



Lara Croft and Jill Valentine

Understanding the Representation of Female Protagonists in Triple-A Video Games in the #MeToo Era

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ABSTRACT

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Recent years have seen a change in female representation in media as movements like #MeToo brought the issues of sexual harassment and abuse to the forefront of public discussion. The objective of this thesis was to analyze and understand changes made to the portrayal of two female protagonists from long running video game series, Lara Croft from Tomb Raider and Jill Valentine from Resident Evil, in response to a more gender-aware audience.

Their portrayals in the games were evaluated through feminist and queer lenses based on Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, Carol Clover's Final Girl trope and Jack Halberstam's queer discussion of the two concepts. A secondary objective of the thesis was to understand how those classic works of feminist film theory could be translated to video game analysis in 2020.

It was found that through their many appearances, both characters had their designs changed more than once and both had positive and negative aspects, particularly when it came to catering to the male gaze and over-sexualized character designs. Their latest iterations were found to be their most positive portrayals yet and a shift was noticed from the focus on sexualization to the punishment and a masculinization of female protagonists. Both characters had parallels to Clover's Final Girl and while neither of the games had any openly queer representation, queer themes and metaphors were present in both, and venues for a possible queer gaze were found.

It was concluded that the portrayal of the female protagonists had improved through time but there were still issues present. A first attempt at a video game character analysis theory was made, focusing on two reflecting gazes, the developer gaze and the player gaze. Other topics were raised for possible future discussion, such as other protagonists to be evaluated, the nature of cross-gender player and character identification in video games, and the popularity of video game death-scenes compilations on the internet.

Key words: video games, female characters, representation, Jill Valentine, Lara Croft

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	6
2	LARA CROFT	9
2.1	The Tomb Raider	9
2.2	The Legend trilogy	10
3	JILL VALENTINE	12
3.1	Resident Evil	12
3.2	Her journey	12
3.2.1	Resident Evil (Capcom 1996).....	13
3.2.2	Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999).....	15
3.2.3	Resident Evil 5 (Capcom 2009).....	17
3.2.4	Resident Evil: Revelations (Capcom 2012a)	19
4	TOMB RAIDER (2013).....	21
4.1	Overview	21
4.2	Lara and the male gaze	21
4.2.1	Lara 2013	22
4.2.2	A troublesome trailer	23
4.2.3	Killing Lara Croft.....	25
4.3	Lara as Final Girl.....	26
4.3.1	Himiko, the undying mother.....	27
4.3.2	Falling into a Terrible Place	29
4.3.3	Final Lara	31
4.4	Queering Lara Croft	32
4.4.1	Bodies that splatter.....	33
4.4.2	Lara’s scars	34
4.4.3	Dual wielding	36
5	RESIDENT EVIL 3 (2020).....	39
5.1	Overview	39
5.2	Jill and the male gaze	39
5.2.1	Jill (1999) vs. Jill (2020).....	39
5.2.2	Her own gaze	42
5.2.3	“Name’s Carlos and I’m saving you”	44
5.2.4	The Drain Deimos and tentacle erotica	46
5.3	Jill as Final Girl.....	49
5.3.1	The Nemesis	49
5.3.2	Raccoon City is a Terrible Place.....	51

5.3.3 Final Jill	51
5.4 Queering Jill Valentine	54
5.4.1 Zombies and rabid women	54
5.4.2 FINGeR grafting	56
6 THE TWO-WAY GAZE	59
6.1 A different time, a different media	59
6.2 The (often) male gazes	59
6.2.1 The developer gaze.....	59
6.2.2 The player gaze.....	60
6.2.3 The two-way nature of the gazes.....	62
6.3 The Punished Femme.....	63
6.3.1 Gender and genre	64
6.4 Fandom and intersectionality	65
7 DISCUSSION	67
7.1 Lara and Jill.....	67
7.2 The two-way gaze	69
REFERENCES	71
APPENDICES.....	77
Appendix 1. Jill Valentine and Lara Croft main game appearances timeline.....	77
Appendix 2. The Many Faces of Lara Croft: Tomb Raider Infographic	78
Appendix 3. Online marketing material	79

GLOSSARY

Triple-A	classification for video games produced with a high budget.
Ship/shipping	derived from relationship, desire in the fandom for two characters to be in a romantic relationship.
Achievement	in video games, a goal that exists outside the game's parameters.
Mods	modified in-game content shared by players and fans.
Femme	identity term used by self-described feminine queer individuals regardless of gender, comes from the French word meaning "woman".
BDSM	a variety of often erotic practices involving bondage, discipline, dominance and submission, and sadomasochism.
Dominatrix	a woman who takes the dominant role in BDSM activities
Headcanon	in fandom, refers to ideas held by fans that are not explicitly supported by official text or other media.
User telemetry	tools for software developers to acquire data on how the users interact with their software.
Cisgender	someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth.
Queer	an umbrella term for sexual and gender identities that fall beyond the heterosexual and/or cisgender normativity.

1 INTRODUCTION

The past years have brought on a new wave of discussions regarding gender equality, with movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp starting on social media and bringing the subject of sexual abuse and harassment to the forefront of social discussions, with many abuses within the game industry also coming into light (Taylor 2020). Those changes in public discourse led to a more gender-aware audience, which is less forgiving of stereotypical and objectified portrayals of women in media. The new sensibilities were not perceived only in more traditional media, but also in video games, where a new sort of female protagonist appeared, different from the highly sexualised characters that were common before.

From lack of representation, to the sexualization of existing female characters, the issues with female representation in video games have been studied for some time. A comprehensive study analysing 31 years of female characters, from 1983 to 2014, found that, while the sexualization of female characters has been diminishing since 2006, the first year of the #MeToo movement, the percentage of female primary characters has remained unchanged (Fritz, Lynch, Tompkins, van Driel 2016). Supporting this, a gender breakdown of the main characters in games featured at the Electronic Entertainment Expo 2019 showed that less than 5% of them were female (Petit, Sarkeesian 2019). This is reflected in the industry itself, a heavily male-centric environment where the majority of developers are “white gamer bros” (Code 2017) and where leading executives actively oppose the creation of female protagonists under the belief that woman leads do not sell (Valentine 2020).

The aim of this thesis is to examine the recent changes in portrayal of two lead female video game characters from popular and long-running triple-A video game series, Lara Croft from the Tomb Raider Series (Eidos Interactive 1996-2009; Square Enix 2010-present) and Jill Valentine from the Resident Evil series (Capcom 1996-present). A more in-depth and critical look is given to this decade’s reboots of each character, seen in Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics, 2013) and

Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020) respectively. This is done to gain insight into the changes to female representation in video games that have been happening through the past years, as well as into how we can evaluate their representation in current times.

Lara Croft and Jill Valentine have been consistently ranked among the most iconic and popular characters in gaming, being mentioned in both gender-neutral lists like the Guinness World Record's 2011 Gamer's edition top 50 video game characters of all time (Gamasutra 2011) and gendered lists such as Game Spy's tellingly named Top Ten Babes in Games (Johnson 2003) and Forbes' Are These The Top Women Game Characters of All Time? (Ewalt 2013).

Through more than two decades since their first appearances, Lara and Jill have gone through many different iterations of their characters, being depicted in several games, movies, comic books, marketing campaigns and collectable miniatures. When presented with such a vast catalogue of representations, it can be difficult to scrutinize all of them with the required diligence. Therefore, I decided to focus on their main game appearances, observing their history and trajectory to get a deeper sense of perspective when doing a more in-depth analysis of their recent reboots. A timeline of their main game appearances is available in the Appendix 1.

The methodology for this thesis work involves critical textual analysis through a feminist lens and literature review. For the textual analysis, I chose to use an approach like the one used by Christopher Alton (2020) in his PhD dissertation on gender representation in the Resident Evil series. In the dissertation Alton uses a modified version of Diane Carr's (2014) method, used in her article Ability, Disability, and Dead Space to analyse horror video game Dead Space (Electronic Arts, 2008). When examining the game, Carr played through it three times. The first time for pleasure, then for a more focused exploration, making notes and taking screenshots, and finally for the third time playing specific sections of the game that were particularly relevant to the analysis. Alton skips the first play-through when analysing games that he is already familiar with and adds notes from Twitter, gameplay videos from YouTube and official material sanctioned by

Capcom to his personal experiences. (Carr 2014; Alton 2020, 6-7.) Like Alton, I am familiar with the games I will discuss in this thesis, especially the ones in the Resident Evil series, which I have gone through twice in the past year.

When it comes to the feminist lens mentioned above, I will be taking into consideration landmark film analysis theories from feminist canon such as Laura Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory, which discusses how the camera perceives female subjects. As well as film Professor Carol Clover's (1992) Final Girl trope, where she analysed a new form of female protagonist that started appearing in horror movies during the 1970's, not unlike the new female protagonists of video games that started appearing forty years after.

To bring the discussion into more current topics of diversity of representation and understandings of gender that go beyond binaries and traditional stereotypes, I will make use of queer theorist Jack Halberstam's (1995) discussion of the Final Girl trope, where he argued for the possibility of a more radical and queer gaze in the Final Girl's slasher movies. That is done as my own intellectualized version of what Edmond Chang (2017) calls queer remediation, a process through which queer gamers solve the lack of representation by creating their own queer narratives surrounding the game's text.

The use of film theories, which may be considered dated even within their own disciplines (Bordo 2015; Kaplan 1983), is deliberate. Within the scope of this thesis is understanding the ways in which they may or may not be applied to the analysis of female character portrayal in video games. From those findings, I seek to create a first draft for my own method to analyse and evaluate the post-#MeToo triple-A video game protagonist.

2 LARA CROFT

2.1 The Tomb Raider

Lara Croft was introduced for the first time in the game Tomb Raider in 1996 (Core Design), the same year as the debut of Jill Valentine. And since then she has been one of the most recognizable characters in the video game industry, with her popularity expanding beyond that. She has also been a very controversial character, about whom there has been a lot of discussion and criticism in critical and feminist readings, which have frequently focused on her design and her sexualised nature (MacCallum-Stewart 2014).

Being the only protagonist in her series, Lara has appeared in games more frequently than Jill. This may be part of the reason why her character design does not change as much as Jill's from one game to the next one. In fact, when observing *The Many Faces of Lara Croft: Tomb Raider Infographic* (Appendix 2) we can see that her design has not changed much at all through the series, with changes being mainly motivated by the evolution of the hardware rendering her into the game. The exception to this being her latest redesign in the reboot *Tomb Raider* (Square Enix 2013), which happened "in line with attempts by the game industry to provide a more appealing female protagonist" (MacCallum-Stewart 2014).

The character has also not experienced much development personality or plot wise through most of the series. Unlike in *Resident Evil*, a series known for its convoluted story, the plot in the first *Tomb Raider* games was limited to the following formula: Lara learns about an intriguing artefact, Lara travels the world to find pieces of said artifact, Lara discovers a big danger behind the artefact, Lara fights the final boss and saves the day.

The first time *Tomb Raider* played with the idea of a backstory and a more developed plot happened in the fourth game in the series, *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation* (Core Design 1999). This was partially because they wanted this game to

be her last one. As level designer Andy Sandham (2016) said in an interview to Retro Gamer magazine:

We all wanted to kill Lara. Looking at Lara's avatar all day every day for two years was about as much as some of us could take. Management were pretty hands off, so for two weeks, we hatched a plan to kill Lara, and followed it through to fruition. (Sandham 2016, 23.)

The fourth game in the series gave us the view of a teenage Lara Croft, with pigtails, and introduced us to her Mentor, Austrian archaeologist Werner Von Croy. It also included Lara's presumed death, being crushed in a pyramid collapse, as the developers had planned. Their plan, as history shows, did not work. Lara came back to life as soon as the next year with the release of Tomb Raider Chronicles (Core Design 2000). After that, the Tomb Raider games started experimenting more with their narrative, to varying degrees of success.

The next game in the series Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness (Core Design 2003) marked its move from the PlayStation to the PlayStation 2 and is generally considered to be a failure, as it was heavily criticized for bugs, a messy narrative and a frustrating control scheme (Marshall 2013). The negative reception eventually led to Eidos transferring the development of the franchise from Core Design to Crystal Dynamics (BBC News 2003). Under Crystal Dynamic, Lara got her first reboot, in the Legend trilogy.

2.2 The Legend trilogy

The so-called Legend trilogy is comprised of three games, Tomb Raider: Legend (Crystal Dynamics 2006), Tomb Raider: Anniversary (Crystal Dynamics 2007) and Tomb Raider: Underworld (Crystal Dynamics 2008). In this first reboot of the series, Lara was given a new design, background and motivations. The team still wanted to honour the series history, however, and the original creator of Lara Croft, Toby Gard, joined them at pre-production stage, having a big part in her redesigning (Sewart 2006).

The trilogy had one single storyline, that ran through the three games. It started setting up Lara's mother's mysterious accident which involved her falling through

a magic portal in the Himalayas when Lara was a young girl. This gave Lara one extra motivation to adventure, as she looked for a way to save her mother. The second game in the trilogy is a reimagining of the first Tomb Raider (Core Design 1996), adding an origin story to this version of Lara and setting up the antagonist to the third game.

In the third game, Lara finds her mother, who has been half-turned into a zombie. Lara is forced to kill her for her own good. This is a variation of a common video game trope that feminist game critic Anita Sarkeesian (2013) calls the “euthanized damsel” in her popular YouTube series Tropes vs Women in Video Games. In this trope, which is a mix of two other tropes, the Damsel in Distress and the Mercy Killing trope, a male protagonist has to kill the damsel he has been looking for in order to save her from a worse fate. (Sarkeesian 2013.) Lara, of course, is not a male protagonist, so this can be understood as a subversion of the original trope.

