"The Death of Sleep – the Sounds of *Bloodborne* and What Makes Music 'Scary'"

Paper for MUS 6100 and Chapter of Master's Thesis

Introduction

Gothic aesthetic in literature and media is well-established and documented, with nearly an intuitive understanding of the meaning from the casual audience. Indeed, gothic aesthetic has made its way to video games as well, with games using darkened scenes, mysterious intangible figures, and disembodied sounds as vehicles for the gothic framing. Ludomusicology has produced much academia on how music is used to these effects in video games. And yet, there is a lack of scholarship on the topic of gothic aesthetic and the affect achieved in the critically acclaimed game *Bloodborne* (2015) by Sony Interactive Entertainment. In this paper, I will describe how music in video games can be used to create visceral impacts in players via proper use of aesthetics and interactivity – in this case, how music can be 'scary' – using *Bloodborne* as a case study.

Isabella van Elferen talks about gothic sound and develops a theory on its usage throughout media. She develops some terminology to describe the characteristics of gothic music: schizophonia, hauntology, excess, and transgression.[1] Van Elferen uses this framework to describe how composers and directors have used common sonic associations, or coding, to create the gothic sound we understand it to be today. However, in video game music, there is the additional element of interactivity that must be considered when developing an aesthetic. Van

---

[1] Isabella van Elferen, *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff, United Kingdom, 2012), 173-174

Elferen also details a model of immersion – the ALI model – that she applies to video game music aesthetics.[2] The ALI model synthesizes musical affect, musical literacy[3], and musical interactivity as a means analyzing game music. Additionally, Tim Summers explains musical implementation on a technical level, where music interfaces with the video game engine, and how that affects perception of aesthetics.[4] He writes in his case study of the 2001 video game *Halo: Combat Evolved* about how the aesthetic goals may not be readily apparent at first because of the interactive nature of game music, primarily due to looping. On gothic elements in games specifically, Tanya Kryzwinska explains that the storytelling, goals of the game, and mechanics are tied together with the extra-ludo gothic dimensions to create a comprehensive "gamified gothic" experience.[5] Furthermore, Kryzwinska notes that through semiosis caused inherently by the nature of ludo interactivity, players interface with the gothic in games in novel ways compared other media.[6]

Music in *Bloodborne* is well-known for its dynamic nature; alternating between and quiet and eerie, and overwhelming the player with massive sounds.[7] This effect is achieved not only via traditional musical factors such as orchestration, harmony, and textures that are commonly coded in ways that are understood to be "frightening", but also in the way the music is used contextually within the game. The coded emotions within each track in the game serves to

---

[2] Isabella Van Elferen, "Analysing Game Musical Immersion: The ALI Model" in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music* (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2016), pages 32-50

[3] Musical literacy in this instance refers to all the social and cultural practices that inform how certain audiences experience a given artform.

[4] Tim Summers, "Analysing Video Game Music: Sources, Methods, and a Case Study" in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2016), pages 8-28. A video game engine is the software in which every aspect of a video game is developed and implemented, including logic, physics, and music.

[5] Tanya Kryzwinska. "The Gamification of Gothic Coordinates in Videogames". *Revenant Journal*. 58-78. http://www.revenantjournal.com/contents/the-gamification-of-gothic-coordinates-in-videogames/.

[6] Ibid.

[7] FromSoftware. Bloodborne. Sony Interactive Entertainment. PlayStation 4. 2015.

enhance the narrative and heighten the player's response to the events unfolding before them –
whether it's a fellow Hunter fallen to madness, or an unspeakable cosmic being.

