The Classical Detective Story Formula from Literature to Videogames

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Abstract— **The classical detective story format, originated from Edgar Allan Poe's tales of ratiocination, has spread into all kinds of different media over the past century, transforming itself each time to make better use of each medium's specificities. This paper stems from John Cawelti's studies about the literary formula of the detective narrative, using them as a base to analyze E. A. Poe's short story "Murders in the Rue Morgue" and Lucas Pope's videogame *Return of the Obra Dinn*. I seek to understand how the literary conventions of the genre were adapted, transposed and recreated in the interactive medium. Through Cawelti's framework for the classical detective story formula, the analysis focuses on four main patterns found in the genre: (1) situation, (2) action, (3) characters and relationships and (4) setting. I will argue here that the element of interaction is responsible for modifying the most important component of the literary genre: the detective figure. This important change alters the purpose of the detective story genre itself; however, it also makes for an experience which is more on par with the literary detective's actions as well.**

Keywords—*detective stories, "Murders in the Rue Morgue", Return of the Obra Dinn, videogame narratives*

I. INTRODUCTION

The classic detective story was one of the most widespread types of fictional narrative during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. With its origins dating back to Edgar Allan Poe's tales of ratiocination, the genre was later popularized through Arthur Conan Doyle's *magnum opus*, the adventures of the consulting detective Sherlock Holmes [1, p. 80]. After such a successful beginning, the ever-rising interest in the theme of criminality within fiction gave rise to many other developments in the form of sub-genres such as the hard-boiled mode, the police procedural, and the crime thriller [2], which presented deviations from the early, classical format by introducing changes to how narrative elements – such as setting and character – were dealt with in these stories.

Further structural alterations were also brought by the expansion of crime fiction into media other than literature, such as cinema and television. Such changes arise from the understanding that, ultimately,

> there are significant differences between such media as the printed book, the film, and television, and that these differences are artistic—in the sense that each medium has its own range of creative potentialities; psychological—in that media have different ranges of conceptual and perceptual implications; and social—in that media are elements in complex cultural networks that interact with both artistic and psychological dimensions. [1, p. 297]

Cawelti's argument is that different media encompass an intrinsic power or potential that can be developed by means of imaginative, creative explorations. Therefore, the classical detective story format had to be adapted to the specificities of each medium to construct narratives which made sense within their context of production and reception. To a large extent, this practice of transformation through migration to other media (television, cinema, videogames) is what has allowed crime fiction to circulate and multiply as a popular genre to this day [3, p. 2].

More to the point, when it comes to videogames many titles incorporate at least some of the main literary conventions of crime fiction, such as investigating locations, searching for clues and solving mysteries. Additionally, many videogame developers rely on the akin genre of adventure games to develop new interactive adaptations of the classic detective story, considering them to be "a natural fit for detective stories, since an essential part of their gameplay involves exploration of the environment [...] before solving the puzzles, whose solution ideally derives from the information gathered during the exploration phase" [4, p. 1].

However, many of these videogames are considered to be lackluster regarding the experience of playing a detective. In her study about Sherlock Holmes' videogame adaptations, Clara Fernandez-Vara argues that

> these games usually fall into tropes that players are familiar with, such as lock-and-key puzzles or long dialogue trees, rather than encouraging the players to use the "art of deduction" as a gameplay strategy to solve the case. What is worse, the player does not usually do any mystery-solving; rather, they see the reasoning behind the case in cut-scenes, reducing gameplay to navigation and object-scavenging. [4, p. 2]

The critic argues that the experience is disappointing: such games fail to create an enticing detective story because they abandon most, if not all, of the elements of reasoning and investigation that characterize the crime fiction genre. Instead of developing an experience which presents a convincing balance between a well-known videogame genre and a popular fictional formula, these games end up focusing too much on the digital medium and fail to present an immersive, compelling narrative experience.