While the Legend trilogy gave Lara Croft the most character development she had had so far, her new design did not do much to address her oversexualization. In fact, I would argue that Tomb Raider: Underworld (Crystal Dynamics 2008) was one of the lowest points for Lara in that regard, as can be seen in the cover art for the game (Figure 1), which blocks out half of her face from her body.

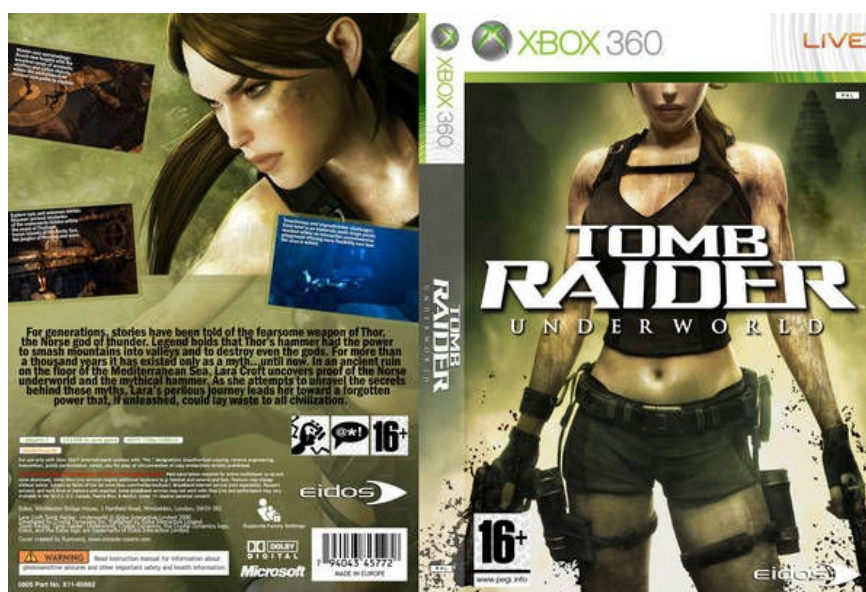


FIGURE 1. The cover art for the Xbox 360 PAL version of the game. (Eidos Interactive 2008).

3 JILL VALENTINE

3.1 Resident Evil

The Resident Evil series (Capcom 1996-present), known as Biohazard in Japan, is a genre-defining survival horror video game series. Since its first release, the series has had the tradition of offering both a male and a female protagonist, each with their own different narrative and slight mechanical differences. While the option to pick a character is not available at the start in all of the games, they do all offer at least parts in them where the player either has the option or must play as a character from the opposite gender.

As a long running series with a large cast of characters, the series does not have a single protagonist, the role alternates from game to game, with the most frequent ones being the first two to be introduced, Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine. The presence of both a female and a male protagonist, with their different scenarios and skills, facilitates a gendered analysis of the characters, it can be as simple as putting one in opposition to the other.

3.2 Her journey

Jill (Picture 1) has appeared in many games, not only in the main series but in spin-off games and cameos in different series. For this analysis I will not be discussing every single appearance of her but focusing on the ones which are most relevant to her history.



PICTURE 1. Jill's original design (Capcom 1996).

3.2.1 Resident Evil (Capcom 1996)

Jill is one of the possible player characters in the first Resident Evil (Capcom 1996), together with Chris Redfield. In this game, both characters are members of an elite police team called S.T.A.R.S – the Special Tactics and Rescue Service. They are sent to investigate a series of cannibalistic murders in the Arklay Mountains, near Raccoon City. When they arrive there, they are attacked by a pack of mutant dogs and get separated as they rush into an abandoned mansion. It is at this point that the player's character choice will come into play.

Whichever character the player does not pick at the start of the game, will disappear, and later found to have been captured by the enemy. It is relevant to note, as pointed out by Alton (2020), that while both characters may be chosen from the first playthrough, Chris is the default option in the character selection screen, Jill is the other from the start. This small bias towards the male character can often be seen in the next entries to the series.

Regardless of character, it soon becomes clear that the mansion is not abandoned but occupied by a horde of hungry zombies. The experience from then on

is not too different on each scenario, characters must fight monsters, solve puzzles, and escape the mansion.

Jill is introduced as a military trained and capable police officer. She is a good shot, being able to take down zombies with relative ease, and while she cannot take as many attacks as her male counterpart, she has a few advantages of her own. Namely, she is dubbed the “master of unlocking”, which means she can use a lockpick to unlock rooms Chris cannot access so easily. Not only that, she can also carry more items than him, which is helpful when solving puzzles and carrying extra ammo or healing items. The other big difference in Jill’s scenario is a third member of the S.T.A.R.S. team, Barry Burton.

Barry is a character exclusive to Jill’s side of the game, and he plays a big part in it. Alton (2020) makes a good case arguing that Barry is actually the protagonist in the scenario and not Jill herself. Alton points out that, multiple times through the game Barry is the one in the active position, while Jill and the player are required to stay in a passive position. One example of this dynamic happens early in the adventure, when Jill is caught in a trap room with a descending ceiling. The player must wait helplessly for a few seconds before a cutscene starts and Barry appears, saving Jill at the last moment. At another point, the player is asked to wait for Barry while he goes looking for a rope. This happens during regular gameplay, and if the player does not wait for Barry to return before moving forward, Barry will die, meaning that Jill will not be able to get her best ending anymore. (Alton 2020.)

When it comes to her character design in the first game, it was surprisingly sensible. Her blue S.T.A.R.S. outfit was tight, but practical. She wore black boots, long trousers, a tight shirt, black gloves, a beret and some sort of shoulder armour. Her original design seemed more focused on making her look like a professional than titillating the audience. Once the player had achieved the good ending with either Jill or Chris, one extra outfit was unlocked, which was more revealing, composed of black jeans and a short crop top, leaving her belly exposed (Picture 2).



PICTURE 3. Jill's alternative outfit (Capcom 1996).

Different versions of this game were released, with the most important one being Resident Evil (Capcom 2002), a remake of the original game for the Nintendo GameCube, with improved graphics, new levels, a better localization, and other improvements. When it came to its representation of Jill, it remained faithful to the original game.

3.2.2 Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999)

The third game in the main series had a tumultuous development phase. This is because, as registered by IGN writer Marc Nix (2009), the game that ended up being called Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999), was originally supposed to be a spin-off, Resident Evil Gaiden. Meanwhile, the game that was supposed to be Resident Evil 3, ended up being released as Resident Evil X: Code Veronica (Capcom 2000). Those changes happened because of legal matters, as Capcom still had a contract with Sony when they started developing games for different platforms, like the Dreamcast and Nintendo GameCube. (Nix 2009.)

Regarding this, the scenario developer to Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999) Yasuhisa Kawamura (2012), said the following in interview with fan site Umbrella Chronicles:

Now, with the sudden promotion of the "Gaiden" game, I was forced to expand the scale of the content. The story was initially supposed to just be an escape chronicle from an infected Raccoon City, but after discussions with the producer and director, it was decided that instead of introducing a new character, Jill Valentine will play the role of the main character. (Kawamura 2012.)

Alton (2020) posits that this could be part of the reason for the changes to Jill's design in this game, as the protagonist was not supposed to be her from the start. This makes sense when you consider her new visuals. Gone is her practical S.T.A.R.S. uniform, in this game Jill decided to face a zombie apocalypse by wearing a blue tube top, a black mini-skirt, brown long boots and a white sweater wrapped around her waist (Picture 4). It is clear the looks were meant to instigate a particular reaction from the presumed male player.



PICTURE 4. Jill's design in Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999).

There is no choice of protagonist in this game. The player will start and end the game in control of Jill Valentine, as she tries to escape Raccoon City, which has been overrun with the zombies from the first game, along with some new enemies. Towards the end of the game, control changes to series newcomer Carlos Oliveira for a little time, as Jill gets infected and he looks for an antivirus. Once that is done, Jill gets back to protagonist position.

When it comes to finer details in the plot of Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999), I will discuss them when examining its remake, Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020) further down this thesis. Overall, it can be said that, while her new design is no doubt an appeal to the eroticizing aspect of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975), Jill is in control of her journey through most of the game. It is disappointing, however, that even after she is done defeating the final boss in the game. Barry Burton, from the original Resident Evil (Capcom 1996), once again comes by to save her, flying her out of the city in his chopper at the last minute. Barry in this case is an example of *deus ex machina*, a plot device which is introduced suddenly and offers an unexpected solution to an otherwise unsolvable problem.

3.2.3 Resident Evil 5 (Capcom 2009)

Resident Evil 5 (Capcom 2009), the sixth numbered game in the series, takes place in Africa and has Chris Redfield as its protagonist. After the events in Resident Evil – Code Veronica (Capcom 2000) both Jill and Chris joined a new organisation called the BSAA, the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance. Early in the game it is revealed that Jill has died in-between games. We are told through a flashback that she sacrificed herself while protecting Chris from his nemesis, Albert Wesker. Nevertheless, her body was not recovered, and Chris believes there is more to this story. His investigations take him to Africa, where he meets his new partner Sheva Alomar.

After some time fighting new zombie-like creatures, Chris eventually finds out the truth. Jill is alive and under the control of Wesker, who regularly injects mind controlling drugs on her through a device he implanted on her chest. He also infected

her with a new strand of virus, giving her superhuman strength and speed, making this the physically strongest Jill is ever seen in the series. It is interesting that this sort of power is given to her when she is not in the position to use it freely. Jill at her strongest is controlled by a man, who decides how she gets to use her new skills. It could be argued that putting her in this passive position allows her character to perform more extreme feats of strength without provoking the anxieties of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975).

Jill's character design is once again changed from the past games. The mind controlling drugs have turned her blonde and she now wears a purple jumpsuit, which is often depicted half-open, showing considerable cleavage. This is particularly noticeable when Chris and Sheva fight Jill as a boss encounter. During the fight, they notice that Jill has the device on her bosom and must tear it out of her by hand in order to save her (Picture 5).



PICTURE 5. Chris tears off Jill's mind controlling device. (Capcom 2007)

Her new design and her role as a damsel-in-distress, a tired plot device who needs to be saved by a Chris who used to be her – mostly – equal, make this a game a low point when it comes to Jill's representation. A fact that is only made worse in retrospective, as this also marked her last appearance in the Resident Evil timeline, as it is revealed that she is offscreen doing therapy to get over her trauma during the events of the next game, Resident Evil 6 (Capcom 2012b).

It is worth mentioning, that while Jill is not playable in the main scenario, she is the protagonist of two paid downloadable short scenarios. One of them is called *Lost in Nightmares* (Capcom 2010) and takes place before the events of the game, taking the player through the mansion where Jill and Chris fought Wesker, ending after the encounter that lead Jill to her assumed death. In this one Jill even wears an appropriate tactical outfit, reminiscent of her design in *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996). The other one is called *Desperate Escape* (Capcom 2009) and takes place after Chris and Sheva saved Jill but had to go ahead to finish Wesker off. In this one she wears her catsuit and must leave the facility they left her in with the assistance of B.S.A.A. Captain Joshua Stone, taking down a lot of zombie-like monsters before escaping to the safety of offscreen therapy.

While it is good that they offered the opportunity for Jill to be played, keeping that behind a paywall is not a positive practice. It is not uncommon to keep female avatars behind a paywall, this seems to be a design choice particularly popular in mobile games. In her article on the *Washington Post*, young gamer Madeline Messer (2015) explained her survey of the 50 most popular running games in the iTunes Store: she found out that while 98 percent of the games offered a male character for free, only 15 percent of them had the option of a free female character (Messer 2015). The downloadable content was included in the special edition of the game, *Resident Evil 5: Gold Edition* (Capcom 2010), without extra charges.

3.2.4 Resident Evil: Revelations (Capcom 2012a)

Despite being released three years after *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom 2009), the events in *Resident Evil: Revelations* (Capcom 2012a) are a prequel to the former. The game was originally released for the Nintendo 3DS and the action took an episodic form which was popular at the time in other games like *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games 2012) and *Alan Wake* (Remedy Entertainment 2010).

The controlled characters change from episode to episode, including series veterans Jill Valentine and Chris Redfield, along with some newcomers. Regardless

of that, it can be said that Jill is the main character of the game, as she is controlled by the player in seven of its twelve 30 minutes-long episodes.

The game starts with a reversal of Resident Evil 5's (Capcom 2009) premise, Chris has gone missing in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, and Jill sets out to look for him with her new partner Parker Luciani. The search takes them to a derelict ship filled with crustacean-like monsters. This role switch gives her a more positive portrayal in comparison to the one she had in the previous game. Jill is once again put in an active position, as a capable and strong protagonist, who can, indeed, save her male counterpart just as well as he can save her.

Regarding the more eroticizing aspects of the male gaze, however, the representation could have been better. Taking advantage of the nautical theme, the designers dressed Jill in a skin-tight wetsuit (Picture 6), which gives the players a clear view of her behind throughout the game, as the third person camera shows her body from the thighs up. In her video about the male gaze and animations in video games, Sarkeesian (2016) talks about how Jill's animation in this game somehow makes her entire body jiggle as she walks.



PICTURE 6. Jill's outfit in Resident Evil Revelations (Capcom 2012a).

4 TOMB RAIDER (2013)

4.1 Overview

Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) was the first game in the series since 2008's Tomb Raider: Underworld (Crystal Dynamics) and the first one produced by Square Enix. Instead of following the established narrative of the previous games, 2013's Tomb Raider went for a total reboot of the series, providing a new origin story for Lara, now framed as a survivor.