Part 1A: Seek Paleblood – the Story of *Bloodborne*

As with other games by FromSoftware, *Bloodborne* opens with the character creator.
This is where the player determines the appearance of their character, as well as their origin.
Once this is established, the journey begins with the player having traveled to the fictional city of
Yharnam to receive treatment for an undisclosed ailment. After a particularly vivid vision
viewed through the perspective of the player character (which may or may not have been a
hallucination), the player awakens in the abandoned clinic. Their only clue for what to do is a
note that reads "Seek Paleblood to transcend the hunt".[8] Now that the player is control of their
character, they explore the abandoned clinic unarmed and soon encounter a beast who kills them.
Upon their death, however, they find themselves awakening in an otherworldly location known
as the Hunter's Dream[9]. There, the player finds a seemingly motionless life-sized doll, small
skeletal creatures known as Messengers offering the player a choice of weapons, and a
wheelchair-bound man named Gehrman who explains what is happening.[10] After claiming their
weapons, the player "reawakens" once again in the abandoned clinic to defeat the beast that
originally killed them and progresses out into the city.

---

[8] This is not immediately apparent and in fact can be missed entirely, though with no impact on the player's ability
to understand the game.

[9] This encounter is generally designed for first-time players and will likely lead to their first death. However,
experienced players and the odd lucky first-timer can survive this encounter, as the mechanic is actually
dependent on the player's first death from any source.

[10] The Doll acts as the player's support throughout the game. Through approaching her, a number of interactions
can occur, primarily her being able to allow the player to increase their Hunter's attributes. The Doll was crafted by
Gehrman, though he seems to have a passive disregard for her.

Yharnam is a Victorian-style setting, with 19th-century European style architecture. It is dark and blood-soaked, with much of the citizenry safely locked indoors on this particular evening – the night of the Hunt.

The city of Yharnam – *Bloodborne Official Artworks* book. The sky is perpetually dark, and the moon is bright and pale for a time.

Those who are out are crazed mobs and vile beasts who were once people. The player, known only as the Hunter, now much search these streets and the regions beyond Yharnam for this mysterious "Paleblood", as well as to find a way to wake up from the dream. There are many secrets within the city and the Healing Church, with the truth behind the Scourge of Beasts known only to a few found in the world.

Part 1B: Overview of the Sounds of Yharnam

Strikingly, *Bloodborne* has very little in the way of music that the player will experience. Indeed, there is no background atmospheric music to accompany the Hunter during that travels

in Yharnam,[11] nor when they are fighting the crazed mobs and beasts, except on three notable

occasions of diegesis which I will discuss later. Music otherwise only occurs in the Hunter's

Dream area and during boss fights and will be where much of my focus lies. Boss fights are

perhaps the most notable part of FromSoftware's recent titles, and their music is a big

contributing factor. For *Bloodborne,* the composers and music department at Sony decided on

instrumentation and musical aesthetic befitting the time period that the game emulates.[12]

Additionally, the sound team chose instruments that would capture a darker sound for the setting.

As such, the orchestration does not include any woodwinds or trumpets due to their brighter

timbres; the orchestra consisted of strings, horns, trombones, tuba/cimbasso, and timpani

performed by live musicians, with other percussion and instruments such as organ supplied via

samples added in postproduction. Lastly, the orchestration was rounded out with a thirty-two-

piece SATB choir, as the sound team felt that the choir added a sense of religiosity to the

soundscape.[13] The choir in *Bloodborne* sings Medieval Latin lyrics – an application of musical

hauntology to help evoke that sense of religiosity - which contain additional context about the

character or creature this music accompanies.[14]

Music in *Bloodborne* sets out to evoke a sense of fear, horror, and otherworldly

existential dread.[15] This coding is achieved in part because of the orchestration, but also via

careful consideration of texture and harmony (with changes to either or both being used as

---

[11] The decision to have no music in the overworlds was because in early tests, the developers realized that players would spend a lot of time in the overworlds, and thus did not want the music to become repetitive.

[12] Game Developers Conference, "The Gothic Horror Music of 'Bloodborne'", GDC, July 6, 2016, YouTube video, 1:04:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yncMReF8QA.

[13] Ibid.

[14] There is no official publication of the Latin lyrics nor their translations. However, there are moments in some of the tracks where the choir is expose or otherwise leads in a way that lends itself to transcription. One such instance will be discussed later. All translation of Latin are done by the author.

