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# The Empathy of Immersion: An Exploration of Battlefield 1 Through the Lense of Empathetic Virtual Reality

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE EMPATHY OF IMMERSION: AN EXPLORATION OF BATTLEFIELD 1  
THROUGH THE LENSE OF EMPATHETIC VIRTUAL REALITY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Katelynn N. Gonzalez

2018

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This thesis, written by Katelynn N. Gonzalez, and entitled *The Empathy of Immersion: An Exploration of Battlefield 1 Through the Lense of Empathetic Virtual Reality*, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 29th, 2018  
The thesis of Katelynn N. Gonzalez is approved.

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Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
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Florida International University, 2018

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

THE EMPATHY OF IMMERSION: AN EXPLORATION OF BATTLEFIELD 1  
THROUGH THE LENSE OF EMPATHETIC VIRTUAL REALITY

by

Katelynn N. Gonzalez

Florida International University, 2018

Miami, Florida

Professor Heather Blatt, Major Professor

This thesis examines two works from different mediums, the short story “How to Tell a True War Story” by Tim O’Brien and the video game Battlefield 1, to compare how each constructs empathy using virtual reality and mimetic communication between audience and the work. The thesis draws from both digital media studies and affect theory to construct a nuanced view of how empathy functions in the works. The body responds to empathy physically. As social creatures, humans feel the emotions of those around them, even if those around them are virtually constructed. In other words, the thesis will explore how video games have been used historically and what their effects are on gamers, especially gamers’ bodies and emotional responses to the constructed virtual reality. This work aims to show how the lines of fiction and reality become blurred to establish empathy within a narrative and virtual reality space.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Electronic Arts .....	EA
First Person Shooter .....	FPS
Role Playing Game .....	RPG
Role Playing Games.....	RPGs
World War 1 .....	WW1

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Video games and ludology had once been at the edges of academia, rarely studied or taken seriously. That has changed overtime as video games have become more complex, more interesting, and more explorative. But at the heart of video games the premise remains true that video games are play. Torben Grodal, a ludologist, examines what it means to play for pleasure in his article “Stories for Eye, Ear, and Muscles: Video games, Media, and embodied experiences.” He argues that, for play to occur, there must be an absence of necessity (140). This means that there must be no obligation for the player to play the game. Video games, as its name suggests, are a means of play, meaning that some pleasure should be obtained from them, but play does not necessarily mean that the pleasure exists in all forms of a game.

Pleasure manifests itself in many forms and dimensions when considering what makes play in a game. For example, a video game may draw the player into play using clever mechanics, challenging puzzles, or aesthetic value. The idea that video games are pleasurable for their content rather than their mechanics creates a divide concerning the reception of video games in media. For instance, video games such as *Just Cause 3*, where the story was mediocre but the pleasure from the game was well-received through the mechanics and imaginative forces that pushed the boundaries of what could be done in a video game, help to redefine what it means to play a video game (Floodaren). Another example is *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrific* where the story is painful, riddled with death, and overall very stressful. However, this well-received game (that went on to be nominated for many awards) was played for the aesthetic value of experiencing something new, different, and engaging (Wallace). Games like *Hellblade: Senua's*

*Sacrifice* and *Just Cause 3* complicate what it means for a game to be pleasurable. Video games do important empathetic work for their players, allowing players to explore different experiences outside themselves. All in all, it can be said that video games are play, and video games are pleasurable, but within each game there lies a difference in the play of the game.

While it is important to note that players playing games is play as we have explored above, this thesis focuses on how video games build emotion and immersion to build tensions and create physical responses within the players. This thesis explores the relationship between the role-playing game (RPG) *Battlefield 1* (2016) and the written short story “How to Tell a True War Story” (1990) through the lenses of empathy and affect theory.

While empathy has long been a subject of video game studies, few have explored the virtual reality and narrative components that construct the empathetic responses of players. To look at a specific instance of these empathetic responses, this thesis will examine *Battlefield 1*, a video game about the first world war, and Tim O’Brien’s “How to Tell a True War Story,” a short story containing multiple war narratives within, to explore how empathy creates virtual reality. Both works have similar narrative structures; however, this similarity is not why they were chosen to be presented alongside one another.

Rather, both stories use narrative to construct a virtual reality space that creates an emotional landscape that the body can then explore. These virtual reality spaces rely on their narratives in different ways. While the written text does not have the element of play present, the same cannot be said for *Battlefield 1*. *Battlefield 1* requires that there be



elements of play present; *Battlefield 1* must carefully toe the line between pleasure and pain by constructing elements of play that challenge and give pleasure to the player while also exploring pain through the narrative. “How to Tell a True War Story” and *Battlefield 1* use their carefully constructed worlds in their respective mediums to create moments of deep empathy in which readers/players feels empathetic pain. Empathy in these moments becomes a method in which the reader/player experiences the works on a more emotional level as opposed to a superficial level. The emotional level that these works build rely heavily on empathy to develop the works’ emotional landscapes.

Empathy is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.” The Oxford English Dictionary definition of empathy encompasses emotions at every level, but does not establish the parameters that separate empathy from sympathy in a clear way. Sympathy is simply the act of recognizing someone’s emotions and empathy is being able to identify with the emotions of another. Because of this differentiation between empathy and sympathy, the Oxford English Dictionary does not identify the aspects of empathy as much as other definitions would allow. In order to explore more deeply the complexities of what it exactly means to share the feelings of another, Amy Coplan, a professor of philosophy, writes, “empathy is a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person’s situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation” (Coplan and Goldie 2). This definition, while useful, elides the body’s reaction to the created spaces that trigger emotional response. To further deepen the understanding of empathy one can consider *The Affect Theory Reader* in which Elspeth Probyn argues that empathy should be looked at in relation to affect and those expressing empathy feel the other’s emotions

while also recognizing that they are another person (86). The use of empathy then expands the definition of affective relation into something that happens physically to the body in response to the emotions of others. Furthermore, the definition of empathy presented within *The Affect Theory Reader* provides a more relevant and nuanced definition than that of Coplan's. The element of affective response included in *The Affect Theory Reader*'s definition enables consideration of how pain and pleasure can be experienced (perhaps simultaneously) by the reader/player. In addition, empathy becomes the lens through which players/readers know, in a very intimate way, the feelings of the characters presented to them.

The research on empathy and video games that this thesis focuses on is understood through the characters and how the characters within the media interact with players/readers. The research conducted in this thesis aims to explore the literary aspects of video games and the written texts to better understand how those literary aspects create spaces for emotional bodily responses using virtual reality and emotional landscapes. More specifically, this thesis' goal is to open an avenue that connects video games to affect theory, exploring how empathy exists in relation to the literary constructed virtual realities and virtual reality spaces. The presentation of a short story alongside a video game will show how the literary aspects of empathy are constructed in parallel ways across media and genre.

The moments of pain and pleasure that players/readers experience and how they experience those moments are relevant to many lines of understanding human ability to empathize and how that empathy takes place. This research aims to create a meaningful connection to empathy and an understanding of empathy to construct these elements

within different platforms. The issue of video games as a means of constructing empathy within human interaction remains a heated debate. However, it has been argued that video games' use of violent narrative creates violent players (Kleinman). And while some video games do have themes of glorifying violence (as do most other forms of media), this thesis aims to deconstruct that argument and open a dialogue on the emotional impacts that players experience after gaming due to their affective responses to the situations presented.

Affect theory emerged as an attempt to categorize the affective responses that people experience (Seigworth et.al 1). When they engage with certain things, whether those things be works, animals, humans, or something else entirely, those affects appear. In consequence, the idea that people can be physically affected by the media they consume is further complicated by this thesis as it explores how *Battlefield 1* and "How to Tell a True War Story" evoke physical symptoms in the reader/player. These physical symptoms can include the feeling of tightening in the chest, tears, goosebumps, yells or crying out, shivers, and a variety of other physical responses that happen in the wake of emotions. It is not uncommon for players/readers to be physically moved by the media that they consume. More commonly, one can recount stories in which someone told them that a movie or book or even game made them cry. To understand how emotions compound in a work to create physical responses in their audience, the thesis looks at virtual reality spaces.

The following chapters explore how video games and texts have been used historically and what their effects are on players/readers, especially players/readers' bodies and emotional responses to constructed virtual reality. Additionally, it's important

to understand immersion and presence. These ideas of immersion and presence become tied to empathy, as empathy becomes constructed as a serious component of immersion and presence. This thesis explores how the works of “How to Tell a True War Story” and *Battlefield 1* blur the lines between fiction and reality that is necessary to establish how empathy works in these virtual reality spaces.

This project draws on affect theory as well as digital media studies to argue that there lies a connection in how virtual reality becomes constructed within video games and within texts. These virtual realities rely heavily on affect theory in order to explore the emotional realm created by virtual reality spaces in which the physical body responds to. Theorists such as Probyn and others are used to explore how affect theory ties into digital media studies and how the two are intertwined. As for the digital media studies aspect of the project, a heavy use of Marie-Laure Ryan’s work is used to tie back to digital media theory. The short story and video game used throughout the thesis explore important insight into the ideas of empathy that exist in virtual reality spaces.

The second chapter of the thesis describes the empathetic aspects of the works, arguing that *Battlefield 1* explores the use of empathy as a vital part of its virtual reality space using its characters and narrative. Players are forced by the virtual reality space to take a step back from the mechanical aspects of gameplay and, instead, access what the characters around the player are feeling, while also recognizing and sharing the struggles of the characters that they play. To facilitate this identification, the game constructs its virtual reality space using sounds, music, falling bombs, realistic gun fire, and dark atmospheric coloring. In addition, the emotional aspects of the virtual reality space develop through the narrative and the characters presented throughout the video game.

The same about emotions and identification can be said of “How to Tell a True War Story.” Instead of a glamorized, romanticized event that the reader witnesses the stories that are gritty, grabbing, and force the reader into becoming present within the war stories. There, in the moment of pain due to the presence created in the works, player/readers can feel what the characters are feeling because the moment becomes real to the reader. That heavy moment where the work feels real develops from the construction of the virtual reality space. The virtual reality is constructed throughout “How to Tell a True War Story” so that the reader’s presence becomes mandatory and empathy emerges as an obligatory reader experience. Immersion functions centrally to developing empathy, and this thesis will use Marie-Laure Ryan’s work to explore how this empathy is used.

The third chapter of this work focuses on how the works create physical changes to the audience through the lens of affect theory. To get to explore those physical changes, the thesis turns to how narrative creates a virtual reality space using details and structure, making the audience perceive a reality within their minds as they are engaging with the work. Empathy that can then be felt by the reader/player highlights the relationship between audience and the emotional landscape. Empathy becomes the force that drives the reader into creating the social and emotional landscape that is needed to create a world that has emotional heftiness to it. These empathetic moments where readers/players feel what the characters in the moment are feeling exist due to pockets of emotionality within the emotional landscape. The pockets of emotion created within the emotional landscape of the works rely on empathy and affect as a way for readers to

negotiate their feelings within a world created through narrative and perceived by the reader in an individual way.

