

Critical Synthesis of Rhetoric of Horror and Disability Representation in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017)

การสังเคราะห์เชิงวิพากษ์เกี่ยวกับวาทศิลป์แห่งความหวาดกลัวและภาพแทนของความพิการในเกม *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research article is to identify and analyze the rhetoric of horror employed in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (Ninja Theory, 2017), and to examine how it portrays individuals with mental disorders. Adopting Thomas G. Couser's concept of the "rhetoric of horror" as its primary analytical framework, this research study utilizes a qualitative methodology involving close textual and audiovisual analysis of selected gameplay sequences, narrative structure, character representation, visual imagery, and sound design. The findings reveal that *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* presents many tropes of the rhetoric of horror through its depiction of mental disorders as grotesque and terrifying, as well as through the maltreatment of individuals with mental disorders by able-bodied characters. The study argues that while this game still reinforces some negative stereotypes of mental illness through its representation of Senua, it also moves beyond mere sympathy to evoke deep empathy by placing the player in the shoe of protagonist with mental disorder, effectively using the rhetoric of horror as a tool for social critique and mental health awareness.

Key words: Rhetoric of horror, Disability representation, Video games, Critical synthesis

บทคัดย่อ

บทความวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อระบุและวิเคราะห์วาทศิลป์แห่งความหวาดกลัวที่ปรากฏในเกม *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (Ninja Theory, 2017) และเพื่อศึกษาการนำเสนอภาพของผู้มีอาการทางจิตในเกมดังกล่าว การวิจัยนี้ใช้แนวคิดเรื่อง “วาทศิลป์แห่งความหวาดกลัว” ของ Thomas G. Couser มาเป็นกรอบการวิเคราะห์หลัก และใช้ระเบียบวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพผ่านการวิเคราะห์อย่างละเอียดทั้งด้านตัวบท สื่อภาพ และเสียงของฉากการเล่นที่คัดเลือกมา โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่โครงสร้างเรื่อง การนำเสนอภาพตัวละคร ภาพลักษณ์เชิงทัศนศิลป์ และการออกแบบเสียง ผลการศึกษพบว่า เกม *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) ได้นำเสนอรูปแบบวาทศิลป์แห่งความหวาดกลัวในหลายลักษณะ ผ่านการสร้างภาพความผิดปกติจากจิตใจให้มีลักษณะน่าหวาดกลัวและผิดปกติ รวมถึงการแสดงให้เห็นถึงการปฏิบัติอย่างไม่เหมาะสมต่อผู้ที่มีความผิดปกติทางจิตโดยตัวละครที่มีร่างกายปกติ งานวิจัยนี้เสนอว่า แม้ว่าเกimdังกล่าวอาจยังคงตอกย้ำภาพเหมารวมเชิงลบบางประการเกี่ยวกับความเจ็บป่วยทางจิตผ่านการนำเสนอตัวละคร Senua แต่ในขณะเดียวกัน เกมดังกล่าวสามารถก้าวข้ามการสร้างความรู้สึกลังเลใจแบบผิวเผินไปสู่การสร้างความเห็นอกเห็นใจอย่างลึกซึ้ง ด้วยการทำให้ผู้เล่นได้สวมบทบาทเป็นตัวละครเอกที่มีความผิดปกติทางจิต เป็นการใชวาทศิลป์แห่งความหวาดกลัวเป็นเครื่องมือในการวิพากษ์สังคมและสร้างความตระหนักรู้เกี่ยวกับสุขภาพจิตได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ

คำสำคัญ: วาทกรรมแห่งความหวาดกลัว, อาการทางจิตเวช, วิดีโอเกม, การสังเคราะห์เชิงวิพากษ์

Introduction

Videogames, although a relatively new medium, have millions of consumers around the world. Videogames are an established form of art and culture, with their unique set of interactive possibilities. A variety of academic sources offer different definitions, for example Nicolas Esposito (2005, p. 2) formulates the definition of video games as an interactive medium through an audiovisual technology where the player is both the spectator and an actor of the stories and the challenges he must complete in a game world. Henry E. Lowood (2024) defines videogames as electronic games played on different platforms including computers, consoles, mobile devices, and server-based technology