[15] Daniel Robson. "The Story Behind Bloodborne's Haunting Soundtrack." PlayStation.Blog, (May 2015) https://blog.playstation.com/2015/05/18/the-story-behind-bloodbornes-haunting-soundtrack/.

formal markers), as well as mechanical usage within the game. The orchestration centers around creating tension through dense tonal clusters, cacophonous brass, and peculiar instrument combinations to achieve unique timbres.[16] *Bloodborne* explores gothic dimensions through all facets of the player's experience – gameplay, storytelling, and music – and can be best understood applying the framework that Isabella van Elferen develops for gothic music in media.

The setting of Yharnam and the creatures within, as well as the choice of music creates a sense of gothic horror within the player; however, as this is a video game, there is another component of the setting and music that contributes to the gothic horror: how the player interfaces with these elements. In the following sections, I will detail musical interactivity in video games, how *Bloodborne* handles this, and what the implications of the player's influence on the music means for the overall gothic experience using van Elferen's four dimensions of Gothic music.

Part 2: "Playing" Music in Video Games

Music was not always in video games, and even when music did start appearing as a regular component of the gaming experience, it certainly was not recorded on acoustic instruments. Likewise, music did not originally have an active role in the game, serving more as a background accompaniment. Later on,[17] music took on a more participatory[18] role in games, having different songs (or moderately altered versions of the same song) to accompany a variety of changing circumstances within the game such as victory, defeat, discovering bonus areas, etc.

---

[16] Ryan Amon, interviewed by author, email, October 16th, 2019.
[17] In the 1980s, the Chiptune genre came to be primary means of music in video games and involved digital synthesis of sounds generated from the chipset of the video game console.
[18] Melanie Fritsch, "It's a-me, Mario! – Playing with Video Game Music" in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2016), page 92.

As games became more complex, so did the musical component. After digital hardware-based synthesis, music developed into MIDI-based production for PC and other CD-based consoles in the late 1980s and early 1990s[19]. It was around this time we start to see music in games evolve into the role we know today. As the nature of storytelling in games started to expand, as did the music; scoring for video games started to take on the same shape as film scoring.[20] This is apparent with the rise of cutscenes – moments in a video game where the story is told independent of the player's input and is very similar to watching a short scene in a film.[21] Additionally, video game music came to have area leitmotifs, where each level would have its own music associated with it. This would extend to events and eventually characters (such as bosses), which many games use to great effect.

In certain genres such as the action role-playing game (rpg), music is heavily used in action sequences like boss fights. In many games of this and other genres, the music was written to have looped sections within the composition so that the music can progress with the player's actions.[22] This can be anything from the player progressing through an area, and as they get

---

[19] Karen Collins. "Press Reset: Video Game Music Comes of Age" in *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design*, (Boston, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008), pages 68-69.

[20] Michiel Kamp, "Suture and Peritexts: Music Beyond Gameplay and Diegesis" in *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*, (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2016), page 92.

[21] Cutscenes have developed greatly over the decades. Early cutscenes would be simple animations, such as the animation for progressing to the next level in *Pac-Man*. Modern cutscenes can involve advanced 3D modeling, motion-capture, and dramatic scripting and set pieces that are much more like watching a film. Within the past decade, the lines between gameplay and cutscene has become more blurred, as the quality of game engines has increased to the point where a gameplay segment can seamlessly transition into a cutscene (and the musical scoring aspect becomes even more complex for it). Perhaps more impressively, modern video games have moments where a cutscene seamlessly transitions into gameplay via clever application of cinematography.