These emotional landscapes placed over virtual reality spaces become epicenters for affect. As social creatures, humans feel the emotions of those around them through mimicry, even if those around them are virtually constructed (Gibbs, 186). Those feelings of pain, relief, joy, sadness, and so on, that are felt by the characters in these virtual spaces, can be felt by the reader/player who engage with the works presented in this project. The way that readers/players feel in this virtual setting emerges through the connection the emotional landscape to the virtual reality space. This emotional landscape then becomes an essential component for the audience to feel these emotions as they happen to the main characters throughout the works. The body then responds physically to those emotions. Feelings of relief, joy, pain and sadness emerge within the virtual reality spaces constructed by *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story.” With joy comes a bubbling within the chest, with pain comes the burning or tingling sensation, with relief comes a full body sigh, and so on. These works use narrative and literary techniques to create virtual reality spaces and emotional landscapes that bring players/readers’ bodies into inhabiting these landscapes through immersion and presence.

Inhabitation in the emotional landscape is significant because it what allows readers/players to experience a different emotional environment. This emotional environment breeds empathy as readers/players become immersed in the new world that they experience. How these emotional landscapes are created is explored later in chapter three.

## CHAPTER 2. EMPATHY CONSTRUCTION

Some scholars within ludology argue the term “narrative” should be distanced from video games. For example, Espen Aarseth states:

Underlying the drive to reform games as “interactive narrative,” as they are sometimes called, lies a complex web of motives from economic (“games need narratives to be better products”), elitist and eschatological (“games are base, low-cultural form; let’s try to escape the humble origins and achieve “literary” qualities”), to academic colonialism (“computer games *are* narratives, we only need to redefine narratives in such a way that these new narrative forms are included”) (49).

Aarseth ardently argues against the term “narrative” being applied to video games by dismissing each argument he has heard been made about narrative and video games. He lists all the reasons that someone might want to apply the term narrative to video games and dismisses each argument. While Aarseth identifies many reasons for how the term narrative does not apply to video games, this thesis utilizes the term narrative because of the undeniable evidence that role playing games (RPGs) have, at the least, a narrative-like structure.

To best understand the uses of narrative in video games, a definition should be established. Eric Zimmerman, a known ludologist, employs a definition from J. Hillis Miller’s *Critical Terms for Literary Study* that can be used to define the narrative structure of many video games today:

1. Narrative has an initial state, a change in that state, and insight brought about by that change...
2. A narrative is not merely a series of events, but a

personification of events [through] a medium such as language... 3. And last, this representation is constituted by patterning and repetition. This is true for every level of a narrative, whether it is the material form of the narrative itself or its conceptual thematics (156).

As Zimmerman states, by this broad definition, developed in 1995, even a game of chess would fall into the definition of a narrative. RPGs can then be something that not only has a narrative but heavily relies on said narrative. As this thesis has mentioned before, games like *Hellblade: Senia's Sacrifice* have been reviewed in terms of their game mechanics as well as narratives. Additionally, RPGs rely on narrative to have the player interact with the world and all the game mechanics that are implemented throughout the game's world. For example, an RPG may not introduce a new mechanic until a certain part of the narrative is reached, making the narrative and mechanic intertwine in a way that a video game without a narrative might not have. Ian Bogost argues in his book, *Unit Operations: An Approach to Videogame Criticism*, that games have narratives: "we use narrative to make sense of experiences and games have embedded stories and backstories that are undeniably narrative" (67). Bogost takes a more human-centered approach to narrative that Zimmerman and other media theorists lack when speaking about narrative within the medium. This expansion of Zimmerman's definition allows for a more detailed understanding of what narrative is and why it is employed when talking about video games. In this way, narrative has a seat in ludology, allowing for video games and other forms of media to be compared more directly and easily.

These critical viewpoints reveal how narrative becomes a foundation for empathy within a work. Empathy transforms the way that audiences immerses themselves within



the narrative, so the narrative must facilitate empathy to transport audiences into the virtual reality created by the works. Often, the more cohesion and depth the narrative has, the stronger the audience's immersion within the virtual reality and world spaces. When looking at video games, narrative heavy games are generally considered more emotional and those games become prized as great works. Additionally, the elements of the narrative allow themselves to be engineered to create certain types of spaces within the works, then the work is presented to the audience, and finally the work is constructed mentally by the audience (Ryan 93). Without the initial aspect of narrative there would exist no transmission of virtual reality, no construction of virtual reality. Furthermore, narrative becomes the transmission tool used by the author to bring the audience into virtual reality and allow them to construct their own version of the world within the work. But the power that narrative has does not only limit it to just the creation of virtual reality through the eyes of the author; it also allows the readers to construct their own virtual world based on the characteristics embedded within narrative. For example, the themes of war in both works allow for readers/players to construct the virtual reality from their own experiences of war. Readers/players thus have power to create these virtual realities alongside the creator of these virtual reality spaces in which the narrative resides.

Narrative leads the audience through the virtual reality space created by the reader; narrative provides the structure that guides the audiences in the construction of the scene and world around them as the plot or world unfolds before the reader. Narrative then becomes a multi-faceted tool that can be used to understand the meaning of the work as well as to immerse the reader within the work while creating virtual reality. Marie-Laure Ryan argues that there are steps in which a player/reader immerses themselves:

“[T]he reader plunges under the sea (immersion), reaches a foreign land (transportation), is taken prisoner (being caught up in a story, being a captured audience), and loses contact with all other realities (being lost in a book)” (93). In other words, Ryan speaks about the steps in terms of reaching a virtual reality space. This immersion within the work becomes linked to the readers’ creation of the virtual reality space, while transportation takes the readers into the virtual reality space, and the narrative holds the readers within the world, until the reader/player recognizes the virtual reality space as something real. Both works, *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story” use these steps by creating connections readers/players can identify and build on in order to transport the audience and allow them to be “lost,” in Ryan’s words, in the virtual reality space.

The empathetic spaces that are created within the narrative become the most effective way to transmit understanding of the virtual world to the reader. By the same token, narrative must inspire empathy within the reader for the reader to construct a virtual reality that emerges as something real and meaningful beyond what is presented within the textuality itself. Meaning then understood through emotions of the readers/players and the emotions of a world become better felt when readers immerse themselves into the world and begins to feel their way through the world itself.

This chapter explores how empathy exists in a work as constructed by narrative to reach the goal of connection and the construction of virtual reality. To better understand the meaning of world and virtual reality, some time has been spent on evaluating the concepts and reviewing their meaning in the context of this work. How “How to Tell a True War Story” by Tim O’Brien and *Battlefield 1* exemplify this production of empathy

through narrative. The focus of this work aims to highlight how video games lend themselves to their audience in a way that is unique and powerful to the medium, so an examination in this chapter reveals how *Battlefield 1* differentiates itself from the written medium that Tim O'Brien utilizes. This distinction is important in order to understand the unique way that video games create empathy versus other media.

Empathy is also explored in this chapter as an obligation to play and what play means in the context of emotional consent. Empathy then has been teased out through the self-other relationship that video games seem to blur the lines of.

Understanding *Battlefield 1* and "How to Tell a True War Story" in terms of empathy and virtual reality demands that these terms be defined through digital media theory. The use of digital media studies will allow for exploration of how "How to Tell a True War Story" and *Battlefield 1* construct empathy through various literary methods such as language and themes, with a focus on narrative. Though, these ideas complicate a self-other relationship between players/readers and characters within the narratives. To understand and address the complicated self-other relationship, affect theory will be used.

#### *World, Virtual Reality, and Empathy*

World and virtual reality are important aspects of empathy that can be used to understand what occurs to players/readers when they become immersed within *Battlefield 1* and "How to Tell a True War Story." To understand how narrative constructs world and virtual reality it becomes important to understand "world" and "virtual reality" as terms along with the other concepts that come up alongside them. These concepts are not exclusive to ludology, but belong to the study of the literary as well. But for the sake of

this thesis, all examples will be reflective of video games and how they fit into RPGs specifically. The concepts of virtual reality and world are powerful ones when taking into consideration the uses of “world.”

“World” emerges through the construction of four features defined by Ryan: connected set of objects and individuals, habitable environments, reasonably intelligible totality for external observers, and field of activity for its members (99). World, then, when it comes to narratives constructed by the author create a series of objects and individuals that are connected in some way. This connection of objects and individuals becomes the characters, places, and things that interact within the realm of the world created by the narrative. These characters, places, and things construct the emotions that exist within the habitable environment. In turn, the habitable environment of the world allows for the player/reader to interact with the individuals and objects within it. The external observers that can access each part of this habitable space can then recognize patterns within the world itself. Then, within this habitable environment, spaces enable the members, the external observer and the individual and objects, to interact. Video game designers actively create this world using coding and world building. However, the world cannot be completely controlled by the author of the work since other individuals will inhabit the world that the author cannot account for: the players/readers.

The concept of “Possible Worlds” stands as an idea worth looking at. Possible Worlds become a term that explains how these worlds become constructed and presented to the external observer who then can re-envision the way that the world has been constructed. Dolezel introduces multiple worlds including a single-person world to multi-person worlds in which the motivation for each person to interact is different.

Additionally, Dolezel marks multi-person worlds and a fertile ground for narrative. In *Heterocosmica* Dolezel writes that, “The person’s interaction, individually or in groups, is the prime source of stories” (74). Dolezel’s argues that the strongest source of stories the interaction of a person, either internally or externally. These narratives are constructed in a way that allows for the story to produce empathy through their interaction with characters. The characters interactions, either individually or in groups, allow for the player to better understand the character motives and allow the player to better empathize and connect with the characters throughout the story.

The virtual reality space emerges through the creation of world and the reader/player interacting with the said world. These spaces create empathy through the interactions that the reader/player have within the world. Thus, the interactions between virtual reality space and world contributes to how RPGs develop virtual reality within fictional worlds. Furthermore, RPGs construct narrative that lend to world creation and world building. The actual virtual reality spaces of *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story” then become more than just a *virtual* reality space. This creation of world allows for the narrative to become an interactable space for the reader/player to inhabit. This interaction with narrative deepens by a presentation of a virtual landscapes that the readers/players can see and interact with on a more intimate level. Readers/players interaction contribute to the virtual reality space, allowing the world to become physically visible to the reader/player. Then a level of interaction also surfaces, in which the player brings their own experiences to the space. Here, in the virtual world created through graphical representation, the reader/player can make outward connections. For example, *Battlefield 1* may remind a person of their deceased grandfather who told many

World War 1 stories and thus one is bringing a certain understanding to the video game. Additionally, video games are not played within a vacuum. Players do not leave their experiences at the start menu; instead, they engage with the video game as a work and as something that is unique to them. In this way, players leave affected by the perception of the landscape around them throughout the video game.

