# WANDERING THROUGH THE VIRTUAL WORLD: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERARY AND AESTHETIC VALUE OF JAPANESE VIDEO GAMES

A THESIS

The Faculty of the Department of Asian Studies

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

By

Jonathan D. Curry

May/2015

*On my honor, I, Jonathan D. Curry, have not received unauthorized aid on this thesis. I have fully upheld the HONOR CODE of Colorado College.*

_____

JONATHAN D. CURRY

READER APPROVAL

This thesis project, written by Jonathan D. Curry, meets the required guidelines for partial fulfillment of the Bachelor of the Arts Degree in Asian Studies at Colorado College.

Professor Joan Ericson

Signed: Joan E Ericson

Date: April 25, 2015

Professor John Williams

Signed: _____

Date: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude for Professor Joan Ericson's unrelenting support and insightful advice, not only during my thesis writing process but throughout my entire Colorado College career. You have helped me to achieve so many of my life goals, so I sincerely thank you.

I would also like to sincerely thank Professor John Williams for his guidance in writing this thesis. You helped me find direction and purpose in my research and writing, an invaluable skill that will carry me through my future academic endeavors.

I also want to give a huge thank you to my fellow Asian Studies majors. Congratulations, everyone! We made it! I know we are a small group, and we did not have many opportunities to spend time together, but I want you all to know that it has been an immense honor to work beside all of you.

I would also like to acknowledge my father for his undying support for me in everything I have ever done, through thick and thin. I couldn't have made it this far without you. I love you, Dad.

I also want to thank my mother for her constant encouragement. I know I've been pretty bad about consistently keeping in touch, but I know that you've been behind me all the way. I love you, Mom.

I would like to also thank my sister for always having my back, even when I'm too busy to be there for you as much as I should. I want you to know that you keep me motivated, your voice echoing back to me to remind me that I am loved. I love you, Whit.

I also want to thank my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents, and family friends. I wish I had time to list you all by name, but know that I strive to make you all proud. Thank you for everything you've done to support me throughout the years, from the reluctant goodbyes to the warm homecoming welcomes. I love you all.

And, of course, an enormous thank you to all of the friends I've made during my time here at CC. You have all been my home away from home, and I love each and every one of you like family. It might be years until the next time I get a chance to see your beautiful faces, so hold our memories close - I can't wait to see you all again.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

From an early age, I, like many of my friends and colleagues, had a serious interest in video games. They provided and continue to provide an escape from the frustrations of daily life, allowing me to indulge in fantastical desires and embark on physically impossible adventures. As I got older, more and more people under the impression that video games are meant for children tried to convince me that I ought to stop playing. Of course, any attempt to defend them and express my belief that they held deeper significance was met with aggressive rebuttal.

Imagine, then, my delight in discovering the existence of an academic discourse on video games. It was somewhat disappointing to see that most literature on the subject was centered around the psychological effects video games might have on young gamers; coupled with the common stigma of violence in games causing violent actions and dispositions in youth, it seemed as though an overwhelming majority of the academic community held video games in a negative light. Fortunately, in writing this thesis, I found several scholars who addressed video games more similarly to the way that I hoped to study them.

The first of these scholars is Ian Bogost, author of *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*. Bogost designs and writes about games, teaches Interactive Computing at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and serves as a Distinguished Chair in Media Studies at the Ivan Allen College. He is also one of Persuasive Games LLC's founding partners, as well as a Contributing Editor at *The Atlantic*. In *Unit Operations*, Bogost approaches video games from a philosophical point of view, analyzing video games in the theoretical style of a Film and Media Studies academic. He writes in response to Espen J. Aarseth and Frans Mayra, and hopes to

synthesize the more extreme notion of "hard core" game study and what he sees as a more appropriate and relaxed notion of game study. The hard core, which was suggested by Frans Mayra, is, in Bogost's opinion, in danger of losing sight of the inherent ludic quality of gaming. Bogost fears that Mayra's approach is "essentialist and doctrinaire," an approach that would alienate the playful nature of games, as well as players who might want to enter the discussion from a more fun and relaxed position. He recognizes, however, that Mayra's approach is nonetheless derivative of Aarseth's analyses of "games as configurative texts." As such, he hopes that there might eventually be established a quasi-academic discipline revolving around games and gaming literature, one that can appreciate games in a sense that is not arbitrary or shallow, but still captures the essential ludic quality of games and play. (Bogost, 49 - 53)

Following and furthering Bogost's approach is Hector Rodriguez, professor of City University of Hong Kong's School of Creative Media course "Play and Game Studies." Rodriguez is a video game theorist who seeks to apply the concept of *homo ludens* (a theory introduced by Johan Huizinga) to video games, reinforces the notion that the seriousness of academia must not overshadow the playful nature of games. He questions whether designers of what he calls "serious games" are misled in their understanding of the nature of play. He references Huizinga, who discusses play as an intrinsically valuable activity that is separate from "the requirements of practical life," as well as Roger Caillois who places heavy emphasis on "the central role of play in human nature." When Rodriguez raises the idea of "serious games," he is referring to two opposing concepts of games. The first, which he considers misguided, is one held by educators attempting to use games as a formal vehicle for learning. He notes that individuals sharing this viewpoint see video games as the means to achieving particular goals

and ends: “The teacher does not consider this subject matter to be essentially playful … Playing is treated solely as a vehicle to maximize the ‘effectiveness’ of teaching” (Rodriguez, *The Playful and the Serious*). However, as derived from Huizinga and Caillois, Rodriguez proposes the second concept, which states that the process of playing is just as if not more significant than the achievement of a goal reached through playing. There is an essential ludic quality that cannot be underplayed, showing that a strictly academically reappropriated approach to playing and understanding video games is deeply mistaken.

The importance of maintaining this essential ludic quality in video games is Jesper Juul, an associate professor at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts: School of Design, visiting associate professor at Comparative Media Studies/Writing, MIT, and avid video game blogger, further emphasizes the potential for a more personally meaningful experience of gaming. Juul challenges notions that games are meant to be strictly goal-oriented experiences that direct the player in a specific direction, leading to a particular experience or outcome. This would indicate that the game does not exhibit any greater significance in and of itself, as it serves as a means to an end. As such, the player’s experience of fun and fulfillment could only manifest after having met the goals set before them in the game, removing the ludic quality from gameplay and creating a return-on-investment scheme. However, as Juul points out, many games over the years have offered players optional objectives and ever-increasing gameplay customization options. In fact, some of these games lack final goals or objectives altogether; indeed, they are meant to be played indefinitely, the player shaping the game as much as the game is shaping the player’s experience. If the only reason to play video games were to get some satisfaction in completion after meeting specific goals, then such open-ended and malleable games as *The Sims 2* and

*Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* would have been utter commercial failures, which is far from the case. Ultimately, this type of video game, unlike its explicitly goal-oriented predecessor (namely, arcade games like *Scramble* or *Pac-Man*), proves to be of a more expressive quality, allowing the player to get something more out of their experience playing the game than a high-score and definitive recognition of completion. (Juul, 1 - 11, 15)

Each of these theorists wants to approach video games from a perspective that appreciates games and the experience of playing as intrinsically valuable, as opposed to seeing games as a means to an end. This can be seen in Juul's commentary on recent games having more superficial goal orientation and Rodriguez's discussion of a misguided approach to "serious games" compared to one that more accurately fits the aforementioned perspective. This also ties in with a common theme of the playful nature of games, as shown by the concern Bogost shares with Aarseth that Mayra's adamant demand for more academic video game studies will ultimately stifle the ludic quality of gaming. I feel that they have laid an essential foundation for the promotion of academically studying video games, but I feel that they have not gone far enough. They have taken the crucial steps of acknowledging that video games ought to be studied and have reminded academics that one must keep in mind the playful nature of video games. Most of the literature on video games thus far addresses that there are narrative structures and unique forms of expression in games, or inquire into the psychological effects of playing video games on young people. However, we have yet to treat games as meaningful texts in and of themselves, as many critics remain dubious of their potential to have greater significance.

With this thesis, I hope to both reinforce the push for greater academic attention for video games, as well as provide an example of how one can reconcile the tension between the inherent

serious and ludic qualities of this field of study. Due to the major impact that video games have had and will continue to have in Japan and around the world, historically and culturally, as well as their clear participation in the evolution of aesthetics and literature, one ought to approach video games with academic appreciation for their literary and aesthetic value while remaining conscious of their inherent ludic quality. I intend to use Sony Computer Entertainment's *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005, 2011) as a case study, treating it as a text in its own right. Please keep in mind that there are countless other games that can be approached in this manner; *Shadow of the Colossus* is simply the first on my list.

Because of the vast history of the evolution of Japanese literature and aesthetics that precedes the advent of video games, the first three chapters will be dedicated to laying out a foundation that highlights the aspects of this history most relevant to *Shadow of the Colossus*. The fourth chapter will synthesize these aspects in an analysis of the game.

In order to better prepare myself for this endeavor, I took the time to replay *Shadow of the Colossus*, as well as closely observe the game's cutscenes. Moreover, during my study abroad program in Japan, I traveled to the sites where stories from Japanese origin mythology allegedly took place. For example, I visited three large moss-covered boulders in Izumo, known to be the land of the gods, wherein Susano-o, the banished prankster, was said to reside. Our guide showed us parts of the stones that were still unobstructed by moss, explaining that this was a sign of modern Japan quickly losing touch with its spirituality. The moss represents clouds obscuring the mortals' view of the gods, the dark gray patches flecked with white spots representing the last of heaven's fading light shining through.