[22] Looping music in games started as a very simple process, with a command programmed in the game to have music repeat and change to a different track based on certain player actions. However, as games and their developed in their complexity, this became harder to achieve with simple programming, especially when the music was recorded with live musicians. As such, middleware (programs designed to offer more services to another program beyond their original capabilities) such as Wwise and MAGI were developed to handle the processing necessary to loop and progress music as needed for the in-game event. Since these middleware programs where

closer to an objective the music progresses with their journey; to intense action sequences where the music changes as more enemies join the fight or the boss changes forms and ups the stakes of the battle. Musical interactivity like this still gave players a tangible impact on the music they were hearing; this is what the *Dark Souls* series and *Bloodborne* focus their music on, as boss fights are the primary source of music in those games. For *Dark Souls* (2011) and *Dark Souls II (2014)*, the music was used for this purpose, whilst being somewhat of an oddity in that the music was not specifically written around looping sections, but rather looping the entire composition.[23] Conversely, for *Bloodborne*[24] and *Dark Souls III* (2016), the sound team went for the approach of looping sections of the compositions and then progressing them as the player advanced in the boss battle.[25]

Part 3: *Bloodborne*, Sound, and the Narrative

Bloodborne uses music in four different ways: non-gameplay segments such as the4 title screen, credits crawl, and demo cinematic; the Hunter's Dream hub space music; boss battles; and diegetic music. For this section, I will be primarily talking about the latter two of these

---

build specifically to do this, the game engine (the software that the game is developed in) only had to handle rudimentary implementation of music.

[23] *Dark Souls* and *Dark Souls II*. Bandai Namco Entertainment. 2011/2014.

[24] *Bloodborne*. Sony Interactive Entertainment. 2015.

[25] *Dark Souls III.* Bandai Namco Entertainment. 2016.

usages and discuss the player's effect on their presentation, and how in turn this influences the gothic experience for the player.

Starting with boss battles, the use of music in these instances is straight forward. When the player enters the arena, a short cutscene may or may not play depending on the boss, and then when control is returned to the player and the boss's health bar with their name appears, the music begins.[26] Many of the bosses in this game have more than one "phase" – set attack patterns and behaviors that are linked to how much health the boss has remaining – and the music is written accordingly. The distinctions between phases can be vary greatly between bosses, with the initially human Father Gascoigne suddenly erupting into a bestial form with far more aggressive attacks, while the already persistent Blood-staved Beast merely adding poison-afflicting damage to its already aggressive attacks. In both instances, the music changes in ways that are reflective to the nature of the change: the music of Father Gascoigne has a complete textural and orchestrational change (at one minute and forty-four seconds), whilst the music of the Blood-starved Beast restates its main theme far more raucously (at three minutes and thirty-one seconds in).

Due to the nature of the storytelling of *Bloodborne*, much of the story is conveyed via these encounters. In this game, the Hunter is coming into a world that has "already happened", so to speak, and can only glean what has transpired from a small number of clues throughout the world. For the player, music takes a role beyond simple mood setting, and is used to inform the

---

[26] In many games, when a boss character appears, a bar that represents how much health the boss has remaining will appear somewhere on the heads-up-display (HUD). As the player damages the boss, the boss's health bar will decrease at a commensurate rate. Many games, such as the *Dark Souls* series and *Bloodborne*, will have the boss character's name attached to the health bar as well, and this is used to *great* effect on the player when revealing a foreshadowed person/creature.

player of the transgressions or tragic circumstances surrounding a character. One such example is Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos.

Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos concept art – *Bloodborne Official Artworks* book. I think she's kind of cute.

Ebrietas is the culmination of an optional side adventure the Hunter can take in Yharnam, one wherein they discover the extent of the Healing Church's secrets in dealing with the Great Ones.[27] Upon traveling to the upper levels of the city, the Hunter encounters the Orphanage – the headquarters of the Choir, a delegation of the Church.[28] It is here that the player will encounter a subtle source of diegetic music. A soft, eerie choral tone cluster blankets the area of upper

---

[27] Great Ones in *Bloodborne* are cosmic entities that transcend human understanding; seeing them is enough to drive most humans mad. Great Ones are known for their disturbing and otherworldly appearances and their awesome abilities. The blood of a specific Great One – Ebrietas – is the catalyst behind the events of the entire game.