Nevertheless, there are some detective videogames which succeed in developing a more coherent structure [4]. One example is Lucas Pope's *Return of the Obra Dinn* [5], a game where players must investigate an abandoned ship in order to figure out what happened to its missing crew and passengers. Given the context presented hitherto, the aim of this paper is to investigate the narrative elements of *Return of the Obra*

Dinn in order to understand how it adapted the detective story format to construct a successful mystery-solving videogame. In order to achieve this goal, the following discussions will be developed: firstly, I will present the main components of the classic detective story format through John Cawelti's study of the genre in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* [1]. Then, Cawelti's criteria will be applied to a discussion of Edgar Allan Poe's first tale of ratiocination, "Murders in the Rue Morgue," investigating the main elements of this narrative which shaped the genre as well as Cawelti's theories. After that, the analysis will turn to the aforementioned videogame, seeking to draw comparisons between the game and Poe's work, in order to determine how *Return of the Obra Dinn* adapted the detective fiction literary genre into the videogame medium.

II.   THE CLASSICAL DETECTIVE STORY FORMULA

There have been many diverse attempts to describe the structure of the classical detective story [6, p. 14-18]. In spite of the disputes, they all seem to agree on one point: the origins of the formula date back to Edgar Allan Poe's tales, and the American author is acknowledged by many scholars as the inventor of the detective story [7, p. 36]. According to Stephen Knight, "Poe was the first to create the intelligent, infallible, isolated hero so important to crime fiction," [8, p. 39], referring to the figure of the detective itself. Poe's stories not only gave rise to an entire literary genre, but also paved the way for other writers who would become the central images of popular literary crime fiction, most prominently Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.

Before delving into the analysis of Poe's tales of ratiocination and Pope's *Return of the Obra Dinn*, the structure of the classical detective story needs to be exposed. This paper makes use of Cawelti's investigation of the genre for a particular reason: it relies more specifically on Poe's original tales as its main source, while still being general enough that it "can be applied to the structure content of most detective fiction" [6, p. 18]. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to see how the conventions of the classical detective story, as described by Cawelti, have been adapted into the videogame format in *Return of the Obra Dinn*.

In his analysis of the genre, Cawelti identifies four patterns within the classical detective story format, which can be generally described as relating to the narrative elements of plot, structure, character, and setting [1, pp. 80-98]. The first of these categories is the (1) pattern of situation. According to the author, "the classical detective story begins with an unsolved crime and moves toward the elucidation of its mystery" [1, p. 80]. It is the establishment of the "whodunnit" question so well known to readers of the genre nowadays, a term "coined in the 1930's to describe a type of fiction in which the puzzle or mystery element was the central focus" [2, p. 35]. Therefore, the classical detective story genre is based on the premise of solving a conundrum, usually one that is exceedingly difficult to be explained, which justifies the employment of a private detective. The characteristics of the crime perpetrated in each story are manifold, but their resolution usually involves either finding the identity of the culprit, the motive of the crime, and/or the means through which it was committed.

Cawelti's second category is that of the (2) pattern of action, in which he identifies a sequence of events common to the genre in six phases: "*(a)* introduction of the detective; *(b)* crime and clues; *(c)* investigation; *(d)* announcement of the solution; *(e)* explanation of the solution; *(f)* denouement" [1, p. 81-82]. Moreover, the author adds that the sequence is adaptable so that steps may be omitted or adjoined, and the order may not always appear in the same way as the structure above [1, p. 82]. Such variations are important to maintain the public's interest in a genre that relies so much on the conventions of a predetermined system. For example, Martin Kayman argues that the success of the Sherlock Holmes series is partially due to the fact that "the problem-setting and solving structure provides fundamental narrative satisfaction, but ... Doyle plays enough variation on the pattern to keep it constantly fresh" [9, p. 48].