By immersing myself in historical, cultural, and ludic environments, I physically and mentally prepared myself for the task at hand. Furthermore, while attending classes at Waseda University and upon my return to Colorado College, I used both schools' libraries and resources to find texts with which I analyzed *Shadow of the Colossus*. Both institutions also provided me with the opportunity to deepen my study of the Japanese language, which proved useful in my study.

My hope is that readers will detect a playful sense of curiosity in my interpretation of *Shadow of the Colossus*. While this thesis is indeed academic in tone and structure, keep in mind that this approach was inspired by my nostalgic love for the game, as well as my lifetime of experience with video games in general. Video games were a major beneficial factor in my formative years and continue to impact my life; as such, I hope to find solidarity with fellow gamers, spark an interest in those with little video game experience, and challenge the stubborn perception of those who doubt the cultural value of video games.

# CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF JAPANESE LITERATURE

As will be more explicitly explained in a later section, Japanese literature has had a profound impact on the video game industry, especially in Japan. Tropes and motifs derived from works ranging from canonical texts to modern pieces can be found in popular media culture. This section will highlight the nature of Japanese literature's evolution and these tropes and motifs in order to set a foundation for analyzing *Shadow of the Colossus*.

## Canonical Literature and Origin Mythology

The history of Japanese literature begins with what are known as Japan's two oldest texts, completed during the Nara period, *Kojiki* ("Record of Ancient Matters," 712, C.E.) and *Nihon shoki* ("Chronicles of Japan," 720, C.E.). These works are known for being the primary containers of the earliest origin mythology, legends, and historical records of Japan (Borgen, Ury, 61). In fact, the *Nihon shoki* was considered an official text, and its popularity all the way through the beginning of the Edo period further established the work's importance. It served as the official account of Japan's national and mythological history from before the Nara period, consistently considered a classical piece (Isomae, 17). Indeed, they were written to establish a legitimizing metaphysical basis for the creation of Japan as a nation; as such, these stories were also implicitly suggestive of a unique Japanese identity, in that the "origin" in "origin mythology" refers to how the Japanese imperial lineage started with the nation's oldest gods. Motoori Norinaga (1730 - 1801), a writer of the Edo period, remarked that the emperor is not merely a figurehead, but a conduit for mythological deities and their interactions with mortal

beings. He recognized that the emperor was ordained by the very gods he was tasked with mediating, and that the history of Japan reflects this observation – Amaterasu, the sun goddess charged with dominion over heaven (Borgen, Ury, 69), foretold of an imperial line that would go unbroken forever, and the actual imperial house has followed this model throughout recorded history (Isomae, 19 – 20).

However, there was an eventual shift of focus from the *Nihon shoki* to the *Kojiki*, which was apparently more appealing and accessible to Japanese readers by the Edo period. This can be seen by the fact that the Norinaga, the texts' first and foremost critic, focused his analyses on the *Kojiki* while occasionally supplementing it with alternate parts of the *Nihon shoki* on an as needed basis (Isomae, 20). Moreover, according to a modern critic of Norinaga, Isomae Jun'ichi, "today people feel an affinity for the *Kojiki* and feel distanced from the *Nihon shoki*. Books for popular audiences as well as scholarly treatises have generally been based on the *Kojiki* … we, like Norinaga, feel a distance" (Isomae, 16 – 17). It seems that the "we" Isomae discusses denotes a Japanese audience, but it could by extension also include foreign readers. The two classics were translated to English during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, but the *Kojiki* received international attention fourteen years before its counterpart. These works were a part of the first wave of Japanese texts to be given English translations, the *Kojiki* first translated by Basil Hall Chamberlain in 1882, followed by William George Aston's translation of the *Nihon Shoki* in 1896 (Borgen, Ury, 61).

In conjunction with the transition into an international setting, Norinaga's reappropriation of the Japanese classics also marked a key point in the evolution of Japanese literature. He initiated a new stage in the discipline's development: the significance of classical works for

popular culture, as well as more widespread accessibility to these texts. With the advent of the more efficient method of wood-block printing in the mid-seventeenth century, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* were now able to be mass produced and circulated throughout towns across Japan. Classic works became effectively liberated from aristocratic exclusivity (Isomae, 29).

Moreover, the shift in focus away from the *Nihon shoki* to the *Kojiki* in and of itself is representative of a shift from the ancient to the early modern, if not modern. As aforementioned, the *Nihon shoki* was unappealing due to its dense and esoteric language; the *Kojiki*, in contrast, had much clearer and more entertaining imagery (Isomae, 17). Isomae comments on how influential Norinaga was in reaching a popular audience, stating, "the interiority and emotions that Norinaga read into the protagonists of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* could appear in a modern novel: in that respect, Norinaga was the progenitor of modern interpretation." (Isomae, 22) Norinaga derived from origin mythology a way to explain his contemporary social setting and its historical context.

Additionally, because Norinaga was a contemporary of the Edo period, and the first major critic of the Japanese classics, he played a key role in bringing them into an ever-globalizing context. For example, his criticism of Confucianism can be understood as Norinaga's attempt to pin down a Japanese national identity beyond the establishment of the imperial house's heavenly ordinance. Norinaga made great use of the aesthetic concept of *mono no aware*, which is a certain appreciation for the impermanence of things. (This will be discussed more in depth in the following chapter.) In contrast to the staunchly reason-based logic of Confucian ethics that seemed to govern the thinking of the ruling classes, Norinaga promoted more emotional aesthetics (like *mono no aware*) based on non-elite popular culture. (Isomae, 23)

This emphasis on popular emotional thought came from his concern that the foreign concept of of Confucianism was an adulteration of "the hearts of people" and far too restrictive on imperial subjects. (Isomae, 21)

Furthermore, Norinaga's reappropriation of the *Kojiki* was the first major move away from the elitist ostracization of common Japanese people. As previously stated, the more widespread distribution of classic texts after the introduction of more efficient wood-block printing methods gave common people the same level of tangible access to the *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki*. However, the texts were still understood as being relevant to those in or connected to the imperial line, leaving a disconnect between the majority of the Japanese population and their nation's origin mythology. Norinaga sought to inspire a new perspective; he considered the elite and the common to be fellow residents in the same "imperial land" (Isomae, 25). This new understanding of Japanese canonical and historical classics caused no shift in the power dynamic between ruling and non-ruling classes, but it helped to establish a sense of identity and community for a broader range of classes within Japanese society. (Isomae, 28 - 29) The significance of these texts, particularly the *Kojiki*, for the modern era and Japanese video games will be explored in a later chapter; this will include discussions of specific tales that I feel are most relevant to *Shadow of the Colossus*.

Tropes and Motifs of the Modern Era

Moving onto modern tropes and motifs, one will notice that the literature of the modern era appears to be particularly concerned with the delineation of reality and fantasy. There are four polarities in pairs as follows: interior and exterior; poetry and prose; aristocratic and

popular; and fiction and fact. However, for the purposes of this piece, I shall focus only on the first and the last of these. (The polarity of poetry and prose is not of the utmost importance here, and the tension between aristocratic and popular was addressed in the previous section.)

One can identify two distinct trajectories in some forms of popular literature, particularly works of fiction: that which moves toward the interior, and that which moves toward the exterior. A focus on the interior more intimately examines the spirituality or psyches of the characters in question. The exterior, on the other hand, places emphasis on the world which the characters populate and the events that unfold within. (Hume, *Four Polarities*, 3) In Western prose fiction, there seems to be a general trend suggesting that more authors are focusing on the interior rather than the exterior. Conversely, Japanese literature seems to be shifting towards greater emphasis on the exterior. This observation implies that the Japanese literary tradition was initially more focused on an interior approach, showing that there it still has the capacity to operate within both styles. (Hume, *Four Polarities*, 3 – 4) Japan's entrance onto the global stage caused a quick shift in focus from the interior to the exterior, as political and social issues were of a unique and urgent sense of intrigue for contemporary authors. However, one can clearly detect an interior trajectory in modern works; regardless of how much emphasis is placed on the exterior, writers still tend to highlight the internalized emotional turmoil of their characters. (Hume, *Four Polarities*, 6) This transcendence of the interior/exterior binary through a synthesis of the two "remains one crucial constant" in the tradition of Japanese literature.

(clarify) Interestingly, the polarity of fiction and fact seems to suggest that the aforementioned shift from an interior to an exterior focus was aligned with the pre-modern tendency to prefer factual literature over fictional narratives. (Hume, *Four Polarities*, 15) Some

groups within Japanese society even considered this form of literature to be potentially dangerous. J. Thomas Rimer suggests that this criticism could have come from the influence Chinese literary practices on Japanese literature, which determined fiction to be fit for lower class audiences. However, given the profound effect that classical works of fiction in the Japanese literary tradition (such as Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*), the interplay of fiction and fact proved to be a way of reconciling the tension between the two. Japanese writers began to use actual people or events throughout history as a backdrop for their fiction; Rimer proposes that this may have been "an unconscious means of grounding, validating their art" (Hume, *Four Polarities*, 16).

The polarities discussed above will provide a foundation for the discussion of various notions of otherness that can be observed as originating in the pre-modern Japanese literary tradition and continuing into the modern era. Susan Napier, a prolific writer on all forms of Japanese literature and media, has some of the best insights into Japanese cultural nuances regarding otherworldly matters and their socio-cultural impacts. She discusses the concept of otherness in contemporary Japanese literature by explaining her understanding of *mukogawa*, or "the other side" (Napier, *Otherness*, 38). She refers to Kinya Tsuruta for a definition of the other side with which to begin, stating that he recognized *mukogawa* as "an artistic space [that] does not exist in reality" (Napier, *Otherness*, 39). This illusory space not only contrasts "this side" – or the side of conventional human experience – but also compensates for its lack of fantastical elements. Tsurata also comments on how the *mukogawa* does not follow typical rules of space and time, but a place wherein natural laws and events one would commonly expect to experience do not necessarily occur. Napier recognizes that *mukogawa* has a transcendent nature, in that it is

not limited by cultural restraints and that it is in close proximity to “the spiritual, the supernatural, and the mythic.”