[28] The Choir is a delegation of scholars in the Healing Church devoted to studying and perhaps even worshiping the Great Ones.

Yharnam. It is not ever explicitly revealed where these voices are coming from, but it can be surmised that they are coming from the lesser Kin in the Lumenflower Gardens of the Orphanage.[29] This is one of three places in the game where music is heard outside of the Hunter's Dream and outside of a boss battle and is an example of sound divorced from its source in the game.[30]

After progressing through this area, and facing many powerful beasts and Kin, the Hunter encounters Ebrietas. As can be gathered from the scraps of lore presented in the game, Ebrietas was one of, if not the *only* Great One that wanted to establish a relationship with humanity. To this end, she helped enlighten the Healing Church Choir with cosmic knowledge. She was, however, left behind by her kind for unknown reasons. Her music, as described by composer Yuka Kitamura, is supposed to have a sense of finality, and scale.[31] Indeed, the orchestration is thick and colorful, as if to convey the depth of knowledge that we do not understand. Her music also conveys a sense of reverence, perhaps from the Healing Church Choir. Consider the following lyric:

Ex tu fles

Ex tu flesque a pulchra

(translation): "You cry out. You cry out and [are] beautiful."

---

[29] Kin are creatures who in many cases were formally humans who obtained enough eldritch knowledge and have transformed into alien-like beings.

[30] Schizophonia is defined as sound separated from its source through application of technology (van Elferen, page 26). Because video games are a technological medium by nature, schizophonia is easy to achieve. In the case of this game, because music is usually presented in a hardline non-diegetic way, instances such as these become much more pronounced.

[31] Robson, "Bloodborne's Haunting Soundtrack".

There is a suggestion here that whoever is speaking here (perhaps the Healing Church Choir IS the choir in the recording) sees that Ebrietas is in despair, yet she is still revered by the Choir. It is a mystery why she might be in despair (indeed, upon first encountering her, she is facing away from the Hunter in front of some makeshift altar, seemingly weeping). Perhaps she weeps because she was left behind by her kind?

Another salient example of this narrative-through-music storytelling is with the character, Ludwig, the Holy Blade.

Ludwig, the Holy Blade concept art – *Bloodborne Official Artworks* book. Note the sword draped across his back.

Ludwig is foreshadowed heavily throughout the game, being mentioned as the first hunter of the Healing Church. There are weapons, clothing, and other items in the game named after him, whose descriptions shed some light on this most venerable of hunters. Clearly, he is, or was, a very influential figure in the early days of the Hunt. However, he is not seen at all

throughout the Hunter's travels in the game, leading the player to believe that he was some form of hero of old. However, this is only true for the base game – several months after the initial release of the game, FromSoftware released the Old Hunters DLC.[32] The Old Hunters DLC sees the Hunter traveling to the Hunter's Nightmare, a twisted purgatory where the hunters who participated in an unspeakable act are trapped, cursed to hunt endlessly. As the Hunter navigates this hellscape – itself being a demented reflection of familiar areas of Yharnam and beyond, but with new geography – they come across an underground corpse pile. Upon entering the space, a cutscene ensues that shows portions of a grotesque beast beyond what we have seen so far encroach toward us. A still living corpse begs for release from the nightmare, from the horror of Ludwig, the Accursed. As the corpse says this name, the camera reveals the horrifying beast the Hunter must now challenge.

For the player, this moment is significant as this seemingly heroic figure of legend has been reduced to the vaguely equine and wild beast we see here. The music presents an angular melody on solo cello and the choir, with the rest of the orchestra providing heavy and haunting textural accompaniment. This serves to create a sense of unease in the player, and to show how twisted Ludwig has become. His attacks are wild and unmeasured, indicating that his mind has completely succumbed to madness. As the Hunter fights the beast, something completely unique to Ludwig happens in terms of how this game handles phase transitions in boss fights; when his health bar is reduced to half, a cutscene is triggered. Ludwig collapses and seems to regain a sense of lucidity. He looks to his sword, which had been knocked off his back in the scuffle and is now glowing with shadowy moonlight.