The third category debates the (3) pattern of characters and relationships. Cawelti argues that, according to Poe's stories, "the classical detective story required four main roles: "*(a)* the victim; *(b)* the criminal; *(c)* the detective; and *(d)* those threatened by the crime but incapable of solving it" [1, p. 91]. These categories also mix and intermingle; however, they are all crucial to the development of this classical formula. Notably, these roles are not usually emphasized in the same way, so that the figure of the detective stands out amongst the other characters [1, p. 93]. Given the focus on solving the mystery and the fact that most characters in these stories are generally not recurrent, the detective becomes the central figure of the formula, and the other characters in the story are mostly identified by how they relate to the detective itself.

Lastly, Cawelti's fourth category is the (4) pattern of setting. Although locations in these stories may be diverse, the author identifies a constant play between the inner and the outer, a "combination of the isolated place and the bustling world outside" [1, p. 96-97]. This is a recurring convention in the classical detective story formula both in terms of setting and the process of investigation, which also revolves around this dichotomy. The detective has to look for clues in the outside world, but must later retire into the inner workings of their mind in order to solve the mystery. Additionally, the setting of a detective story is usually placed in isolation from the rest of the world in such a way that "it abstracts the story from the complexity and confusion of the larger social world" [1, p. 97], allowing readers to focus on the investigation itself. Finally, the trope of the isolated place also helps the buildup of suspense, given that crime and mystery are often associated with less crowded and quieter locations [1, p. 97].

Considering the classic detective story formula described here, the following sections will investigate Poe's short story and Pope's videogame in terms of the four patterns developed by Cawelti, focusing on the plot, structure, character and setting of these stories to contrast and compare how similarly/differently literature and games construct a detective story.

III.   THE DETECTIVE IN THE RUE MORGUE

The first of Poe's tales of ratiocination, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was published in Graham's Magazine in 1841, and is now widely known as "the first detective story" [2, p. 19]. It tells the first the adventure of C. Auguste Dupin (the detective figure, although Poe never used this term to describe his character) and his unnamed roommate/colleague, who is also the narrator of the tale. The story tells of a horrific crime perpetrated in the city of Paris: two women, Madame L'Espanaye (mother) and Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye (daughter), were found brutally murdered inside their own

home. Given the strange circumstances in which they were found, and the rather contradictory testimonies of the many witnesses involved in the matter, the situation was deemed to be an "insoluble mystery" [10, p. 190]. However, through his investigation, Dupin finds out that the killings were carried out by a frenzied orangutan who had escaped from the clutches of his proprietor. After confronting the animal's owner, who elucidates the matter further, Dupin deems the case as solved.

The facts about the situation are established mostly through newspaper articles. The first account presents a narrative of the night of the occurrence through witnesses' testimonies. The various bystanders who are called into interrogation mention that they heard screams coming from the house and rushed towards it. All witnesses stated that, upon arriving at the gate, two distinct voices could be heard, "the one a gruff voice, the other much shriller—a very strange voice" [10, p. 186]. While everyone agrees that the gruff voice was that of a Frenchman, the witnesses cannot agree on the nationality of the second voice because no single word could be understood by anyone present. Consequently, everyone assumed that it must have been the voice of a foreigner.

After forcing the gate open, the noises suddenly stopped, and the party entered the house. The witnesses stated that "the door of the chamber in which was found the body of Mademoiselle L. was locked on the inside when the party reached it. […] The windows, both of the back and front room, were down and firmly fastened from within" [10, p. 188]. Upon examining the area, the apartment was found to be in complete disarray, "the furniture broken and thrown about in all directions" [10, p. 184]. Drawers had been opened and papers had been scattered about; most importantly, on the floor were found "two bags, containing nearly four thousand francs in gold" [10, p. 184].

By means of the information regarding the crime scene and the suspects, the newspaper article develops a framework for the story, centering the mystery around three main points of interest. Firstly, the puzzling situation behind the identity of the suspects, especially the one with the shrill voice. Secondly, the locked room, which presents a challenge in determining how the killer was able to leave the crime scene without being caught. Finally, the large sum of money found in the crime scene, which presents a third conundrum exactly because it was not taken by the assassin. In short, the story posits three main questions which must be answered: who the killer was, how he escaped the room and what was his motivation behind this heinous crime.