Studies of videogame character diversity and representation of various groups within the medium have repeatedly found the representation of characters with disabilities, including mental disorders, to be problematic. Shell (2021, p. 7) determined that disabled characters in gaming continue to be vastly underrepresented with only 18.52% of the game trailers analyzed having any disabled characters. Groves and Anderson (2017, p. 17) argue that when mental disorders are represented, they are most often stigmatized representations that do not reflect the lived experiences of many people with mental disorders and appear in a narrow range of plotlines. Characters with mental disorders are also more likely to be represented as villains, two-dimensional, or as plot devices

(Groves & Anderson, 2017, p. 17). Videogame scholar Diane Carr in “Ability, disability and Dead Space” (2014) concludes that the game like “Dead Space” reinforces the negative stereotype of disability as the game represents the concept of disability as threatening.

Nonetheless, many research depict the link between video games as the potential medium to increase understanding of mental health conditions. Abdul Aziz, Ibrahim and Abdullah (2024) claim that a well-structured game design can be an effective tool for promoting and educating mental health awareness. Independent game studios, not constrained by the demands of corporate management, have also found their own approaches to combining game design with the depiction of mental disorders.

Independent game designers have been commended for their innovative approaches to mental disorders, as evident in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017). The game was developed with insights from individuals who have lived experiences with mental disorders (Takahashi, 2017). Released on August 8, 2017, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* is an independent action-adventure game developed by Ninja Theory Studio with neuroscientists, mental health professionals and people with mental disorders as consultants for the game development process. The player progresses through the story by defeating enemies and completing puzzles. The game received an 18 PEGI Rating because it contains both explicit language and realistic violence that is intended for mature audiences aged 18 and above (Steam, 2023). The story takes place in the Viking age of 790 A.D. (Houghton & Crimson Staff Writer, 2017). Senua, who is from the Pictish Celt, is an exiled warrior who returns to her homeland and discovers her lover, Dillion, was sacrificed to the Norse gods. In an attempt to overcome the grief of her lost love, she sets off on the quest, traveling into Helheim, the Norse goddess of death Hela's lair to retrieve her lover's spirit (Ninja Theory, 2018, 0:03:22).



Figure 1 Official banner of *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017).

Note: Banner from Steam. (2017). *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* [Banner]. Steam.

https://store.steampowered.com/app/414340/Hellblade_Senuas_Sacrifice/



Figure 2 Senua discovers her lover's corpse.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017), developed by Ninja Theory.

The game depicts mental disorder through Senua's character, who experiences auditory and visual hallucinations. For instance, as she journeys further into the dark places of Helheim, she can detect the presence of many male and female voices, named the Furies. They speak to her in a non-stop conversation of encouragement and attempts to break her down at the same time, often resulting in a muddle and a conflicting state. (Ninja Theory, 2018, 0:09:34).



Figure 3 Senua experiences auditory and visual hallucinations.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017), developed by Ninja Theory.

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice is an acclaimed game that has received multiple awards for its portrayal of mental health. The game was awarded "generally favorable reviews" on Metacritic based on Critic Reviews and User Reviews (*Hellblade: Senua's sacrifice* reviews, 2017). The game won five BAFTA Games Awards, three Game Awards, and a lot of other nominations from the part of industry experts for its story, sound design, and acting (IMDb, n.d.). The game won the Independent Game Developers' Association Awards 2017 for Best Action and Adventure Game (TIGA Games Industry Awards 2017, 2017), the Game Awards 2017 for Best Audio Design, and Games for Impact (Hester, 2017). Furthermore, many scholars have praised this game for its groundbreaking in depicting mental disorder as heroin as well as its medical accuracy (Austin, 2021; Antoniades, 2018)

Therefore, the study focuses on *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* as the object of research due to its reputation and the popularity of the game. The number of recognitions and awards are evidence of high-quality game production and a potential mass audience. Lastly, the studio has gone to unprecedented lengths to provide an accurate representation of Senua's experience. It collaborated with neuroscientists, mental health experts, and people who have first-hand experience with psychosis. The producer's approach to writing a narrative around Senua's experience, in conjunction with discussions with people who have had a similar experience, exemplifies a unique study method and serves as an excellent case study for this research.