---

[32] DLC, or downloadable content, is a form of additional content added on to a game after its initial release. DLC can range anywhere from new weapons or outfits added to the game, to expansive new areas and story content for the player to explore. In the case of the Old Hunters DLC, it contains all the aforementioned kinds of additions.

"Aah, you were at my side, all along. My true mentor… My guiding moonlight…"

Ludwig now speaks with a proper voice, and he stands on his hind legs, pulling his sword from the ground. The game is coded to bring the music to a specific point (roughly two minutes and ten seconds in) every time the player reaches this point in the battle: the music builds to a climax, and then drops everything except for the choir.

Oh Venator! Beatus Sanctus

Bonam fati par dia

Domus aeternus fiat morte

Perit sanguine opulentum

(translation): "Oh Hunter! Blessed, Sacred

Brave like the gods of fate

May this [place] become a house of death

He becomes nothing, rich with the Blood"

When the cutscene finishes, the music lands on a massive E minor arrival point and the battle continues, now with Ludwig wielding his massive Holy Moonlight Sword. His health bas has even changed his title from "Ludwig, the Accursed" to "Ludwig, the Holy Blade". The above Latin serves to describe just how important a figure Ludwig was to the setting, with the choir quite literally singing his praises.

One final example of this narrative elaboration is with Lady Maria.

Lady Maria of the Astral Clocktower concept art – *Bloodborne Official Artworks* book. She is very fancy.

Lady Maria serves as the penultimate boss of the Old Hunters DLC and is foreshadowed

throughout the expansion. The patients of the Clocktower's Research Hall (the mostly lucid

ones, anyways) speak fondly of a "Lady Maria" in their wandering delusions. The music (from

roughly two minutes and twenty seconds) of the Living Failures boss fight includes the lyric

"Ave, Maria" during the phase transition.[33] Based on the exaltations from the patients, it would

appear that Lady Maria is somehow the keeper or guardian of these people, yet she is nowhere to

be found as the Hunter explores the Research Hall. After defeating the Living Failures, the

---

[33] The Living Failures are large deformed humanoid creatures, likely produced as a result of the Healing Church attempting to create special kinds of Kin via experimentation. It did not work as intended.

player progresses into the upper atrium of the Clocktower to find a seemingly dead women sitting in a chair. However, upon getting close, the woman suddenly awakens, and begins a duel with the Hunter, declaring that she will free them of their "wild curiosity".

Shared appearance between Lady Maria (left) and the Doll (right) in the Hunter's Dream.

The keywords to describe Lady Maria's music are "transgression" and "excess". Based on her attire and title, Lady Maria would appear to be a noble from Cainhurst,[34] yet she resides in the Hunter's Nightmare along with several other hunters. Despite her ties to Cainhurst, Lady Maria forsake their ways during her life, instead preferring the way of the hunter. As the player sees her face and appearance during the battle, it becomes clear that this hunter was who the Doll Gehrman had created was based on. This is the first transgression. The second transgression comes when one third of Lady Maria's health is depleted; despite her bane of blood techniques, she resorts to using her own blood to empower her swords, as she is committed to stopping the

---

[34] Cainhurst is a foreign territory away from Yharnam. Instead of hunters, Cainhurst has knights and nobility referred to, perhaps with a hint of antagonism, as Vilebloods. The Vilebloods are known for using blood to power their abilities, a technique with which their weapons reflect in gameplay.

Hunter from uncovering the secrets she is cursed to conceal. This is despite her having given up

the ways of the Cainhurst Vilebloods. The music conveys this transgression via the complete

change of texture, with the massive arrival point marked by the addition of the choir and large

chords in the orchestra (roughly one minute and twenty seconds in).