Napier tasks herself with reevaluating Tsuruta's explanation, claiming that “we now live in an era where it does indeed seem possible to imagine 'meet[ing] on the other side', and the boundaries between this side and the other side, between Self and Other, or between the virtual and the real are not as firm as Tsurata seems to be suggesting.” This can be seen in all forms of Japanese literature and media, and plays a profound role in many *anime*, *manga*, and video games. Napier writes,

> Japanese literature and other arts have tended to be particularly comfortable with interrogating the notion of separateness and highlighting the fluidity of boundaries. Tropes of androgyny, including the specific incorporation of one gender into the other, metamorphosis, and phantasmagoria of all kinds, characterize many modern literary texts as well as theater and art in Japan. (Napier, *Otherness*, 39)

However, this embracing of the other side creates tension for those who occupy such a space, in that finding oneself somewhere between the Self and the Other, or any such dichotomous relationship would naturally cause one to struggle with defining one's own identity. In light of the trend of reappropriation within the Japanese literary tradition, the struggle to maintain balance between tradition and progress seems inevitable. Napier also comments on a more specific social manifestation of this struggle, suggesting that the dynamic between male and female Japanese people has been steadily becoming more complicated since the beginning of the twentieth century. She recognizes that initially the female was seen as “an uncanny repository of the past [that] has become by the end of the century a trope of the female as mediator to an Other world that the contemporary male can no longer penetrate.” Reconciling

these and other issues is no simple task. Napier comments further on the alienation from the Other in Japanese literature and culture, noting that there still remain boundaries – permeable as they may be thanks to modern technology – to accessing *mukogawa*, and that the Other can only penetrate "this side" to a limited extent. (Napier, *Otherness*, 52)

One can supplement Napier's commentary on the notion of Otherness in contemporary Japanese literature with her understanding of the fantastic in the genre. This paper will focus on her explanations of woman found, woman lost, and the alien in Japanese literature, all of which connect back to issues of Otherness. Keep in mind that woman lost and woman found are not in any particular chronological order; rather, the finding is an encounter with the Other in the West, while the losing is the growing void between man and woman in modern Japan.

According to Napier, the notion of woman found comes from the tension between conservative ideals and a shift toward a Western standard of modernization. She raises the example of Shiba Shiro's *Kajin no kiguu* (Chance Encounters with Beautiful Women), which was meant to be a *seiji shosetsu*, or "political novel," that was focused on trying to inform Japanese readers about important historical topics. (Napier, *Fantastic*, 21) Napier calls this text "paradoxically conservative," in that it promotes a conservative message by utilizing common modernization imagery. The satirical use of a male Japanese youth seeking enlightenment in the West, which can represent the Other, served as a warning to the Japanese people: keep traditions sacred, and do not allow yourselves to be taken over by foreign powers. The protagonist encounters various Western female figures during his quest. The women encountered in Shiro's work do not display any actual mystical qualities, other than their connection to the unknown Other. (Napier, *Fantastic*, 22) This is opposed to "pre-modern archetypes" in Japanese literature,

which often depict women with intense passion and associate them with evil or even demonic qualities; for example, Murasaki from *The Tale of Genji* is one of the most well-known pre-modern female figure and she is a "positive characterization of womanly virtue," but even more famous than her is the vengeful Lady Rokujo, who murders Genji's lovers both while alive and postmortem. (Napier, *Fantastic*, 23)

While the Western woman as Other was being found, the woman of Japan was being lost. Napier highlights Natsume Soseki's writing style, discussing his distaste with the rapid modernization of Japan. He seems to suggest that the closest thing to a reprieve from Meiji era Japan's obsession with "notions of speed, progress, and technology at the cost of humanity and tradition" was escaping to a fantasy realm with a "metamorphosized woman" (Napier, *Fantastic*, 53). However, Soseki acknowledged that, ultimately, no retreat - fantastical or conventional - could be a realistic response, as a desperate denial of reality in favor of fantasy is unviable by any standard. Moreover, because woman was understood to be incapable of providing refuge for male characters, they came to be seen as part of the cause of the suffocating atmosphere of modern society. Napier notes that, in a paradoxical way, both the presence and absence of woman became "an excuse for male rage" (Napier, *Fantastic*, 55). She brings attention to two patterns that the notions of woman found and woman lost highlight: "The first is the pattern of absence of the opposite sex and the isolation of the self … Another important development is one linked to modern Japanese fantasy in general and that is the descent from control into chaos" (Napier, *Fantastic*, 89).

These patterns feed into Napier's understanding of the alien as it appears in modern Japanese literature, insofar as the mutual isolation of male and female characters leads to rage in

the former and celebration by the latter. (Napier, *Fantastic*, 93) While the alien, as well as the concept of the self as alien, manifests in many different ways, there are two major archetypes that originated in the pre-modern era that Napier focuses on: "the ghost and the monster" (Napier, *Fantastic*, 93 - 95). Ghosts, which are frequently featured in Noh plays, are typically "horrific engines of retaliation;" rather, Napier calls them "poignant vehicles of memory," beings unable to unbind themselves from worldly attachment. Even in the modern era, pitiful and angry ghosts still play a significant role, reminding characters of both personal and Japanese historical pasts. Monsters, on the other hand, were representative of outside entities that posed a threat to society, but could be pacified. The modern concept of monster maintains similar attributes, but is more frequently found within the self as "a feared alter ego." While this alien self may still prove to be threatening to society, it is even more dangerous to the individual and to those closest to him.

The following section will discuss different Japanese aesthetic concepts that were impacted by and had an impact on the literature and trends in the Japanese literary tradition explored above. Eventually these two sections will be placed in a recent historical context, and subsequently applied to the literary and aesthetic analysis of Japanese video games.

# CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF JAPANESE AESTHETICS

As briefly stated above, Japanese aesthetics have both emerged from and heavily influenced Japanese literature, from canonical texts to contemporary works. This section will focus on defining the following terms: *mono no aware*, *wabi*, *sabi*, *ukiyo*, *otaku*, and *moe*. For clarification purposes, the last two will be given brief contextualization here, which will be expanded on later. The other terms will be used more explicitly in the analysis of *Shadow of the Colossus*. There will also be an explanation of Matsuo Basho's aesthetic of wandering.

## Aesthetics of Pre-modern Origin

Recall that the aesthetic of *mono no aware* played a crucial role in Norinaga's reappropriation of the *Nihon shoki* and *Kojiki*, insofar as he used it to establish a middle ground between "Confucian propriety and Buddhist nothingness" (Inouye, 82). As Charles Inouye explains, *mono no aware* was at the core of the foundation of Japanese identity from the Edo period onward. He calls is "the aesthetics of the sullied and the weak," and notes that it is characteristic of an appreciation of the "impressive poignancy of all things."

*Mono no aware*, simply put, is recognizing the awe (sometimes regarded as the 'ahh-ness') that can be seen in the ordinary. (Inouye, 83) This aesthetic promotes the idea that because life is fleeting and impermanent, it is therefore beautiful in a somber and sobering way. (Inouye, 85) One can observe this characteristic in, for example, the hauntingly beautiful fall of cherry blossoms after they bloom. Thomas Heyd, a scholar on Matsuo Basho's poetry, gives an eloquent explanation of this concept: "Just as the impending fall of the blossoms may be

tolerable, and even aesthetically pleasing, so, perhaps, may old age" (Heyd, 295). The grief and sorrow that come with the acceptance of life as such enhances its beauty; indeed, the aesthetic of *mono no aware* emphasizes that life's evanescent nature makes it precious. According to Norinaga, to deny this grief is to distort reality with delusion, insofar as all living beings experience aspects of impermanence, particularly illness, failure, and eventually death. (Inouye, 83)

The terms *wabi* and *sabi* have subtle differences and can be related back to *mono no aware*, but these subtle differences deserve individual attention. One can understand *wabi* as "the beauty found in sparse, simple things, such as an undecorated and uncomplicated tea bowl" (Inouye, 85). This concept celebrates the simple and the incomplete, as such characteristics are reflected in the nature of the human experience, insofar as humans are finite beings with physical limitations. Moreover, a plain tea bowl holds water as well as an intricately designed one, just as a poor person can function as well as a wealthy person; the differences between the two are merely cosmetic. Through this aesthetic, one is able to find a way to let go of one's dependence on material objects; this implies that one can achieve deeper spirituality by coming closer in proximity to the fantastic. (Hume, *The* Wabi *Aesthetic*, 246)

The counterpart of simplicity is found in *sabi*, which one can interpret as "the beauty of age and decay, such as we might find in the patina of moss on an earthen wall, or the look of unpainted, weathered wood." This aesthetic highlights the value in impermanence, celebrating objects even in their worn down states. Furthermore, "age and decay" imply a certain resilience and therefore strength that can be found in finite objects. The beauty that is found is a reminder that people ought to live with graceful humility, knowing that despite one's finite nature, one's

existence retains meaning. These two aspects of *sabi* both complement *wabi* and supplement the following aesthetic concept.