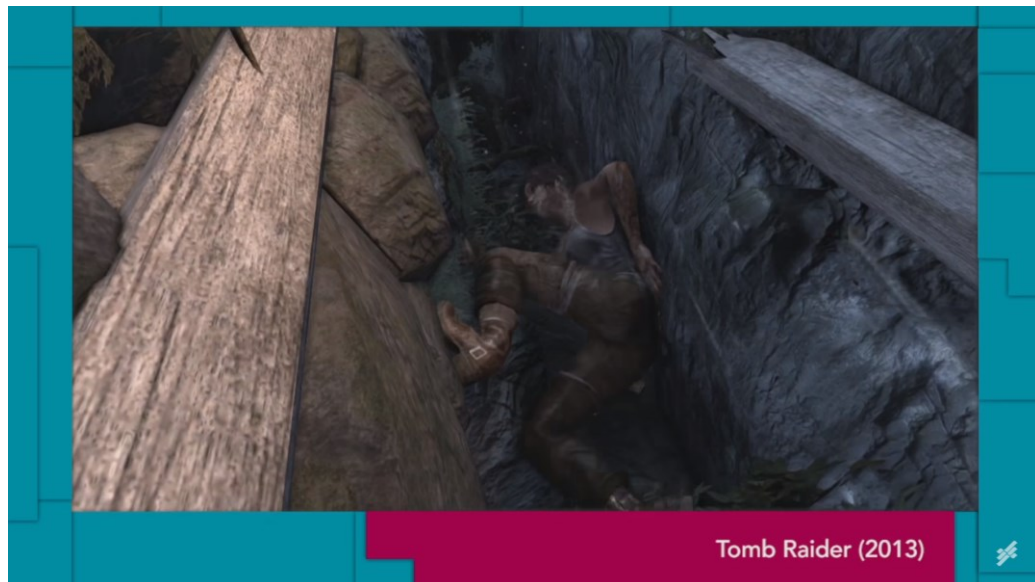
The story follows a fresh out of college 21-years-old Lara Croft, who survives the wrecking of her exploring ship, the Endurance, and ends up in the lost island of Yamatai. Separated from her adventuring team, Lara is quickly captured by the locals, a male-exclusive cult called the Solarii Brotherhood. As Lara confronts the Solarii in order to escape and save her friends, she learns to fend for herself and discovers the true nature of the Solarii and the cursed island.

4.2 Lara and the male gaze

When analysing the presentation of a female character in media, an interesting notion to dialogue with is the idea of the male gaze. According to feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) the camera's view in mainstream cinema represent the psychoanalytical concept of a male gaze, which in order to deal with its castration anxieties, must portray women through either a fetishistic view or a sadistic one. In the first case, it builds the female subject into an eroticized object, to be appreciated by its beauty. On the second one it investigates the woman, asserts control, and then either punishes or redeems and saves her. (Mulvey 1975.)

The 45 years old concept is relevant to this day, but some of its definitions do not translate as well into video games like Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) and Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), which allow the player a good degree of control over the camera. Despite that, there is still valuable insight to be gained from analysing 2013 Lara Croft's portrayal in relation to Mulvey's (1975) theory. In her

video *Body Language & The Male Gaze*, Anita Sarkeesian (2016) discusses the male gaze in video games and how it can be perceived on the character animations, using Lara's climbing in *Tomb Raider* as an example of the way the camera sometimes rests centered on a female character's buttocks without necessity (Picture 7).



PICTURE 7. Lara's climbing puts her anatomy on the camera's focus (Sarkeesian 2016).

On my analysis of 2013's Lara and the male gaze I will focus on three other aspects where I believe the male gaze applies: her new character design, her portrayal in the publicity campaign before the game was released, and the presence of the male gaze in some of the game's cutscenes, particularly the ones where she is hurt.

4.2.1 Lara 2013

Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamic 2013) was not the first game in the series to give Lara a new beginning. *Tomb Raider: Legend* (Crystal Dynamics 2006) also gave the archaeologist a new design and backstory, but it was much more alike her previous iterations than the changes made in Lara's second reboot. The 2013 game was not only a departure from Croft's infamous character design, well known for its unrealistic proportions and overt catering to the male gaze, it also made changes to her personality, aiming for a more realistic character. Her new

origin story also marked the first time one of Lara's adventures was penned by a woman, as writer Rhianna Pratchett took the lead writing position for the game.

As can be seen in Appendix 2, Lara's new design was indeed less sexualised than any of her previous appearances, Lara is still portrayed as an attractive woman, but her features are no longer exaggerated nor is her outfit unnecessarily revealing. This is something that is also carried on to the unlockable costumes in the game, which is a positive surprise, as it is not uncommon for extra costumes to cater more to the male gaze than the standard ones.

Regarding her personality, where Lara was once a cocky, intelligent, and deadly woman, new Lara's defining characteristic before arriving in the island is her love of books. Online marketing material (Appendix 3) describes her as "an unassuming and rather bookish young woman", who is a bit of a workaholic and has interests in archery, rock climbing, reading and research. She also possesses a powerful sense of moral courage, is clever, resourceful, determined and loyal to her friends.

Those may be positive changes from her previous representations, but the male gaze still plays a role, albeit a different one, in the way Lara is viewed in the game. In this chapter I will argue that in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) the male gaze does not stake a step back when it comes to looking at Lara Croft, it simply shifts sideways. Where once Lara was a fetish to be desired and appreciated aesthetically, the camera now focuses on her constant punishment. This could be seen even before the game was released, in its first gameplay trailer.

4.2.2 A troublesome trailer

Tomb Raider's (Crystal Dynamics 2013) first gameplay trailer was titled *Crossroads* (Square Enix 2012) and was a subject of some controversy upon its release during E3 2012. The over three-minutes long video has Lara getting impaled on its first thirty seconds and continues to show her moaning and shrieking as she

gets hurt again and again. The cause of controversy comes around the two-minute mark, as a hands-tied Lara is pressed against a wall and groped by a menacing cultist (Picture 8).



PICTURE 8. Screen capture of the Crossroads trailer (Square Enix, Youtube 2012)

That scene, along with an interview by executive producer Ron Rosenberg (2012) to Kotaku's Jason Schreier (2012a) created the speculation that Lara went through a rape attempt as part of her character development in the game. "She is literally turned into a cornered animal" states Rosenberg (2012), "it's a huge step in her evolution: she's forced to either fight or die." (Jason Schreier 2012a). Crystal Dynamics later clarified that sexual assault was not part of the plot of the new game and that Rosenberg had misspoken when he said the word "rape", which they claim not to be in their vocabulary (Schreier 2012b).

Sexual assault as a tool for character development is not an uncommon trope for female characters, with a whole subgenre of horror focused on rape-revenge stories. This is not the case in Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) and as the developers explained, Lara does not experience sexual assault in the game. Her framing as a victim, however, is a recurring theme.

4.2.3 Killing Lara Croft

When asked about the differences in making a game with a female rather than a male main character, Rosenberg said:

When people play Lara, they don't really project themselves into the character. They're more like 'I want to protect her.' There's this sort of dynamic of 'I'm going to this adventure with her and trying to protect her. -- She literally goes from zero to hero... we're sort of building her up and just when she gets confident, we break her down again. (Rosenberg 2012.)

While I believe that the notion that "people" do not project themselves into Lara is born from a sexist preconception that assumes all players to be straight cis-gender men, Rosenberg's quote gives great insight into how the male gaze operates within Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013).

During the first playable part of the game, Lara is tied upside down and must set herself on fire to escape her bindings, she goes on to fall several meters into an iron spike that impales her on the side. From then on Lara will continually get punished through her journey, falling many more times, as well as getting shot at, stabbed, burnt and mauled by wolves, among other things. Lara's suffering gets even more intense in the more than thirty different death scenes that the player may get by failing at different points in the game, with death by impalement being the most common one. The death scenes also seem to be popular with a certain audience, as compilations of Lara's deaths can be easily found on Youtube, in videos like AGOXEN's Tomb Raider - All Death Scenes [HD] Compilation (Youtube 2013), which has over 800 thousand views.

Through all her punishments, Lara moans and shrieks while the player is invited to look at her wounds, scars that stay on her character model until the end of the game. Mulvey (1975) talks about the necessity to either sexualize or punish and save female characters, in order to alleviate the male gaze's anxieties. The older Tomb Raider games were heavily focused on the fetishization of Lara and could focus minimally on her punishment. Even in Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation (Core Design 1999), where Lara faced her only canonical death, she is not shown to be crushed under the pyramid, leaving the punishment to the imagination.

With all that in mind, it can be said that as a concession to the male gaze and in order to be less sexualized in the new games, Lara Croft must endure a constant series of punishments. In that way, any insecurities the male player may get from seeing an otherwise empowered female character are remedied by her portrayal as a sufferer to be saved and protected. Even then, some occasional sexual objectification still occurs, as can be seen in Sarkeesian's (2016) example.

4.3 Lara as Final Girl

On the first chapter of her book, *Men, Women and Chain Saws*, Carol Clover (1992) examines a common archetype to slasher horror films, which she names the Final Girl. The Final Girl is the female protagonist of those films, and is usually the last survivor, who sees her friends die in the hands of the murderer but manages to survive. Her survival at the climax of the film usually comes after a symbolic transformation, where the Final Girl picks up some sort of weapon, which works as a metaphorical phallus. This allows her to move from a passive to an active position in the action and defeat the murderer, a process that Clover refers to as phallicization. (Clover 1992.)

The traditional Final Girl is not sexually active or available, she shows intelligence and quick wit, and can be considered boyish, a not fully feminine figure, which is usually chased by a not fully masculine killer. Examples of Final Girls are Sally from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974), Stretch from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper 1986), Ripley from *Alien* (Ridley Scott 1979), and Laurie from *Halloween* (Carpenter 1978). (Clover 1992.)

While at first view the Final Girl may look like the positive representation of a stronger sort of female character in horror, who goes beyond the usual role of victim, Clover (1992) claims the archetype to ultimately be a tool for the sado-masochistic pleasure of the male viewer. The masculinized female protagonist is only apparently a woman, in truth the character is a stand-in for the male audience, which starts the movie with an incipient masculinity that permits the viewer a cross-gender identification with roles usually reserved to female characters. At

the end of the movie, in order to comfort the castration anxieties of the male gaze, the Final Girl's incipient masculinity is fully realised during the phallicization. Within the context of horror movies, where gender is given through the function of woman/victim or man/hero, the surviving Final Girl is not really a girl. (Clover 1992.)

The idea of the female character as a stand-in for a male audience is made even more interesting when thinking of a video game, which by its very nature takes the cross-gender identification to the next level, allowing the player to take control over the character's body. Not only that, the slasher film binary that positions the female body as a victim and the male as a hero is also commonly seen in video games. The assumption of a straight male audience is a bit problematic, however, and is something I will address later in this thesis.

When surveying the evolution of the slasher movie genre and appearance of the Final Girl, Clover (1992) uses Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) as the benchmark and distils the genre into five main components: killer, locale, victims, weapons and shock effects. In my examination of both *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) and *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020) I will be focusing mainly on the three first components, bringing the others into the conversation when they are relevant.

4.3.1 Himiko, the undying mother

Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) does not have one single killer, but many different ones. This is not entirely out of the scope of the slasher movie, as even the film that originated the Final Girl trope, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974) had a family of killers working together, even if most of the killing was done by the chainsaw wielding Leatherface. However, even the concept of a single killer family does not translate perfectly unto *Tomb Raider*, as Lara faces not one, but two different groups of enemies: the Solarii brotherhood and the Stormguard.

The Solarii brotherhood are a cult made up exclusively of men who have washed upon the cursed isle of Yamatai. They are run by a man named Mathias and are the only living inhabitants of the island. Unlike the traditional slasher film murderer as described by Clover (1992), the Solarii use fire weapons, are not particularly large, do not wear masks and do not come back from apparent death after being taken down. They are also recognisably human, despite often acting inhumanly. The most apparent connection between the slasher murderer and the Solarii is the figure of Himiko.

Like Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960), Mathias and his followers' reasons for murder come from a troubled relationship with a mother figure, Himiko, the Sun Queen. The ancient matriarch of Yamatai died millennia ago but found a way to transfer her soul into the body of young girls in order to extend her reign. When one of the rituals failed and she was unable to find a new host, Himiko was left trapped in her own decaying body, which is now kept in her tomb (Picture 9), in a similar way to how Norman kept his own mother's corpse in the cellar. While Himiko is not Mathias' mother, she is a matriarch and he worships her, capturing women who may be a proper host for her spirit and killing the ones who are not.



PICTURE 9. Lara finds Himiko's mummified body (Crystal Dynamics 2013).

Throughout the game, the Solarii kill two of Lara's companions, including Roth, her mentor. They also capture Sam, Lara's companion and friend since university, who is a distant relative of Himiko herself and therefore a fitting host for her ghost.

The Stormguard, also known as the Oni, are the undead protectors of Himiko, who serve and protect their matriarch even after their deaths. Like the Solarii, the Stormguard seem to be exclusively male. The most notable member of the Stormguard is simply known as Stormguard Stalker and has many of the characteristics of Clover's (1992) killer that the Solarii lack. Like other slashers he is a hulking figure, has his face covered by a samurai mask, comes back from apparent death and uses a pretechnological large mace as his weapon of choice. He also inhabits his and protects his own Terrible Place (Clover 1992).