The final transgression is in the third phase of the battle; Lady Maria begins to channel

fire into her blades, using her own blood as fuel. During this climax, the texture of the music has

become even thicker, with a modulation from the key of D minor to G minor (using D Lydian as

a bridge), and the addition of a solo soprano on top of the discord underneath. Here, the

excessive orchestration as well as the overwhelming nature of the battle pushes the player with a

lot of sonic force; this serves to heighten the player's response to the emotional impact of the

transgression suddenly thrust upon them by the revelation of Lady Maria's appearance. The

visual-musical dissonance between the character presented to the player and her music is striking

because it suggests that there is much more at stake here than "just" another hunter the player

encounters trapped in the Nightmare.

Part 4: Implications of Gothic Elements in *Bloodborne*

We have seen a few examples of the Gothic elements that *Bloodborne* draws upon, from

its setting and imagery to its music and sound. Isabella van Elferen states that no one aspect

makes a piece of literature or media gothic, but that all of its components make it gothic.[35] For

---

[35] Van Elferen. *Gothic Music*. Page 176.

Bloodborne to be as definitive a gothic experience that it is, it was important for the developers to take into account the interplay between setting, story, and sound. And the final piece of the puzzle was the player, and how they interface with these elements through gameplay. Here, it is the player's input that turns these elements into gothic ones.

For schizophonia, the divide between music and diegesis is rather regimented at first, but the music contains coding that serves to inform the player's emotional response to the events unfolding before them. In a game where the narrative is not presented in a traditional way, this is important for understanding the implications. Likewise, musical hauntology is a powerful tool in conveying the connotations behind the story. The use of Latin in the choir harkens back to Catholic tradition and helps ground the presentation of Yharnam and the Healing Church in a framework that is familiar. The Latin itself is also coded in a traditionally gothic sense from a liturgical standpoint and draws on the language to depict these imposing figures and events in the game as something to be revered and feared.

Regarding excess and transgression, it can be said that the visuals themselves provide a proper sense of excess in the game. The terrifying monsters, deformed in appearance and brutal in their actions, form an excessive visual image. Some of the kinds of creatures encountered during the Hunter's journey certainly depict a kind of sickening transgression (there are several humans and animals that have had horrible experiments performed on them). Sonically, this is portrayed through the often loud and thick orchestrations which enhance the visuals. Transgression is represented through sudden changes in texture or mood. The player's influence on these musical events is the connective tissue that creates this gothic experience; the player can explore all of these dimensions of gothic music through their actions of exploring the world and events of the game. Every one of those dimensions is intertwined with the storytelling and

gameplay experience. The player triggers when music occurs by progressing the story; the story is progressed through the music and through the player's exploration; and the world becomes more and more available to the player as they uncover its secrets.

Closing Thoughts and Conclusion

Everything presented is only a small sampling of what could be talked about regarding *Bloodborne* and gothic aesthetic. But hopefully, this offering provides a solid foundation for understanding the game and its contributions to gothic media. *Bloodborne* uses sound as a powerful tool to bring players into the world and bridges the gap between the truly horrible and fantastical setting and our reality. This grounding then makes the horror even more effective despite horror being the premise of the setting as the transgression become more tangible.

Of course, due to the nature of the storytelling, there is no way for sure to know what happened, and the clues found throughout the game can be interpreted in many ways. Even the Latin lyrics in many of the tracks, while offering more insight than just the visuals do, still do not paint a full picture. And because the setting takes place in a "dream", distortions of reality and time are fully present in the surroundings. So perhaps much like the characters in the game, we can only glean a small piece of the world around us as we play and are not able to perceive the whole picture. Certainly, the scholars in the Healing Church wanted to understand cosmic knowledge but succumbed to the madness such a quest brings; likewise, the player tries as much as they can to make sense of the events and world around them, but still fall short. When the nuances of the narrative are intentionally obscured, the music can help us gain insight, and so they say, eyes on the inside; although, no one remembers what that truly entails.