The understanding of RPGs as a tool to create virtual reality landscapes then invites a layer of emotional response. The emotional response lays heavy over the landscape, which is something that will be explored more deeply within chapter 2 of this thesis. For now, it's important to focus on the development of empathy throughout the work. Empathy and empathetic responses are determined by the ability of the player to interact with a work and to understand the work through their undivided experiences. Empathy, as the thesis has defined before, is defined by Probyn as shaping the affective relations and bonds with the other known as other (86). This definition explains how the player begins to understand the position of these individuals and objects placed within the world, and to interact with them in a more personal level. In other words, understanding emotional responses becomes essential to understanding the RPG video game. These emotional responses are driven by both the work and the players, who become responsible for experiencing, and expected by the construction of the narrative to experience, emotion onto the individuals and objects placed around the world as the player's character navigates through the world.

For empathy to take place within a world, players must first experience telepresence. The idea of telepresence emerges from the fact that there exists a connection between the characters and player. They are experiencing the world together.

Alison McMahan explains: “‘We are together’ in which two or more communicators are transported to a common place, space, such as in immersive video conferencing...

*Telepresence* can also cover the ‘we are there together’ meaning, as this is only different from ‘You are there’ in that it covers more users, whereas *teleoperation* will keep its meaning of people controlling tools” (77). McMahan shows how telepresence is defined against other terms, illustrating how the idea of telepresence extends to more than just the audience who engages with the game. However, empathy reorients telepresence, meaning that the “we” comes to mean both the audience and the characters within the work itself. The player and the characters exist there together. This form of immersion allows for the player to experience empathy within the immersive aspects of the work. Video games are particularly immersive through their use of empathy as they use telepresence to immerse the player within the realm of video games as well.

*Construction of Empathy Within “How to Tell a True War Story”*

“How to Tell a True War Story” by Tim O’Brien tells multiple stories through the lenses of someone who has seen war and knows of people who have war stories. These stories are told in a conversational manner, highlighting the depth and understanding in which they are told. Each story ends with a truth about what a true war story is like, and how to tell it. Some of these truths are: one cannot believe everything in a war story because the horrendous parts are true and the normal parts might be false, that a true war story cannot be generalized, that nothing is completely true in a true war story, and that some of the truest war stories never happen.

Language and narrative are the driving forces in which empathy asserts itself in “How to Tell a True War Story.” Tim O’Brien uses language and narrative to construct a virtual reality in which the reader becomes transported into war, experiences life through the eyes of a soldier, all while being reminded that the immersion remains a story and a true story at that. With this world can be constructed in mind, Ryan explores how language is used to construct the virtual reality space: “The function of language in this activity is to pick objects in the textual world, to link them with properties, to animate characters and setting-in short, to conjure their presence to the imagination” (91). Ryan’s exploration of language function becomes an important way to access “How to Tell a True War Story”. For example, O’Brien uses language throughout his text to conjure up the scene for the audience to immerse themselves in. The aspects of the story are vivid and recall a realness that has the presence and weight of reality to it. Because of this, readers are then transported to the virtual reality that emerged from the construction of O’Brien’s narrative. Ryan highlights how the virtual creates realness within a work: “[T]he virtual is not that which is deprived of existence but that which possesses the potential, or force, of developing into actual existence” (141). Works that call upon virtual worlds, according to Ryan, have the potential to become real. This realness manifests itself onto the body of the reader/player. The use of such skills is the key to understanding the virtual reality space constructed within this short story lies in the heavy weight of the virtual reality that develops within O’Brien’s work through his use of language and themes of war. These language uses and themes build up emotional energy on readers. His work allows for a potent virtual reality to be created. The stories become



real through the bodily responses readers have. His work allows the audience to dive into something that becomes familiar, but still distant.

These distant stories are created by O'Brien to connect the reader to themes and feelings of war. He writes about what it is like to live through war through these different stories. The focus centers on what seems "true," sometimes implying that there is things that did not actually happen but have seemed to have happened, aiming to leave no glorification or romanticization of war but to disorient readers the same way that war disorients a soldier. To exemplify this use of language and themes, in the beginning of the story the audience is introduced to Rat, a soldier whose closest friend in the war died. Rat decides to write to his fallen friend's sister. The moment plays out as follows: "And then the letter gets very sad and serious. Rat pours his heart out. He says he loved the guy... So what happens? Rat mails the letter. He waits two months. The dumb cooze never writes back" (68). Showing how a soldier relates to the outside world highlights how different other realities can be. Thus, O'Brien builds a world in which soldiers suffer from not only the war, but the civilian population that lacks empathy. It is in this moment that the narrative drives the construction of empathy within the story. In other words, the narrative reveals the pains of not being able to connect to those around oneself, even when those around said person should be experiencing something similar. A disconnect between Rat and the sister of his fallen friend drives feelings of empathy within the reader. Rat has lived through so much, and the sister of his fallen friend refuses to connect back with him, which invites readers to identify themes of disconnect between those who experience war and those who do not. Despite not many of the readers living through war, empathy reaches out to the reader through the narrative and characters

constructed. This narrative invite readers to step into the shoes of a soldier to try to understand what it was like to be those characters in the virtual reality space.

The narrative has interludes in which it explains what makes a true war story, sometimes contradicting and most of the time insightful. One such moment occurs near the story's conclusion: "In the end, of course, a true war story is never about war. It's about the special way that dawn spreads out on a river when you know you must cross the river and march into the mountains and do things you are afraid to do. It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow. It's about sisters who never write back and people who never listen" (O'Brien 85). The last line from the story simultaneously forces the reader into immersion, where they begin to empathize more strongly with the characters within the short story. In other words, the last lines of the text leave readers with the most powerful part of the story, which is the immediate understanding of a soldier's view and empathetic connection to that view using heavy language that weighs on readers. If they do not comprehend, they occupy the same role as the sister who never wrote a letter back. Discussing how empathy emerges in moments like these, Ryan explores how a work creates immersion for the readers. "The most immersive texts are often the most familiar ones" (96). Creating familiarity, as Ryan says, is what leads to a text become more immersive. Thus, O'Brien creates war stories and the types of characters that the audience would understand to create that familiarity. A virtual reality world created in the image of war is something that many people can identify and share feelings with, despite maybe never experiencing war themselves. Those feelings come to the forefront of the world and the reader then begins to rethink their connection with the characters that were presented. The immersive aspect of "How to Tell a True War Story" lends itself to

becoming such a powerful text to read because it forces readers to empathize with the characters. In this way, readers become absorbed into the text and must flesh out their emotions alongside those of the characters such as Rat and Lemon, his friend who died.

Immersion thus creates empathy within the narrative. Narrative creates a world and a series of possible worlds in which a reader interacts. Immersion becomes the part of a work that brings to the table the emotions of the reader who becomes surrounded by characters that call out to be empathized with by the narrative. Often, readers are expected to do the emotional labor of a written work. Meanwhile, video games create virtual reality worlds quickly through the aspects of the medium that allow for multiple avenues of stimulus. This contrast between a written text and video games is important as it highlights how different mediums create worlds and the uses of those worlds for more than just entertainment.

#### *Construction of Empathy Within Battlefield 1*

*Battlefield 1* uses a different medium than “How to Tell a True War Story,” and so these works need to be examined separately to better grasp how each construct virtual reality worlds to allow for empathy. *Battlefield 1* is a first-person shooter (FPS) game that has an RPG story mode. There are six different storylines that feature over six different protagonists from various sides of War World I. The first story is “Storm of Steel” which takes place in France from the point of view of Harlem Hellfighters. The next chapter is called “Through Mud and Blood” and it also takes place in France from the perspective of a British Tank driver named Edwards who was a chauffeur in England before he was drafted into the war as a tank driver. The chapter that follows is “Friends in High Places”

which focuses on a fighter pilot named Blackburn who has been a gambler and liar all his life, accompanied by a well-to-do fighter named Wilson. The middle chapter is “Avanti Savoia” which takes place in Italy through the eyes of a member of Arditi, Luca, who fights in the war with his twin brother Mateo. Together, they were supposed to capture a fort from the enemy. Then there is the chapter “The Runner” which takes place in the Gallipoli peninsula and is played through the perspective of an ANZAC runner named Frederick Bishop who attempts to protect a young boy named Foster. The game concludes with “Nothing is Written,” set in Mesopotamia through the eyes of a Bedouin warrior named Zara who fights under the leadership of Lawrence of Arabia. These narratives in *Battlefield 1* help to construct empathy within the video game, but video games also have other mechanics and features that help to build up immersion, empathy, and the virtual reality that facilitates immersion and empathy.

Video games have different conventions than written works, which allow for empathy and virtual reality to be constructed in different ways. Due to the constraints of the medium, Video games create different expectations in their audiences. RPGs especially breed a certain amount of expectations for the narrative itself since many RPGs are story-driven. Within the RPG genre of video games, narrative emerges as an essential aspect for immersion if it intertwines with the game mechanics. The game mechanics must facilitate the narrative as well as the narrative facilitating the game mechanics. These conditions help to build the understanding of the RPG. For the immersion to take place several things must occur, according to McMahan: the player’s expectations of the game must match the environment’s conventions, the player’s actions need to have more than a minor impact on the environment, and the conventions of the

world and narrative must be consistent (77). These aspects allow for a game to be engaging, and *Battlefield 1* is no exception in that it asks its players to engage with a work that allows players to realize that the game mechanics are tied to the narrative. The connection of narrative and game mechanics within *Battlefield 1* reveals how narrative pushes forward the plotline while game mechanic allows for audiences to be engrossed and challenged, and it shows how video games are used to construct a virtual reality space in which players experience the world that the characters they play inhabit. The narrative and game mechanics of a video game is important as it shows that narrative and game mechanics are not so tied to each other that they rely on each other.

The use of the first-person perspective in *Battlefield 1* opens the game up to feeling empathy for the characters as the player plays through the narrative. For example, players play as a character that they do not see outside of cutscenes, which lead to the lack of visuals on the character that the player plays, inducing a more empathetic response. First-person narratives generally add feelings of immersion to game play, but must also interact with other factors for the narratives to be effective in creating immersive aspects. The first-person point of view allows the characters within the game to make eye contact with the player, creating a depth to their interactions with the player that would otherwise be more distant in a third-person point of view. First-person narratives allow for the players to be more interested in the characters within the virtual reality space.

