in the masculine. During this beginning chase sequence, when the point of view switches to the woman being chased, the gender of the imagery changes. Where once it was overtly phallic, now it is uterine. The girl is running down a dark, damp hallway. In the dream states, most of the imagery that has to do with Freddy Krueger (his razor fingers and, at one point, his stiff, erect arms) is masculine, whereas most of the imagery that has to do with Nancy or Tina is feminine. The girls spend a considerable amount of time in dark, damp places. In fact, at one point

in the film, Nancy is sitting in English class and looks over to see the dead body of Tina in a clear, bloody body bag, simulating the womb.

Though there is an abundance of overly feminine images in the film, there are also some less explicitly feminine elements.

The most obvious of these is when Freddy slits his stomach open in Nancy's first nightmare. When Nancy falls asleep in school and makes her way down to the boiler room, she encounters Freddy. She asks him who he is and, smiling, he lifts up his shirt



Figure 2. Freddy's slit abdomen.

and cuts his abdomen with his razors. Not only is Freddy literally penetrating himself in a way that suggests a masturbation of sorts, the cut is reminiscent of a vaginal slit. This penetrated slit is filled with maggots and green pus oozes from the wound (see figure 2). Freddy's masculine image coupled with a self-inflicted womanly image is a juxtaposition that can be off putting. However, Freddy's cutting of himself is easy to explain. He is showing Nancy that her womanhood is vile and disgusting; it is undesirable, perhaps because it has been penetrated.

Of course, Freddy's penetration extends further than just himself. Glen, Tina, and Marge are all penetrated. Glen's penetration is slightly more aberrant because he is technically male. However, Glen's murder is feminized in such a way that his penetration makes sense. Glen, like everyone else, is killed in bed. Beds represent sex, of course, but they also represent safety. Rarely does someone go to bed with the sense or plan of being brutally murdered there. Beds are also inherently feminine. Glen is

already starting to be feminized from the moment he lies down. He is further feminized when a hole appears in his bed and he sinks, or is pulled, down into the hole where Freddy is waiting. After Freddy penetrates Glen (which the viewer does not see), blood geysers out of the hole in the bed (see figure 3). Not only is the blood shooting out of a hole in a feminine space is clearly menstrual, it is also a form of ejaculation for Freddy. It is his uncontrollable, horrific release after penetration. This ejaculation occurs from the gratification that Freddy gets from killing Glen, but it also demonstrates his excitement that he can finally move on to Nancy. He can finally penetrate Nancy with his masculinity.



Figure 3. Blood shooting from Glen's bed after his murder.

Nowhere is Freddy's masculine nature more obvious than in the strangely sexual relationship between Freddy and Nancy. The fact that Freddy invades people's dreams when they are lying prone in their beds is already sexual, but Freddy's relationship to Nancy takes that small sexual element to an entirely different level. Already the imagery associated with each character in the nightmares is sexual – Freddy literally wants to penetrate Nancy – but there are other more obvious sexual moments as well. When Nancy falls asleep at school and winds up facing off with Freddy, he flicks his tongue out at her in a clearly sexual gesture replicating cunnilingus. Again, toward the end of the film, the mouthpiece of the phone Nancy is using turns into Freddy's mouth, and he licks her lips. Clearly, Freddy has an oral fixation and a sexual desire for Nancy. The most sexual scene in the film is the bathtub scene. Nancy is

unwinding in the bath after a long day and several nights with little to no sleep. As Nancy closes her eyes and appears to doze off, the camera angle moves to water level and down at her feet. The viewer is looking at Nancy in between her bent, spread apart legs and is horrified when Freddy's gloved hand stretches up and reaches for Nancy, or at least a part of Nancy (see figure 4).

Robert Englund (the actor who portrays Freddy) said that the "question of 'am I going to kiss her [Nancy] or gut her' informed his performance as Krueger" (Kingsley 147). David Kingsley proposed that



Figure 4. Freddy reaching up from between Nancy's legs in the bath.

the sexual component of Freddy and Nancy's relationship was used to showcase the incest between Nancy and her father. Kingsley's argument is that Freddy is a *doppelganger* for either Nancy or her father, allowing them to play out their incestuous desire for one another without ever actually admitting that the desire exists. In fact, Kingsley posits that Nancy's father was molesting her as a child and that she dreamed up the name "Freddy Krueger" and her mother's story about Freddy's crimes in order to repress what her father had done to her. This suggestion is that she is simply another woman whose brain and self cannot be trusted.

Kingsley's point about Krueger being a *doppelganger* for Nancy holds some merit. Kingsley uses Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* to illustrate his proposal that Freddy could be Nancy's *doppelganger*. Gilbert and Gubar assert that,

in Gothic literature, the lead female is “filling the role of an angel, a chaste and subservient character type,” whereas her *doppelganger* gets to play out all of the fantasies that the lead woman wishes she could (qtd. In Kingsley 150). Certainly, Nancy plays more of the angel role than does anyone else around her. Tina has sex with her on-again-off-again boyfriend, Nancy’s mother is drunk, Glen attempts to have sex with Nancy, Rod is the on-again-off-again boyfriend who is a jerk, and her father is less family-involved and more work oriented. Nancy is less sexually active than Tina, Rod, and Glen. She won’t even entertain the idea of having sex with Glen while staying the night with him, Rod, and Tina. Nancy, in short, is a good example of what an angel teenager would have been in 1984. Freddy, on the other hand, is obviously a sexual being. Nancy may not want to murder people the same way Freddy does, but Freddy could be acting out Nancy’s repressed sexual desires. Films have taught us that women are not allowed to be sexual beings. If they are too sexual, they are almost always ultimately punished, often violently, and through their death.