This concept is known as *ukiyo*, or "the floating-world." *Ukiyo* takes the sorrow revered by *mono no aware* and applies it with more social relevance. The recognition of one's finitude that follows the acknowledgement of the impermanence of all living beings could lead one to a nihilistic, depressive state. The notion of *ukiyo* remedies this by simply stating that one ought to make do with the hand one is dealt; while life may be more cruel than forgiving, one can find brief escapes that can ease one's suffering. These alleviations are indeed temporary, but this aesthetic emphasizes that they are still worth being sincerely sought after. (Inouye, 85) One can recognize a link to the concept of *wabi* in interpreting *ukiyo*: accepting the misfortune and difficulty of everyday life is being content with drinking from the plain tea bowl, and the temporary alleviation may be filling it with fresh, high quality tea on occasion. While the implementation of this aesthetic has been criticized as a hedonistic inversion - or even perversion - that distracts from genuine happiness (especially since it may imply a celebration of debauchery and denial), perhaps this understanding is too harsh. In the physically and emotionally demanding world in which one finds oneself, perhaps the closest one can get to true happiness without submitting to monastic Zen practices is by adopting a floating-world mindset.

The final pre-modern aesthetic concept to be discussed is Mastuo Basho's (1644 - 1694) aesthetic of wandering. Basho was an early Edo period poet who specialized in *hokku no haikai*, which was eventually shortened to its more well-known contraction, *haiku*. According to Thomas Heyd, he sought to write poetry "that was at once deep and light … meant to reach the very essence of things" (Heyd, 292). However, rather than through some deep or mystical means,

Basho's goal was to find this essence in the mundane. One can see clear connections to the aesthetic concepts of *wabi* and *sabi*, in that Basho recognized great value in simple, common experiences. His approach was in contrast to popular topics that appeased the elite of the court or the merchant class. Echoes of this movement away from elitist literature can be seen in Norinaga's reinterpretation of the *Kojiki*.

Eventually, Basho took to traversing relatively unknown areas of the Japanese countryside, making sure to take routes that were as physically demanding as possible. While he did not intend to create an aesthetic, the resulting notion of wandering proved to be of significant aesthetic value. He focused on keeping his wandering methodical and disciplined, making it an intentional and performative practice. Yet, while his method, called *angya*, was more serious than aimless walking, it was not quite as intense as *shugyo*, the much more intense practice performed by *yamabushi*, or "mountain ascetics." *Shugyo* includes "immersion in cold mountain waterfalls and fire walking;" Basho admired the *yamabushi* for their dedication and hoped to achieve similar insights with his own practice. (Heyd, 293)

According to Heyd, there are three major themes that one can derive from Basho's practice: one's traversal through a space, along with one's belongings; as Heyd explains it, "the (re)cognition of places; and coming to understand nature "as it presents itself to a wanderer in the land." He also identifies three objects of aesthetic appreciation - "space, place, and nature" - that one would overlook by depending on more sheltered and rapid forms of travel, or by remaining sedentary. (Heyd, 300) In fact, part of Heyd's thesis in regard to the significance of Basho's aesthetic of wandering is that people have lost a certain sense of appreciation for their

surroundings (namely nature) due to a reliance on high-speed transit, and the wanderer's lack of these conveniences gives the act of wandering its aesthetic value. (Heyd, 291, 300)

Contemporary Aesthetic Concepts

Next are two modern slang terms that were derived from Japanese words, and while many may understand them as merely catchy phrases popular among Japanese youth, one can also interpret them as contemporary aesthetic notions. There are many terms that one could take into consideration, but for the purposes of this piece the concepts of *otaku* and *moe* will be the focus. According to Morikawa Kaichiro, the director of the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale's Ninth International Architecture Exhibition (2004), popular terms related to *otaku* subculture "are a perpetuation of previous aesthetic terms, such as *wabi* and *sabi*" (Amit, 175 - 176).

A more detailed explanation of the socio-cultural etymology of *otaku* will be in the section on the history of the video game industry; here I will explain why I agree that *otaku* is a modern aesthetic in Japan. The term *otaku* denotes individuals and groups that occupy a liminal space between normal reality and the fantastical realms of various forms of popular culture, including video games. Rea Amit also identifies *kosupure* ("costume play", or "cosplay") as a major phenomenon in this subculture, as it is arguably the most explicit combination of reality and fiction; the performative aspect of cosplay in relation to video games will be revisited in a later section. (Amit, 174) The important thing to notice about *otaku* in its aesthetic sense is its constituents' proximity to the fantastic. One can recognize that the *otaku* subculture is a modern extension of the Edo period concept of *ukiyo* with a technological twist. Although this subculture

represents an extreme level of popular culture consumption, this form of consumption is nonetheless a modern way to escape from the harshness of reality. For average video gamers, for example, a couple of hours a day spent in an interactive fictional universe can be seen as today's equivalent of the temporary escapes sought in the Edo period.

Finally, a very popular term in the *otaku* community is *moe*. This term comes from the verb *moeru*, which means "to bud or sprout," and is often contrasted to its antonym *naeru*, a verb meaning "to wither." (Amit, 177 -178) Amit calls instances of *moe* the "primordial phenomena" that one experiences when one encounters an object that appeals to them in a deeply personal way. One can see *moe* as a fantastical element that supplements a real object, thereby creating an opportunity for the observer to gain greater "emotional insight." For both *otaku* and average popular media consumers, the excitement and enjoyment felt while playing a video game are instances of *moe*. This emotional response makes gaming that much more significant for the player, making her more invested in her experience. Moreover, *moeru* has a homonym that means "to burn." While this is a side note, I feel that there may be a level of wordplay at work, in that *moe* could also imply a burning, irresistible urge to indulge in pleasurable things in life. This is of particular relevance to the *otaku* subculture; as will be discussed in the next section, *otaku* are frequently criticized for their obsessive consumption habits, yet they clearly persist regardless.

The connection between the aesthetics defined above, as well as the history of Japanese literature, and video games will be explained in the next section. As one will soon understand, the three have evolved historically and culturally, always parallelling and often intersecting with one another.

# CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORY OF THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY

The history of Japanese video games, unlike that of Japanese literature and aesthetics as previously discussed, happened in conjunction very early on with the United States of America. In fact, one will soon realize that the development of Japanese video games has always been part of a globalized process. As will be discussed shortly, the inspiration, resurrection, and revolutionizing of the industry did take place in Japan, but were in response to the nation's competitors abroad. The first major Japanese video game came in arcade form, a science-fiction hit named 'Space Invaders' developed by Taito, a toy manufacturer (Yoshimatsu, 145 – 146) Notice how Taito, even though it had produced the first Japanese video game, was not known as a video game developer but a manufacturer of "amusement equipment." Here one can observe the true beginning of the industry in Japan, and the eventual change in language is representative of its steady evolution.

'Space Invaders' was released only six years after the first major game developed for sale in the US had its own debut. This was the classic, simple game called 'Pong', developed by Atari (Aoyama, Izushi, 427) This game followed the release of 'Space War,' developed in a lab at MIT in 1961 and dubbed the original computer game (Aoyama, Izushi, 426). However, 'Space War' was only copied and shared for the use of labs that had the proper equipment to make use of the game without cost, as it was not intended for commercial distribution. Moreover, the game's development took place before American copyright laws were changed to apply to computer software (Aoyama, Izushi, 427). This change in copyright policy was clearly influenced by the eventual release of 'Pong', as it managed to outperform pinball machine revenue by tenfold due

to its instant popularity. Twenty other companies subsequently became active players in the gaming industry in 1976, only a year after the shift in copyright law application and four years after the release of 'Pong'. The industry within the US had a huge initial boom: in 1978, the industry was worth US$ 200 million, and in three years grew to be a US$ 1 billion business. Atari was eventually bought out by Warner, accounting for about fifty percent of the company's total revenue (Aoyama, Izushi, 427).

Meanwhile, a Japanese firm that was “widely ignored” by its contemporary mainstream competitors in the toy industry was doing its own experiments with home console gaming, no doubt partly inspired by the success of electronic entertainment in the US (Aoyama, Izushi, 427). This firm is none other than the now famous Nintendo, a firm founded in 1889 that originally produced toys for children. In the 1960s, Nintendo shifted its attention from playing-cards and other toys to experimentation with electronics. As the industry boomed in the US, Nintendo quietly developed its own home consoles, using 'Pong' as a model. The firm's rise to fame came when the industry's market suddenly crashed in the US between 1983 and 1984. According to various analysts' observations, the crash was caused by unsatisfactory game software that could not meet the standard, coupled with an over-supply of such software, which eventually led to prices that were detrimental to American firms like Atari (which was ultimately broken up and sold off) and unsatisfactory levels of quality, two factors that would naturally lead to insufficient demand (Aoyama, Izushi, 427).

In the same year of the American video game industry crash, Nintendo released the Famicon, its original console developed for at-home use by consumers. While it was not the first of its kind in Japan, as other Japanese toy companies like Tommy and Bandai had already

released their own, the Famicon was unquestionably the most influential system of its time. Nintendo not only succeeded in making a great console, but also achieved competitive success due to several factors: its ability to set competitive prices; its pre-established alliances with developers of existing arcade game hits; and, in contrast to American firms, its ability to consistently meet consumer standards and demand with unique and successful software, such as their famous 1985 release, 'Super Mario Brothers'. Nintendo dominated its home market, and continued to move the industry forward with the development of a successful portable as well as an upgraded home console over the next seven years (Aoyama, Izushi, 427)

Simultaneously, Nintendo set its sights on the Western video gaming market and quickly became a powerhouse abroad. The firm gained initial fame, thanks to the success of its arcade game 'Donkey Kong' in the US. When met with reluctance from American firms that suffered from the Atari crash in the early 1980s, Nintendo appealed directly to consumers; this led to a restoration in demand, as these consumers – and consequentially the previously reluctant retailers – recognized Nintendo's aforementioned attributes that gave the firm its competitive edge. In concurrence with the development and release of the Super Famicon from 1983 to 1990, Nintendo had clearly established itself in the US market. Nintendo systems had become so popular that one-third of American homes had at least one of their own, making the firm a household name in a foreign nation (Aoyama, Izushi, 428).