4.3.2 Falling into a Terrible Place

When discussing the locales present in the slasher film, Clover (1992, 30) introduces the concept of Terrible Places. The Terrible Place is often a house or a tunnel and is the place where victims will find themselves once they have crossed the threshold from safety to danger and horror. The Bates mansion in *Psycho* (Hitchcock 1960) is an example of a Terrible House and the underground tunnels of the Sawyers in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper 1986) are Terrible Tunnels. Terrible Places share similarities with the Belly of the Whale from Joseph Campbell's (1949) monomyth, a dark and unknown place that swallows up the hero and marks their departure from their previous life and passage of the magical threshold.

When we meet Lara at the beginning of *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) she has already passed the threshold between safety and horror. It is explained in an initial cutscene that her explorer's group sailed into the dangerous Dragon's Triangle when Lara had a hunch that the lost island of Yamatai could be in there. She was correct, but they did not know about Himiko's curse, which caused ships and planes coming near to island to crash, as Himiko searches for a new body to inhabit. In his review of Lara's journey in *Tomb Raider* (2013) through Campbell's

(1949) monomyth, Kimmo Markkanen (2016) talks about how the island of Yamatai is the inescapable belly of the whale in the game, pointing out that Lara Croft has to deal with a literal goddess, Himiko, in order to escape the island.

After her capture, we find Lara in the position described before, hanging upside down and then falling into an underground tunnel. Lara's fall into this Terrible Place can be compared to Stretch's fall into the Sawyers tunnels in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper 1986). In the same way as Stretch, Lara is faced with human bones and creepy decorations as she moves forwards, looking for an exit.

Lara is eventually chased by a cultist and manages to escape the first tunnel, coming out from the dark cave into the sunlit island. This gives Lara a moment to breathe before she enters another Terrible Tunnel, this time of her own volition. It is a sequence that repeats itself many times through the game, as Lara explores safer areas of the island before heading into dangerous Terrible Places filled with Solarii cultists or Stormguards. The most common types of Terrible Place in the game are the tunnels and tombs that Lara willingly explores in order to help herself and her friends, but there is one significant Terrible House in the game, Himiko's temple, home of the Stormguard Stalker.

Once again Lara is brought into this Terrible Place against her will, this time captured by the Stormguards, and once again she is hanging above the ground, but now in a room filled with corpses and body parts. Lara hangs on a meat hook, in another parallel to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper 1974) the Stormguards seem to feed on human flesh and keep a large supply of bodies around their Terrible House. After another painful fall, Lara must find a way to escape the temple, going through dead bodies and dark corridors while avoiding the Stormguard Stalker who patrols the rooms of his home, not unlike *Chainsaw's* Leatherface.

4.3.3 Final Lara

The new Lara Croft is akin to other Final Girls (Clover 1992) in a number of ways. She is intelligent and inquisitive, Lara is the one who discovers the location of Yamatai and is also the first one to understand the true nature of Himiko and the island. Lara is quick witted, and her fast thinking and skills save her life several times through the game. While she is not necessarily boyish, she does have interest in practical affairs and is revealed to show little interest in partying and meeting boys in a diary entry by her long-time friend Sam. Like other Final Girls, she sees many of her friends die and must face their killers in order to survive, and as was mentioned before, she copiously screams and shouts through much of the game.

Lara also starts the game with no weapons, having only the ability to run away and kick herself free from her first attacker. She goes on to find a bow and arrow, which she uses to hunt a deer for food, once again showing her Final Girl ingenuity. The first time she kills a man is also remarkably like what Clover (1992) calls phallicization.

Lara's first kill is a moment meant to have a heavy impact in the story and character (Pratchett 2012). It happens during the controversial scene from the original trailer, the one that was assumed to be a rape attempt by a cultist. After Lara is found and attacked by him, they both struggle for a bit (Picture 10) until Lara manages to seize his gun and ends up shooting him dead. The scene is well executed and carries a weight both to Lara and the player, as she is shocked with her own actions once she sees the dead man. If this were a traditional slasher film that would have been Lara's culmination as a Final Girl and the climax of the movie. Instead, this happens on the first hour of an eight-hour-long game. After this moment, Lara proceeds to kill many men without thinking twice about it. That is explained by Pratchett (2013) as a necessity of gameplay over narrative: once a player gets a gun, they will want to use it.



PICTURE 10. Lara struggles with the cultist (Crystal Dynamics 2013).

As Lara finds stronger enemies, she also finds new weapons, which she uses to kill them in new ways. Lara eventually faces down the Stormguard Stalker, finishing him with her climbing axe, which would fit the description of a traditional Final Girl phallic weapon (Clover 1992). In her final confrontation with Mathias, she ends him not with one weapon, but two at once. It is the first and only time in the game that Lara uses her iconic dual pistols.

With all that in mind, it could be said that Lara's Final Girl journey does not happen as a straight line going from start to finish, but as a series of cycles repeating themselves. Lara repeatedly is brought into a new Terrible Place, where she faces new killers and finds new weapons to kill them with. Lara is not the traditional Final Girl, but a hyperbolic one that keeps getting stronger with each new phallicization.

4.4 Queering Lara Croft

Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) has no openly queer characters, although there are themes that may be interpreted as queer in the text. In the process of trying to create a queer reading of Lara Croft in the game, I will make use of a concept which Edmond Chang (2017) calls queer remediation in his article, *Queergaming*.

In the article, Chang (2016) proposes queergaming as, among other things, a response to the lack of queer representation in games. Through the process of queer remediation, queer gamers appropriate and repurpose game characters, stories, and worlds into queer versions of themselves. Game mods, wikis, fan fictions, video playthroughs can all be forms of queer remediation. (Chang 2016.) In this subchapter, I will queer remediate Lara Croft and Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) with the assistance of Jack Halberstam's (2016) queer reading of slasher movies.

4.4.1 Bodies that splatter

In the chapter *Bodies That Splatter: Queers and Chain Saws* from his book *Skin Shows*, Jack Halberstam (1995) starts a discussion of the *Final Girl* (Clover 1992) theory, arguing that while Clover's ideas work well with the assumption of a straight male viewer, they do not address female or queer audiences. In order to discuss the possibility of a female and queer gaze in the slasher movies, Halberstam brings concepts from gender theorist Judith Butler's (1995) book, *Bodies That Matter*, into the conversation. (Halberstam, 1995.)

In the book, Butler (1995) talks about the ways gender is produced and performed. From her thoughts on gender constructions and categories of humanness, Halberstam (1995) places improperly or inadequately gendered bodies as representing the limits of the human, monstrous arrangements of skin, flesh, social mores, pleasures, dangers, and wounds. Focusing on the way slasher/splatter movies focus on the dismantling and reconstruction of bodies and skin into monstrous arrangements, he says that horror's queer potential lies in its ability to create new gender categories. When placing the *Final Girl* within horror's gender construction process, Halberstam says:

The bodies that splatter in horror films are interestingly enough properly gendered "human" bodies, female bodies, in fact, with all the conventional markings of their femininity. Female bodies that do not splatter, then, are often sutured bodies, bodies that are in some way distanced from the gender constructions that would otherwise sentence them to messy and

certain death. Carol Clover has named the improperly gendered, de-girled being as the "final girl. (Halberstam 1995, 141.)

Further on, when discussing the use of metaphors in the slasher genre, he claims that:

In slasher horror film, violence is the act performed by men upon female bodies in ways which sometimes make the violence into a metaphor for sexuality but more often the violence represents violence itself and nothing more; mostly, in fact, the chain sawing or the knifing is the desired activity. (Halberstam 1995, 156.)

This separation of violence and sex creates the possibility of a violent visual pleasure that is beyond the traditional male violence on the female body but is connected to female violence and male terror. The penis is not necessary when performing this self-referring violence, and it is easier for a woman to acquire chain saws, knives and guns than a penis. It also means that we can move beyond Clover's (1992) concept of phallicization. If the knife in the hand of a Final Girl is a knife, and not a metaphor for a penis, then we can think of her final transformation as not one moving from the feminine, or incipient masculine, to the fully-realised masculine, but as a more queer and radical transformation from the feminine into something else. A new monstrous arrangement of flesh and weapon that goes beyond the "generic identity codes that read femininity into tits and ass and masculinity into penises." (Halberstam 1995.)

4.4.2 Lara's scars

As discussed previously, Lara's skin is torn and cut many times throughout the game. As a Final Girl, her body is often put through extreme punishment, yet refuses to break completely. If the slasher movie's obsessive focus on the skin and its ripping represents a spectacle of identity breakdown (Halberstam 1995), then the same can be said about Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013). Not only does Lara's skin get new scars, burns and entrances, but the symbolism of rebirth is constantly repeated, as Lara falls into dark, uterine, Terrible Tunnels, and eventually emerges from their narrow exits with a transformed skin and identity. The

metaphor for Lara's identity reconstructions and its gender implications is especially evident when she goes through the caves where the Solarii have their headquarters.

After once again being captured and having most of her arsenal taken from her, Lara manages to free herself and jumps out of a bridge into a pool of blood. While no clear reasons are given to the existence of a pool of blood inside a cave system, the symbolism is evident when Lara emerges from the blood (Picture 11) with only her bow, the first weapon she gets in the game, and walks once again into a narrow dark tunnel. Here, as several times before, Lara goes through another metaphorical rebirth, but this time she must go through a particularly interesting, gendered experience before being able to surface back into the island.



PICTURE 11. Lara emerges from the blood pool (Crystal Dynamics 2013).

On her way to the exit of the cave system, Lara inadvertently walks into the chambers where the Solarii hold their initiation rites. As is revealed in documents found in the cave, the Solarii capture shipwrecked men and put them through a series of trials in order to strip them from their past identities and test their strength. The trials involve leaving them to fend for themselves, with no clothes or weapons, in the tunnels running under the Solarii's palace, until they can return and begin their new lives in the cult. It is notable that only men can take the trial, captured women are either offered as sacrifice to the Stormguard or as a possible vessel for Himiko. In those tunnels, Lara is faced with several naked and crazed men,

which she takes down one by one using her most primitive weapon. When Lara emerges from the Terrible Tunnels this time, she not only has gone through another symbolic rebirth, but she has also been rebirthed as an honorary member of the Solarii. Of course, she is not accepted as one of them, neither would she be interested in that, but she has gone through their initiation ritual and survived, the only woman to have ever done so.

4.4.3 Dual wielding

Lara's final confrontation with Mathias takes place during the ritual where Himiko attempts to take over Sam's body. In her position, Sam plays the classic role of the damsel-in-distress, an extremely common trope in video games. The fact that Lara is the one doing the saving instead of a male character is less common, but it is not something that had not been done before in the series, as the Legend trilogy had already put Lara's mother in a similar position.

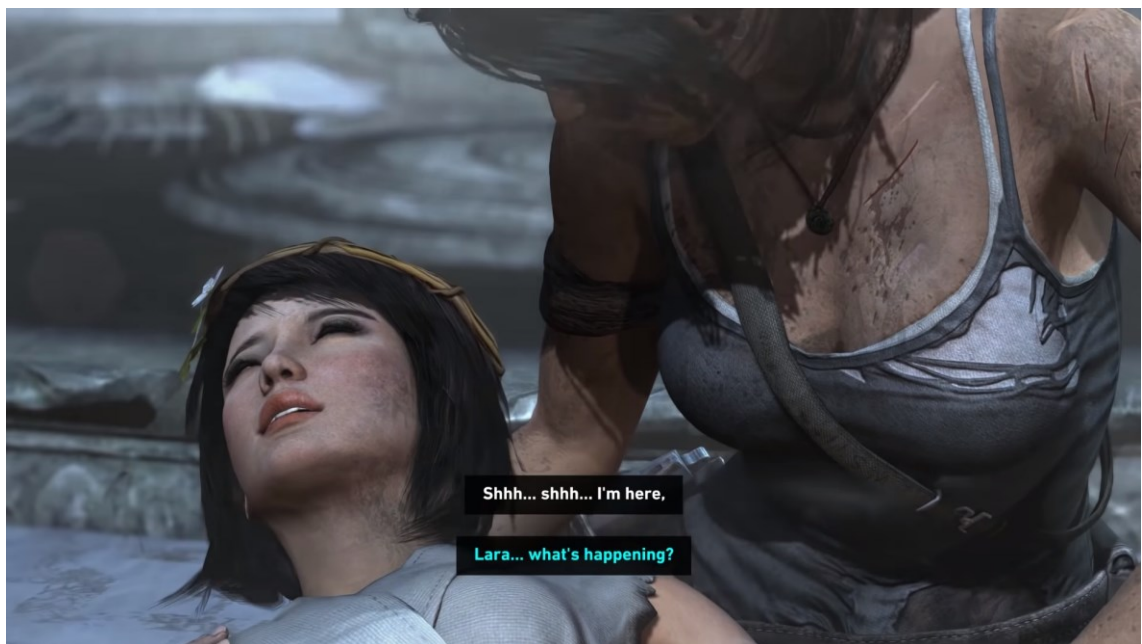
Regardless, Lara's last culmination as a Final Girl is particularly notable not only for being the climax of the game, but because it raises Lara Croft unto her own symbolic mythology, as the Tomb Raider. This is done the moment when Lara picks up both of her pistols and wields them together against Mathias. The dual pistols have been one of the most recognisable features of Lara Croft in all her previous games. The final confrontation of Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) is the only time in the game where Lara is seen dual wielding.

While Halberstam (1995) asks us to see weapons in horror movies as the weapons they are and not as substitutes for a penis, considering the origin of her pistols is still relevant when attempting to queer Lara Croft's experience. Her first pistol was taken from her first kill, the cultist which groped and tried to kill her as well, Lara's first and most traditional Final Girl culmination. The second pistol, she took from her old mentor, which was killed by Mathias when placing himself between him and Lara. In that way, it can be said that each pistol is a relic from a different sort of masculinity, one which was toxic and showed Lara that she could

kill, the other was a positive figure which taught her important survival skills and sacrificed himself so she could live.