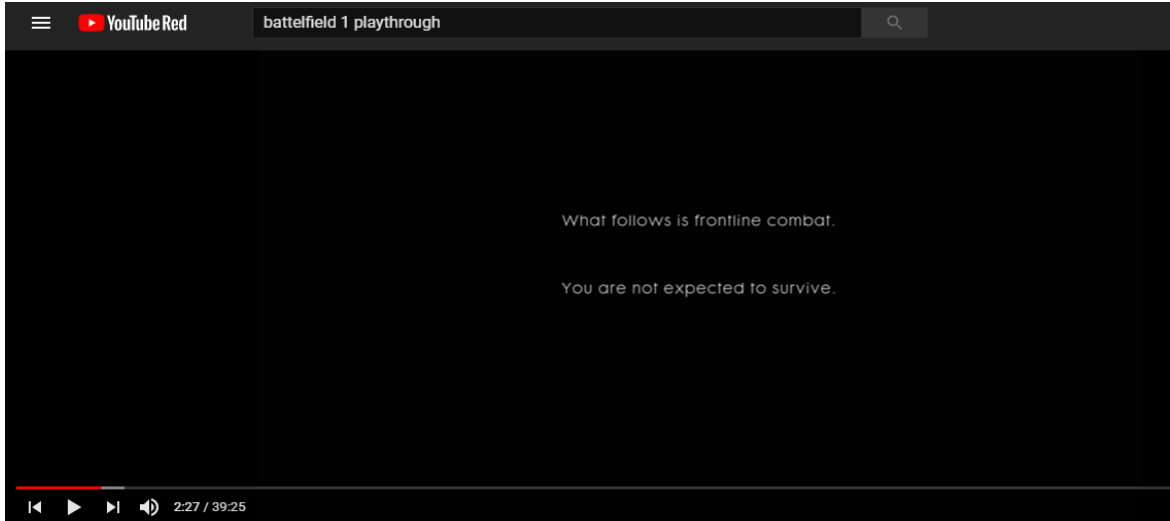


Figure 1. theRadBrad Playthrough. Opening title screen.

The game opens up with the lines featured in Figure 1, “What follows is frontline combat. You are not expected to survive.” And yet, the player goes in believing that they are going to play an immortal hero that fights over and over, while being able to be reborn over and over, evidenced by players’ understandings that permadeath within games are few and far in between. But that is not how the game operates. Instead the game sets up its play so that players will never know if their characters get to live or die.

In this way, *Battlefield 1* emulates the feelings of war and the confusion associated with the frontlines as it strips players of any guidance and puts them within the chaos without any directions or objectives besides to “hold the line”. That change in expectations does not go unnoticed by the audience, it becomes an immersive force allowing for *Battlefield 1* to not fall into the trap of “it’s just a video game.” Instead, these immersive aspects allow for the audience to feel empathy more easily. For example, the game’s first playable sequence presents a Harlem Hellfighter on the frontlines in

France. The name of the character remains a mystery to the player as they assume control over him. The player's first interaction as the Harlem Hellfighter is another soldier telling him that the unit is surrounded, and that his troop must hold the line. Then the player has full control and movement over the protagonist. The scene involves confusion, loud noises, and overall chaos. The player can hear bombs dropping, whistles blowing, and a commander yelling orders to his troop. There are no quest markers or way to orient players within the context of the game. Only the character played by players, said character's health bar, and his gun. The chaos of war allows the player to feel the frustrations and confusions of both the character that players are playing as well as the other characters within the game.

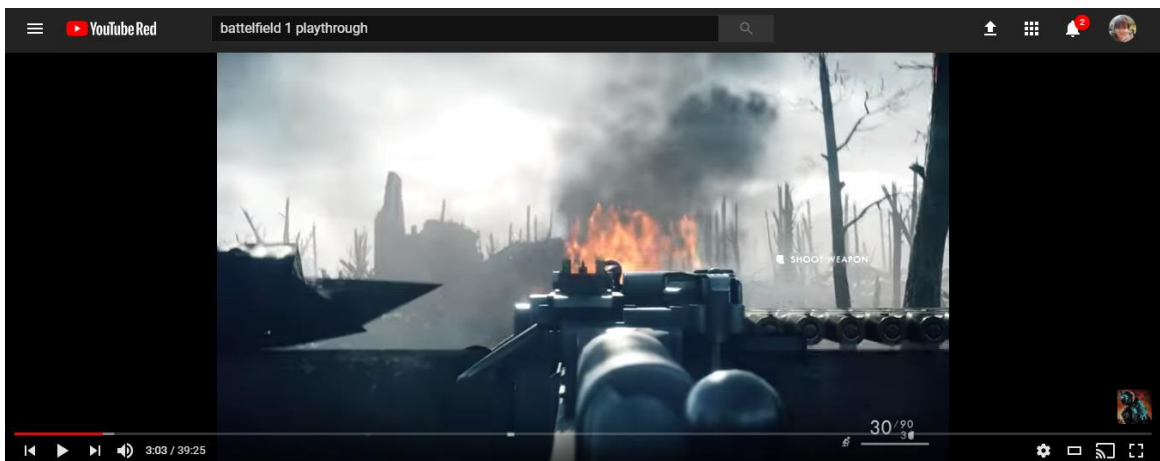


Figure 2. theRadBrad's Playthrough. "Storm of Steel" scene.

Characters become more real and engaging as they are shown as neither immortal nor infallible, allowing for virtual reality to construct empathy in players more easily. The protagonist promptly dies roughly two minutes into gameplay and the player assumes a new protagonist to continue the game. The chain of changed protagonists continues as a theme all throughout the first sequence: the protagonist or main characters

die in a senseless, confusing act of war, and the player assumes a new protagonist. The player takes on a new person to feel the war through, to feel the pain and suffering of those who served, and to feel the wrath of war. The player changes perspectives numerous times in the introduction of the game, giving a varied view of the senselessness and destruction that occurs on the battlefield. The end of the introduction to the game comes to a pair of soldiers, one from each side, holding a gun to each other. The choice appears to shoot or to not shoot. If the player chooses to not shoot, the soldiers drop their guns and they both survive. It becomes one of the few moments of hope within the game. This moment emerges as one where players' empathy for enemies is rewarded as an experience not about pain, but the undying idea of human hope in times of darkness and destruction.

As the chapters unfold in *Battlefield 1*, players are confronted with empathetic gameplay due to the literary aspects of the game. Each chapter contains characters that the player can identify with or at least recognize as personality types, making the characters easy to understand and to connect with on a deeper level, such as Edwards who does not want to be in the war to begin with but will fight to protect his friends. The use of title cards sets the stage for the player to build up the immersive and sympathetic aspects of gameplay that lead to easier empathetic connections with the characters, emphasized through title cards that introduce the gravity of the situation the player is about to enter. At many times throughout the video game patriotism becomes an important theme to establish empathy derived from pride and soldier's connections to their country. The player gets to explore characters from perspectives that the player does not inhabit or could understand without the first-person perspective that is given



throughout the story. These uses of exploration of character viewpoints as well as story allow for human compassion and hope to be a driving force in empathetic connection throughout the game.

Music allows for better immersion and thus better empathy due to its ability to sway its listeners emotionally. Each chapter creates empathy through its use, or lack thereof, of music to create immersion, allowing empathy to sink in with the reader. Music connects the player to the story. Additionally, music emerges as a driving force in understanding the character without dialogue. In *Battlefield 1*, music rarely presents itself in comparison to other video games. Additionally, the lack of music allows for the scene to be filled with sounds of war that emulate the experiences of the characters that go through these wars. Instead of battle music, the sounds of bombs dropping, tanks moving, gunshots, and the commands and screams of the men dominate the soundscape of the battlefield. Music, when the player can hear it being played within the game, is used to highlight and immerse the player within the emotions of the character that they are playing. For example, music plays when the tank mechanic dies trying to keep an eye on Edwards, the tank driver from the “Through Mud and Blood.” The music rings in as a high-pitch violin sound that resonates as Edwards stares at the body of Finch, the mechanic of the tank who he was supposed to be protecting, while the player can hear Townsend, the commander of the tank, faintly in the background screaming orders. Small musical cues such as this allow the player to glimpse the heart of the character that experiences the emotions that the game wishes to convey while also being moved emotionally in a similar manner. The use of nondiegetic music to show emotion has been a method that many game and film designers have used to create connections to players.

Consequently, the music prompts particular responses from players, and in the case of *Battlefield 1*, that elicited response is of the same emotional capacity as the character that they are playing. For example, the deafening sounds that comes with Blackburn realizes that he lived and Wilson did not. The sounds of war surrounded Blackburn, but he heard it all as if he were underwater. The overwhelming music gives players anxiety alongside Blackburn.

Another way that *Battlefield 1* aims to build empathy and connection between the player and the characters is through familiar personality tropes that allow players to readily identify the type of characters they are playing and to see how the characters move beyond the tropes that were used in creating them. Nearly all the characters within the game fit into tropes and familiar character relationships. First, Townsend and Edwards' relationship becomes one of a teacher figure and a student. Edwards (who the player is playing) is much younger than Townsend and of lower rank, thus Edwards takes orders from and looks up to Townsend. Edwards, through the course of war, becomes loyal to a fault, even when given the chance to escape the battlefield and leave the troop he had been assigned to, he stays. Townsend does not become overprotective of Edwards, but allows himself to be confident in Edwards' ability to perform the tasks assigned. Edwards takes these tasks in stride. Ultimately, Townsend gets injured and the Germans begin to raid the tank. Townsend kills himself to protect those under his command by letting the Germans raid the tank and then blowing it up. Edwards and McMagus, one of the soldiers within the tank, survive to tell the tale at the expense of Townsend. This moment creates an empathetic response because the player can readily identify with the characters as they go through the motions of empathetic response. In addition, the uses of

the teacher-student dynamic create feelings of empathy, since many players have experienced this relationship before. In this way, while the character enact these emotions, players also begins to recall emotions from their own past experiences that better help them identify with Edwards, as exemplified earlier by Ryan's explanation of how narrative builds virtual reality.

The world in *Battlefield 1* continuously builds itself in a way that allows players to be familiar enough with it that they can connect with the world while still learning and engaging with it in a meaningful way. For example, the next chapter shows Wilson and Blackburn (the character that the player plays), a rare pair, one man who does everything by the book and the other man who lives life gambling and on the edge. Blackburn assumes the identity of a fighter pilot in the military to be able to fly an aircraft he only meant to take out on a joy ride. Wilson fights as his co-pilot and gunman who watches the rear of the plane after they find themselves in hot water when German planes attack. Blackburn believes he tricks Wilson, but Wilson soon calls him out for who he really is. Blackburn in return for all Wilson had done helps Wilson stay alive. This eventually ends with the death of Wilson. Blackburn tells the story as he knows it, only for the story to them paint him as an unreliable narrator. This trope of a crooked man who tries to do the right thing has been seen many times before, and allows the audience to understand what goes on in the mind of the characters, due to the understanding of what type of person each character is right from the beginning. But still, Blackburn surprises the player as he surprises himself with acts of kindness and connection with Wilson as well as Blackburn's desire to do the right thing at the end. The bad boy gone good trope highlights the building of the world and the setting of the place that has been seen. This

trope of a bad man gone good is exemplified by Blackburn's behavior from the beginning as opposed to the end. And it signals values and morality through the change. This trope is a redemption narrative that many players can identify with as it is a common trope within media. Perhaps it is because many people feel the urge to do the right thing, or have had a redemption arc themselves, but the underdog chaotic neutral character doing the right thing seems to resonate with many players as the play.