As this research focuses on the depiction of people with mental disorders, the narrative of disability will be used as a tool for analysis. In the disability field of study, Thomas G. Couser is one of the pioneers who studied the disability narrative. In his book *Signifying bodies: disability in contemporary life writing* (2009), he classified the five types of rhetoric used in disability life writing, which are: rhetoric of triumph, rhetoric of horror, rhetoric of spiritual compensation, and rhetoric of nostalgia. In those type of rhetoric, they mostly present life experience of disabled people, which vary from depicting disability as tragic to inspiring impairment. His concept offers valuable insight into how disabled people depicted themselves and its effect of each type of rhetoric on the representation of disability people in public.

Research Objectives

1. To identify and critically analyze the rhetoric of horror employed in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017)
2. To examine the representation of individuals with mental disorders as depicted in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in the field of disability studies, specifically focusing on the analysis of disability narratives. The primary framework utilized is G. Thomas Couser's conceptualization of the rhetoric of horror, as detailed in his seminal work, *Signifying bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (2009)

In *Signifying bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (2009), Couser examines how disability is portrayed in contemporary life writing. He focuses specifically on memoirs and provides a critical lens through which to understand how personal narratives about disability can contribute to broader social and cultural conversations about disability, challenging stereotypes and advocating for more rights and recognition for disabled people.

In Chapter 3, “Rhetoric and Self-Representation in Disability Memoir” in *Signifying bodies: Disability in contemporary life writing*. He identifies five rhetoric patterns are generally employed in Disability memoirs: rhetoric of triumph, rhetoric of horror, rhetoric of spiritual compensation, rhetoric of nostalgia, rhetoric of nostalgia, and rhetoric of emancipation (p.33). However, this research will focus solely on the rhetoric of horror, as it is the most prominently presented element in the game’s narrative.

Couser explains that gothic rhetoric or rhetoric of horror, is a common rhetorical pattern used in the description and narrating of disability, borrowed from gothic fictions that regularly depicted maimed or deformed characters. The rhetoric of horror simply describes disability as something that is hideous or terrible. This might give people with disabilities the notion that they are a victim of a horrible situation or destiny which can be neglected or avoided (Couser, 2009, p.34).

Turner (2018) expands on Couser’s concept by suggesting that the rhetoric of horror can be repurposed in a more constructive way when the source of horror is shifted from the disabled body itself to society’s treatment of disabled individuals. In her analysis of American Horror Story: Freak Show, Turner argues that “when the horror stems from how hegemonic culture treats the ‘other’ instead of the ‘other’ being horrific” (p. iv), the rhetoric of horror can actually serve as a critique of societal prejudices rather than reinforcing negative stereotypes about disability.

Furthermore, Couser argues that by presenting the disability as a horrible or terrifying condition, it may influence how others respond to people with disabilities. Other people might be filled with sympathy for disabled individuals as a pathetic creature. Other people can be feeling disliking about disability thus reinforcing negative sentiment and stereotype towards these individuals. This may seem to be unlike to be found in first-person life stories, for an author narrator seems to appear to be negative towards him or herself. However, these negative attitude to the author-narrator can change in a happy end of narrative, if the narrator happens to overcome or to become better. As far as people with disability is healed or in the state of rehabilitation, as in the case of people who destigmatize their disability conditions, it is common to describe their disability as something frightful and not preferred. Readers should be part of the joy of narrator for having gotten rid of the stigma or negative distinction of being disabled (Couser, 2009, p.34).

In *Signifying Selves: Disability Life Writing* (2017), Couser explains that rhetoric of horror often has a happy ending like a conquering narrative. Conquering stories represent narratives about individuals defeating their disabilities or recovering from them. A clear illustration involves achieving complete recovery from an illness or successfully addressing an impairment. Both of them can be called a “comic plot” meaning not humorous but have a good ending (p.5).

However, the rhetoric of horror may be used in a different way. For instance, instead of focusing on the disability condition, it may point out the treatment of people with disabilities, such as abuse, negligence, and other inhuman treatment. It can also be used to criticize and question the healthcare they are getting because many people with disabilities do not receive the health attention and healthcare they are so much needed. It also helps to expose how people with disability are being failed by the system and society at large giving the rhetoric its counterhegemonic potential (Couser, 2009, p.35).

Rowan (2015), in her review of Couser's book *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (2009), states that Couser lays out the development of disability narratives in life writing texts such as memoir, autobiography, and biography. She explains that Couser's insights into disability narratives reveal how both individuals and society view disability, and how these types of narratives serve as a critical response to common misrepresentations of disability (p.177).