The twenty-four years following the success of Nintendo's Super Famicon has been an era of intense competition and rapid improvement in an ever-growing industry. Eventually, Sony Computer Entertainment (SCE) and Microsoft entered the fray; Sony in particular was in direct competition with Nintendo for their shared Japanese home market. Following the lackluster

performance of the Nintendo GameCube (selling a mere 22 million units compared to 120 million units sold by Sony's Playstation 2, over the course of their respective lifetimes) (Ewalt, 38), Sony came to dominate the Japanese market and, while Nintendo still held control over a large amount of the American market, gave its counterparts fierce competition (Aoyama, Izushi, 429). Even more recently was the release of the Nintendo Wii in 2005, a unique system that (in typical Nintendo fashion) revolutionized the industry and revamped it in the face of inevitable decline (Ewalt, 38). Alongside the Nintendo Wii was the Nintendo DS, the firm's revolutionary portable game system. The device opened and closed like a pocket sized laptop, with a normal screen on the top half and a touch screen on the bottom (Ewalt, 40). Nintendo has a long history of dominating mobile gaming, given that its consoles were all commercial successes and had very little competition. However, even with the advent of Sony's Playstation Portable (PSP), which boasted greater processing power than the Nintendo DS, Nintendo's unique approach to video games and how they are played gave the company its competitive edge. Moreover, while production issues that kept Nintendo from meeting consumer demand certainly damaged the firm's reputation, the sold-out signs in Nintendo product sections of video game stores still go to show that this ever evolving form of popular media is, indeed, extremely popular.

The firms that followed in Nintendo's footsteps were clearly influenced by Nintendo's success, and while their presence has taken attention away from the underdog turned champion, the competition among the three entertainment giants has allowed the success of the video game industry to become comparable to that of the film industry in Japan and around the world. While at its outset it “may not [have been] generally […] regarded as a sector offering forms of 'haut culture' or refined art, it has become a sizeable industry with pervasive influences on popular

culture." (Aoyama, Izushi, 423) However, video gaming is not the only entertainment medium facing barriers that keep it from critical acclaim – the Japanese style of animation, *anime*, has also been criticized by those of elitist positions. Criticisms from both Western and Japanese perspectives are contextually different but essentially similar, and after explaining these, one will see how they also relate to video games.

First, allow me to establish a brief culturally contextual history detailing the development and significance of *anime* as part of Japan's "pictorial narrative tradition." (Napier, *Animation*, 73) Dissimilar to Western cultures, Japan has a long history of using visuals to supplement written stories – or, one could argue, vice versa – and has evolved with Japanese literature since its outset. The earliest known narrative in pictorial style came in the form of *emaki mono*, or picture scrolls, originally featuring satires of the aristocracy but eventually used to create an alternative version of Japan's most famous classic work, *The Tale of Genji*. This art style was followed by *ukiyo-e*, a woodblock printing method that depicted the "floating-world" aesthetic, which thus enabled *kibyoshi*, or illustrated book, culture to thrive. The *kibyoshi* evolved to be what we now know as *manga*, which are essentially Japanese graphic novels. Many *anime* are animated versions of popular *manga* adapted for television and theaters, and as such the genres share very similar narratives. This contrasts with the general approach to illustration and animation by Western cultures, insofar as narrative productions in which the print and the visuals share the focus tend to come in the form of children's books. Comic strips, graphic novels (despite their tendency to address serious themes), and animated adaptations of these "were largely seen as something for children, for hobbyists, or for light comic relief," while "print culture was considered serious and adult." (Napier, *Animation*, 73)

However, labeling animated works and other forms of popular media culture as, well, uncultured and immature is not a uniquely Western criticism. Indeed, there is a slang term in Japanese that has changed with context over the years, but is still generally used derogatorily towards the primary consumers of popular media: *otaku*. This word was originally used as an honorific way of addressing another's home. However, a columnist named Nakamori Akio used the term in 1983 to denounce participants of a public convention wherein popular media fans would buy and sell *doujinshi*, or fan publications (Huat Kam, 39). Eventually the negativity of the word was magnified six years later, when it was applied to a notorious murderer when he was found to have been a collector of *shoujo manga*, comics written for a younger female audience.

While the *otaku* subculture does have counterintuitive benefit to the Japanese economy and its international presence - according to two different Japanese research institutes, the value of the *otaku* market in 2005 was somewhere between 88.8 billion yen and 411 billion yen, roughly $US 7.4 to 34.4 billion (Huat Kam, 40) - the general social consensus can be captured by this definition of the term:

> … 'otaku' is a label that is applied to people who are judged to have failed to consume in ways productive of capital, as required by an advanced capitalist Japan. At the same time, they are also labeled when their consumption is perceived to be a perversion of the forces which are critical to the maintenance of an advanced capitalist economy, such as imagination, knowledge, and autonomy. (Huat Kam, 41)

In addition to their failure to function as productive rather than obsessive consumers, *otaku* are also seen as a genuine threat to the well-being of the Japanese population. Shortly after the murders that led to the derogatory undertone attached to the term *otaku*, the sarin gas attack perpetrated by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in 1995 struck even deeper fear in the hearts of average

Japanese people. In light of the common theme of apocalypse in *anime* and *manga* during the modern era, the cult's usage of the two in their propaganda prompted a generalization about the genres: Japanese youth are in danger of being affected more detrimentally than positively by these forms of literature, as well as mass media and technology. (Gardner, 200, 206 - 207)

Yet, the *anime* industry has been able to persuade many critics of popular media culture's productive and creative influence through some of its wildly successful and incredibly deep, yet widely accessible productions. From Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away* (千と千尋の神隠し) to Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (攻殻機動隊), a great number of *anime* have received critical acclaim and have surpassed the certain limitations that live action films face: *anime* are able to work within an "open vocabulary" that allows the genre to more freely and easily portray surreal yet deeply relevant and moving narratives, as well as their dynamics and complexities. (Napier, *Animation*, 76) While many academic interpreters of *anime* are still reluctant to seriously regard it as an art form, none can deny the immense impact the genre has had on Japanese culture – in fact, *Spirited Away* grossed more profit than any other Japanese film in history, including foreign and live action movies. (Napier, *Animation*, 72)

However, while *anime* and *manga* have gained greater recognition for their cultural impact and aesthetic value, video games have yet to achieve this status of appreciation. They are still seen as appropriate chiefly for children and hobbyists, potentially detrimental and even dangerous, and mostly valuable economically. Even Napier, the Western authority on Japanese popular culture, criticizes anything other than the "best [that] the medium produces" as being merely "shallow commercial fare," showing that there remains an elitist undertone to the study of popular media.

Moreover, within the gaming community, various awards and accolades are presented to what are considered top tier games. However, while this is a step in recognition and appreciation of games, little is done in the way of promoting further and greater discourse. Instead, the games fall to the wayside, only deeply engaged with by die-hard fans. This even applies to *Shadow of the Colossus*, which received numerous awards and had a clear impact on design and storytelling in games, but has yet to be approached as a culturally significant text in and of itself. (Team Ico Wiki) In the next section, I will attempt to approach it as such, and in doing so provide a case study of why video games ought to be given more serious academic attention while retaining their inherent and necessary ludic quality.

# CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY: AN ANALYSIS OF *Shadow of the Colossus* (ワンダと巨像)

On the surface, *Shadow of the Colossus* (hereafter to be referred to as *Colossus*) appears to follow a rather simple narrative: a young man escapes an oppressive kingdom with his young female friend in hopes of saving her from her fate. However, beneath this simple plot lies a much deeper story that, as will be discussed, derives from classical Japanese origin mythology, reflects and advances the evolution of many modern tropes and motifs of modern Japanese literature, and makes elegant use of pre-modern and modern Japanese aesthetics. For the sake of clarity, first allow us to get a grasp on the basic but essential details of the plot; a more in-depth analysis in light of the concepts discussed in the previous three chapters will follow.

There are five main characters (aside from the sixteen colossi) that advance the storyline in *Colossus*. The protagonist, who the player controls and from whose perspective the player witnesses the unfolding of events, is a young man named Wander (ワンダ). He appears to be in his late teens or early twenties due to his height and displays a mature, yet slightly rash disposition. In the beginning of the game, he has short dark brown hair, pale skin, and dons an intricately designed cloak over a cloth tunic. At his hip rests the Ancient Sword in its sheathe, its blade a uniquely shaped, magically reflective surface. He is accompanied by his horse, Agro (アグロ), with whom he shares an intimate bond. The third member of the party is Mono (モノ), a young woman of roughly the same age who was "sacrificed for she had a cursed fate," according to Wander. She has a similar complexion to Wander's, long black hair, wears a flowing lavender dress, and is barefoot for the duration of the game.

The fourth character is Dormin (ドルミン), an apparently androgynous godlike figure (to be referred to as "They" interchangeably with "Dormin"). They speak with a female and male voice simultaneously, Their archaic dialect booming throughout Their domain. For the time being, Dormin only appears audibly, Their full form having been sealed away. The fifth and final character, the shaman Lord Emon (エモン), is affiliated with the religious group which perpetrated Dormin's banishment. Followed by his armed acolytes, he rides a pure white horse in pursuit of the leading trio.