Though Kingsley is right on some level about Freddy being Nancy’s *doppelganger*, his assertion that Freddy is not real is at best a stretch. Freddy is real if for no other reason than Nancy believes he is real, as do viewers, because of their alignment with Nancy as the point of view character. However, no one in the film believes Nancy about Freddy being in her dreams and her insistence that this is real. It isn’t until her mother, Marge, tells her the story of Freddy Krueger that Nancy realizes that she is not completely crazy and that there is something more going on. When Marge pulls Freddy’s glove out of the boiler in the basement and tells how she was the only one with the “guts” to make sure Freddy was dead, she is celebrating her castration of Freddy by relating the

moment she took his glove (Kingsley 147). Marge's castration of Freddy indicates (as do other moments in the film) that Freddy wasn't just murdering children; he was also raping them. Freddy might have even been raping Nancy. At one point during Marge's confession, she refers to his victims as "children we all knew" (*Nightmare*). At the time of the film, Nancy is fifteen and would have been five ten years before, when all of Freddy's crimes came to light, just the right age, and she is certainly a child "we [Marge and Donald] all knew." This would certainly explain Freddy's sexual fixation on Nancy; to him, she would be the one that got away. Though empathetic anger could be the reason Marge and Donald (Nancy's father) got involved in the hunting down and killing of Freddy, it also could be that after Freddy was released, he took Nancy and the search party wanted to find him before he committed his atrocious crimes yet again. This is not something Marge can tell Nancy; it is not something Marge would want Nancy to remember. Marge's castration of Freddy is revenge for Freddy taking and hurting her daughter. Luckily for Marge, Nancy has apparently repressed these memories. When Nancy first starts bringing up Freddy, Marge and Donald are understandably terrified that she could be uncovering that memory, so they refuse to believe her, ostensibly to protect Nancy, but also to protect themselves from having to remember. Marge has already tried to drown the memory with alcohol, and Donald's commitment to his job keeps him distracted. They don't want to remember any more than they want Nancy to remember.

Though both Donald and Marge are complicit in Freddy's murder, it is only Marge who is punished. Marge is punished not only for castrating Freddy; she is also punished because she is a "bad" woman; she is monstrous. Marge has lied to her daughter, she is divorced and does not take her ex-husband into account in any of her

decisions, and she is an alcoholic. Her transgressions cannot be ignored by the film.

Like many women before her, she must be punished. The film allows Freddy to punish her because of her castration of him. Without killing the woman who emasculated him, Freddy can never fully redeem his masculinity.

Likewise, Tina is also punished for her sins. Tina, however, is not a drunk or a known liar. Instead, she is sexually transgressive, which may be worse. In the beginning of the film, Freddy is chasing Tina through a dream, but she manages to get away. The next night, Nancy, Glen, and Rod all stay the night: Glen and Nancy, to make Tina feel safer after being so scared by her dream, and Rod (seemingly) to get laid, which almost immediately happens. Tina and Rod disappear upstairs to take advantage of Tina's mom's empty bedroom. After sex, Tina and Rod have a conversation, and Rod pulls up the blankets and turns to go to sleep. The blanket he pulls around his shoulders is red and green striped, matching Freddy's signature red and green striped sweater. If Freddy was not there while Tina and Rod were having sex, he was certainly there after, before Tina ever entered the dream where Freddy would kill her. Not only is the presence of the blanket obvious foreshadowing, it also serves to show that once Freddy has someone in his sights, he is always watching.

Before Tina's murder, she tries to relate to Nancy, Glen, and Rod the realness of her dream. She tries to get them to understand how she feels like this man could actually harm her. No one believes her. The only one who comes close is Nancy. She is not openly dismissive of Tina's concern and even agrees to stay the night to make Tina feel better. After Tina's murder, the same thing happens to Nancy. She tries to explain to Marge, Donald, and Glen that she is terrified and fully believes that these dreams and

Freddy are real and, like Tina, she is dismissed. No one wants to talk about it; Marge and Donald for self-serving reasons and Glen because he honestly doesn't believe her. Most of the film is spent with Nancy trying to get people to believe her and getting angry when they don't. Glen is dismissive of Nancy's concerns. When she tries to enlist his help in waking her when she's in danger, Glen falls asleep, twice. Marge keeps telling Nancy she needs to sleep and it's only a dream. She even takes Nancy to a sleep study during which Nancy is attacked and her mother still doesn't believe her. Donald is the most likely person to help her. Like Freddy, he's hyper masculine; he's a police lieutenant and is clearly protective of Nancy as he yells at Marge for allowing or not knowing about her little sleepover with Tina, Rod, and Glen. Donald could be the perfect foil to Freddy – two masculine men fighting it out over a girl. However, Donald is the one who is most dismissive of Nancy. He won't even talk to her about it. Like Marge, he just keeps telling her it's only a dream.

Everyone's refusal to believe forces Nancy to try to save herself. She is well equipped to be a Final Girl (Clover). Clover's tenets about the Final Girl ring true for Nancy: "She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the preceding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded; who we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified" (35). Viewers see this again and again with Nancy. Nancy is the first to see Tina's eviscerated, dead body (after Rod, of course) and she is one of the first to see Rod's hanged body. She is chased by Freddy through several dream sequences. She is "abject terror." Nancy also fits the other Final Girl conventions laid out by Clover. She is less attractive than Tina and, if not a virgin, then she at least spurns Glen's advances

when he tries to engage her. Nancy, in her own way, is also “boyish” (Clover 40). Though Nancy’s name is conventionally feminine (masculine names are the first clue to a more masculine Final Girl, according to Clover), she presents her masculinity in her own ways. When Nancy and Glen are staying with Tina, they all go outside to investigate a noise, which turns out to be Rod pranking them. Rod and Glen then get into a testosterone-filled conversation. The frame is nearly filled with Glen and Rod facing off and Nancy turned toward Glen but in between the two. When Rod pulls out a switchblade, Glen begins to shy away. Nancy, on the other hand, plucks the knife from Rod’s hand and flicks it closed, unfazed and nearly rolling her eyes at him. Additionally, Nancy seeks out Freddy. She goes to sleep at least twice with the intention of locating Freddy or at least with figuring out what is going on. Nancy is also ready to take matters into her own hands and fight Freddy. When Nancy figures out that she can pull things from the dream space (which she figures out during the sleep study when she pulls Freddy’s hat out of the dream), she sets about figuring out the best way to use this to her advantage. She extensively researches booby traps and then turns her house into a makeshift, booby-trapped bunker in order to trap and fight Freddy when she pulls him out of the dream. Nancy plans to have Glen wake her up so she can pull Freddy out, but when Glen falls asleep and is murdered, she switches to plan B. She calls Donald and asks him to come wake her up in exactly 20 minutes so he can “cold cock the guy” when she pulls him out (*Nightmare*). Nancy’s intelligence and resourceful nature mark her as a perfect Final Girl.