Related Research

In the past, studies on the representation of disability within games are rare (Carr, 2009) However, in recent years, researchers have increasingly focused on video games and the ways in which disabilities are portrayed by game characters.

In the master thesis "Rated T for Therapy: How Video Games Portray Mental Illness and Their Effects on Social Stigmas," (2013) Wendell explores how video games depict mental disorders and the impact of this portrayal on social stigmas surrounding them. The research critically examines how games can act as an amplification of damaging stigmas surrounding issues like anxiety and depression; they can just as easily represent them in an empathetic, sensitive, and productive light (p.1). Wendell finds games like *The Evil Within* and *Outlast* as examples that reinforce negative stigmas (p.12). In contrast, she highlights games like *Celeste* and *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* for their positive contributions. These successful examples are noted for their ability to induce empathy through the subjectification of a person with a mental disorder. Wendell even created a concept design of a character to showcase how symptoms of the disorder could be projected. The conclusion she came to is that video games could be used to promote combating the stigmatization of mental health through engaging and empathetic narratives (Wendell, 2023, p.23).

In Austin's study "The hardest battles are fought in the mind": Representations of Mental Illness in Ninja Theory's *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2021)," employs a disability studies framework to critically evaluate the portrayal of psychosis in the video game. Austin concludes that *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* offers a complex representation that successfully subverts some, though not all, stereotypes associated with mental illness.

The study acknowledges the video game for authentically representing mental suffering through partnerships with subject matter experts and presents this development as an exemplary case of ethical portrayal. Austin's recommendations include the need for sustained and formalized collaboration between game industry workers, humanities researchers, and medical professionals to avoid inadvertently perpetuating stigma.

Austin's study focuses on analyzing the portrayal of people with mental disorders in the game, comparing it to the stereotypes associated with mental disorder that frequently appear in media, and examining the distinction between illusion and delusion as portrayed in the game. However, this research will focus on identifying the rhetoric of horror used in the narrative and examining the effect this type of rhetoric has on the image of people with mental disorders.

Similarly, Turner (2018) examines the representation of disability in popular media through her analysis of American Horror Story: Freak Show. While focusing on a different medium, Turner's work provides valuable insights into how the rhetoric of horror can be repurposed to critique societal treatment of disabled individuals rather than portraying disability itself as horrific. Turner argues that when combined with what Couser calls the "rhetoric of emancipation," the rhetoric of horror can actually serve as a powerful tool for challenging stereotypes and advocating for more nuanced representations of disability. This framework is particularly relevant to understanding how *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* portrays mental illness, as the game similarly employs elements of horror while also attempting to create empathy for its protagonist.

Methodology

A qualitative approach will be employed in this study, utilizing a descriptive content analysis as its research methodology. The data will be collected through a purposive sampling method focusing on the portrayal of Disability and the narrative in *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) using rhetoric of horror in G. Thomas Couser's "Rhetoric and Self-Representation in Disability Memoir" in *Signifying Bodies: Disability in Contemporary Life Writing* (2009) as theoretical framework for this study. An interpretive research perspective will be applied to analyze how disability narratives are constructed within the game, which focus on the rhetoric of horror as conceptualized by G. Thomas Couser.

Results and Discussion

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice (2017) uses rhetoric of horror to narrate the story which mainly evidence on Senua's disfigured hand, her hallucination, and the relationship between Senua and her father. The applications of the rhetoric of horror are visible in the

abuse of Senua's father and Senua's symptoms that are manifested as horror. In order to get a better understanding of how the game applies the rhetoric of horror, this part will examine her disfigured right hand, the hallucination and the relationship between Senua and her father.

Mental Disability as Terrifying and Grotesque

One of the central elements of the rhetoric of horror is the portrayal of disability as the terrifying and grotesque state of being. In *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, Senua's mental disorder is introduced at the beginning of the game through her auditory hallucinations. Throughout the gameplay, Senua constantly hears voices, referred to in the game as the "Furies". These voices continue to talk throughout the game, commenting, mocking, and warning about her actions. These voices overlap in whispers, laughter, sudden yelling or screaming at the players, creating a disorienting and menacing soundscape. These auditory hallucinations intend to mimic the real-life experience of those who have mental disorder; however, they also establish an atmosphere of fear and heighten tensions, creating dreadful conditions for being disabled. This condition reflects the rhetoric of horror that disability is usually presented in fearful conditions that need to be avoided.