The game is set in a vast region referred to by Emon as "forbidden" or "sealed lands," and serves as a prison for the great deity Dormin. Wander, having stolen (according to Emon) the Ancient Sword, sought Them out, desperately hoping to use the sword's power to appease Dormin and request that They restore Mono's soul. The details of the contract Dormin offers will be discussed in greater detail later on, but the basics of it are simple: slay the sixteen colossi that reside in the forbidden land so that their respective idols lining the shrine in which Dormin dwells may fall. These idols act as inhibitors, preventing Dormin from manifesting Their true power and form; should Wander succeed, They will once again be powerful enough to grant his request in return. From here the story truly begins to unfold – but allow us to backtrack a bit to the game's opening sequence, which provides key background information and will allow us to begin our engagement with the game's greater narrative.

*Colossus* begins from a bird's eye view, watching Wander riding Agro through a storm in a dark canyon, and into a lush forest. They eventually reach a massive bridge, which is presumably the edge of the kingdom from which they fled, leading to the massive Shrine of Worship. After momentary hesitation from Agro, Wander rides into the temple, steadying the

figure wrapped in black cloth draped across his lap. They descend the high tower, coming upon a shallow pool of water and the entrance to the shrine's main hall. He rides past the massive idols lining the hall to an altar, upon which he lays the cloaked figure. He pulls away the cloth, revealing Mono's lifeless body.

This scene is followed by a monologue delivered by Emon (recognizable by his trademark owl mask hovering over a mass of dark clouds), during which he explains the historical context of the game's setting:

> That place… began from the resonance of intersecting points... They are memories replaced by ens and naught and etched into stone. Blood, young sprouts, sky – and the one with the ability to control beings created from light... In that world, it is said that if one should wish it one can bring back the souls of the dead... ...But to trespass upon that land is strictly forbidden.

Within the game's opening sequence, *Colossus* already presents the player with the seeds of numerous Japanese literary themes that will grow for the remainder of the story. Both notions of woman lost and woman found can already be recognized. Wander, seeking a way to restore Mono's life, rides into the forbidden land, reminiscent of the young Japanese male seeking enlightenment in the mysterious West. Emon's commentary furthers this concept through his conservative perspective in explaining that "to trespass upon that land strictly forbidden." This harkens back to the "paradoxically conservative" message of woman found, especially when one considers that Emon affirms the potential power one can gain from the act of trespassing.

The notion of woman lost can be seen in the fact that Wander is literally escaping an oppressive regime to a magical realm with Mono. She can be understood as Soseki's "metamorphosized woman," for though she is dead, there is still potential for her to live again;

she exists in a liminal space, and Wander is desperately grasping for her. Her physical presence, living absence, and his awareness of both drive him to seek out a way to reconcile the two. However, he is reminded time and again throughout the game of the growing void between himself and Mono. One can also look to Mono's name, which sounds like "*mono*" (物), meaning "thing." The only visible woman in the game is objectified by her own name, suggesting that her usage and importance are entirely in the hands of the raging male adversaries. Dormin's unique character also derives from these ideas. Not only do They exhibit androgynous characteristics, thereby breaking the boundary of the gender binary, but They also present an example of a self in tension with an alien self, manifested in the way the male and female voices are not perfectly synchronized and the male seems dominant.

Furthermore, one should also be able to recognize themes from the earlier discussion of fantastical otherness. The only thing truly stopping anyone from entering the forbidden lands was strict indoctrination, as can be seen by Wander's failure to heed Emon's warning. His transgression reaffirms the notion that the boundaries between reality and fantasy are indeed permeable.

Curiously, the traditional idea of traveling between the human world and the realm of the gods in Japanese mythology was one-sided; only gods had the capability of freely traversing the two. Wander takes this traditional notion and turns it on its head, fearlessly rushing headlong into the world of a banished god. According to the *Kojiki*, Susano-o, elder brother of the sun goddess Amaterasu, was banished from the realm of the gods for his destructive and insolent behavior. (*Kojiki*, 63 - 76) Wander was perceived by an oppressive society the same way Susano-o was

perceived by his fellow deities; of course, they differ in that Wander's intentions are noble and Susano-o's misdeeds were spiteful.

Our focus returns to Wander, whose attention is drawn to shadowy humanoid beings emerging from the shrine floor. He unsheathes the Ancient Sword, shining sunlight reflected from the blade to ward them off. The camera moves up to reveal a hole in the ceiling through which a heavenly light bursts. After a brief cut to a scene of thundering clouds (which represents Wander's success in enticing Dormin's attention), the great deity speaks to Wander:

> **Dormin**: Hmm? Thou possess the Ancient Sword? So thou art mortal...
> **Wander**: Are you Dormin? I was told that in this place at the ends of the world – there exists a being who can control the souls of the dead.
> **Dormin**: Thou art correct... we are the one known as Dormin...
> **Wander**: She was sacrificed for she had a cursed fate. Please... I need you to bring back her soul...
> **Dormin**: [*They chuckle.*] That maiden's soul? Souls that are once lost cannot be reclaimed... Is that not the law of mortals? With that sword, however, it may not be impossible.
> **Wander**: Really?!
> **Dormin**: That is, of course, if thou manage to accomplish what we asketh.
> **Wander**: What do I have to do?
> **Dormin**: Behold the idols that stand along the wall... Thou art to destroy all of them. But those idols cannot be destroyed – by the mere hands of a mortal...
> **Wander**: Then what am I to do?
> **Dormin**: In this land, there exist colossi that are the incarnations of those idols. If thou defeat those colossi – the idols shall fall.
> **Wander**: I understand.
> **Dormin**: But heed this, the price you pay may be heavy indeed.
> **Wander**: It doesn't matter.

**Dormin**: Very well... Raise thy sword by the light... and head to the place where the sword's light gathers... There, thou shalt find the colossi thou are to defeat.

As can be seen by Wander's disregard for his own well being, Mono's simultaneous presence and absence is the direct cause of Wander's male rage. Having transcended the boundaries between conventional reality and unknown fantastical possibility, he is willing to take drastic action for the sake of restoring the absent woman. Insofar as the full acceptance of woman is representative of an acceptance of modernity, Wander represents the young male eager to explore the mysterious Other. In this regard, Mono would be seen by Emon as the unknown woman found in the world of the Other; from his paradoxically conservative standpoint, it is only natural that Emon would oppose Wander's - or anyone's - trespassing of the forbidden lands. Emon opposes Wander by fully rejecting woman, showing that he sees modernization as a foreign and threatening concept. Moreover, Wander's intrusion of the realm of a banished god is a perversion of the natural order, which dictates that only gods can freely access their or realm or that of mortals. Again, the paradox in Emon's conservativism can be seen: though he opposes modernization, he also seeks to protect pre-modern notions from those who would attempt to sully it. (explain paradox) Wander is an example of modernization imagery that Emon points to in order to reinforce his conservative ideals.

The camera moves to reveal a small part of the vast land Wander will have to traverse to find each colossi. Each colossus has a unique lair – temple ruins, ancient coliseums, desert sands, deep waters, and even the skies – and Wander must follow where the light of his blade shines to find them in the proper order. Toppling his giant adversaries is a matter of unique puzzle-solving; Wander must climb the massive creatures (clinging to fur and stone), seek out their weak points (which are represented by a glowing bluish white symbol when Wander gets

close or shines his light on the beast), and drive the Ancient Sword into these vulnerable spots. Successful strikes will draw a violent gushing of ink-like blood – this represents Dormin's dormant dark power that resides within each colossus, and how the Ancient Sword is capable of releasing this power. After each colossus is defeated, a pillar of light visible from across the landscape appears above its corpse; this light also shines above the Shrine of Worship. As the dead colossus falls to the ground in a crumbling mass, it becomes consumed by shadows. These shadows form thin tendrils that seek out and penetrate Wander's body, choosing him as its new vessel and causing him to pass out. This constant onslaught of dark power begins to alter Wander's appearance, causing his skin to appear as though it were smeared with soot and his eyes to seem more sunken. He is then transported back to the Shrine of Worship through a dark tunnel illuminated by a distant light.

In the nature of *Colossus*' gameplay, one can recognize the aesthetic concepts of *mono no aware*, *wabi*, and *sabi*. Wander's (and therefore the player's) interaction with the forbidden lands and the colossi that inhabit them invoke a sense of *mono no aware*. While traversing the vast forbidden lands, the player comes across vast and unique landscapes, massive enough to make one stop and wonder whether it is even possible to cover so much ground. The fact that there is nothing in the game's environment for which one could find a real life equivalent further emphasizes the notion that *mono no aware* is at play; whether peering down sheer cliffs, navigating through thick woods, or swimming in deep lakes, the player naturally takes a moment to appreciate the depth and sense of place she feels in these moments.

One should also notice a somewhat paradoxical, fourth-wall breaking aspect of *Colossus* in terms of its invocation of *mono no aware*. The player's encounter with the colossi is at the

same time an engagement with the fantastical and a moment to find awe in the ordinary. The colossi are fantastical insofar as such creatures do not exist in normal reality; however, because the player is aware that she is playing a video game, she should not be all too surprised to come across gigantic beasts. In this way, such an encounter is ordinary for a gamer. However, the game is designed to make Wander and, thereby, the player feel tiny in comparison to the colossi. Somehow, fighting a giant creature with a magical sword becomes ordinary, but the experience itself has a certain ahh-ness to it. Furthermore, the life and death struggle between the colossi and Wander reinforces the idea that life is impermanent, and even these massive adversaries are susceptible to injury and can be killed.

The experience of the colossi and their lairs also invoke a sense of *wabi* and *sabi*. Some of the colossi dwell in hidden caves or valleys, while some reside in ancient moss-covered ruins; others can be found in the depths of - or high above - restless lakes. The colossi themselves partially resemble their homes, covered in dark fur and clumps of moss, chunks of stone protruding here and there. The fact that such awe inspiring beasts can be found in nondescript caves makes the player feel as though there is something mystical about their simple dwelling. Upon closer inspection, the player can see that the cave is just a cave, and yet the fact that it housed such a powerful being gives it a mysterious aura; hence, the invocation of *wabi*.