However, Nancy doesn’t completely fit with the Final Girl trope. Clover also says that the Final Girl “alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the

strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B)” (35). Nancy does look death in the face and finds strength alone to stay the killer with the intention of killing him herself. But Nancy doesn’t quite manage to kill Freddy. After Donald and Nancy watch Freddy kill Marge, it appears that Freddy is gone. When Donald leaves, Freddy rises from the bed to attack Nancy again. At this point, Nancy has come to believe that Freddy is feeding off the fears of his victims (undoubtedly true) and that by taking that power away from him, by not being afraid, she can defeat him. As Nancy turns her back on Freddy, he vanishes and she appears to awaken in a perfect, sunny world. Nancy says she feels more refreshed and awake than she has in a long time. Marge is alive again and says she’s giving up drinking. Glen, Rod, and Tina pull up in a convertible to whisk Nancy away to school. As Nancy gets into the car, the hood comes up and the



Figure 5. Little girls jumping rope.

doors lock. When the car drives away with the gang crying out for help and beating on the windows, the viewer sees that the hood is red and green striped. The children in the background are skipping rope and singing Freddy’s song (see figure 5):

One, two Freddy’s coming for you  
Three, four better lock the door  
Five, six grab your crucifix  
Seven, eight gonna stay awake  
Nine, ten never sleep again (*Nightmare*)

The film is laying on the horror. The last scene of the film shows Freddy's gloved hand breaking through the glass on the front door, grabbing Marge, and yanking her back into the house. Nancy didn't manage to defeat Freddy or to convince anyone to save her. Though we do not see Nancy actually die, it is clear that she has not escaped Freddy's grasp. Nancy has all the major traits of a Final Girl; her downfall is unsettling to the viewer and adds to the already overwhelming horror.

Freddy's obsession with Nancy borders on mania. He kills all of her friends around her as she watches with mounting horror; he isolates her and then pursues her, like a hunter stalking and then taking down (or taking home) its prey. If Nancy is the one who got away and was saved at the eleventh hour, Freddy's obsession makes sense. He wants Nancy because he didn't get to have her before. He wants to corrupt her innocence, to violate her. If he did manage to rape Nancy before the angry mob found him, then Nancy's innocence (and thus Nancy herself) belong to Freddy. She is a possession to Freddy, something to be put down for ten years and played with again when he feels like it. Freddy may have reemerged to simply claim what he believes was stolen from him.

### III. The Blood

Of the thousands of horror games on the market, *Bloodborne* gained more fame than a horror game has in several years. This is mainly due to the fact that it was conceptualized by the game director, Hidetaka Miyazaki of *Demon Souls* and *Dark Souls I* notoriety. *Bloodborne* was released by FromSoftware and Sony in March 2015. By the end of 2015, *Bloodborne* had sold millions of copies, was nominated for several awards including Game of the Year by several gaming magazines, and spawned at least one card game and a comic book series (“Bloodborne”). Gamers loved the difficulty, the atmosphere, and the horror of *Bloodborne*.

The game follows the playable character, the Hunter, through the streets and wards of Yharnam, a gothic, Victorian inspired town. The simple story of *Bloodborne* is that the player has come to Yharnam to partake in their famous blood ministration for some unknown disease. Yharnam’s blood healing is supposed to help cure disease or at least help to stave off death. The Hunter arrives in Yharnam on the night of the hunt when all the beasts of Yharnam are purged. Unbeknownst to the Hunter (at first) the beasts were created from the blood ministration. In fact, these blood rituals are the way the Healing Church communes with their gods, the Great Ones. The Hunter battles the beasts and Great Ones present in Yharnam to uncover the truth of the blood ministration and to end the hunt.

Like *Nightmare*, *Bloodborne* has an abundance of masculine and feminine imagery and implications throughout. This gendering occurs in the first cutscene (an in-game cinematic, which is not interactive) before the game even fully begins. In the cutscene, the player is in a first person point of view, which neutralizes the scene. This

neutralization of the scene makes it inherently male because consumers of film and game have been taught that the look, the gaze belongs to men first and foremost, according to Laura Mulvey whose theory on the male gaze has been proven true in film after film (Mulvey). After the prone character is greeted by a wheelchair-bound man with his eyes covered by gauze, the player goes into the character creation scene.

In character creation, players are given the freedom to decide exactly what their character will look like. FromSoftware is fairly famous for having awful character creation. Most characters in previous FromSoftware games end up looking identical because there is little to no variety in the aesthetic choices. *Bloodborne* is better than most, which should tell players and viewers something about the fact that female characters are still simply reskinned men. If the player chooses to be female, the only thing that changes about the character is the length of her hair. The width of the shoulders, the widespread jaw, the bowed legs, and general bulkiness of the entire body stays the same. Of course, players can choose to adjust these things to make their character more feminine, but the fact that the game developers did not program the game to feminize the character once the female option is selected indicates that this is a game primarily for men. Women, supposedly, would not be able to handle the horrors that lurk in Yharnam's streets. Since the Hunter is most naturally male, I will refer to the Hunter and player as male throughout.

After creating a character, the player is introduced to the world of *Bloodborne*. During this beginning cutscene, the player is unsure of where exactly he is beyond the fact that he is in what appears to be some sort of clinic room, albeit a dark, dirty, Victorian one. Upon a small groggy waking, the player sees a pool of blood in the

room beside the gurney. From this pool of blood rises a werewolf with exaggeratedly long limbs and claws. The blood itself does not necessarily immediately read as feminine. However, the fact that a werewolf, a creature controlled by the moon, rises from a pool of blood, which is also controlled by the moon through the menstrual cycle, allows the player to accept that the werewolf is probably female. Only a female could be so monstrous and covered in blood at the same time (just ask Stephen King's Carrie).

After reaching toward the player, the werewolf catches fire and the player shifts his gaze to look down at his prone body. At this moment, the Messengers begin to crawl up the player. The Messengers are small, humanoid creatures. They are starkly white and emaciated. Their mouths are also distorted in grotesque ways: an exaggerated yawn, a teeth-bearing scream, and a slit. The second Messenger the player sees crawling up his body and reaching for his face sports a vertical, vaginal slit for a mouth. Though the Messengers are technically devoid of gender or sexuality, this slit marks at least this one Messenger as feminine. This is not the last time the player will see this Messenger. In fact, this Messenger is present at almost every gathering of Messengers in the game, reinforcing the feminine.