Furthermore, the rhetoric of horror does not only present through auditory hallucinations but also through the visual transformation of her body, specifically her disfigured right hand. At the beginning of the game, Senua's hand appears normal. However, after encountering the dark figure representing darkness of Hela, she experiences an illusion in which her right hand begins to rot and later spreads to her head, resulting in a tragic death. After that her right hand is infected until the end of the game and each time she is defeated, when she respawns, the dark rot continues to spread.

After Senua contact the darkness and experience the illusion of her death due to the dark rot, the voice of the narrator states that:

A vision, of what's to come? Poor Senua. The darkness does not bargain. It does not reason. It is rot. And now it has taken hold, it will spread towards her head, the seat of the soul, until there is nothing left of her. All her suffering will have been in nothing. It's just a matter of time (Ninja Theory, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, 0:21:10).

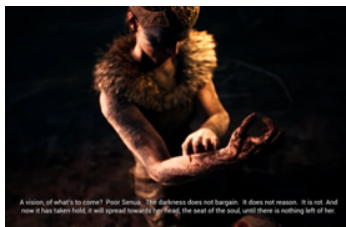


Figure 4 Senua tries to get rid of the dark rot that spread through her right hand.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017), developed by Ninja Theory.

In this dialogue, the narrator, who is one of the voices in her head, pities Senua as she figures out that the situation she is in is an illusion; however, her right hand remains rotten. This storyline reflects the use of the rhetoric of horror through the presentation of Senua's rotten hand. In this game, the rotten hand is applied to make the disability condition more dreadful in combination with her agonized scream as the rot spreads each time she dies. This increases fear and pressure on the player who role plays the role of Senua, creating a fearsome experience of being a disabled person. Throughout the game, the game does not provide any item that heals the dark rot on her right hand which made it initially incurable, creating a sense of hopelessness in Senua's situation as it relates to the real-life struggles of people with mental health issues. This is in line with the rhetoric of horror where mental disorder is a horrific condition and further reinforce negative image of mental disorder.

Furthermore, the condition of the game is that when each time Senua dies, the rot will begin to spread to her body and if it reaches her head, the result will be permanent death meaning that all save files will be deleted. The narrator states, "The dark rot will grow each time you fail. If the rot reaches Senua's head, her quest is over, and all progress will be lost" (Ninja Theory, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, 0:22:08).

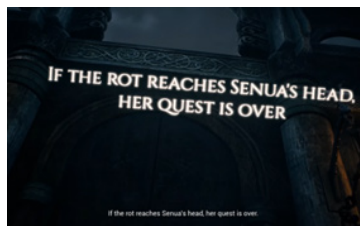


Figure 5 A warning to the player.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017), developed by Ninja Theory.

In this warning to the player, it intensifies the horror by threatening permanent death and deletion of all files. The player's fear of losing the progresses mirrors Senua's fear of losing her mind, creating a shared vulnerability between the player and the character. The grotesque transformation of Senua's hand can symbolize the breakdown of mental stability. The game intensifies this horror through visual and auditory cues, which are Senua's agonized screams and the increasingly grotesque appearance of her hand. These elements reinforce the idea that mental disorder is a consuming and repulsive state that destroys the person's life. This condition of the rotting hand and the spreading of the rotting condition relate to the rhetoric of horror as it intended to depict the mental disability of Senua as threatening and grotesque that needs to be avoided at all costs.

The Maltreatment toward Mental Disorder

Another trope of rhetoric of horror is the maltreatment of the abled people toward those who have disability. This section will explain how Zynbel's abusive actions embody horror tropes through his ill-treatment behavior towards Senua. Senua's relationship with Zynbel, her father, remains dysfunctional because of his abusive and manipulative actions which affect her physical health as well as her mental well-being. Senua is not the only person who faces Zynbel's cruelty since her mother too becomes his victim.

The first scene depicts Zynbel informing the villagers of the message he purportedly received from the deities, which states that Galena, Seuna's mother, the village's priestess, and healer, must be sacrificed to ensure the safety of the Village. He sacrifices Galena in front of Senua, who was merely five years old at the time. Although Zynbel assures Senua that his loathsome act is intended to free Galena from a curse, Senua experiences profound trauma and, as a result, believes that her mother willingly met her demise. Zynbel holds an authentic belief that mental illness is a curse, but his major motivations are driven by his quest for political power and control rather than true conviction. In the moment when Senua confronts the shadow, which symbolizes Zynbel, after recalling the circumstances surrounding her mother's death, he asserts that Galena challenges the gods by rejecting his assertion that mental illness is a curse requiring eradication.