And it is in that way that Lara, the tortured and reconfigured female body, wields and controls polar opposites of masculinity in order to rain down violence upon the body of Mathias, who falls dead into the abyss. In that moment, Lara is a victim, a killer, and a saviour. A stretching and mixing of different horror gendered identities into one female-coded body. After Mathias is down, Lara proceeds to stab the corpse of Himiko with a wooden stake, ending the ritual of soul transfer and freeing Sam from the non-consensual body take over.

The game then ends with imagery that can be easily read as queer, when Final Lara Croft picks up her friend Sam (Picture 12), who wears a white ceremonial gown, and carries her back to their reconstructed ship (Picture 13) as if they had just been married.



PICTURE 12. A scarred Lara Croft picks up her friend Sam (Crystal Dynamics 2013)



PICTURE 13. Lara carries Sam back to their ship (Crystal Dynamics 2013).

The queer subtext between the friends is especially meaningful when considering lead writer Rhianna Pratchett's own admission that she would have liked to make Lara gay (Pratchett 2013). While Sam and Lara's relationship stays strictly platonic in the game, many fans noticed the subtext and they are a common ship in the fanbase, with their queer potential realised in fanfics and fanart, which can easily be found in websites like fanfiction.net and tumblr (Figure 2).

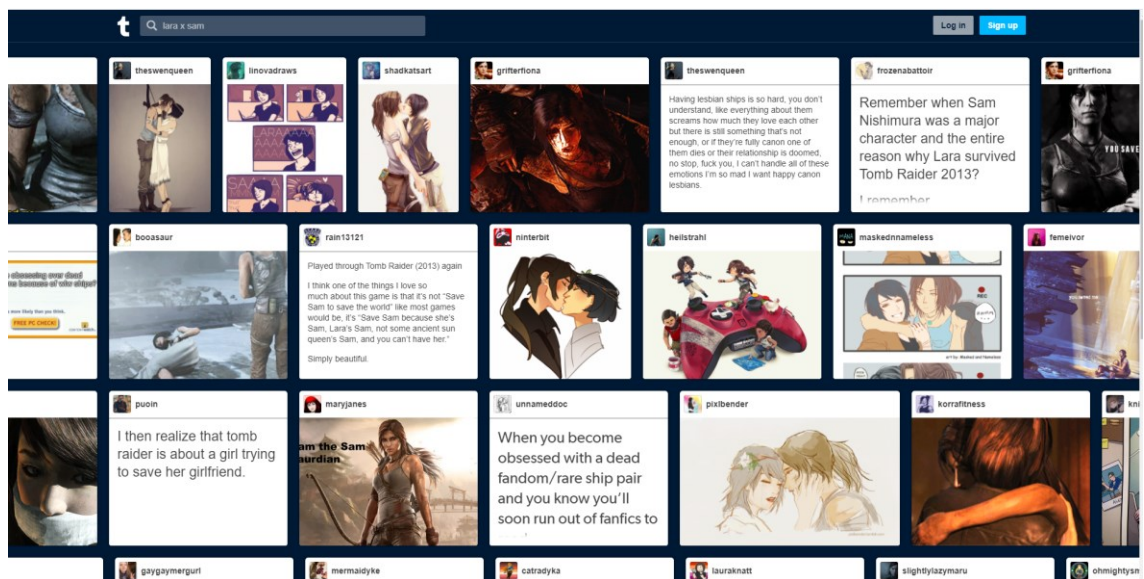


FIGURE 2. Print screen of a quick search on tumblr that returned plenty of Lara and Sam shipping content (Tumblr 2020).

5 RESIDENT EVIL 3 (2020)

5.1 Overview

Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), sometimes called Resident Evil 3 Remake, is a remade version of the third game in the series, Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999). Following the precedent set by the critically acclaimed remake released the year prior, Resident Evil 2 (Capcom 2019), the game was a radical change from the original one, going for more modern and action-focused controls, a player-controlled camera as well as making changes to the plot.

Like in Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999) the game the story takes place three months after the mansion incident in Resident Evil 1 (Capcom 1996) and follows returning protagonist Jill Valentine, as she attempts to escape the zombie-ridden Raccoon City. As Jill makes new allies and enemies in her journey to safety, she is stalked by the titular Nemesis, a new form of monster which is intelligent enough to receive orders and even wields firearms against her.

5.2 Jill and the male gaze

When it comes to examining Jill Valentine's portrayal in Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), I will focus on the following themes: her new character design, her relation with the male protagonist, and the presence of the male gaze during cutscenes. I will also discuss the use of the first-person camera in some of the sections in the game.

5.2.1 Jill (1999) vs. Jill (2020)

Jill Valentine went through the biggest redesign in her history for Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020). Now modelled after Russian model Sasha Zotova, both her outfit and personality also went through considerable changes. According to the developers, the idea behind the redesign was to make her a more realistic character.

When asked about it in an interview to Edge magazine, co-producer Peter Fabiano (2020) said the following.

When we approached Jill, if you look at the original we had to do what we needed to make her stand out, but with this game, everything is on a photorealistic level; it's more of a believable atmosphere we're trying to create. We want to have a Jill that fit in that, but still stayed true to her original personality and essence. And that's really how we came about the new Jill. (Fabiano 2020, 68.)

In his interview to Game Informer magazine in April 2020, art director Yonghee Choo went even further.

There were a lot of discussions internally about that direction. The original design of Jill Valentine was clearly going for sex appeal, but that was not the right direction. This is a very strong character, and it is a character that's going through a lot of adversity, so we wanted to home in on that and make sure that there's a certain level of believability in what she's wearing, a certain level of practicality. (Choo 2020, 36.)

The new Jill is still an attractive character, created after a professional model, but her new design is more practical than the revealing outfit from the original game, which seemed more interested in titillating the male gaze than anything else. Gone are the mini skirt and tube top, switched for a more grounded pair of jeans and a tank top, featuring some tactical straps for holding weapons and such. While it could be argued that covering her arms and shoulders would have been even more practical for protection against zombie bites, the fact that Jill starts the game being ambushed in her own home lends some credibility to that particular design choice. Interestingly, Valentine's new outfit has some noticeable similarities to Lara Croft's in Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013), both sport a light blue tank-top, trousers, boots and straps. Towards the middle of the game Jill even gets a bandage wrapped on her left arm, mirroring Lara's bandage on her right one. Figure 3 shows, from left to right, a side by side comparison of Jill Valentine's design in Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999) and Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), as well as Lara's design in Tomb Raider.



FIGURE 3. Character design comparison (Capcom 1999, 2020; Square-Enix 2013, modified).

Beyond the standard new outfit, two other costumes are available for Jill in Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), one is based on her design from the first Resident Evil (Capcom 1996) and can be unlocked after finishing the game once, the other is inspired by her Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999) outfit and was given as a pre-order bonus.

Not every player was happy with the changes made to Jill's character design and many mods offering alternative, "sexier", looks to the character can easily be found on modding websites like NexusMods.com. One of the most revealing ones is DrSlumpX's Sugoi Dekai, Japanese for "it's huge", which exaggerates Jill's body features and changes her into a much more revealing outfit (Picture 14).



PICTURE 14. Screenshot of GrizzoUK’s playthrough of Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020) with DrSlumpX’s Sugoï Dekai mod (GrizzoUK, Youtube 2020).

When it comes to her personality, new Jill is much more abrasive than her 1999 version. She is a hardened and no-nonsense trained officer that thinks tactically, talks back to the male characters, and swears often. Jill also shows very little fear throughout the game, facing terrible monsters and situations head on with the courage fitting of an action movie hero, where Lara screams, Jill cusses. She is, as described by her male deuteragonist Carlos, a “supercop”.

5.2.2 Her own gaze

My remarks on the uneasy translation of Mulvey’s (1975) male gaze theory to the controllable camera found in the games are particularly interesting when examining Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020). Firstly, because the remake chose to abandon the more movie-like fixed cameras found in the original game, which may have provided a different analysis regarding the gaze. Secondly, and more importantly, because the game makes an interesting use of the first-person camera in specific points of the story.

The first time we take control of Jill, after the game introductory first scene, we do it through a first-person perspective, what is called in cinema as point of view shot, of Jill waking up in her own apartment. It is a subversion of the male gaze,

as regardless of the gender of the player, the camera they control is the literal gaze of the female protagonist. That is even more significant when, after exploring Jill's apartment for a bit, the player reaches the bathroom. Until this point, Jill's character has not been shown in-game, and the first time we get to see her, we literally do it through her own eyes, in the dim light, reflected in the bathroom mirror.

That is an interesting twist, only made clearer when the game transitions from a first-person interactive state into a first-person cutscene when Jill/the player approaches the mirror. This is a scene that is repeated twice in the first ten minutes of the game, the first time it is revealed that Jill is having a nightmare and her reflection turns into a zombie, showing her fear of being infected after the events on the first game. The second time the player approaches the mirror, however, Jill turns on the light and once again a cutscene starts. At that point, after waking from her nightmare, Jill has fully seized control of the gaze and we finally get to see her clearly, as she checks herself out, on her own terms (Picture 15). The message seems evident, unlike in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) where Lara moved sideways within the male gaze, *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020) promises to give Jill the control of the gaze.



PICTURE 15. Jill seizing the gaze and observing herself (Capcom 2020).

The game will soon move into the more traditional third-person view, where it will remain for most of the action. But until Jill is violently ambushed in her apartment by the Nemesis, we get some moments of calm in her perspective, as we have time to walk around her home. This scene is also used to give Jill a larger sense of depth than we got in previous games, as we get to see her hobbies and interests beyond zombie-killing. In the form of books, fashion posters, photographs, records and empty bottles of beer spread through the studio apartment. We even get to see some of her research into the company behind the zombie outbreak, and her plans to escape the city in two days from then.

The other time when the first-person is used in the game happens around the middle of the game. Jill has been infected by the Nemesis and the player has been controlling Carlos, the male protagonist, as he recovers the vaccine and protects her while she heals. Once that section is done, we are once again put in Jill's point of view as she awakens. Here, once again, the game reminds us that we are playing her story.

Carlos does not get the privilege of a first-person perspective, the closest he gets to that is an over the shoulder close-up shot of Jill's face as she lays unconscious on the hospital bed. This shot only lasts a few seconds, but it does cater to the rescuing aspect of the male gaze, and the role of Carlos in the game deserves a bit more of discussion.

5.2.3 “Name’s Carlos and I’m saving you”

Carlos Oliveira is the male controllable character in both *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom 1999) and *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020). Those are the only two games in the series where he appears, and his role is similar in both, with him also going through a redesign for the remake. In this game, as in the original one, he is part of the mercenary unit sent by Umbrella corporation, the evil company that invented the zombie virus, to rescue key personnel and other survivors from Raccoon City. This leads him into an alliance with Jill which is uneasy at first, as she knows that Umbrella is responsible for the zombie outbreak, something which he is initially unaware of.

At first look, his role may seem similar to the role of Barry in the first Resident Evil (Capcom 1996), as he often appears at the last minute to save Jill from the Nemesis, often doing so after Jill and the player have gone through a boss battle with the enemy. This saviour routine peaks around the middle point of the game, when Jill gets infected by the Nemesis after beating it/him in combat once again, and the player must take control of Carlos as he goes after the cure to save Jill.

As I mentioned earlier when discussing Jill's portrayal in the first Resident Evil (Capcom 1996), Christopher Alton (2020) makes some good points in his chapter about Jill's problematic relation to Barry and the male gaze, as he often forces her and the player into a passive position, making him the active character of Jill's plotline in that game. While parallels to that can be seen in the dynamic between Jill and Carlos, there are also some notable differences, first one being that, despite only being controllable in two sections of the game, Carlos is a playable character in the game, unlike Barry which was exclusively a non-player character. Secondly, the relationship and dynamics between Jill and Carlos are more complex in this game, and its evolution is an important part of the plot.

While Carlos is initially presented as a saviour, he even introduces himself as such, Jill is quite cold to him, as she does not trust his employers. As the game goes on, they both assist each other several times and Jill eventually learns to trust him, putting herself in danger to protect him, as well as he does for her.

In the final confrontation with the strongest version of the Nemesis, Carlos is split between helping Jill or chasing a traitor to his mercenary unit who is about to escape the city on his helicopter. When Jill tells Carlos that she can handle Nemesis by herself, he agrees with her and goes after the traitor, leaving her as the active force in the game's climax. In fact, the final action the player takes in the game, is shooting the escaping traitor, as Jill, while Carlos is holding him in place. In conclusion, although there is an undeniable saviour element to Carlos, ultimately the relationship is much more even than the one between Jill and Barry in the first game. This time Jill is undeniably the protagonist of her story.

As if to hammer the point on that, there is an interesting change in the ending of the remake when compared to the ending of the original Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020). While that game ended with Barry miraculously appearing with a helicopter to save both Jill and Carlos, this time they both get into the traitor's helicopter and fly away together, as Raccoon City gets destroyed by missiles.

A final point that needs to be discussed when talking about Carlos, is his flirting. While in the original game, he referred to Jill as a "foxy lady" in one of their first conversations and implied she was interested in him romantically, to which Jill answers with a simple "you wish!". In the remake Jill retorts to him calling her "a tall drink of water" with a curt "fuck you". Carlos' flirtatiousness could be intended as simply a part of his playful personality, the drink of water comment comes as a pun when telling Valentine to put off a fire. That is unclear, however, as there is no other female named character in the game and he does not appear interested in flirting with his male comrades. Regardless, in the remake his initial teasing of Jill quickly turns into respect and admiration.