Familial relationships help to build emotion within *Battlefield 1*, allowing for players to empathetically connect more with these characters. The following chapters of the game focuses on those familial relationships: Mateo and Luca are twin brothers within the war and one of them dies; Bishop and Foster (though not actually related) explore the father-son relationship on the battlefield. These moments create the notion of telepresence that was discussed earlier. The player stands there with the character: "we are there together" (McMahan 67). These events within the narrative occur to the player and character simultaneously, as the player engages with an empathetic understanding of the world around the player. Furthermore, the player's interaction with the characters creates story as much as do the characters' interactions with each other. The player realizing that the characters have family and family ties creates a sense of bond, as many people do value their family relationships above nearly all else. These familiar feelings surrounding family dynamic create emotions within the player, like those felt by the characters on the screen.



Figure 3. theRadBrad's Playthrough. Opening title card for "Friends in High Places."

The title cards that roll before the scenes unfold are shown the dedication to setting up the desperate world that was World War 1, which builds up both the virtual reality space as well as empathy within the video game. As viewed in Figure 1 and now in Figure 3, these title cards reveal historical information that shows the situation for what it really was instead of glorifying the moment. The use of these title cards put players into a mood in which they can more easily connect with the mindset of the character that they are playing through, due to the use of the historically accurate yet grim information given to them through these title cards. One of the title cards (Figure 3) for the chapter "Friends in High Places" with Wilson and Blackburn reveal that an RFC pilot's average lifespan was seventeen days due to the technology gap between the Central Powers and the Allied Powers. The historical information sets the mood for just how unlikely it becomes for the character to survive, or for everyone that he cares about and interacts with to make it out alive. The use of these historical facts provokes the player to feel desperation as he enters the battlefield in this new angle. In addition to background, these title cards convey a sense of dismay and emotional energy that the

player picks up on before the player takes on the mission ahead of him. These negative emotions, emotions rooted in fear and anxiety, fuel the interaction that the player has with the characters on screen. Another connecting force, however, is more positive.

Patriotism comes to be played up many times within *Battlefield 1* for the characters to develop as well as to construct empathy between player and character. The uses of patriotism are varied, reaching into the underbelly of the characters presented to connect to the player. Many players have a sense of patriotism themselves, and their pride in their own country or their own understanding of “the fight for freedom” lead players to connect more deeply with the nationalistic characters. First there are Foster and Bishop, who were both Australian serving under the British. They had pride in their country and the game makes a point that they could fight under their own flag for the war. This highlights patriotic pride in war stories. Players connect to these characters from their own understanding and relationship with patriotic pride. There are many social constructs that lend themselves to the phenomenon or patriotic identification, but that itself should be studied and looked at separately. To go forward, Bishop at one point tells Foster that he cannot die because he is Australian, and it's hard to kill an Australian. These plays on patriotism and fighting for a perceived justice are recognizable and are generally important to the player who now sees events through the eyes of the character. Additionally, the fight for justice may resonate with players without their own state but with their own nation, and this connects to the character Zara who fights in the desert to create her own state out of the Ottoman Empire. The game is designed in such a way that would prompt such a reaction, however more research into how players respond would be an interesting addition that this thesis does not have time to explore. Moving forward,

Zara has a taste for this justice and freedom that players may be interested in; she would give anything to obtain for her and her people. These personality traits resonate with players who feel that they must protect their country from something, or from a group of people. These connections allow for the player to more easily immerse themselves into the characters' point of view and really understand what it means to be and feel like that character does while playing through their point of view.

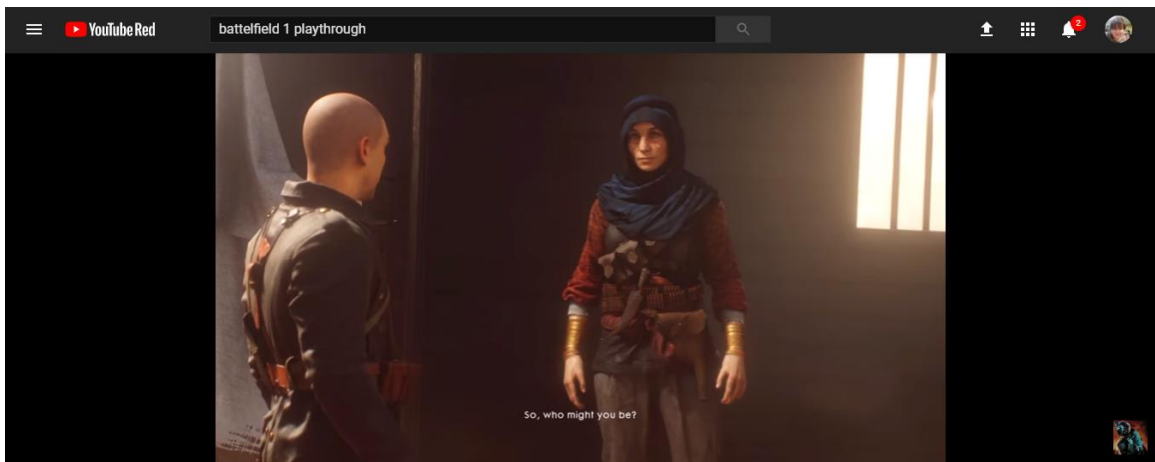


Figure 4. theRadBrad's Playthrough. Zara revealed in the chapter "Nothing is Written."

Zara's character emerges as particularly interesting when looking at ideas of empathy and immersion since she is a woman. While *Battlefield 1* has a disproportionate number of male players, Zara is a woman, and her story unfolds at the very end as the last taste of the game for the player. Using a female character as the last story is effective because it allows the players to immerse themselves with the more common male war stories, and then after immersion already takes place, Zara is revealed. The use of a female character takes a tactful approach to achieve empathy, as many players might perceive her as a token that only exists for diversity. Despite the possibility of tokenism, developers of *Battlefield 1* overcome stereotypes about women in video games by having

the character be played by the player before they even realize that Zara is a woman. Instead of revealing her gender from the start, *Lawrence of Arabia* narrates her story. The chapter is set up as if *Lawrence of Arabia* were the players' viewpoint character. The camera and cutscenes eventually reveal Zara's gender when she captures a much sought-after enemy. As the enemy, Tilkici, belittles her for being an attractive woman, she strikes him and cuts him across the cheek. It is now that she is seen as a female character with a lot of depth as she reveals her desires and motivations for her actions in the war to the audience through her conversation with Tilkici and Lawrence, making her intriguing to players using that initial cutscene. The developers craft her as someone who has lost everything but her life, and is willing to lose that if it means that her people can be free. This context allows players to immerse themselves into the character before they even have the occasion to reject empathy because she is a woman. Players continue to be immersed and empathetic to the character that they play. Even when Tilkici goes to assault Zara, the player feels her pain, confusion, and ultimately her desire to survive against him regardless of gender or other barriers that keep the player at arm's length with her.

The emotions of pain and suffering within *Battlefield 1* create the most immersive and empathetic aspects of the narrative. There exist pain and suffering exist at every corner within the realm of the game, but somehow among all the death in each chapter, the player is left with glimmers of hope and survival through the horrors of war. These moments have the player connect with the characters and the world in an empathetic way. As players see the struggles and victories of the characters, identify with the characters, and through first person perspective even become the characters, empathy becomes a



natural response and players then feel deeply connected to the world and leave the world with a new sense of self. This is important to the construction of empathy within the game since empathy generally is longer lasting than sympathy due to the nature in which empathy is felt. Empathy creates physiological reactions that players have a hard time forgetting (Probyn 86).

### *Comparing Battlefield 1 to “How to Tell a True War Story”*

Video games and written stories are different by design, despite what some theorists and ludologists argue (Aarseth 49). The two works create empathy and connection differently. While *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story” share many themes and emotional aspects that would put them in similar genres if it was not for the mediums that they were created in, the differences between these two works result from the parameters that the works operate in, including audience and conventions of the medium.

These two works are very similar in theme and operate under the same overall narrative structures that drive empathy creation. Both works tell a collection of war stories punctuated by information that heightens players understanding of the works. Despite these similarities in structure and theme, these works have very different parameters set up by their mediums that help create empathetic responses in different ways. The way that mediums construct empathy is interesting to this thesis that compares how mediums create empathy. Looking at empathy creation side by side allows creators and readers/players to better understand the emotional landscape that is being built within a text.

*Battlefield 1* looks at the player as an active participant, and views itself as a means for the player to develop skills to unfold the story that lay ahead. Torben Grodal explains that need for player skill to move ahead: “The computer story... is only developed by the player’s active participation, and the player needs to possess a series of specific skills to ‘develop’ the story, from concrete motor skills and routines to a series of planning skills” (139). While Grodal emphasizes the use of skill to move ahead, active participation also plays a role. Active participation within the world, which allows players to become immersed via active participation and physical action in the unfolding of the story. Physical action of the game also facilitates greater empathy, as discussed above. While both “How to Tell a True War Story” and *Battlefield 1* use plot and dialogue to make the experience worth engaging with to the reader, there emerges a heavier emphasis on creating a solid literary experience. His short story relies more heavily on diction as well as language to create its world while the video game uses visuals to fill gaps in human imagination.

Due to the parameters of the text-based medium, short stories are input-driven works while video games become output driven works. This contrast means that “How to Tell a True War Story” requires labor from readers to create the world in their own mind and thus input their own emotional understanding to each word more so than video games do. To expand upon the emotional landscape that video games create of Grodal examines video games as output-driven narratives: “Video games are furthermore mainly based on sympathetic, aversive emotions, due to their output-driven setup, contrary to films, which are input-driven, and thus able to simulate parasympathetic emotions but also to a certain extent able to simulate output-driven narratives, thus cueing sympathetic emotions”

(153). Video games, as Grodal argues, are mechanisms that allow for the player to input their own understanding of things to receive something in return through a means of a quest marker, a reward of some kind, or something similar. Video games create sympathetic emotions from a feedback system within the game. In addition, when a player makes mistakes in *Battlefield 1* they are admonished by the other characters, and thus a mindless, selfish reading would be undercut by the explicit reactions of the characters. Unless a player is interested in making the characters reprimand them for some reason, whether that reason is comedy-based or based on achieving something in the narrative, or another reason entirely, there is no reason that a player would enjoy getting admonished in this context.

#### *Self-Other Relationship within Gameplay*

In order to understand why players play games that require them to go through brutal moments, this thesis must consider the self-other relationship within video games as designed in specifically first person role playing games (RPGs). Empathetically, players see themselves in the shoes of the character that they are playing. They begin to identify the character as both themselves and as a character that they value. For example, when a terrible thing happens to the character, players exclaim that they themselves have been cheated. Players believe that an injustice has been done to them as well as the character that they are playing. The rhetoric that the players use to talk about the game and the characters in it is interesting to note as well, and requires further research.