Zynbel: This is what happens when you listen to the voices of the underworld. They crawl into your soul and rot you from the inside. Defy the gods like your mother, and the darkness will come for you too. Do you understand, Senua? (Ninja Theory, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, 4:05:46).

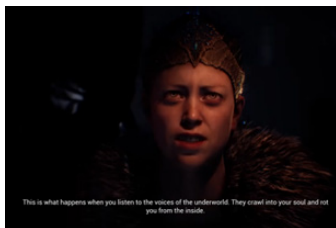


Figure 6 The shadow threatens Senua.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017), developed by Ninja Theory.

From this dialogue, the way he refers to mental disorder as “rot” or “curse” reflects the rhetoric of horror that presents disability as something “repulsive” that needs to be cured, and in this scene the way of curing is to “eradicate” the symptom which is to kill Galena.

The scene which shows Zynbel’s abusive actions takes place when he separates Senua from the community members by declaring her cursed and unfit for social connections. Zynbel amplifies his manipulative parenting style after Galena dies. Zynbel keeps Senua trapped in the pit and rarely allows her to leave for necessary tasks while pretending to show parental concern to manipulate her into following his demands. The isolation relates to rhetoric of horror that often shows the condition that those who inflict with disability are “shunned”. In this scene, Senua is shunned by her father due to his view of mental disability as a curse that needs to be fear. At the same time, his action shows the mistreatment toward those who have mental disorder by belittle them as evil. As the game obvious presents Zynbel as the villain through his cruel’ actions, the rhetoric of horror in this scene serves to raise the issue of maltreatment of people toward mental disability people.

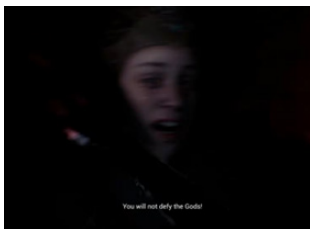


Figure 7 Zynbel slaps Senua’s face.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) at 2:14:18, developed by Ninja Theory.



Figure 8 Senua being trapped in the pit by Zynbel.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) at 3:27:19, developed by Ninja Theory.



Figure 9 Galena burned at the stake by Zynbel and the villagers.

Note: Screenshot from video game, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) at 4:06:05, developed by Ninja Theory.

This portrayal aligns with Turner's (2018) constructive application of horror rhetoric. In *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*, the true horror lies not in Senua's mental condition itself, but in Zynbel's cruel treatment of her based on his superstitious beliefs about mental illness. By positioning Zynbel as the antagonist demonstrates this constructive approach, where mental illness itself is not demonized, but rather the societal response to it becomes the true source of horror. This distinction creates opportunities for empathy while maintaining the atmospheric tension essential to the horror genre.

Conclusions

Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice (2017) provides a unique example of horror rhetoric being used both traditionally and inversely when depicting mental health. While the game reinforces traditional negative stereotypes through grotesque imagery—such as Senua's deteriorating hand and pervasive darkness—it simultaneously subverts these conventions through Turner's (2018) constructive framework.

Firstly, the source of horror is shifted away from Senua's disability and placed onto others mistreating those with her disability. A character by the name of Zynbel is shown tormenting Senua in many ways because of her "madness." By pushing back on others' ableist perceptions of those with mental illnesses, *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice* (2017) effectively uses horror rhetoric to critique others who stigmatize those with mental illness.

Additionally, by placing players in her shoes during her journey with mental illness, game creators may have reduced sympathy and heightened empathy in players when faced with players with mental illnesses in real life. Therefore, the use of the rhetoric of horror in this game could be beneficial in promoting awareness toward individuals with mental disorders, especially when considered alongside Turner's framework for understanding constructive representations of disability in popular media.

Recommendation

As this game focuses solely on the main character and relies on a single text, it would be beneficial to increase the number of texts to strengthen the results and identify whether this type of rhetoric is commonly used to portray mental disorders in games. Furthermore, adding more texts could allow the application of other types of rhetoric as analytical framework.

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