YouTube Videos of Selected *Bloodborne* Boss Fights:

Father Gascoigne: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnYw9Vs9V0Q

Blood-starved Beast: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vtj19enwgSE

Ebrietas, Daughter of the Cosmos: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROJqQAg9vtk

Ludwig, the Holy Blade: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cF3LooXSxaI

Living Failures: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJcMiYSLF4Q

Lady Maria of the Astral Clocktower: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdWOFrFbcz8

Bibliography

Allen, Ryan. "Horror Film Music: Factor That Make Them So Terrifying", *The Blog* (blog), *stockmusic.net*, September 26, 2018, https://stockmusic.net/blog/horror-film-music/.

Amon, Ryan. *Main Title.* San Mateo, California: Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2015.

Boss Fight Database. "Bloodborne: All Bosses", Boss Fight Database, February, 8, 2017, YouTube video playlist, 41 videos, https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7bwjwx5Wwdcw_2oq4mQcZuRbfFd0S4G8

Collins, Karen. *Game Sound: An Introduction to the History, Theory, and Practice of Video Game Music and Sound Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008.

Collins, Karen. *Playing with Sound: A Theory of Interacting with Sound and Music in Video Games*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014.

Fritsch, Melanie, and Tim Summers, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Video Game Music*. Cambridge Companions to Music. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

_____. *Bloodborne*. Sony Interactive Entertainment. PlayStation 4. 2015.

_____. *Dark Souls II: Scholar of the First Sin*. Bandai Namco Entertainment. PlayStation 4/Xbox One/Microsoft Windows. 2015.

_____. *Dark Souls III. Bandai Namco Entertainment*. PlayStation 4/Xbox One/Microsoft Windows. 2016.

_____. *Dark Souls*. Bandai Namco Entertainment. PlayStation 3/Xbox 360/Microsoft Windows. 2011.

Game Developers Conference. "The Gothic Horror Music of 'Bloodborne'," GDC, July 6, 2016, YouTube video, 1:04:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yncMReF8QA.

Haider, Arwa. "What makes a great horror movie soundtrack?" BBC Culture (2016) Accessed 10/27/2021. https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20161031-what-makes-a-great-horror-movie-soundtrack.

Halfyard, Janet K. *Sounds of Fear and Wonder: Music in Cult TV*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2019.

Hayward, Philip. *Terror Tracks*. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd. 2009.

Kamp, Michiel, Tim Summers, and Mark Sweeny. *Ludomusicology: Approaches to Video Game Music*. Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2016.

Kryzwinska, Tanya. "The Gamification of Gothic Coordinates in Videogames". *Revenant Journal*. 58-78. http://www.revenantjournal.com/contents/the-gamification-of-gothic-coordinates-in-videogames/.

Lerner, Neil William, et al. *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*. England: Routledge, 2009.

Masek, Dannielle. "The Effects and Importance of Music in Horror-Based Games". Culture Vultures (2015) Accessed 11/5/2021 https://culturedvultures.com/effects-importance-music-horror-based-games/.

Mooreman, Pete. *Music and Game: Perspectives on a Popular Alliance*. Berlin, Germany: Springer Science & Business Media, 2012.

Philips, Winifred. "Interactive Music for the Video Game Composer". Game Developer (2016) Accessed 11/5/2021 https://www.gamedeveloper.com/audio/interactive-music-for-the-video-game-composer.

Robson, Daniel. "The Story Behind Bloodborne's Haunting Soundtrack." *PlayStation.Blog,* (May 2015) https://blog.playstation.com/2015/05/18/the-story-behind-bloodbornes-haunting-soundtrack/.

shehrozeameen. "Story Telling and Interactivity in Video Games". The Article (2017) Accessed 11/4/2021 https://the-artifice.com/video-gaming-story-telling-interactivity/.

Sweet, Michael. *Writing Interactive Music for Video Games: A Composer's Guide*. Boston, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Professional, 2014.

Van Elferen, Isabella. *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny*. Cardiff, United Kingdom: University of Wales Press, 2012.