At the end of the game Jill has also warmed up to him but there is no direct indication that their relationship goes in any way beyond friendship. In Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), as well as in all other games in the series, Jill Valentine remains single and unavailable. I will discuss that further when examining her in relation to Clover's (1992) Final Girl archetype.

5.2.4 The Drain Deimos and tentacle erotica

While most of the game is not particularly interested in catering to the male gaze as described by Mulvey (1975) and, as discussed, even goes as far as subverting it, there is also some level of interest in hurting Jill, similarly to what is found in most of Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013). While that may be par for the course in a survival horror game, there is one cutscene stands out for its jarring mix of violence and sexualization of Jill.

The cutscene in case happens early in the game, when Jill encounters a type of enemy called a Drain Deimos. Drain Deimos were present in the 1999 version of

the game and were described in the official guidebook as a flea-like creature that grew to the size of a human and could lay eggs (Project Umbrella n.d.). While they were dangerous in the original game, being attacked by one of them in the remake is a different experience, as seen in their graphic introductory cutscene described below.

Jill Valentine has reached the electrical substation of downtown Raccoon City. After unlocking a wire mesh door, she notices something behind her. As Jill turns only to find no one there, she sees a green liquid falling from the ceiling. It is the spit of a many-legged monster, which grabs her by the neck, choking her. Its long, tentacle-like tongue quickly finds its way into Jill's mouth. She struggles helplessly for a few seconds while the creature injects parasites into her.

The attack takes place in less than ten seconds. Throughout the scene the camera switches between two views: one showing Jill's upper body, with the creature holding her by the neck and another from the creature's point of view, a close cut of Jill's face as she chokes on the phallic tongue/tentacle (Picture 16). During those seconds, both Jill and the player are stolen of their agency. We are instead invited to observe Jill, the military trained police officer turned fetish, as she is assaulted, through her assailant's eyes. It is a violent scene where the male gaze is both punishing and eroticising.



PICTURE 16. Jill being attacked, from the Deimos point of view (Capcom 2020).

The analogy of the phallic tentacle becomes even clearer when cultural aspects are taken in consideration. Tentacles and other forms of monstrous phallus are a common trope in hentai, Japanese pornographic animation. Something that Japanese literature Professor Susan Napier calls the “demonic phallus incarnate” in her book about anime (Napier 2001, 65). They are also a recurring motif in the game, as the main antagonist Nemesis grows more and more tentacles through its many encounters with Jill.

While there are other gruesome scenes in the game, particularly the death scenes, this one stands out for its sexualised voyeuristic nature, which is not present in most other scenes. It cannot be considered a death scene either. Throughout the substation section of the game, Jill will encounter other Drain Deimos, if they hit her, she will once again be infected with the parasites. This gives the player a short amount of time to procure a healing item, while the screen flashes red, indicating the urgency of the matter. If the player fails to heal Jill, she will fall to the ground and die as tiny Drain Deimos explode out of her body. It is a scene reminiscent to the birth of the alien in the science fiction horror film *Alien* (Ridley Scott 1979).

Further insight can be gained by putting Jill’s demise in relation to what Laura Mulvey says about the function of woman in her essay on the male gaze:

To summarize briefly: the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is two-fold, she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real absence of a penis and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end, it does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack. (Mulvey 1975.)

In such a way, so is Jill’s journey at its end once she gives symbolic birth to the parasites inside her. Leaving the player with no other choice than starting again from an earlier save point.

5.3 Jill as Final Girl

Out of all the Resident Evil games (Capcom 1996-present), Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1996) and its remake are the ones which seem closer to the structure of a traditional slasher movie, featuring a possible Final Girl in Jill Valentine and an analogous murderer in the Nemesis.

In his dissertation, Alton (2020) talks about how Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 2020) subverts the original trope, positioning Jill and her revealing outfit as representing confident female sexuality, placed in opposition to a male impotency represented in the Nemesis. While that does a good job in explaining how Jill from the original game is not portrayed as a traditional Final Girl, I believe there are enough changes in the remake to warrant a new analysis.

5.3.1 The Nemesis

In his analysis of the Nemesis in Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999), Alton (2020) refers to it/him as a “bio-slasher”. In dialogue with Clover (1992), he goes over how Nemesis fulfils many of the established traits of a slasher movie killer: a virtually indestructible large humanoid with a deformed face resembling a mask, which repeatedly rises back from apparent defeat and continues to chase the protagonist. He goes on to discuss the traits which Nemesis does not fulfil, focusing mainly on its use of weapons, while his tentacles align with the phallic nature of the traditional slasher’s weapons, they are a part of his body and thus “not an extra-physical replacement for a phallus” (Alton 2020, 88). (Alton 2020.)

Alton’s review of the Nemesis ignores the fact that it does use an extra-physical weapon in the game, the rocket launcher. That choice of weapon does not fit well with Clover’s definition of the slasher killer. The slasher killer does not traditionally use fire weapons, instead he operates in what Clover calls a pretechnological terrain, preferring phallic weapons such as knives, axes, ice picks, hammers and the like (Clover 1992).

Nemesis' rocket launcher returns in *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020), not only that, but a flamethrower is also added the analogous slasher killer. Those weapons are readily discarded by the creature, though, as they prove incapable of besting Jill Valentine. Nemesis, which initially appears as the archetypical slasher, bursting through the walls of Jill's studio apartment, goes through numerous changes, picking and dropping different weapons, and even mutating his own body, growing more tentacles and eventually turning into a more animalistic shape, standing on his arms and legs.

As in the original game, by the final confrontation, the Nemesis has mutated to an almost unrecognizable state. Once again it appears bursting out of a wall, but this time it is a massive blob of flesh, akin to a slug, or maybe a womb, which once inside the room violently opens itself, giving birth to its own final form, a horrifying agglomeration of bones, tentacles and teathed maws (Picture 17). This final form and transformation might in some ways relate more to the archaic mother from Barbara Creed's (1993) theory of the monstrous-feminine than to Clover's (1992) predominantly male slasher killer.



PICTURE 17. Close up of the Nemesis in his final form (Capcom 2020).

5.3.2 Raccoon City is a Terrible Place

One of the ways the remake moves closer to slasher movies than the original game is in its chase scenes. Due to both design choices and technological advancements since 1992, *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020) can create a much more cinematic experience than its predecessor. This is clear from the first time the Nemesis chases Jill, through the burning corridors of her apartment building. Camera angles, photorealism and limited interactivity give these kinds of scenes a much more similar tone to the chase scenes found in slasher movies. With the exception that Jill does not scream as much as the usual horror movie victim.

This initial chase is the point when Jill leaves the safety of her home and embarks on a journey through the Terrible Place that is Raccoon City. While Jill's first contact with zombies in *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996) took place in an abandoned mansion that fits in with what Clover (1992) refers to as a Terrible House, in *Resident Evil 3* (2020) much of the action takes part in Terrible Tunnels, places that can be described as "dark, exitless, slick with blood, and laced with heating ducts and plumbing pipes." (Clover 1992, 31). Those places are under Raccoon City, its subway tunnels, sewers, the enclosed areas of the electrical substation and the subterranean lab owned by Umbrella.

But even in the moments when Jill is above ground, there is no respite. The streets of Raccoon City are completely overrun with destruction and zombies. Nemesis roams the downtown area of the city through much of the game, making any exploration in the area a dangerous endeavour. By the end of the game, Raccoon City's status as a Terrible Place has become such that there is no option for redeeming it other than total destruction. Something that Jill and Carlos get to see as they fly away just in time to avoid the destruction themselves.

5.3.3 Final Jill

When comparing the Jill Valentine in *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom 1999) to the Final Girl archetype, Alton (2020) agrees that the former shares in some

attributes of the latter. Jill is intelligent, carries herself with gravity and is mechanically and practically competent. He also says that Jill differs from the Final Girl in one major aspect: while Clover's (1992) archetype is recognised by a lack of sexuality and femininity, Jill is overtly sexualised in her design for the original game. Beyond that, she does not need to go through a sudden change before being able to confront the Nemesis, instead Jill and the player have the option to face him, and temporarily defeat him in all of their encounters. (Alton 2020.)

Much of that remains true in Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), Jill is still an intelligent, serious and competent character. The ways in which she used to differ from the archetype, however, are changed in the remake. As mentioned before, Jill's new design no longer focus on her sex appeal, but goes for a more practical vision, which can be perceived as less feminine in comparison. The remake also adds scripted sequences where Jill/the player is not allowed to face the Nemesis, being instead forced to run. Those sequences are rare, and most of the times Nemesis can still be faced and temporarily taken down, but the changes are still a move towards a more traditional horror archetype.

In the conclusion to his chapter about Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999), Alton (2020) suggests that, despite issues with the male gaze, Jill's depiction implies a woman confident with her sexuality which stands in opposition and defeats the Nemesis' impotent, fragile and toxic masculinity. This, he says, make original Resident Evil 3 a more progressive game than its main rival at the time, Silent Hill (Konami 1999) which had its male protagonist confronting and defeating the female puberty of his missing possessed daughter. (Alton 2020.)

Those are interesting points regarding the original game, but they do not translate well into the remake. While Jill is undoubtedly portrayed as a confident woman, when it comes to her sexuality, she is closer to Clover's (1992) findings that the Final Girl is not sexually active or available. In a similar way to Stretch from The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 (Hooper 1986), Jill quickly turns down the Carlos' romantic interest. Her unavailability seems to have been understood by him by the middle of the game, as when his mercenary colleague asks him about Jill, referring to her as his "hot date" he replies with: "She is not like that."

Throughout Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020), Jill is portrayed as more performatively masculine than the one from the original game. Ultimately, the only significant difference between the new Jill and the archetypal Final Girl is that Jill already starts the game as an active character. She is hardened from the start and does not go through a considerable transformation in the culmination of the game. Her arsenal, however, goes through a big change in her last fight with the Nemesis.

Jill picks up her biggest weapon yet during the climax of the game, it is not a knife or chainsaw, as common in the slasher movies, but a massive rail cannon called the Ferromagnetic Infantry-use Next Generation Railgun, also known as the FIN-GeR. In comparison with the Final Girl's symbolic phallicization, it can be said that Jill's transformation does not happen from a castrated/passive to a phallic/active position, but from an initial active position to an even more powerful one. Armed with a considerably bigger phallus which she shoves down the Nemesis maw, finally killing it for good (Picture 18).



PICTURE 18. Jill gives Nemesis the FIN-GeR (Capcom 2020).

5.4 Queering Jill Valentine

In the same way as *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013), *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020) does not have any openly queer characters, creating the need for queer remediation (Chang 2016). Also similar is the game's interest on the skin, wounds and transformations, which opens possibilities to dialogue with Halberstam's (1995) ideas for the queer gaze.

In this subchapter I will collate different ideas previously discussed in the thesis, seeking to push the normative constraints of *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020) in favour of a possible queer dimension to the game. The most interesting points for this discussion are Halberstam's (1995) discussion of rabidness and Jill's transformations through the game, leading to her final ascension into a sort of monstrous gender.

5.4.1 Zombies and rabid women

In *Bodies That Splatter*, Halberstam (1995) talks about David Cronenberg's (1977) *Rabid* and discusses the scrambling of gender identities and performances found in that movie, introducing us to the concepts of rabid women and gender horror. "Gender horror", says Halberstam (1995, 158), "is produced when female bodies become rabid."

In this way, the potential for gender horror is introduced in the first minutes of *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020), when Jill looks in her bathroom mirror and sees herself turning into one of the rabid zombies she had faced in the previous game. It is only a nightmare, Jill is still the same when she wakes up, but this scene speaks of her anxieties and themes that will be repeated throughout the game.

Jill's nightmare also has parallels with Halberstam's (1995) idea of stretched gender, as it happens in a scene from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper 1986). In it, Leatherface, the wielder of the eponymous chainsaw, places the flayed face of LG, Stretch's male partner, over the Final Girl's own face, as a

mask. At this moment, Stretch, the stand-in for the audience, is seeing Leatherface literally through LG's face. Leatherface, who also wears a mask made of human hide, sees another leatherface in Stretch and is fascinated with her, asking her for a dance while wearing the skin. The gaze in this situation is neither male nor female, it is instead deflected through different gender positions, as the audience sees through LG from the position of Stretch and reflected on Leatherface. (Halberstam 1995, 151-152.)

Similarly, when Jill is having her nightmare. We see through her eyes, which were under our control just seconds ago, a reflection in the mirror which is neither Jill nor the player but a third, rabid body (Picture 19). Regardless of the player's gender, the first scene both establishes the risk of rabidity and scrambles Jill and the player through different identities. The dramatic nature of the scene reaches its peak when Jill picks up her gun and attempts to shoot herself, only to wake up in her bad again, not rabid.



PICTURE 19. The player sees rabid Jill through non-rabid Jill's eyes (Capcom 2020).

The notion of rabid gender is also relevant when observing Jill's encounter with the Drain Deimos. In her essay called "The Traffic in Leeches: David Cronenberg's Rabid and the Semiotics of Parasitism" Ira Livingston (1993) talks about the rabid woman.

The mutant woman who comes to occupy the center of the film figures a dazzling confusion between the sites and functions of production, reproduction, and consumption, succinctly condensed into a prohibited exchange of features (Livingstone 1993).