*Sabi*, on the other hand, is experienced when the player has the same feeling when exploring the ancient ruins that house the colossi, or when noticing that the stone protrusions on the colossi's bodies resemble the architecture seen throughout the forbidden lands. There is something mysterious and intriguing about these signs of an ancient civilization, striking the player with a sense of wonder. Indeed, Wander's act of slaying the colossi ought to invoke

sorrow, or even pity, in the player after recognizing the beauty in the forbidden land's decay. Acting as a destructive agent in this awe-inspiring world is a way in which the game creates for the player an alien, monstrous self, which she must reconcile as she progresses through the game. (more explanation of wabi sabi)

In addition, the act of traversing *Colossus*' vast landscape in order to find the colossi and their lairs is reminiscent of Matsuo Basho's aesthetic of wandering. Due to the fact that one is sitting in front of a screen with controller in hand, exploring the world of a video game is still a high-tech, sheltered activity. However, the way in which *Colossus* immerses the player allows her to "feel" the exhaustion of trekking and climbing, the exhilaration of finding the colossi's lairs, the weight of the colossi, and the fear of losing her life in battle. Her visceral response is similar to that of a wanderer in the real world; the main difference, which may also be something of a privilege, is that the player can wander in a fantastical, virtual world. Though some aspects of Basho's are inherently lost in playing video games, others are greatly enhanced. Not to mention, the protagonist's name is Wander, a stylistic touch that should not be taken lightly. The player is literally in control of Wander, a manifestation of Basho's aesthetic.

As the game progresses, an initially faint, disembodied female voice becomes clearer and seems to call out to Wander from the light, drawing him back to consciousness. Given this is the last voice to be introduced, and that it clearly belongs to a female character, one can deduce that this is indeed Mono's voice. This is not explicitly stated at any point, nor does Mono engage in dialogue with any of the characters – and even after being awakened, Mono remains silent. Her voice is not accompanied by subtitles, so what she whispers to Wander whenever she is audible is unknown. Before waking, Wander is sometimes seen being watched by the shadowy figures

from his arrival to the Shrine of Worship, generally increasing in number as the game progresses. At the same time, the idol corresponding to the most recently defeated colossus shines with a light similar to their weak points, then crumbles with a loud explosion.

Mono's silence, as well as her unsubtitled disembodied monologues, further reinforces the notion of woman lost. Compared to many games, *Colossus* takes a minimalist approach to dialogue, letting the visual aspects speak for themselves. The fact that what little speech is heard is male dominated, and that all female voices are disembodied or unintelligible, suggests that man and woman are literally isolated from each other. Mono whispers to Wander from the distant void, showing that the other side is by no means inaccessible, but also reaffirming the existence of such a void between the pair. One can imagine that hearing Mono's voice in the darkness, then awakening to the sight of her dead body only fuels Wander's manic male rage. Mono begins to resemble a ghost of memory, haunting Wander and the player more and more as the story continues.

The game is interspersed with story-advancing cutscenes, each of them directly involved with the player's progression through *Colossus*. While they are scarce and fairly brief, they are nonetheless telling and, more than anything, foreboding. About halfway through the game, after having toppled the eighth colossus, the player is shown a vision of Mono waking and rising from the altar. (One can conclude that this is a foreshadowing of the second half of the story, as Mono's awakening would only logically happen after having fully restored Dormin's power.) The scene only lasts a few seconds, and is obscured by a sepia visual effect, muffled audio, and intermittent bursts of light. The camera zooms backward away from Mono, presumably towards the pool of water seen at the beginning of the game.

Roughly three-quarters of the way through the game, once the twelfth colossus is slain, we see a cutscene of Lord Emon and his followers riding toward the Shrine of Worship. Emon, recognizable at first by his voice, wears the same owl mask shown in isolation during his opening monologue. He and Wander wear cloaks of a similar design, suggesting that they come from the same place and culture of origin. He eagerly looks to the Shrine of Worship on the horizon, stating, “Only a little more to go.” Given the fact that Wander still has four colossi to defeat at this point, one can infer that Emon has been fervent in his pursuit, clearly wasting no time in deducing Wander's whereabouts and intentions, organizing an escort, and riding out after him.

Before the sixteenth and final colossus, Dormin addresses Wander with a brief monologue that is unique to the other fifteen. Rather than advising Wander on its lair and behavior, They stress that time is the most critical factor, saying, “Finally, the last colossus... The ritual is nearly over... Thy wish is nearly granted... But someone now stands to get in thy way... Make haste, for time is short...” in reference to Emon's rapid approach.

Upon arriving at the entrance to the final colossus' lair, Wander shines Ancient Sword to open a massive stone door opening into canyon. Riding Agro into the dilapidated temple, the duo find themselves racing across a quickly collapsing bridge. Agro, instinctively recognizing that they will not make it across in time, launches Wander forward before she falls to her apparent demise in the river below. Wander shouts her name as he watches her descent, bowing his head in sorrow. His grief for his loyal partner shows that he still retains his humanity, despite being filled with Dormin's darkness.

Having defeated the last colossus, Wander is struck by the dark tendrils as usual, but the player does not see the same illuminated dark tunnel sequence. Instead, it is briefly revealed that the tunnel sequence is Wander's first person experience of being transported back to the Shrine of Worship; in this scene, we see that from a third person view he appears to be lifted toward the sky and presumably (since we do not see his actual landing) lowered through the hole in the shrine's ceiling.

Before he returns to the shrine, however, the player sees Emon and his entourage dismounting and entering Dormin's forbidden domain. One of the soldiers cries out in surprise to Emon as the sixteenth idol glows beside them and shatters violently. Emon, panicked and in disbelief, rushes to the altar where Mono's body rests. Lifting his mask, he begins chanting an incantation while waving his hand over Mono's face (which, mysteriously, is not accompanied by subtitles) – only to be interrupted by Wander's sudden appearance on the shrine floor behind him. The Ancient Sword also appears, flying from the ceiling and lodging into the floor next to the first fallen idol, as if having been cast aside now that its purpose has been served. Wander's appearance has undergone the most drastic change to date, his skin dark with blemishes, eyes pure white and lacking pupils, and small horns prominently protruding from his temples. He arises, straining for breath and surrounded by shadowy figures, and takes the same stance as when he engages in combat, suggesting that he intends to protect Mono and her resurrection by force if necessary. Wander has clearly lost his ability to speak, be it from exhaustion or his dark metamorphosis, but Lord Emon and Dormin finally engage in direct contact. One should keep in mind that only the male sounding part of Dormin's voice can be heard:

> **Emon**: I don't believe this... So it was you after all. Have you any idea what you've done?! Not only did you steal the sword and trespass upon this cursed land, you used the

forbidden spell as well... To be reduced to such a sight... You were only being used. [*Commanding his soldiers...*] Eradicate the source of the evil. Look... He's possessed by the dead. Hurry up and do it!

[*One of the soldiers fires his crossbow into Wander's leg, severely crippling him.*]

**Emon**: It is better to put him out of his misery than to exist, cursed as he is.

[*Another soldier approaches Wander and plunges his sword into Wander's chest. This wound begins spurting black blood, similar to a colossus when struck in its weak points.*]

**Wander**: [*Panting for breath, he rises, clutching the sword and staggering towards Mono, reaching out to her. As he pulls the sword from his chest, he becomes engulfed in shadow, like a fallen colossus.*]

**Dormin**: [*As Wander's shadowy remains rise and grow into a colossal horned beast with glowing white eyes...*] Thou severed our body into sixteen segments for an eternity in order to seal away our power... We, Dormin, have arisen anew...

**Emon**: He's been resurrected...!

**Dormin**: We have borrowed the body of this warrior... [*Shadowy figures flock to Dormin, merging with Them.*]

**Emon**: Place a seal over the entire shrine before it's too late! [*While some of the soldiers attempt to distract Dormin, one rushes to retrieve the Ancient Sword for Emon. They manage to avoid Dormin's wrathful attacks and retreat to the top of the tower. Commanding his soldiers...*] Ready my horse.

Emon raises the Ancient Sword above his head and casts it down into the shallow pool, shouting, “Be gone foul beast!” The pool begins to shine an intense light and emit a powerful force as Emon and his acolytes exit the shrine. The pool starts to swallow Dormin, sucking his dark visage into the light as he claws at the floor in resistance; as Dormin shrinks, Wander's original form (still cloaked in shadow) desperately crawls toward Mono. Interestingly, the cutscene briefly ends here and control is returned to the player. However, no matter how long the player manages to resist the pull nor how close the player gets to Mono, there is no way to

successfully resist being sucked into the pool. The cutscene returns when the player realizes this and allows Wander to tumble backwards into the water, at which point the vortex of light closes and the shrine goes silent.

With the resurrection and prompt re-banishment of Dormin, the player is presented with the epitome of the man raging in longing for woman and that of the man raging in rejection of her. Emon is remorseless in his swift action, still pointing to the now possessed Wander as the archetype of the modern male youth, as the example for why one should avoid modernization. Wander is so engulfed by his desire to find woman that he loses himself, becoming a monstrous, alien other. One can see that Emon interprets Wander's possessed state as the literary motif of monster, a perversion of the self that poses a threat to society at large. Ironically, in highlighting a main character as being uncomfortable with engaging with the Other, *Colossus* manages to show its ability as a text to do so with confidence. The game challenges the player to question the value of modernization versus that of tradition, the supposed dichotomy of male and female, and whether the Other - or even the Self - is a destructive or productive force.