As the Messengers reach the player's face, the Hunter falls back into unconsciousness. Once the Hunter fully awakes, he sees that he is in fact in a dark and dirty clinic, evidenced by the location name that pops up in the bottom of the screen – "Iosfeka's Clinic." Later, the player will learn that Iosfeka is a type of nurse who has locked the upper portion of her clinic to keep the beasts out. As the player tries to leave Iosfeka's Clinic, he is accosted by another (or possibly the same) werewolf. The werewolf, the name Iosfeka, and the fact the Hunter is in a clinic (where women nurses

care for the injured) all serve to supplement the feminine imagery already present thus far.

At this point in the game, the player is supposed to die to the werewolf. After dying, the Hunter is transported to the Hunter's Dream, a safe space for the player where he can increase his level, store and buy items, and get helpful tutorial tips from the Messengers. In this dream, the Hunter gets his first weapons and is introduced to Gehrman, another wheelchair-bound man with gauze over his eyes who is the keeper of the Hunter's Dream and is there to advise the Hunter (see figure 6). Gehrman's gauze-covered eyes and wheelchair serve to symbolically emasculate him, much like Freddy's lack of glove emasculates him.

From the Hunter's Dream, the player can fast travel to different areas he has unlocked. After picking up his weapons, he returns to Yharnam to hunt beasts as instructed by Gehrman. In the streets of Yharnam, the player begins to notice something – the beasts and humanoid creatures in Yharnam are all male. Even the humans who have mostly turned into beasts speak with male voices and wear men's clothes. On some level, this makes sense. The men and beasts at this point don't know they're beasts and are patrolling the streets for actual beasts. They have been driven mad by the blood and believe the Hunter to be a beast. Clearly, a woman would not be able to handle patrolling the streets for and killing beasts.

The player goes about Yharnam slaughtering the beasts and mad men before eventually returning to the Hunter's Dream to use the blood echoes (points the player gets for killing beasts) to increase his character level. At this point, the player should have access to the Doll. When the Hunter first arrived in the Hunter's Dream, the Doll was

inert. After gaining at least one point of insight, the Doll animates and allows the player to level up and also gives the player small bits of lore. The Doll is obviously and in some ways exaggeratedly feminine. She has long, white blonde hair and is wearing a gold-embroidered brown dress, a pinkish red kerchief and matching fingerless gloves. She is also wearing a bonnet and shawl that match her dress (see figure 7). She is there only to serve the Hunter. Beyond giving the Hunter small snippets of lore and praying at one of the graves in the



Figure 6. Gehrman.

Dream, serving the Hunter is all the Doll does. Gehrman reiterates the fact that she is there for the Hunter when he says, “We don’t have as many tools as we once did, but ... You’re welcome to use whatever you find... Even the doll, should it please you...” (*Bloodborne*). Not only is this bit of dialogue from Gehrman overtly sexual, it tells the



Figure 7. The Doll from the Hunter's Dream.

player that the only purpose for the Doll is to serve the Hunter, showing that when women aren’t monstrous like the werewolf, they are there simply to serve a higher cause

While the Doll may only be an object, she is based on a real person within the game, Lady Maria, an original hunter like Gehrman. The player does not meet Lady Maria in the original story of *Bloodborne* but does meet her in the downloadable content “The

Old Hunters.” It is immediately obvious that Lady Maria is the inspiration for the Doll. Though Lady Maria dresses in a much more masculine fashion, their voices, hair, and eyes are all the same. Unlike the Doll, Lady Maria was a hunter of beasts. She was directly involved in the blood, beasts, and horror of Yharnam, which undoubtedly made her into a strong character. The Doll is Gehrman’s fetishized version of Lady Maria. Gehrman was obsessed with Lady Maria and based the Doll on her after being forced into being the keeper of the Hunter’s Dream. Perhaps Gehrman meant the Doll to have Lady Maria’s personality or more likely Lady Maria’s strength scared Gehrman and he created his perfect, submissive version of the woman he loved. Gehrman’s outright refusal to be anywhere near the Doll (he is always either missing, in the back garden, or in the workshop, and she is always out front or at a side grave, praying) indicates that he is ashamed of what he has done, at this creation born out of his obsession. Gehrman’s mania for Lady Maria is reminiscent of Freddy’s obsession with Nancy. Freddy’s coveting of Nancy is clearly sexual, and there are hints that Gehrman may also be motivated by sex, such as him telling the Hunter to “use” the Doll. However, both Freddy and Gehrman are identical in the fact that they were (in the case of Gehrman) and are (in the case of Freddy) driven by a desire for a woman that they cannot have.

After leaving the dream once the player has leveled up for the first time, *Bloodborne* stays fairly masculine. The townspeople are still clearly men and the first mandatory boss is also male. A boss is a unique enemy that either progresses the story forward or gives the player access to an area or item he wouldn’t normally have access to. Boss fights are often in separate areas called a boss arena that cannot be left without dying or defeating the boss. However, women are not completely sidelined in this boss

fight either. Throughout Yharnam, the player can talk to various non-playable characters (NPCs). One of these NPCs is a little girl whose name the player never learns. She tells the Hunter that her father is a hunter and her mother ventured out to bring him home because she was worried about him. She asks the Hunter to go look for her mother, whom the Hunter will recognize by her big red brooch, and gives him a music box that her mother uses to remind her father “who we are” (*Bloodborne*). The music box is inscribed with the names Gascoigne and Viola. A few twists and turns later, the Hunter meets the first mandatory boss, Father Gascoigne. Father is not a rank that is recognized by the Healing Church so the use of the term here seems to be to show that Gascoigne is an outsider like the Hunter and to drive home the point that this is the little girl’s father. During the boss fight, it becomes clear that Gascoigne has gone mad from the beasts and the blood. Once Gascoigne is half healthy, he transforms into a beast, a werewolf who walks on his hind legs. After, or during, the fight with Gascoigne, the player will eventually notice an item on the roof of a building. Once the player gets to the item, he is met with a grisly scene. Half of the roof is soaked in blood and face down in the middle of the blood is a blonde woman. The item that the player picks up is a red jeweled brooch inscribed with the name Viola. It appears that Gascoigne had been driven mad enough to slaughter his wife after she found him. The fact that Viola was found on the roof of a building indicates that she probably ran from him, that she realized what was about to happen and was powerless to stop it. Viola and Gascoigne’s relationship is one of the more tragic relationships in *Bloodborne*. However, it is just the beginning.