If we see the explosion of parasites infecting Jill after her encounter with the Drain Deimos as a symbolic birth, we can also see how that presents a similar confusion between Jill's sites and functions of consumption and reproduction. The parasites enter Jill's body as her mouth is penetrated by a tentacle and it is once again through her mouth that she births/vomits the premature parasites. If they get enough time to developed, it is also not through regular means, but as a deadly burst from her stomach.

Jill's fear of rabidity almost becomes true when she is infected with the virus after a combat encounter with the Nemesis, where he pierces her arm with one of his tentacles. She is then saved from becoming into a zombie by Carlos, who manages to find the cure and injects it in her before she turns. It could be said that just as Lara carries both a relic of positive and toxic masculinity on her guns, Jill is injected with the literally toxic virus from Nemesis, and with the anti-toxin by Carlos.

5.4.2 FINGeR grafting

Jill Valentine's body is teased with mutations and rabidity through all of Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020) but her actual transformation happens at the climax of the game and it is more akin to Stretch's performance at the end of The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 (Hooper 1986) than the one by the rabid woman from Rabid (Cronenberg 1997) or the one from Lara Croft in Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013).

Stretch's ending in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* (Hooper 1986) has the Final Girl picking up a chainsaw herself and using it to kill Chop Top, a member of the Sawyer family of cannibals. In an over the top performance, Stretch disembowels him, leading him to fall down a cliff where she stands, waving the chainsaw over her head. This was a direct reference to the ending of the first *Chainsaw Massacre* movie (Hooper 1974), which ended with Leatherface waving his own chainsaw in a similar manner, as Sally, that movie's Final Girl, manages to get away from him.

Stretch's performance in the final scene is described by Clover (1992) as high drag, a mockery of cinematic conventions of symbolic representation, that is meant to remind the audience that the one who performed the heroic/masculine role of killing the villain is not a man, but a girl. Halberstam (1995), with his view on the capacity of the slasher horror to blurry gender lines and go beyond a boy and girl binary, claims that Stretch's performance is not high drag. Stretch change from the girl/victim identity does not take her into a male/hero one but into a new body, a Stretch with chainsaw. A Stretch that kills the one who would kill her, with a chain saw "sutured and grafted onto the female body rendering it a queer body of violence and power, a monstrous body that has blades, make noise and refuses to splatter." (Halberstam 1995.)

Same as Stretch, Jill Valentine's final stand against the Nemesis is also an over-the-top affair. Jill pulls out the massive FINGeR railgun, the metaphor in its name is not lost, and pushes it up Nemesis' mouth. The FINGeR shoots such a powerful shot that it causes the giant monster to explode from the inside out, with his innards now decorating the room as if they were a corridor made of flesh for Jill to make her glorious exit (Picture 20).



PICTURE 20. Jill in front of the Nemesis' opened body.

In that moment, Jill's sixth finger has taken her to a position beyond the woman/victim and man/hero binary common in video games. She penetrates the tentacled body that would penetrate her and turns all of it into an opening, which she then takes in order to finally leave the Terrible Place she has been stuck on for the whole game. Jill's body, which had been threatened with mutation since the first scene, has reached its most extreme form, a queer body of violence and power, a monstrous body that bursts energy, makes noise and splatters the one who would have splattered her. For a moment, Jill is rabid, but on her own terms.

6 THE TWO-WAY GAZE

6.1 A different time, a different media

After using Mulvey's (1975), Clover's (1992), and Halberstam's (1995) film theories to analyse modern video game characters, it became clear that, while much of the landmark theories can be used for that, plenty does not translate properly into a different time and media. To remediate that, here is my first attempt at a guideline for analysis of female video game protagonists after #MeToo. Inspired by my experiment with those theories, I will focus on three main aspects: the gaze, the video games' version of the Final Girl and the players' role in remediating the character's presentation.

6.2 The (often) male gazes

The fact that so much of the 45 years-old theory by Laura Mulvey (1975) is still applicable to modern triple-A video games may be a testament to the conservative nature found in much of the industry. The interactive nature of video games, however, turns much of Mulvey's theory upside-down, as unlike cinema, a video game cannot be experienced passively and requires input from its player. Taking that into consideration, and making the deliberate choice to move away from the Mulvey's naming of her theory, which could help to solidify old prejudices of gaming as a male-only activity, I chose to divide the gaze in video games to two different gazes: the developer gaze and the player gaze, which work together and in opposition to create the full gaming experience.

6.2.1 The developer gaze

While the gaze is not always male, it often is. That is especially true when it comes to the gaze of the developers in an industry heavily composed by white cisgender men (Code 2017). The developer gaze can be observed in the way the characters are presented in the non-interactive content of the game, mainly the animations and cutscenes. It can also be noticed in the promotional material, such as in

Tomb Raider's (Crystal Dynamics 2013) gameplay trailer and in the narrative relations of the female protagonist with important male characters, like in Jill's relations with Barry in Resident Evil (Capcom 1996) and Carlos in Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020).

When compared to earlier games in the series, the newer versions of Jill Valentine and Lara Croft are noticeably less sexualised than their previous versions, indicating an awareness from the developers of the audience's new sensibilities. In exchange, and particularly in the case of Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013), a shift to a more punishing gaze has been noticed, intending to portray the character as someone to be protected, rather than desired. The occasional objectifying scenes are still present, but even then, they can be conflated with a violent punishing side, as seen in the Drain Deimos encounter in Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020).

6.2.2 The player gaze

The player gaze represents the most radical change to the gaze in video games from the cinematic gaze. Unlike traditional cinema, video games require direct input from the player, a more explicitly active form of gazing. Differing from the developer's gaze, the player's gaze cannot be observed in the text by itself but requires analysis to go beyond it and into the player's relation with the text.

Understanding what MacCallum-Stewart (2014) criticizes about trying to understand Lara Croft through simple textual analysis, as well as Chang's (2017) notion of the fandom being a part of the video game media experience, the player gaze reframes the characters' presentation through the players experience and interpretation of the characters. The player gaze exists in relation with the developer gaze and can be separated into two main aspects: the player's control of the in-game environment, including the camera, character outfits and styles of play, and fan-made content.

The first aspect is more closely related to the developer gaze, as it depends on the amount of control given to the players in the game's world. Games like Nier:

Automata (PlatinumGames 2017) and Resident Evil 4 (Capcom 2005) display an understanding and expectation from the developers to a voyeuristic nature of the player gaze over their female characters. Both games have specific animations that play as response when the camera is moved to allow a view under the character's skirts, as can be seen with Resident Evil 4's Ashley in picture 21, according to Alton (2020) the character's behaviour suggests that the developers want the players to try and look at her in that way. Nier: Automata goes as far as offering an achievement to the player who peeks at the protagonist's underwear at least ten times. Notably, Death Stranding (Kojima Productions 2019) appears to go beyond the assumption of an exclusively straight-male gaze and includes animations where the male protagonist covers up and eventually punches the camera if the player focuses it on his crotch.



PICTURE 21. Ashley covers herself if the player tries to peek under her skirt (Capcom 2005).

The second aspect is much more expansive and less limited by the developer-given tools, opening new avenues for player/character relations. In a similar way to what Chang (2017) calls Queergaming, the player gaze broadens the understanding of consuming and playing video games into paratextual elements such as “Let’s play” videos and streamed playthroughs of the games, as well as in-game modifications and other fan-created content, such as fanart and cosplay.

Despite its radical distancing from the traditional cinematic gaze, features of Mulvey's (1975) theory are still present in this, as can be seen in the fetishistic punitive nature of Lara's death compilation videos (Youtube 2013) and in the "sexy-Jill" character model mods. The democratic nature of the player gaze makes those less of an issue, however, as the player gaze is controlled by the players themselves and cannot be forced upon them, lest it become the developer gaze.

6.2.3 The two-way nature of the gazes

In his talk about queer representation and gaming, Jaakko Stenros (2020) compares single-player video games to a mirror which may or may not be able to reflect "queer acts of play" in the player's actions, depending on the tools offered by the developers. Bugs, glitches, mods, and other fan practices can produce opportunities for queer readings in otherwise not queer games (Stenros 2020). In a similar way, the player gaze is initially limited to reflect the intents of the developer gaze. As seen in Jill's character modifications, mods can be used to change aspects of the developer's gaze disliked by the player, like the lack of sexualisation.

What can be less explicit are the ways in which the player gaze influences the developer gaze. User testing and feedback, as well in-game achievements and other tools for user telemetry allow the game developers to understand what the players do in their games and what they are interested in, those provide insight to the development of patches and sequels. Popular mods can also influence the developers, going as far as becoming their own game series, as was the case with Valve's Counter-Strike (2000) and Dota 2 (2013). Furthermore, fan reactions to character representations can lead to changes, as was seen in the case of Overwatch (Blizzard Entertainment 2016), when Blizzard changed female hero Tracer's victory pose after the fandom complained about its sexualised nature (Bratt 2016).

The strangeness felt when the control of the first person camera changes from the player to the developer in the mirror scene at the beginning of Resident Evil

3 (Capcom 2020) is an example of the unease that may happen when transitioning from the player gaze to the developer gaze. On the other hand, the Lara and Sam ship represents an alignment between the two gazes, as the players catch on to the queer subtext in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) and see it to fruition in their own fanart and fiction.

6.3 The Punished Femme

Maybe not surprisingly, Clover's (1992) Final Girl archetype shares a lot of commonalities with both new Lara and new Jill. The stand-in aspect of Clover's character is exacerbated by the nature of video games, where the player is literally in control of the character, and both characters have traits and narrative points like the Final Girl's. The main difference seen in both games was that while the Final Girl usually spends most of the movie running away, only to turn into an active position during the climax (Clover 1992), Lara and Jill have a much more active position throughout the whole game. This is, as put by Pratchett (2013), a necessity of gameplay over narrative, unique to video games.

Beyond that, some concepts of Clover's (1992) theory, such as phallicization and the assumption of the more masculine Final Girl as in incipient male character for the straight male audience do not hold as well with today's understandings of gender expression as going beyond a simple male or female binary.

That being said, the fact remains that Lara, a character who was written while keeping her femininity in mind, so as not to be "a male character with boobs type approach" (Pratchett 2013), goes through more punishment than a more androgynous Jill Valentine. This brings into question whether the triple-A game industry has a larger issue with portraying femininity rather than womanhood itself.

When considering Rosenberg's (2012) quote on the audience wanting to protect Lara, as well as Clover's (1992) idea of the necessary masculinization of the Final Girl to make her a more suitable stand-in for the male audience. It may be asked if a male-centric industry believes that a male-assumed audience would be more

comfortable cross-gender identifying with a masculine woman, while putting feminine protagonists in a position of objectification for the player's pleasure or victimhood in need of the player's protection.

It is important to clarify that this line of questioning is not a criticism of masculine female protagonists. Refuting Clover's (1992) idea that the masculine Final Girl character is an incipient male character, a notion that was challenged by Halberstam back in 1995, it is understood that gender can be expressed in a multitude of ways and that diverse representations of womanhood are important. This importance of diversity in representations also calls for femme-presenting protagonists which can be strong without being overly sexualised or punished.

6.3.1 Gender and genre

It may be argued that there is something innately masculine to the video game action hero. In the same way as a player expects the gun they receive to be used regardless of narrative incongruities (Pratchett 2014), an action hero is expected to perform violence, shoot, slash and kill a large number of enemies throughout the game. With a large percentage of gaming involving said activities, it can be expected that a female protagonist would already start from a position of required masculinization.

That is valid point, but it does not always need to be the case and there are examples to the contrary, as can be seen in the Bayonetta series (PlatinumGames 2009). Bayonetta (Picture 22), the main character of the games, is a witch who performs undeniably femme-coded violence as she uses the hand-guns attached to her high-heels, dance moves, and magical hair-weave to kill hundreds of enemies. It is an over-the-top twist of semiotics, weaponizing traditional feminine symbols into tools of fabulous violence and death.



PICTURE 22. Bayonetta performs dance moves in combat and has handguns attached to her high heels (PlatinumGames 2009).

Bayonetta is not above controversy however, and her portrayal, which is heavily inspired by BDSM dominatrix aesthetics has been both criticized and praised in feminist discussions. Through her appearances, Bayonetta is often seen in exaggerated displays of sexuality which do not necessarily objectify her, but as argued by Katherine Cross (2016), may serve as an extra dimension for the expression of her personality. Not every female protagonist needs to be Bayonetta either, hers is just an extreme example that traditional connections of violence with masculinity may be left behind when it comes to game and character design. Resistance to expand from the conventional may be yet another sign of the stagnation of game design remarked by Ignasi Granell Vendrell (2019), where game developers who are mostly gamers themselves take existing established mechanics for granted.

6.4 Fandom and intersectionality

Finally, it is understood that discussing female protagonist representation in video games during current times is taking part of a larger discussion on diversity that focuses on intersectionality and issues of gender, race, sexuality, disability, and

other overlapping aspects of identity. Positive representation of female characters must go beyond issues of the gaze and expressions of femininity.

However, the game industry is a notoriously conservative industry, and while efforts must be made in order to diversify its workforce and its games' protagonists, the audience does not need to wait for that before they can recognise themselves in the developer gaze. In the same way as changes in the audiences' perspectives allowed for a new type of female protagonist to appear, so can even more diverse types be born.

When dealing with an interactive media like video games, it is essential to understand the player's gaze and input as a constituting part of the narrative and evolution of the characters. Fan-made content, such as mods, fan theories, fanart, fanfiction, cosplay, headcanons, and even queer theme explorations in academic papers, are part of Chang's (2017) Queergaming and can expand the representation of the characters into a multitude of possibilities, forms and parallel narratives.