We once again see Emon hurrying across the bridge with his soldiers, its supportive pillars crumbling behind them in the same way the idols fell once their colossus was defeated. Upon reaching the end of the bridge, he looks upon the forbidden lands for the last time, speaking in a somewhat remorseful but nonetheless condescending tone to Wander: "Poor ungodly soul... Now, no man shall ever trespass upon this place again. Should you be alive... if it's even possible to continue to exist in these sealed lands... One day, perhaps you will make atonement for what you've done."

Returning to the shrine, Mono awakens alone, seemingly unaware yet unfazed. She suddenly turns around in surprise, recognizing a distinct set of footsteps – Agro, who Wander thought had fallen to her death, has returned to the Shrine of Worship, gingerly limping after miraculously only having broken one leg.

Mono and Agro slowly walk together toward the now drained pool, where a horned baby with a likeness to Wander lies naked and whimpering. Mono cradles the baby and proceeds to ascend the tower behind Agro; the three then ascend the path lining the outside of the shrine, eventually reaching a garden hidden atop it. The player once again returns to a bird's eye view, flying out of the garden to see that there is an even larger structure surrounding the garden resting atop the Shrine of Worship. Moving away from the shrine, the game ends with the sight of an oncoming thunderstorm, reminiscent of the opening sequence and the battle with the final colossus.

So what relevance does the experience of having played *Shadow of the Colossus* have for the modern gamer? Perhaps embarking on such an adventure is the contemporary way to engage with the world from an *ukiyo* frame of mind. Of course, this manifests as the notion of *otaku*, the way in which the player is able to access the world of fantasy from his seat in reality. The player's transcendance of the boundary between real and fantastic parallels Wander's entrance into the forbidden lands. And perhaps the subsequent emotionally visceral response to the events in the game and the experience of playing itself is a manifestation of *moe*. The player's motivation to finish the game is aligned with Wander's drive to restore Mono, both of which reflect the potential for the player to gain emotional insight as he progresses through the story. Having wandered through the forbidden lands, the player can return to reality with a newfound

respect for real objects and events that exhibit aesthetic and literary qualities, even if he is not fully aware of them. The experience will stay with the gamer, reminding him that, should he need an escape from reality, a world of fantastical journeys and challenges for his sense of Self are at his fingertips. The only barrier that stands between the two is the power button.

# CONCLUSION

In case there are still readers who doubt that video games have a major presence in the world as important texts, consider the success of Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto V*. Within twenty-four hours, this game managed to break the following six world records: best-selling action-adventure video game in twenty-four hours; best-selling video game in twenty-four hours; fastest entertainment property to gross $1 billion; fastest videogame to gross $1 billion; highest grossing video game in twenty-four hours; and highest revenue generated by an entertainment product in twenty-four hours. (Lynch, *Guiness World Records*)

This game and countless others come from an industry that clearly has a major influence on youth in their formative years, and is reflective of popular culture, history, literature, art, aesthetics, and the discourses of each of these disciplines. From the historical globalized nature of the video game industry, to the profound aesthetic and literary value games exhibit, to the commercial success of the industry as a whole, my assertion of the importance of approaching games as texts in and of themselves goes beyond my personal feelings of nostalgia. Do not mistake these statistics as suggesting that the financial success of the industry is the key factor in evaluating video games as texts. Rather, the industry's dominance of entertainment products reflects how its influence permeates popular culture.

In closing, I would like to mention that one of *Shadow of the Colossus*' mechanics for the in-game map is reminiscent of Susano-o's giant stone dwellings in Izumo. Initially, most of the map is obscured by thick clouds; as Wander discovers new areas of the forbidden lands, these clouds fade away. This seems to be a reversal of the moss that slowly swallows Susano-o's

stone, which serves as a metaphor for clouds blocking the gods from mortal view. Perhaps *Shadow of the Colossus* - or more pertinently, the gamer's journey to and from the fantastical virtual world - is a call for a return to spirituality. Maybe the best way that one can bridge the gap between reality and fantasy, for the sake of deepening our understanding of ourselves and the world around us, is by venturing boldly into the virtual realm of video games.

Bibliography


- Amit, Rea. “On the Structure of Contemporary Japanese Aesthetics.” *Philosophy East & West*. 62. (2012): 174 - 185. Print.
- Aoyama, Yuko; Izushi, Hiro. “Hardware gimmick or cultural innovation? Technological, cultural, and social foundations of the Japanese video game industry.” *Research Policy*. 32. (2003): 423 - 444. Print.
- Ashihara, Yoshinobu. *The Aesthetics of Tokyo*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994. Print.
- Bogost, Ian. *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006.
- Borgen, Robert; Ury, Marian. “Readable Japanese Mythology: Selections from *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki*.” *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*. 24. (1990): 61 - 97. Print.
- Ewalt, David M. “Nintendo’s Power Up: How an oddly-named gizmo rebooted the video game industry.” *Harvard Asia Pacific Review*. (2008): 38 - 40. Print.
- Heyd, Thomas. “Bashō and the Aesthetic of Wandering: Recuperating Space, Recognizing Place, and Following the Ways of the Universe.” *Philosophy East & West*. 53. (2003): 291 - 307. Print.
- Hume, Nancy G. *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. N.p.: State University of New York Press, 1995. Print. Focus on Donald Keene’s “Japanese Aesthetics.”

- Hume, Nancy G. *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. N.p.: State University of New York Press, 1995. Print. Focus on Haga Koshiro's "The *Wabi* Aesthetic through the Ages."
- Hume, Nancy G. *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. N.p.: State University of New York Press, 1995. Print. Focus on J. Thomas Rimer's "Japanese Literature: Four Polarities."
- Hume, Nancy G. *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*. N.p.: State University of New York Press, 1995. Print. Focus on Wm. Theodore de Bary's "The Vocabulary of Japanese Aesthetics, I, II, III."
- Hutchinson, Rachael, and Mark Williams, eds. *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature: A Critical Approach*. N.p.: Routledge, 2006. Print. Focus on Susan Napier's "Meet Me on the Other Side: Strategies of Otherness in Modern Japanese Literature".
- Inouye, Charles Shirō. *Evanescence and Form: An Introduction to Japanese Culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. Print.
- Jun'ichi, Isomae. "Reappropriating the Japanese Myths: Motoori Norinaga and the Creation Myths of the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*. 27/1-2. (2000): 15 - 39. Print.
- Juul, Jesper. "Without a Goal: On open and expressive games." In Tanya Krzywinska and Barry Atkins (eds): *Videogame/Player/Text*. Manchester: Manchester University Press 2007. http://www.jesperjuul.net/text/withoutagoal/.

- Kam, Thiam Huat. “The Anxieties that Make the ‘Otaku’: Capitaland the Common Sense of Consumption in Contemporary Japan.” *Japanese Studies*. 33. (2013): 39 - 61. Print.
- *Kojiki: “Records of Ancient Matters.”* Basil Hall Chamberlain. Trans. Tokyo, The Asiatic Society of Japan, 1973. Print.
- Lynch, Kevin. “Confirmed: Grand Theft Auto 5 breaks 6 sales world records.” *Guiness World Records*. 08 Oct. 2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2015. <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/news/2013/10/confirmed-grand-theft-auto-breaks-six-sales-world-records-51900/>.
- MacWilliams, Mark W. ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008. Print. Focus on Kinko Ito’s “Manga in Japanese History.”
- MacWilliams, Mark W. ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008. Print. Focus on Gilles Poitras’ “Contemporary Anime in Japanese Pop Culture.”
- MacWilliams, Mark W. ed. *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*. M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2008. Print. Focus on Richard A. Gardner’s “Aum Shinrikyo and a Panic About Manga and Anime.”
- Napier, Susan J. *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Napier, Susan J. “The Problem of Existence in Japanese Animation.” *American Philosophical Society*. 149. (2005): 72 - 79. Print.

- *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest times to A.D. 697*. W. G. Aston. Trans. Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1972. Print.
- Rodriguez, Hector. "The Playful and the Serious: An approximation to Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*." *Game Studies*. Game Studies, n.d. Web. 23/2/15.
- Roquet, Paul. "Ambient Literature and the Aesthetics of Calm: Mood Regulation in Contemporary Japanese Fiction." *Journal of Japanese Studies*. 35. (2009): 87 - 111. Print.
- Team Ico Wiki. Web. 10 Apr. 2015. <http://teamico.wikia.com/wiki/Shadow_of_the_Colossus/_List_of_awards_and_nominations>.
- Treat, John Whittier. ed. *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1996. Focus on Andrew A. Painter's "Japanese Daytime Television, Popular Culture and Ideology."
- Treat, John Whittier. ed. *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*. University of Hawai'i Press, 1996. Focus on Susan J. Napier's "Panic Sites: The Japanese Imagination of Disaster from *Godzilla* to *Akira*."
- Sony Computer Entertainment: *Shadow of the Colossus*. Sony Computer Entertainment 2005. (Playstation 2) 2011. (Playstation 3)
- Wolf, Mark J. P. ed. *The Medium of the Video Game*. University of Texas Press, 2001. Print. Focus on Mark J. P. Wolf's "The Video Game as a Medium."
- Wolf, Mark J. P. ed. *The Medium of the Video Game*. University of Texas Press, 2001. Print. Focus on Mark J. P. Wolf's "Narrative in the Video Game."

- Wolf, Mark J. P. ed. *The Medium of the Video Game*. University of Texas Press, 2001. Print. Focus on Rebecca R. Tews' "Archetypes on Acid: Video Games and Culture."
- Yoshimatsu, Hidetaka. "The State and Industrial Evolution: Development of the Game Industry in Japan and Korea." *Pacific Focus*. 20. (2005): 135 - 178. Print.