Viola and Gascoigne’s daughter can be revisited and given the brooch, which causes her to immediately break down in tears and refuse to speak to the Hunter anymore.

Eventually the little girl will leave her home and the Hunter will find her white ribbon soaked in blood after killing a pig in the sewers. Upon going back to the little girl's home, the player can give the ribbon to the little girl's older sister who asks if the Hunter has seen her sister who wears a big white ribbon. After giving her the ribbon, the older sister seems upset and the Hunter goes to leave to give her privacy or just to continue with his quest. As the Hunter gets a few steps from the window, the older sister begins to speak, "What a perfect ribbon... I can't wait to try it on..." (*Bloodborne*). She says this in a reverent voice and begins to giggle manically. It's clear that the older sister had been coveting her sister's ribbon for a long time. After seeing her sister so broken hearted over losing their mother, she may have seen her chance and told her sister that the Hunter (who is an outsider, and Yharnamites are extremely distrustful of outsiders) was probably lying and stole the brooch from their mother. She may have encouraged her sister to go look for their parents, giving the little girl just enough hope to send her out into the streets to die. Of course, the girl could not have known that anyone would find the ribbon and the Hunter bringing her the ribbon rather than her having to go retrieve it herself was simple luck. The older sister ends up being punished for her manipulation of her sister when she packs a suitcase and tries to flee to safety. The Hunter finds her bludgeoned to death only a few hundred steps from her doorway. Up until now, the story of Gascoigne's daughters had simply been a tragic one. However, when it becomes clear that the oldest sister has gone mad and possibly caused the death of her sister, the tone of the story changes. It is no longer tragedy; this has become a story about the way women manipulate other women and become monstrous without ever turning into an actual beast.

The story of Viola and Gascoigne's daughters is slightly subtler than the other two female "relationships" in *Bloodborne*. Like the sister arc, these relationships also show the monstrousness of women to one another in *Bloodborne*. Near the beginning of the game, if the player goes back to the starting room, he can walk up the stairs and talk to Iosfeka herself. Iosfeka refuses to open the door for him (all the citizens of Yharnam refuse to open their doors out of fear) and tells him that she cannot risk exposing her patients. She is friendly and will eventually tell the Hunter she hopes she will be able to see him in the daylight once the hunt is over, creating a sexual tone. However, at some point, Iosfeka is replaced with an imposter. She is clearly not Iosfeka; her voice is different, she is obsessed with getting the Hunter to send her people looking for a safe place, and, if the player looks carefully through the cracked glass, he can see that she is concealing a weapon behind her back. The player can also tell she is not Iosfeka because Iosfeka would occasionally give the player items called Iosfeka's Blood Vial, which the Imposter Iosfeka never gives the player. In fact, until the player sends people to Iosfeka's Clinic, she never gives the player anything. Eventually, the player makes his way into the back of Iosfeka's Clinic where he is met by an alien, a sparkly blue, gelatinous alien. After killing this alien, which will not attack the player until it's near death, the alien drops Iosfeka's Blood Vial, sealing the fate of the real Iosfeka in the player's mind. The Imposter Iosfeka somehow made her way into Iosfeka's clinic and began experimenting on Iosfeka in her own lab. Though Imposter Iosfeka does not actually kill Iosfeka, she manipulates her into something not human. Here are two more women made monstrous, one literally and the other through her actions toward the other. *Nightmare*, on the other hand, doesn't necessarily use women to make one another

monstrous. Instead, *Nightmare* uses the conventional trope of letting the man force the women into monstrosity.

The other female relationship in *Bloodborne* is between Arianna the prostitute and Adella the nun. There are two safe places in *Bloodborne* – Iosfeka’s Clinic and Oedon Chapel – that NPCs who ask for safe places to go can be sent. Arianna and Adella are both NPCs who can be sent to safe places and, if they are both sent to Oedon Chapel, which is the only real safe place as everyone who is sent to Iosfeka’s Clinic is turned into a blobby alien, their interactions turn nefarious quickly. Arianna would typically be the first one sent to Oedon Chapel. Arianna seems nice and conversational if a little seductive. Once Adella gets to Oedon Chapel, things go downhill. Adella is reverent and essentially wants to worship the Hunter for his “noble deeds” in killing the beasts. Arianna remarks to the Hunter that she thinks she’s the “black sheep” of this “little family” and, if the player turns the camera when talking to Arianna, Adella can be seen glaring at the Hunter (*Bloodborne*). Both Arianna and Adella will give the Hunter their blood vials (Blood of Arianna and Blood of Adella, respectively); however, if the Hunter takes only blood from Arianna and not blood from Adella, Adella will eventually kill Arianna out of jealousy. If the Hunter “forces” Adella to kill Arianna, Adella will turn hostile toward the Hunter. Arianna and Adella’s story is not necessarily as involved as the story of Iosfeka or Gascoigne’s daughters, but the woman on woman violence is no less tragic. All of these instances show women perpetrating violence against other women, women becoming monstrous. There isn’t really an obvious precedent for this in video games, let alone horror games. For the most part, men are the perpetrators of violence in horror. In this way, *Bloodborne* is different because women often take out

their aggression on other women. Video games have mostly shown either strong women or women as supporting characters with little or lesser influence on the plotline. Women are often just the victims of violence. Because of this, little is written about woman on woman violence in video games. However, Phyllis Chesler's groundbreaking work *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman* explores the world of violence between women. For the most part, Chesler focuses on the subtle ways women show violence toward one another: gossip, manipulation, and the like. However, this same line of thought can be applied to *Bloodborne*. Chesler said:

Studies have found that women are hostile to women and do not like, trust, respect, or find their statements to be credible. This is hardly surprising since women grow up in the same culture that men do, and thus are not immune to that culture... To the extent that women are oppressed, we have also internalized the prevailing misogynist ideology which we uphold both in order to survive and in order to improve our own individual positions vis-à-vis all other women. (2)

Nearly every woman in *Bloodborne* has climbed on the failing backs of the women around them in order to achieve something. For the elder sister, it was getting a coveted hair ribbon; for Imposter Iosfeka, it was possibly higher standing in the Healing Church; and for Adella, it was the favor of the Hunter. According to Chesler, they do this because it is what they have been taught in the patriarchal culture they live in. We know this universe contains a patriarchal culture because there is only one woman in power, Vicar Amelia, the head of the Healing Church. Though she's in power, she has allowed such atrocities to happen to women, like allowing the blood ministration and worship of the Great Ones (who essentially rape women) to continue. Vicar Amelia is not the founder

of the Healing Church; that honor goes to a man named Laurence, the First Vicar. She is simply continuing his rule and extending his reach, making her complicit in the brutality against women. When the women of Yharnam see not just men but other women perpetrating the violence against them, they also become perpetrators of the violence. They have come to understand that in this world, women are lesser and thus can be subjected to violence.