Players, when they have failed to do something that allows them to progress within the game, refer to the perceived injustice as happening to them specifically and not

the character. Players exclaim things like: “That’s bullshit and this game knows it,” “He shot me before I was able to do anything!” and “It's impossible for me to beat this!” (TheRadBrad). This rhetoric shows how players identify with the frustrations and challenges that the character they play experience as something that also happens to them. However, empathy has another aspect to it that highlights how players know that they are not the character while they still care for the emotions of the character regardless.

Players, ultimately, understand that they are not the character that they are playing in games such as *Battlefield 1*. Players know that they are a separate entity from the characters, and so, while they feel the emotions of the characters, they know that the emotions do not necessarily belong to them. When Townsend kills himself to save the rest of his crew, it cuts to a scene where Edwards stands staring at his blood soaked gloved hands. This powerful moment becomes the point that players recognize that they are not Edwards, but they do feel his pain and hopelessness within that moment. Separating players from characters is important to the value of empathy, as empathy should be felt knowing that the other is someone else. Empathy, then, should be something that the player experiences and not something shallower like sympathy.

### *Conclusion*

The uses of empathy by O’Brien and *Battlefield 1* are calculated to make their audience engage with the characters on an emotional level. The narrative structures within *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True a True War Story” allow for their audiences to be immersed within the world that they create. These aspects of immersion are

important to the player and audience experiencing the emotional landscape of the game and story that they are inhabiting. Video games can benefit from these empathetic responses because it gives players something to hold onto. With the rise of indie gaming, and the way that indie gaming conducts itself, its important to recognize what makes these games so appealing. A big part of the appeal of these indie games is the empathy they create in players. There is both profit and social interest in making games have empathetic narratives and characters.

### CHAPTER 3. EMPATHY AND BODILY RESPONSES

Bodies respond empathetically to a work due to the emotions created by the world and virtual reality space of the work. These emotional responses lead to empathy being felt. Affect theory bridges the gap between sympathy and empathy when it comes to virtual reality spaces. Affect theory can be defined as the organization of affects (or the experience of feelings and emotions) into categories to better understand their physical, cultural, and interpersonal instances (Seigworth et al. 2). To better understand what affect is, the thesis turns to the explanation offered by Seigworth et al.: “Affect... is the name we give to...visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing... that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us... across... force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability” (1). Seigworth et al. argue that the definition of affect as a force does not register to conscious knowing. Instead, affect happens to bodies without minds making conscious decisions to act. Consequently, affect moves the readers/players into a different mindset than they had initially experienced. The idea that someone can be forced in such a direction requires further consideration. *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story” use affect in different ways due to their construction of the emotional landscape that exists in the virtual world. These works are staggering forces that move their audiences in emotional ways, and leave them in affected states of being. These pieces push their audiences to re-evaluate where they stand in relation to the world, both virtual and real. To build these physiological responses to the virtual reality world, this thesis looks at the emotional landscape that overlays the world that it is constructed in. *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story” both move

readers/players to those physiological responses in different ways. These different ways highlight how the mediums use the parameters given to them to construct new ways of understanding the works.

Physiological changes that happen to the body as the mind goes through certain events have generated interest since well before the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, long before *Battlefield 1* and “How to Tell a True War Story” came into existence. For a time, some works of literature called for readers to experience physiological responses to events as the main character had done within the work. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century such novels played upon sensibility and bodily response to emotions. Even now, written literature calls for the reader to identify with the emotions of the main character and to be moved by those emotions into a physical response. Written language causes a physical emotional response can be seen within the short story that this thesis focuses on, “How to Tell a True War Story.” O’Brien calls upon empathy to move his readers on a deep level through his use of language and themes of war. Empathy that the audience feels becomes accompanied by physical responses to the work: chest pain associated with sadness, the tightness of the throat when there is regret, crying out, drooping of the eyelids at the hopelessness of it. These physiological reactions to the emotions are only a few of those felt by the readers when they begin to empathize with the created virtual world. This connection to the virtual world is important to as the readers/players move into telepresence and understand the world created around them.

Empathy, and how it ties to affect, informs this chapter. Empathy’s link to affect becomes undeniable as empathy calls upon the person experiencing it to imagine the emotions of another. In imagining, and ultimately understanding, the emotions of the

virtual world players experience emotional and physical response to that connection between character and player/reader. That characters and players/readers have affected one another is unavoidable. Readers/players' connection to characters cause them to experience intimately what the characters feel and guide them to that moment that causes empathy (whether passively by the reader or actively by the player) by readers/players. This is important because the feelings evoked by witnessing the events is essential to producing empathy. Experiencing events that happen to the characters around them allows for readers/players to understand the events in new ways, even if they have never come across those events before.

In playing video games, witnessing intensifies the physiological responses of empathetic emotion. Unlike in written texts, where readers can only imagine so much without the assisted help of having seen something similar beforehand due to that fact that they can only experience things from their own understanding, video games allow players to step into a virtual reality space that they have not created mostly on their own. The virtual reality space that video games create can reach beyond the experiences of players due to the ability to construct visuals that can be accurate to the reality that players know. This is not to say that written texts do not reach beyond their readers' experiences, but that the audience can disengage when their perceptive reality is challenged in a written text, while a video game challenges the boundaries of player knowledge and experience with visuals and atmospheric cues that are ingrained in the medium video games use. As a player becomes psychologically immersed within a game, the game imitates experiences that the player would not normally have access to. In this



way, it becomes harder for players to reject the reality presented within the game as something real.

Presence and immersion allow players to experience affects that are foreign to them through empathy. These experiences that players have not experienced before are acting upon them, calling for their bodies to respond. Even when these emotions are not pleasurable, or are negative, players still come to love the game. McMahan argues that “immersion means the player is caught up in the world of the game’s story... but it also refers to the player’s love of the game” (68). She explains that there are multiple dimensions to immersion. The emotional aspect of immersion and presence cannot be separated from the game, and neither can the physiological response from the game be separated. Nevertheless, certain conditions of immersion must be met for players to fully feel and react to the game that play, as further explained by McMahan: “Three conditions create a sense of immersion in a virtual reality or 3-D computer game: (1) the user’s expectations of the game or environment must match the environment’s conventions fairly closely; (2) the user’s actions must have a non-trivial impact on the environment; and (3) the conventions of the world and narrative must be consistent” (69). McMahan emphasizes that all these aspects must be met for a game to create a physiological response from a player. *Battlefield 1* uses these aspects to create physiological responses. The game mimics what players think war would be like, while also constructing an accurate to reality virtual world. Not only this, players feel like the choices they make in *Battlefield 1* are heavy, meaningful choices (such as the before shoot or not to shoot opening sequence). Furthermore, because the game is rooted in real world conventions, the game remains consistent with what players understand.

While affect has emerged in many literary forms through the centuries, it is also pertinent to other forms of storytelling, not just written tradition. This perspective on affect is important for ludology, and specifically for the first-person RPG genre of video games. To understand more about the genre of first-person shooters we turn to Dolezel who writes on emotional power, “Compatibility of emotions increases their motivational power” (69). Dolezel argues that the greater a reader/player’s ability to identify and empathize with a character, the stronger a player’s response to the character’s emotions. Creating that identification is explored in the first chapter of this work; further explored is the focus on creating a dialogue and exploring the way that players/readers experience physiological responses to the content that they engage with.

#### *The Emotional Landscape Over Virtual Reality World*

In the last chapter it was established that virtual reality spaces constructed within texts give the reader/player a sense of presence and immersion. These virtual reality spaces are not just visually loaded, but are also emotionally loaded spaces. Additionally, virtual reality worlds provide a layer of emotion that the bodies of players/readers can explore while they also navigate the virtual reality space. In other words, a layer of affect intertwines with the virtual reality world. Addressing this intertwining, Anna Gibbs argues that the “ways of conceiving affect understand it as intricately involved in the human autonomic system and engaging an energetic dimension that impels or inhibits the body's capacities for action” (188). Gibbs explains here that works use affect to incite players/readers into physiological reactions that pushes them into either action or stalls them into inaction (or perhaps somewhere in between). These affects that lay scattered

across the virtual reality landscape are visited through language, narrative, presented visuals, music, and other immersive tactics. Furthermore, the emotional landscapes, as it will be referred to, are one that exist suspended in time within the narrative and are obtained when the reader/player arrive to a certain area of emotionality.

These areas of emotionality drive the readers/players to empathizing and connecting with the characters and narrative. Additionally, readers/players only arrive at these areas when they are moved by the narrative towards them. The areas of emotionality call upon readers/players to make those emotional connections within the works that they are exploring. Thus, the virtual reality world that becomes created is the visual aspect while the emotional landscape emerges as players/readers begin to be physically moved and affected by the virtual world. Timothy Welsh argues that “these generated ‘worlds’ remains somehow less than real, somehow in competition with the physical world” (5). Welsh is explaining here that virtual realities are viewed as less than the physical world. Welsh attempts to explore how mixed realism creates virtual reality spaces. The generated world perceived in video games, for example, is believed to be a completely different world removed from the physical world. In other words, the virtual world is thought to be the opposite of reality. But that is not the case, for players bring their own understanding of the world, their thoughts of the real world, and their knowledge of the real worlds into the game. These virtual realities are not opposite of real life, but rather are adjacent to real life due to the player bringing in real life experiences to the landscape of the world created in the work. The fact that the virtual reality exists adjacent to, and overlap with, real life is what allows for the emotional landscape and pockets of emotionality to transverse between the two. The connections made by

readers/players and the characters become more realistic, more affected, and thus, ultimately, allow for more empathy to be created. The more empathy that is created, the more affect. This allows for the reader/players to better interact with the virtual reality world.

The virtual reality world, due to its connections to the real world, allows for readers/players to come into it with preconceived notions of what should occur, based on how they understand their own reality. Because players can find familiarity within the virtual reality space, they can then communicate with the virtual world in very forward ways. Communication between virtual reality and players/readers also create interesting reactions. Those reactions that are received by readers/players are proof of the effectiveness of the texts in creating emotional responses and empathy. Gibbs introduces a new understanding of empathy through the term mimetic communication: “This calls for a new understanding of what I term ‘mimetic communication.’ By ‘mimetic communication’ or mimesis, I mean, in the first instance, the corporeally based forms of imitation, both voluntary and involuntary (and on which literary representation ultimately depends)” (186). Gibbs explains that readers/players learn and understand through imitation. Mimesis, or mimetic communication, takes place within works, allowing the player/reader to feel physiological reactions that the characters within the works may be feeling themselves. Empathetic physical mimicry generates readers/players’ physical responses that mirror the characters that they engage with within the virtual reality space. This physical mimicry comes in many forms. For example, physical mimicry may be through language, past connections, and physically moving to match the characters’ movement. For players, it may be analogous to the buttons they press, the way their eyes

track across the screen, or other forms of engagement that the medium allows. Yet mimicry does not end with these behaviors, Gibbs elaborates on that: “At the heart of mimesis is affect contagion, the bioneurological means by which particular affects are transmitted from body to body” (191). Affect contagion is physiological response passed from one body to another. Gibbs use of mimesis and affect contagion shows how the body can be affected by another’s body. These emotional landscapes that exist over the virtual reality world are areas of affect contagion that bring the player/reader to feel and thus empathize with the character they are associating with.