In her article, "Take That, Bitches!" Refiguring Lara Croft in Feminist Game Narratives, Esther MacCallum-Stewart (2016) talks about how long-time fans of Lara Croft were shocked to hear the frequent criticisms made about Lara by feminist academics, which focused mainly on her body. She noted that after growing up with Lara as a female heroine in a landscape of male characters, some fans developed a personal relation to the character, and were surprised that people would see her as anything other than an icon of liberated independence. (MacCallum-Stewart 2016.)

That is why, when analysing the representation of a video game character, one must go beyond the traditional textual analysis and investigate the players' experience and dialogue with said representation. This is not to say that the textual analysis does not provide valuable input, it is also an important and necessary step, but it only provides half of the picture. Video games, as an interactive media, require at least two gazes, the developer's, and the player's, both being required to fully understanding its characters.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Lara and Jill

When observing the history of both Jill Valentine and Lara Croft together, it becomes evident that through their years in the video game industry they have had both positive and negative aspects to their representation. While Jill did not start from a position of overt sexualization, it did not take long for the developers to take her there, and it took many years before she was moved back from that position. It is undeniable, however, that both characters are pioneers as female protagonists in an industry that has seen little change in the ratios of gender representation since the 80s.

If we take matters beyond their bodies, both characters are shown as capable women who can handle active positions in their stories and achieve great feats. Lara, however, being the single protagonist to her series, has never had to share the spotlight nor was she ever put in the passive position of a Damsel in Distress, unlike Jill, who has clearly been in that position during *Resident Evil 5* (Capcom 2007) and arguably so during her own scenarios in *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996) and *Resident Evil 3: Nemesis* (Capcom 1999).

When it comes to character development and background, before their most recent iterations, both had been somewhat lacking in that aspect. While Lara has had a more of an attempt to establish a background, with flashbacks to her early years and mentions of her parents, Jill has gotten more of a story arc, if only because the *Resident Evil* series has a more linear sense of progression than the one in *Tomb Raider*, where there can be very little development from one game to the next one. A curious thematic coincidence is that both Lara and Jill have been presumed dead at some point in their trajectory, only to be discovered alive afterwards.

In their more recent iterations, both Lara and Jill have seen positive changes. They are not as sexualised as before and have been generally portrayed more

realistically than in previous games, with more developed and relatable personalities. The new designs share some visual similarities too, and Lara may have been an influence to the new Jill.

They are not completely free from the male gaze, as can be seen especially with Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013). In that game the position of the male gaze has moved from the intense and overt sexualisation, towards an interest in fetishizing the punishment and pain of the female protagonist. In Jill's case that is not as evident throughout *Resident Evil 3* (Capcom 2020), a game which starts by actively subverting the gaze. Because of that, the few instances where the male gaze is in control feel even more jarring when they happen.

When compared to Clover's (1992) *Final Girl*, both characters share traits and narrative points with the archetype, but neither fits perfectly into it. This may be in part because of the difference in the media of video games from cinema, having the player escape conflict for most of the action could be an unsafe choice for a triple-A game. Still, there are enough similarities to consider them adjacent to the archetype, translations of the trope into a different medium.

The two games are lacking when it comes to queer representation, but the rarity of female protagonist in video games and the themes depicted in the games open venues for queer remediation and Halberstam's (1995) reading of the queer and female gaze in horror movies. Lara and Jill perform beyond the traditional borders of gender and cause a lot of destruction and terror upon the bodies of the nearly exclusively male enemies.

It can be argued that both 2013's *Lara Croft* and 2020's *Jill Valentine* reboots changed them into the best version of the characters in their long history, with a less objectified character design and a bigger focus on the character's personality and characteristics beyond their body. This resulted in a new type of female character that is less offensive to modern, more gender-conscious audiences. Despite that, both games still have issues when it comes to their portrayal.

Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2013) has an obsession for hurting Lara that borders on torture porn, catering to a punishing side of the male gaze and portraying the protagonist as someone who needs to be protected by the presumed male player. It would be interesting to compare the game with its two sequels, Rise of the Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2015) and Shadow of the Tomb Raider (Crystal Dynamics 2018) and see how the male gaze's relation with Lara has evolved as her character developed.

In Jill's case, it is notable that her version in Resident Evil 3 (Capcom 2020) is closer to the Final Girl archetype than in the original Resident Evil 3: Nemesis (Capcom 1999). This is mainly due to her new character design and personality, while to Lara escaping objectification meant getting hurt and shrieking more, to Jill it meant moving away from the gentler aspects of her previous self.

The future for Resident Evil 3's (Capcom 2020) Jill Valentine is unclear, as there is no future game featuring her announced as of November 2020. This is unfortunate, as Jill's latest appearance is her strongest one so far. Resident Evil Village (Capcom unreleased) has been announced for release in 2021 and has no revealed female protagonist, but has a female witch as its main enemy, which may provide interesting discussion of that game with Barbara Creed's (1993) monstrous-feminine.

7.2 The two-way gaze

Through this research and analysis, the use of Mulvey's (1975) male gaze theory and Clover's (1992) Final Girl, as well as my exercise in queer remediation (Chang 2007) with Halberstam (1995) were both helpful and limiting when applied to videogames. Understanding their usefulness and limitations allowed me to start to formulate my own theory of two gazes, the developer and the player, and their roles in the analysis of female characters in video games in 2020.

While the initial findings can be considered satisfactory for Lara and Jill, the theory needs to be tested further in the examination of other modern female protagonists, both from long-running series, like Samus from Nintendo's Metroid series

(Nintendo 1986-2017), as well as more recent ones, like Aloy from Horizon Zero Dawn (Guerrilla Games 2017). It would be particularly interesting to see how my ideas hold up when analysing characters that at first view do not fit well with my current findings, such as the masculine and punished protagonists of The Last of Us Part II (Naughty Dog 2020) and the violently feminine Bayonetta (Bayonetta 2009) with her controversial mockery of the male gaze.

Other topics of interest raised during this research are the popularity of video game death scene compilations on the internet, Resident Evil 3's (Capcom 2020) Nemesis as a possible monstrous-non-binary, and a more thorough look at the nature of Player/Character relation in video games, particularly when it comes to cross-gender identification.

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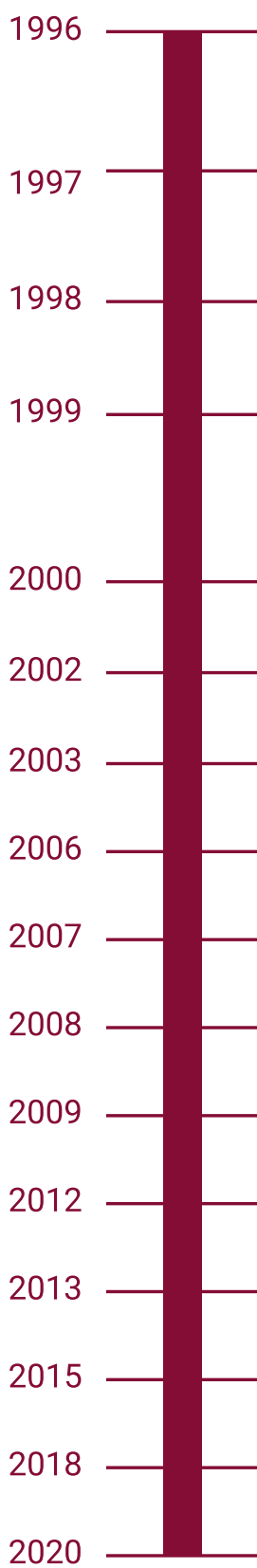
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Jill Valentine and Lara Croft main game appearances timeline.

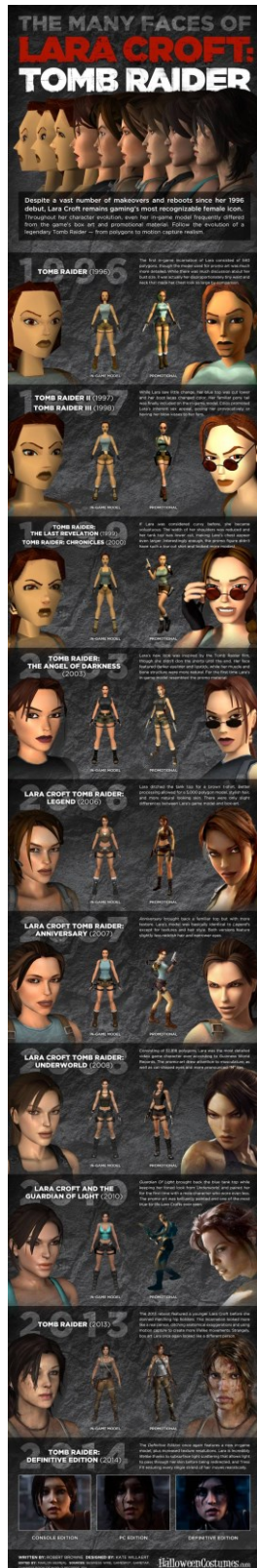


1996	Resident Evil Tomb Raider
1997	Tomb Raider II
1998	Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft
1999	Resident Evil 3: Nemesis Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation
2000	Tomb Raider: Chronicles
2002	Resident Evil (2002)
2003	Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness
2006	Tomb Raider: Legends
2007	Tomb Raider: Anniversary
2008	Tomb Raider: Underworld
2009	Resident Evil 5
2012	Resident Evil: Revelations
2013	Tomb Raider (2013)
2015	Rise of the Tomb Raider
2018	Shadow of the Tomb Raider
2020	Resident Evil 3 (2020)

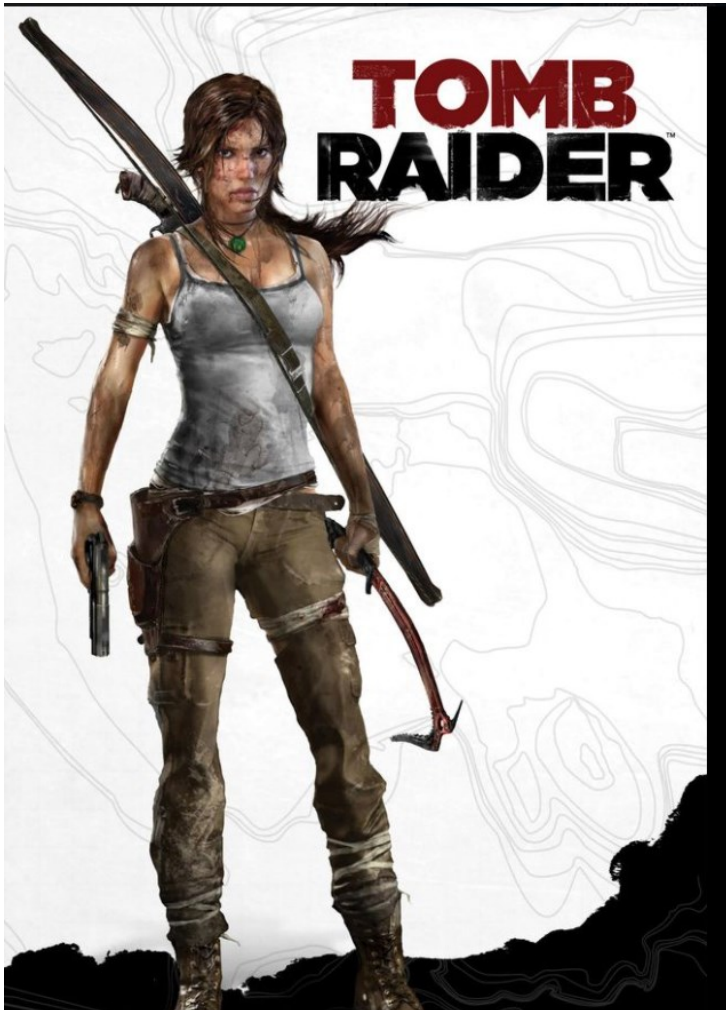
Appendix 2. The Many Faces of Lara Croft: Tomb Raider Infographic

(Browne, Heimerl & Willaert 2014). Retrieved in 9.10.2020.

<https://images.hallowencostumes.com/infographics/Tomb-Raider-Infographic.jpg>



Appendix 3. Online marketing material



TOMB RAIDER™

Tomb Raider
Like This Page · February 18, 2013 · ✨

Endurance Week: Learn more about Lara's shipmates the week of 2/18 – 2/24. Unveiling a character a day, we'll give added insight into those who join Lara Croft in the search for Yamatai!

Lara Croft

- Real Name: Lara Croft
- Age: 21
- Nationality: British
- Occupation: Recently graduated Archaeologist. Also worked several part-time jobs as a student to help pay her way through university, including bar work.
- Interests: Archery, rock climbing & hiking, reading & research.

A bit of a workaholic, Lara is an unassuming and rather bookish young woman, making her way through life in search of meaning and direction after the disappearance of her parents while on an expedition. She is a product of a privileged childhood, and was initially sheltered from many of the harsh realities of life. Growing up, Lara spent time travelling with her parents on archaeological expeditions. She developed a worldly outlook and a passion for ancient mysteries.

The search for Yamatai marks her first job after graduating from university. Although it is her first time as a full crewmember, it is not her first time on the Endurance. She spent time in her early adolescence on the ship when her father used to hire Roth for expeditions, and took several smaller trips more recently as an intern when she could get time away from her studies. Her best friend Samantha and the crew of the Endurance are the closest thing to family that Lara has.

She possesses a powerful sense of moral (if not physical) courage. Lara is clever, resourceful and determined. When push comes to shove, Lara's loyalty to her friends outweighs her fear for her own safety.

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