Though Vicar Amelia expounds upon violence against women, she is also one of a few tragic female characters in *Bloodborne*. Vicar Amelia is the second mandatory boss fight in the game. Entering the Healing Church's Grand Cathedral and approaching the kneeling Amelia



Figure 8. Vicar Amelia before her transformation.

triggers a cutscene. In the cutscene, Amelia can be heard praying, clad in bloody, ragged clothing, and clutching a gold locket that has been passed down through the vicars of the Healing Church (see figure 8). As the prayer winds down to an end, Vicar Amelia begins to transform into a beast. Though most people slowly turn into beasts, Amelia suddenly and violently transforms, much more violently than Gascoigne's transformation, which is the first transformation the player saw. The player watches Vicar Amelia's transformation in shadows. He sees her head bent and listens to her breath become scratchy and thick as her neck twists back. He hears her screech as her skin rips apart and her blood splatters to accommodate her new beastly form. As a beast, Vicar Amelia's ashy blonde hair has become a thick coat and her ragged dress has become a

headpiece. She has also sprouted thin horns and gained a lupine snout and a huge mouth with an unusual amount of teeth (see figure 9). Vicar Amelia's appearance is more horrific than anything the player has seen thus far. Her appearance and the violence with which she transforms tells the player that not only are women monstrous but so is the Healing Church. The Healing Church making their vicar a woman was monstrous enough, having her literally transform into a beast only solidifies her and the Church's monstrosity, although order is quickly restored when the player kills Amelia. Amelia's death is much easier for the player to stomach now that she has transformed into a hideous beast.



Figure 9. Vicar Amelia's beast form.

Like Nancy, Tina, and Glen before her,

Amelia must have some sort of deformity in order for her death to be celebrated; those who must die cannot appear human, or they need to have committed a sin grave enough for the viewers to understand and appreciate their death.

About midway through the game, the player fights Rom, the Vacuous Spider. Rom is found at Byrgenwerth College, at the “bottom” of the lake beside the college and guarded by Master Willem, a founder of the blood healing and, by proxy, the Healing Church. Rom does not really resemble a spider but she does look like a giant, multi-legged bug with a porous head; through the craters in Rom's head the player can see multiple eyes (see figure 10). Rom was once a scholar at Byrgenwerth and was once a woman, which is evidenced by the fact that she spawns “children” to help defend her and

she was confirmed as a woman by Miyazaki (10). Rom prayed to one of the more powerful Great Ones, Kos, to grant her true sight, eyes on the inside. Kos apparently

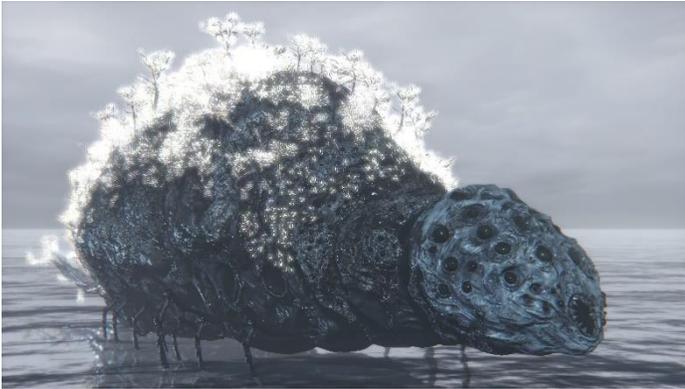


Figure 10. Rom, the Vacuous Spider.

granted her wish and transformed her into a Great One with eyes literally on the inside. Rom also controls the veil between realities because of her true sight. Once Rom has been killed, the veil is lifted and the Hunter and all the

Yharnamites can see reality instead of the reality Rom chose to present to them. This actual reality is filled with more horror than most people can comprehend and it causes them to go mad much faster. This “new” horror is filled with more aliens that are grotesque and it reveals the hidden Great Ones that have been clinging to buildings in Yharnam for gods know how long. Again, it is much easier to justify killing a woman when she is made into a monster, hiding her femininity, but not making her any less of a woman.

Of all the tragic, punished women in *Bloodborne*, Queen Yharnam has the least amount of screen time. The player sees her once after defeating Rom and then again as he ascends to kill the first of three final bosses – Mergo’s Wet Nurse. Each time the player sees Queen Yharnam, she looks the same: bloody, white dress with a ruffled collar, pale and sunken cheeks, black eyes, and



Figure 11. Queen Yharnam.

shackled hands (see figure 11). After the boss fight with Rom, the player watches the Blood Moon rise with Queen Yharnam and hears the cries of a baby. From a previous bit of lore picked up by the player, he knows that when the Blood Moon rises “a womb shall be blessed with child” (*Bloodborne*). All the children the Great Ones give birth to are stillborn, so Great Ones are constantly looking for wombs to “bless” with their children. Though the Great Ones don’t physically manifest and rape the women, forcing them to bear children is a reproductive rape, a violation of the sanctity of the womb. The fact that Great Ones can give birth to children and impregnate women is a puzzling contradiction. Queen Yharnam’s womb was clearly one of those hijacked by a Great One. The player knows this because her dress is bloodied nearly directly over her womb, as if the babe was ripped from her before it reached full term. Another clue is that she is found crying outside the boss room for Mergo’s Wet Nurse, indicating that Mergo is her child. The queen’s bound hands suggest that this was done against her will; how much of it was against her will, the player doesn’t know. Perhaps she wanted to be blessed with a baby Great One and just didn’t want the baby ripped away from her so early or maybe she didn’t want anything to do with any of it and was forced into it.