*“How to Tell a True War Story” and the Emotional Landscape*

The use of strong, calculated language in written texts distinguishes their emotional landscape and virtual reality world over that of the video game computer-based virtual reality world. These uses of language within “How to Tell a True War Story” are conducive to creating areas of emotionality. These areas of emotion draw out physical responses from readers as they move through the virtual reality created by the work. Expanding upon the above, Ryan states that, “The function of language in this activity is to pick objects in the textual world, to link them with properties, to animate characters and setting-- in short, to conjure their presence to the imagination” (91). Ryan here is stating that language draws attention to certain aspects of virtual reality. Through the discussion of virtual reality, she expands upon immersion because of language. The use of language brings to life to the virtual reality that the text has created by giving the characters and setting emotional power that can affect readers. This creates a physiological impact; which readers can remember. Physiological and emotional impact

can best be understood in terms of mimicry as communication, explained by Gibbs:

“Mimicry can be understood as a response to the other, a borrowing of form that might be productively thought of as communication” (193). Mimicry, as Gibbs states, is a communicative action. This communicative action can develop within works that utilize empathy to inspire readers/players. O’Brien’s short story is no exception to how a text can communicate and change readers. Goodreads exemplifies reactions where readers of “How to Tell a True War Story” walk away feeling changed in some way. For example, phrases such as “blown away” and “eye-opening” are used in many of the reviews given on Goodreads. This powerful war piece by O’Brien communicates with readers using mimicry to transmit feeling rather than just information. The transmission of feeling is important to understanding characters and themes within a text. It allows for readers to experience what the characters are experiencing and expands their world views.

The transmission of feeling shapes response to “How to Tell a True War Story” because it invites readers to empathize with the characters that O’Brien creates, thus the prompting readers to understand feelings associated with being a soldier. The war story becomes “true” in O’Brien’s terms because it makes the reader feel, it makes the reader physically feel the moment. For example, O’Brien uses the line: “You can tell a true war story if it embarrasses you” (69). O’Brien relates a series of true war stories and he wants the reader to feel many things, which is that of embarrassment, experiencing a physical reaction from reading his work. He emphasizes the fact that readers should not enjoy hearing a true war story; that it should make readers uncomfortable.

O’Brien conjures those emotions in readers through language and repetition in his work. “How to Tell a True War Story” uses language to conjure emotional responses

within the reader through repetition and short syntax that allow for the reader to feel the tension and emotional moments of the text. The uses of this short syntax allow for the reader to experience a form of mimesis. This use of mimesis means that readers react by mimicking the characters presented within “How to Tell a True War Story.” The repetition of phrases or moments allows for the feeling of disbelief that builds tension within the reader themselves alongside the text.

The repetition used in “How to Tell a True War Story” builds first hope and then tension, allowing readers to be carried into a state of shock like that the characters might have felt in moments of war. O’Brien captures these moments of war by using these tense sentences, as he does here: “I remember the smell of moss... I remember the shadows spreading out under the trees... I remember” (O’Brien 76). The use of repetition by O’Brien creates an air of regret, but also highlights the significance of a day to be remembered to the characters involved in the death of Curt Lemon, one of their brothers in arms. The use of “I remember” creates at first hope, as if the character were recalling something pleasant for a moment, but as he continues into more detail, tension builds. Something significant must have occurred if the narrator remembers everything in such vivid detail. Finally, it comes to a head: “When a booby trap explodes... When a guy dies, like Curt Lemon” (O’Brien 71). The repetition of “when” heightens readers’ emotional states, first allowing them to empathize with the characters, and then to feel, in the moment, the heart sinking at the reality of the matter. The death of a character who was so young, and was bright and new to the world, and who was out in the war regardless of those two things, shakes readers. Weight sets in on readers, in the same way it does the narrator. O’Brien writes: “[Y]ou look away and then look back for a moment

and then look away again” (71). A transmission of sadness through the use of repetition by the characters takes place, sadness and hopelessness permeate the narrator and readers. “[T]here is always that surreal seemingness” (O’Brien 71). While that repetition and communication of emotion seems surreal, it becomes the force that makes the war story true. Furthermore, the language used by O’Brien creates the doubt and uncertainty which readers should feel alongside the narrator.

The language used to create the virtual reality of “How to Tell a True War Story” draws the reader into the emotional state of the characters. A line such as, “You can tell a true war story by...” (O’Brien 68) illustrates how the narrator gives advice to readers based on truths that the narrator understands and has lived through. The narrator’s experience with war communicates on a personal level to the reader throughout the short story. The connection established between narrator and reader becomes a teacher and student relationship where the transmission of information is not really information at all, but is emotional transmission. “You can tell a true war story by the questions you ask” (O’Brien 83). Here O’Brien addresses the surrealness of war, and the emotional disbelief of something happening. He tells the reader that if they wonder if it's true or not, then it must be true. Asking questions illustrates the emotional disbelief that follows understanding something horrific or witnessing something horrific. That feeling created by language lead readers to mimic the emotions of a soldier. The language of the text elicits mimicry of a soldier’s emotions. Readers and soldiers both ask: Did that really happen? Readers mimic the way that the soldier feels, creating a sense of disbelief that later may turn into regret or shame. Readers feel what the soldier feels through the construction of the language used in the text. The text creates doubt, uncertainty, and



confusion within the reader to show how war stories and those who lived through war feel and understand it.

The way that the sentences are structured within “How to Tell a True War Story” creates mimesis. Alongside language, syntax creates moments where the reader mimics the feelings of the characters simply by the structure of the sentences. For example, O’Brien’s uses of short sentences create quick thinking, quick uncontrollable thoughts where the reader has no time to think about what occurs within the moment as it quickly unfolds before them. The moment of disbelief creates the tensions that the characters within the short story feel. The interludes where the narrator explains what makes a true war story is where the sentence structure becomes the most long-winded. These long sentence structures allow, for a moment, readers to think about what happened. The respite in between moments of war create the characters within the virtual reality space, leaving readers to view those characters as they have time to think about the tragedies and moments of violence that they had experienced.

These moments of tension and pain that the text provokes readers to experience alongside the characters and narrator in “How to Tell a True War Story” provide moments of mimesis and connection that allow for readers to experience the affects that the characters have created. The written word, however, does this in a different way than other media.

### *Battlefield 1 and the Emotional Landscape*

*Battlefield 1* uses different methods to construct the emotional landscape than “How to Tell a True War Story.” The narrative of *Battlefield 1* follows the themes of war time,

specifically World War 1. However, unlike most games that focus on war, *Battlefield 1* makes no attempts glorify the conditions or sacrifices that were made by thousands of soldiers, fighters, and other military operatives. Instead, *Battlefield 1* carefully constructs its emotional landscape with heavy, weighted narrative surrounded by the dark, grimy battlefield. This allows the players to experience something adjacent to the reality.

In the past chapter, the use, or lack thereof, of sound was discussed as influencing empathy construction within the game. Here would be time to add that the uses of music and sound within the game create and load the emotional landscape. The sound curates readers' emotions as players approach certain areas. High-pitched music may mean that they are about to enter a piece of the emotional landscape that would call upon the players' anxiety or fear. Low-pitched music may indicate that the player is about to experience a moment of grief or loss. For example, as Townsend kills himself to save the crew of the tank, the music begins to bellow deeply as it cuts to Edwards looking at his blood-stained hands. The music, low and bumbling, drowns out the sounds of war (if only just barely). This encourages players to begin feeling as Edwards does as they move into this pocket of emotionality in the emotional landscape of the game. Many other spaces within the game display emotionality in *Battlefield 1*. Another example of an emotional pocket would be when Tilkici confronts Zara and begins to assault her (both physically and somewhat sexually). The moment between these characters is dense with emotion that players feel due to the tenseness the music causes and the intent of Tilkici. There emerge feelings of confusion to players, as it would be Zara, exemplified by gasps of Lets Players such as theRadBrad when they realize the intent, and a moment of desperation that the character and player both feel as they navigate this moment in the

emotional landscape. Players feel Zara's tension. The emotional landscape becomes the curator of affect as it affects players. These pockets of emotionality are placed over the emotional landscape created by the narrative of *Battlefield 1*.

While the emotional landscape is story-driven in this FPS RPG, it is important to note players freedom to navigate this landscape. Video games allow for players to be involved in the physical movement of the character that they play. The player must perform physical movements whether it is played on their controller, a mouse and keyboard, a VR headset, a joystick, or any numerous other controllers that operate on breath, eye movement, head movement, etcetera. Players' bodies are physically, in some way, navigating the emotional landscape through the character that they are playing. Together, the player and character move through the emotional landscape. Grodal emphasizes this use of active participation in the development of narrative: "The computer story... is only developed by the player's active participation, and the player needs to possess a series of specific skills to 'develop' the story, from concrete motor skills and routines to a series of planning skills" (139). Explaining that the narrative cannot be navigated without players involvement, Grodal shows how the emotional landscape ties to the physical movement of players. Players know that the story and world cannot be explored without themselves and they also know that they are active participants in moving the narrative along and moving through the emotional landscape. Continued navigation of the narrative even when the pockets of emotionality are painful to visit can be motivated through the development of skills necessary to complete the game. In this way, the play part of *Battlefield 1* comes from the mechanics of the game rather than the story itself.

The active participation of players creates physical responses as they navigate through the story and empathize with the characters in *Battlefield 1*. Additionally, players are not only receiving the information about the characters through the narrative and through watching them, but also are mimicking movement of the characters as well. For a gamer who uses a mouse and keyboard, for example, pressing W becomes analogous to walking forward, pressing D becomes analogous to stepping to the right, A becomes analogous to stepping to the left, and so on. As a result, for players, pressing these buttons directs the character. If the game succeeds in creating an immersive virtual reality (as this thesis argues that *Battlefield 1* does) then the player should feel as though they are mimicking the character. The reason that mimicking the character has more function within the game is that players identify with a character while always being aware that the character does not exist. Instead, narrative creates empathy that links the character to player in an emotional way. Players do not have to believe that they are the character to have an emotional response. To explain this self-other distinction, Gibbs elaborates on why mimesis works upon an audience: “[W]hen we see an action performed, the same neural networks that would be involved if we were to perform it ourselves are activated” (196). To expand upon Gibbs’ ideas of audience response, players become witnesses to the game and physically mimic the character that they play. This subconscious mimicry creates an affective response within the player due to that empathetic, mimic connection that the player shares with the character.

Players experience the affective response that develops with the character as if the emotion was experienced by players directly. Not only do players witness the emotions of the character, but they also have a hand in creating the moment that the character lives in.

One of the components of video games that allow the player to become an active participant in the events that unfold is the emotional stake that players have in the game and characters. However, as video games require active participation players, players have an emotional stake in the narrative of the game as well as the completion of the game. Grodal elaborates upon this emotional stake in a video game, stating that, “Video games are furthermore mainly based on sympathetic, aversive emotions, due to their output-driven setup, contrary to films, which are input-driven, and thus able to simulate parasympathetic emotions but also to a certain extent able to simulate output-driven narratives, thus cueing sympathetic emotions” (153). Video games, Grodal argues, are created with the idea that the player will at least be sympathetic with the characters and events within the game. This becomes especially true with the game *Battlefield 1* through its attempts to create sympathy, so much so that the immersive experience allows for empathetic, physical response. These feelings of empathetic response show case how players navigate virtual reality spaces.

### *Conclusion*

“How to Tell a True War Story” and *Battlefield 1* create experiences for their audiences that allow their audiences to be physically affected by the works. The creation of emotional response becomes curated by the creators of the works to challenge players’ views and to test the limits of their genres in their respective media. O’Brien creates the emotional landscape by leading the readers to pockets of emotionality through his language choices within his narrative, allowing the readers to bond and empathize with his characters. *Battlefield 1*, showing that not all war video games glorify war, allows

players to explore a world riddled with painful pockets of emotionality, which leave the player deeply affected by the scenes created within the virtual reality.

The experience is enhanced using these players and readers mimesis. Video games have a specific knack for creating mimetic knowledge since the player must physically navigate the virtual reality space in some way. The use of mimicry allows for these pockets of emotionality to be explored in a more empathetic way. Gibbs argues that “[m]imetic knowledge may be the earliest form of knowledge of both self and other, as the infant researchers Meltzoff and Moore suggest, and this is a knowledge made possible by the work of feeling” (196). Gibbs’ understanding of mimicry reveals how the differentiation of players from the characters that they play allows for mimicry. Mimicking the movement of characters, players know that they are not the character, but only doing as the character acts. This acknowledgement complicates the idea of emotionality and empathy within video game narratives. While players come to explore their own bodies through mimicking the bodies of characters. The limitations of these characters’ bodies and the emotional impact that these bodies experience are also felt by players themselves. Gibbs expands mimesis to include an understanding of the “organization of relations between bodies enabled by mimetic communication and the development of the self also facilitates one's sense of agency” (197). Gibbs argues that mimesis allows for the development of a self-other differentiation. This sense of agency leaves the player at a loss at the end of *Battlefield 1*. This leaves players thinking about the game long after the game ends, allowing them to contemplate the lives that they had just experienced.

## CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

Video games are play. They are played for pleasure, even though not every game players enjoy a game for the same reasons. Grodal explains that “[t]o play means to perform an activity for pleasure, not out of necessity, although the survival value of playing may be to train important skills, from motor skills to imagination and hypothesis-formation” (140). While Grodal explains play, he also implies that play and pleasure can be obtained from the mechanics and challenges that games present rather than their thematic choices or their plots. *Battlefield 1* is a video game that challenges how much pleasure can be obtained from the story of a video game, focusing instead on the tragedies of war. The idea of tragedy and realism when it came to war might seem ineffective, or might push players away. However, that was not the case when it came to *Battlefield 1*. As I have argued above, this game puts players into the shoes of the characters within the game thereby evoking empathy. That empathy physically alters the player. The use of mimicry to create those feelings do not leave the player as they make their way through the game and even outside the game. In terms of *Battlefield 1*, many players loved the campaign and saw it to be a realistic take on war that they would carry with them for long time.

*Battlefield 1* received an 89/100 score by critics on Metacritic and an 8.1/10 by players. Even though these scores are high already, they were muddled by the player’s interactions and experiences with the multiplayer (a game mode that allows for online play). It seems that the multiplayer mode, although not discussed in this thesis, was not polished enough upon release. For players disappointed in the most-played game mode of the game, this is, nevertheless, a very high rating. Players responses to the game mode this thesis studied varied from focusing on the enjoyable mechanics of the game to

discussing the story-driven and riveting game play. “The campaign is highly enjoyable. Excellent graphics, varied and fun gameplay, with solid stories and gritty realism throughout” (Metacritic). The realism is described as gritty, a word often associated with war and the pains surrounding it. Collnsmall34 is not the only player that enjoyed the story; DrBuckaroo on Metacritic described the single-player campaign as “great” and praised the sounds and music as a top-notch experience. While there seems to be a level of distancing that allows the players to disengage from the work, they still indicate its impact in the way that the gamer critics review it. They enjoyed it as an “experience”:

Ma111679 addresses this as a reviewer on Metacritic: “Battlefield has created a campaign that feels authentic, emotional and educational. The graphics and sound create a fantastic environment to bring alive the horrors of WW1, unlike anything we have seen before” (Metacritic). This player recognizes what the development team of *Battlefield 1* was attempting to do through designing for emotionality. Ma111679 notes that *Battlefield 1* “brings alive the horrors of WW1.” The virtual reality space seems very alive and real in this work, connecting players to WW1 in a way that they might not have seen or experienced before. A view shared by many other players: “I was a bit skeptical about the campaigns at first (multiple small ones), but they are spectacular and far more emotionally rivetting than [I] expected out of a battlefield game” (Metacritic). Another player writes: “My friend Albert Ingason said it perfectly ‘IM BLOWN AWAY’ the graphic is sensational and the campaign OMG” (Metacritic). As seen in these comments, many of these players view the campaign aspect of *Battlefield 1* to see the horrors and experience the pain associated with World War 1. They are interested in playing the game for the story, but leave being emotionally moved. Trelleborg says it perfect with



“the campaign OMG” (Metacritic). These moments of speechlessness and awe are centered in how the players received the game for the empathy and affect that it was trying to achieve. Even when looking at the genre of Let’s Plays on YouTube where the player engages with an audience as they play, has moments of emotional power where the player goes silent as the story unfolds. For example, theRadBrad on YouTube remains silent, after a panicked “fuck” escapes him, as the scene with Edwards unfolds. His YouTube show continues, allowing its audience to watch him play through the scene. YouTube Let’s Plays generally call for the player to be engaged constantly with the audience. However, it seems that theRadBrad’s silence highlights the power that the moment has on players. The interaction that theRadBrad has with the game is shared by other players. During his playthrough of *Battlefield 1*, theRadBrad whispers many curses reflecting moments of intense emotion. During the introduction scene he exclaims “Holy shit, man” as his first character dies. Other examples like these illustrate the power of the game.

Due to the medium of “How to Tell a True War Story,” is more difficult to collect data on reader reactions. However, reviews from readers do mark how they are affected by the story that they read. For example, on Goodreads, a site that collects reviews of novels, stories, and books, readers talk about their experiences with those written works. To reflect upon how “How to Tell a True War Story” affects its audience, the thesis turns there for its data. On Goodreads, Lyn explains the story as “Poignant, touching, endearing, heartbreaking, terrifying, saddening, maddening, O’Brien has succinctly stated what so many have before tried to and failed. He has formed a voice from this wilderness of human experience and has documented for us all a glimpse into moments of humanity

during wartime” (Goodreads). Lyn claims to have been a soldier and connects with the story in a way that makes him recall his time in the service. It touches him in a way that moves him to powerful emotion. Amanda from Goodreads, however, claims to have no such service, but still writes, “Awestruck may be the best way to describe how I felt upon reading this book the first time” (Goodreads). And finally, Terri from Goodreads writes, “And yet it is also emotionally scarring and based enough on truth to get me where it hurts” (Goodreads). These interactions highlight the effectiveness of “How to Tell a True War Story”’s empathetic work which this thesis was built upon.

The goal of this thesis is to explore how *Battlefield 1* creates affect in comparison to “How to Tell a True War Story.” Within this work, I have attempted to explore how these works from different media use empathy to affect upon readers/players. Players/readers explore these virtual reality spaces in different manners, but to similar ends. While written works have been a more serious medium as compared to video games, this thesis explores how certain games (particularly first-person RPGs) have literary aspects that create similar affective responses for their players as the written works do for their readers. How these video game environments create immersion becomes interesting due to the idea of immersion being the first step to empathy. Empathy is expanded by Welsh’s argument of the need to “unseat the still-prominent description of media-generated environments as ‘immersive’, a metaphor that casts these virtualities as a ‘completely other reality’” (19). Welsh attempts to upheave the idea of immersion as the something that puts someone from this reality into a completely different reality. Rather than that, he uses the idea of mixed realism to make immersion more complex. Virtual realities are not different realities, but a reality that sits adjacent to

our current reality. Players/readers connect to the virtual reality world using complex immersion. The audience sees the familiar and begins to connect with it.

“How to Tell a True War Story” and *Battlefield 1* both explore war in visceral ways. They attempt to tell stories of those who have fallen and moments of intense emotion within war. O’Brien writes his from a perspective of exploration of what becomes true and untrue, and how to tell what stories are “true” in O’Brien’s words, while *Battlefield 1* comes at the perspective of the pain riddled battlefield that was World War 1. *Battlefield 1* presents moments in the game that feel so real and gritty that they affect the player more than just at the surface level:

We know very well that the media-generated virtualities that fill our lives are not what they represent; as Jesper Juul put it, the dragon on screen is not a real dragon. But these virtualities are something. The virtual environment of digital media plays a variety of roles in contemporary culture, mediating all manner of daily activity (5).

Players know that what happens on the screen is not real, that the dragon is not a real dragon. But it becomes something. And that something can be powerful and leave the player deeply affected.

We are surrounded by digital media; digital media has emerged as an active player in our lives and move us to have physiological responses to them even if they are not necessarily “real” (whatever that may mean). In our current environments, we are meant to learn and to create in through empathetic and affective ways. Humans mimic to learn. This mimicking is not something that disappears when dealing with a work, whether that work is written or not. Through Gibbs’ explanation of mimesis, empathetic

affect is emphasized: “[m]imesis is rather like an image in which figure and ground can always be reversed, so that sometimes subjectivity is in focus, while at other times it recedes into the background, leaving something new to appear in its place” (189).

Mimicking a concept can bring in new understandings of the said concept, even to the person being mimicked. As we gather from Gibbs, humans communicate and learn from mimicking. Works can push the limits of human empathy, and this empathy prevails in the creation of a virtual reality space in which we see and mimic that reality. In this, we feel that pain, we feel that happiness, we feel the hopelessness, we feel the hope, we feel what the other body feels.

The fact that that other body is not real in terms of our reality does not slow down the genuine and sincere human connection that players/readers experience when interacting with that body. In that virtual reality space, in that moment of empathetic connection, in that moment of experiencing affect, the other body becomes real.

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