The player then goes on to kill two women with one boss fight. Mergo’s Wet Nurse is clearly a woman simply based on her title as a wet nurse; to reiterate that she is female, the game developers also put her in a corset and gave her rings and necklaces to wear. While Mergo’s Wet Nurse is not a humanoid creature, she is still clearly female. When the wet nurse first enters the arena, she swoops down on a baby carriage and seemingly picks Mergo up and cradles her. Throughout the boss fight, the player hears Mergo’s cries. After defeating the wet nurse, Mergo only cries for a few more moments

before being silenced. *Bloodborne* makes it easy for the player to kill the wet nurse because she is, again, monstrous, but it also gives permission to kill yet another woman, a baby, because the player only kills her by proxy.

The player also learns that Queen Yharnam's womb was not the only womb that was "blessed." If the player has allowed the Imposter Iosfeka to live until after Rom has been defeated, he finds her upstairs in her clinic on her hands and knees on a gurney. She is moaning in pain and lost in her own madness. She says she feels things wiggling around in her brain. After killing her, she drops One Third Umbilical Cord, reinforcing the idea that she was a surrogate for a Great One. Arianna's womb is the last one to be used as far as the player knows. After defeating Rom, Arianna will tell the player she doesn't feel well. Eventually, Arianna will give birth to a small, winged worm-like "child" (see figure 12). Arianna is crying and is visibly upset. If the player kills the baby Great One, Arianna will also die—another transgressive woman to throw on the pyre.



Figure 12. Arianna and her Great One child.

#### IV. The Dream

*Nightmare* and *Bloodborne* share many elements of the gothic, which is typical of horror films and games. Some elements of the gothic include “mysterious religious cults, repressed memories, uncanny doppelgangers, murder, betrayal and incest... claustrophobic, gloomy settings imbued with a sense of forthcoming violence...” (Kirkland 107). *Bloodborne* has a religious cult, murder, and betrayal in “gloomy setting imbued with a sense of forthcoming violence” and *Nightmare* is rife with repressed memories, murder, and cramped, scary places like boiler rooms and dark, dank alleyways (Kirkland 107).

Gothic elements have long been identified in films but it is a new idea to video games, though horror games tend to be heavily inspired by the gothic. Ewan Kirkland uses Charlene Burnell’s claims that “a key quality of the Gothic being its ‘ability to actively engage the reader’s participation in the story’” and “[a]n audience cannot merely read the Gothic story; they must experience it” to illustrate the ways survival horror video games are influenced by gothic elements (109). If the idea of gothic literature is to experience it rather than just be a bystander, video games are a shining example of gothic literature because in order to be “read,” a video game must be interacted with and experienced. Though Kirkland’s essay focuses on the *Silent Hill* video game franchise, his idea that horror games are heavily inspired by gothic elements rings true and is another way that video games could be scholarly examined.

Dreams and nightmares are prevalent in gothic literature. Dreams are important; dreams are safe, even if disjointed. The Hunter’s Dream in *Bloodborne* is a prime example of this. For the Hunter, the Dream is the safest place in the game. It’s where he

goes to level up, buy new items, and travel to different areas of the map. But the Dream isn't such a safe, happy place for Gehrman. The Dream is horrific to Gehrman; it's his cage and the place he can never escape. Gehrman, like Freddy, is trapped by the Dream and unable to enter the waking world without help. Freddy needs someone to pull him from the veil; for Gehrman, death is his only release.

Both Freddy and Gehrman were put in these dream spaces because they essentially had no other choice. Though the lore in the game does not say why exactly Gehrman was put in the Dream, players can infer a few things from what they do know. The player does know that Gehrman considers the Dream a nightmare. If the player walks up on Gehrman while he's sleeping, he says, "Oh, Laurence... Master Willem... Somebody help me... Unshackle me please, anybody... I've had enough of this dream... The night blocks all sight... Oh, somebody, please..." (*Bloodborne*). The player also knows that the Great One, the Moon Presence, created the dream and put Gehrman there. The player knows this because after killing Gehrman, the Moon Presence descends and the Hunter must either kill him to end the Dream or die to him and take Gehrman's place. The item description for the One Third Umbilical Cord that the Hunter picks up in the Old Abandoned Workshop says, "The Third Umbilical Cord precipitated the encounter with the pale moon, which beckoned the hunters and conceived the hunter's dream. – Abandoned Workshop" (*Bloodborne*). This item description is the root of a popular theory among the *Bloodborne* community – that Gehrman is the substitute child for the Moon Presence. This is indicated by a few things in game: that the Hunter becomes Gehrman's substitute upon dying to the Moon Presence and the One Third Umbilical Cord found in the Old Abandoned Workshop. That workshop was founded by Gehrman,

and he taught many students there. When the blood was found and the moon loomed closer, the Moon Presence (whose baby was stillborn as evidenced by the umbilical cord) took Gehrman to replace the child. Gehrman is the perfect choice to oversee the Dream because he was the first hunter and, therefore, knows the most about the Hunt and Yharnam. However, that is a choice the Moon Presence makes, not Gehrman. Gehrman is essentially kidnapped and placed in the dream. Because Gehrman is the keeper of the Dream, it is necessarily gendered masculine, which fits in with the overtly masculine and patriarchal theme of *Bloodborne*.

Freddy does choose to enter the dream realm, but it isn't much of a choice. The original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* doesn't explore why Freddy appears in people's dreams but the sixth movie in the franchise does. *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* takes a much more comedic and campy approach than the other films, but it is still considered canonical by *Nightmare* fans. In *The Final Nightmare*, the viewer learns that Freddy was approached by dream demons, which are essentially worm-like creatures made entirely of bone instead of flesh, who give him the opportunity to walk in their dream world. The goal of the dream demons is to break down the barrier between reality and dreams, and they believe Freddy can help them do that. Freddy accepts and thus comes to stalk the nightmares of children. Freddy's alternative was just to die and, one would assume, go to hell. It isn't much of a choice. Freddy can either no longer exist or continue to exist and do one of the things he loves – kill.

No one is safe in his or her dreams in *Nightmare*, and Gehrman is not safe in his dream either. Dreams, simply, are not always a safe place for everyone. Dreams occasionally challenge the fabric of reality in horrific and mind-bending ways that are

specific to the people within the dream. This is evident in both *Bloodborne* and *Nightmare*. From the beginning of *Bloodborne*, the Hunter doesn't know if this is all real or "just a bad dream" (*Bloodborne*). Even if it isn't technically a dream space, it's still a nightmare realm for the Hunter and player, a nightmare that is specific to the Hunter. A hunter's worst nightmare is to become the thing he hunts. Throughout *Bloodborne*, the hunter is hunting people much like him, people who were involved in one way or another with the hunt and turned into beasts, a horrific end. A hunter's main goal is to hunt but the larger goal within that is to protect the people of Yharnam. The Hunter causes the death of more than a few innocent citizens of Yharnam: Gascoigne's youngest daughter by giving her the brooch, Arianna either by making Adella so jealous that she murders her or by killing Arianna's alien child, an old woman who agrees to go out into the city to find sedatives for the Hunter and who is murdered steps from Oeden Chapel, and anyone the Hunter chooses to send to Iosfeka's Clinic is also murdered in a way. Those deaths are on the Hunter and player's heads and their heads alone. Essentially choosing who lives and who dies through his actions creates an individualized nightmare for the Hunter and player. Freddy doesn't have the same qualms about killing innocents like the Hunter and player would. That's what Freddy feeds on. However, he does shape his nightmare realms to specifically horrify each of the people he kills. This is best seen in third film in the series *A Nightmare on Elm Street 3: Dream Warriors*. In this film, the last surviving children of the people who killed Freddy all end up in the same psych ward together with Nancy who is an intern psychologist. Nancy begins teaching them how to fight Freddy in their dreams, which results in several individually tailored deaths. The first to die is Phil. Phil likes to play with puppets, marionettes. When Freddy appears to Phil, he first

appears as a puppet before transforming to his full size and slicing out Phil's tendons to use as puppet strings. Freddy then walks Phil up to the top of the hospital and dangles him over the side before slicing the puppet strings and letting Phil fall to his death. Not long after, Jennifer, who wants to be an actress, is also murdered. She's staying up late and watching television to research for her career when Freddy appears in the program and then becomes the television before reaching out and grabbing Jennifer (see figure 13). Just before smashing Jennifer's head into the screen to kill her, he says, "Here's your big break in TV. Welcome to prime time, bitch" (*Nightmare 3*). Freddy also kills former drug addict Taryn. In the dream, Freddy and Taryn are having a knife fight when Freddy transforms his razors into syringes filled with drugs and plunges them into Taryn, killing her with a drug overdose. Each of these dreams and deaths are specifically tailored to things these kids liked, turning something that used to bring them pleasure into something horrific.

Though people are constantly dying in their dreams, the characters in *Nightmare* still choose to enter their dreams where death is, for all they know, imminent. Nancy specifically plans to fall asleep in order to fight Freddy. By doing so, Nancy is turning the hunted into the

hunter. She's taking control back of her narrative and asserting a more dominant identity, which until then had been mostly



Figure 13. TV Freddy grabbing Jennifer.

passive. In short, it's a power play on Nancy's part. Similarly, the Hunter also takes control of his own narrative. Though the Hunter is already hunting, he's still a pawn in the game of the Great Ones, slaughtering beasts in the ritualized Hunt. However, when the Hunter starts hunting Great Ones, he too takes control of his own narrative. No longer are Nancy and the Hunter content with being pawns or victims in someone else's game; they're trying to make their own rules. The difference here is that Nancy is a character with thoughts, feelings, and emotions all her own. She is free to make these decisions and the viewer is simply there to watch. The Hunter is not. The Hunter is a character too but a playable one, which makes all the difference. It's not really the Hunter who is deciding to go into these dreams, it's the player. Therefore, it's the player asserting his identity and taking control of a narrative that he had thus far just been following along.

The player and Nancy taking back their narratives restructures the dream spaces. From the beginning of both the game and film, the dreams were masculine. In *Nightmare*, the dreams are controlled by Freddy, making them masculine regardless of whose dream it is. In *Bloodborne*, Gehrman controls the Dream, making it masculine, and Great Ones control the nightmares, making them ambiguous (an argument could be made that ambiguity is necessarily masculine). However, when Nancy briefly defeats Freddy, the dream space becomes feminine. She has gained control back. Gehrman's control of the Dream in *Bloodborne* is relinquished after his death. If the player becomes a baby Great One, the dream is no longer controlled by a male point of view; it's now controlled by the Doll, making it feminine. Likewise, if the Hunter is female, it restructures the Dream to a feminine one.

Another important element of the dream spaces in both media is that what happens in the dream informs reality. When the Hunter kills Rom in a dream-like world, it causes the veil to lift and the true horrors of the waking world to come to light, and the Hunter can bring things from the Hunter's Dream into the waking world. When Freddy hurts or kills someone in the dream, they also die in reality. This indicates that really the dreams and nightmares are all parts of reality. It's not "normal" reality in that things make sense and are immutable. But it is reality in the sense that things that happen have lasting consequences. The dream spaces are simply a different plane of reality than the "normal" reality is. In fact, it could be argued that the "normal" reality is the safe dream. It's the place that makes sense and is filled with horrors and changes that can be understood. Dream spaces are really all nightmares in that the fabric of the normal reality is thin and there are horrors and changes that are vast and inscrutable.

## VI. Conclusion

*Bloodborne* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* are both vastly different and shockingly similar. Both media have dream spaces that are homogenous, have women who are monstrous, and have men who are symbolically castrated (Gehrman and Gascoigne by their self-inflicted blindness and Freddy by the loss of his glove). However, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* gets far more attention from the academic community. In fact, I could find no scholarship on *Bloodborne*. There is some critique on the gothic in video games as well as articles that focus on the psychological effects of games and gender in games. However, the articles that do focus on gender in games focus on male violence against women, ignoring the violence women perpetrate against one another. The landscape of academic study is ever changing and games are going to become a part of that realm. There is no reason for games to not. They provide an entirely new playground of psychological, sociological, and theoretical study, an untapped wealth that ties directly into film and literary study. Games have yet to be taken seriously in academics, but that will and should change. If scholars choose to take advantage of video games and consider it a new medium, it could reinvigorate horror film studies. The parallels between *Nightmare* and *Bloodborne* prove that it can be done. It is an area that with time and the proper attention will become much more important to the academic community.

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