As for the structure of the tale, the narrative starts with the introduction of the detective. However, this is done in three different ways: first, the narrator introduces the detective as a prototypical figure, presenting him as someone who is interested in intellectual, analytical matters. This kind of mind "derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension praeternatural" [10, p. 175]. The narrator also employs many different metaphors to describe the "higher powers of the reflective intellect" [10, p. 175], using different tabletop and card games to exemplify his description of the character.

In sequence, the narrator turns to the introduction of the 'detective' himself, C. Auguste Dupin, who is man of much

knowledge, but also of many quirks. The narrator becomes especially impressed by "the vast extent of his reading; and, above all […] the wild fervor, and the vivid freshness of his imagination" [10, p. 179]. As the two men become friends and roommates, the narrator begins to observe the many peculiarities of his colleague, such as his secluded routine and passion for nighttime. Additionally, Dupin's influence on the man in such that the narrator starts to share all of the detective's interests, succumbing to "his wild whims with a perfect *abandon*" [10, p. 179].

The introduction of Dupin continues with a celebration of his skills even before the situation of the story has initiated. As the two roommates stroll down the streets of Paris at night, Dupin performs a "mind-reading trick" [1, p. 82] on his friend, using logics and reasoning to state the narrator's exact thoughts during their stroll. This event familiarizes the reader with the detective's methodology and asserts that his practice is not mere guesswork, but simply derived from observation, and a bit of intuition. The introduction of the detective, therefore, reaffirms itself in diverse ways, covering a large section of the narrative, reinforcing the centrality of this brainy, cerebral figure in the classical detective story formula.

The structure of the tale continues with the presentation of the crime and clues by means of the previously mentioned newspaper articles and the various testimonies from neighbors and eyewitnesses. However, in this first moment, Dupin still has not taken on the responsibility of solving the crime, he is simply an interested reader. It is only after a suspect is arrested that the man decides to call in a favor with the Prefect of Police and investigate the matter further. This allows Dupin to start his own investigation, looking for additional clues that may have been missed by the authorities. This arrangement attests to the superiority of the detective figure, who comes in after the police's first examination in order to find what others could not.

Dupin's investigation is rather swift, given the "facility" [10, p. 193] with which he arrives at the answers: he suddenly announces the discovery of the solution, leaving the narrator "in mute astonishment" [10, p. 193]. The story then quickly moves into its longest section, the explanation of the solution, in which the detective once again reveals his methods, much as in the mind-reading episode mentioned before. The length of this segment attests, once again, to the importance of the detective figure as the one responsible for uncovering the insoluble mystery, as well as on the resolution itself. According to Cawelti, "the explanation is important because in completing the investigation it represents the goal toward which the story has been moving. It also reflects the pleasure we feel when we are told the solution of a puzzle or a riddle" [1, p. 88]. In other words, this section is the climax of the classical detective story, the moment when the detective ties up all the loose ends of the case. It organizes all the data and clues which were previously gathered in a more linear, coherent manner, clarifying the detective's process of investigation. This segment also ties into the last part of Cawelti's structure, the story's *denouement*. In the case of "Murders in the Rue Morgue," since no human can be held accountable for the killings, this involves events other than the usual "apprehension and confession of the criminal" [1, p. 90], although it is delivered in a similar fashion. Dupin elaborates a ruse to attract the owner of the escaped orangutan into their home so that he can hear from the man's own words what had occurred before the events on the Rue Morgue, as well as what

prompted it to commit the two horrible killings. The *denouement* of the classical detective story, therefore, completes the tale with information which was inaccessible to the detective but still instrumental to the narrative, elucidating the events which led to the mystery and confirming that the detective's reasoning was correct.

The story's characters and the connections between them also play an important role in "Murders in the Rue Morgue." According to the first of Cawelti's pattern of situation, the two female victims of the crime are duly presented by means of a newspaper articles and testimonies, starting a search for a motive for the crime. Their many neighbors state that the two L'Espanaye lived by themselves in the house and were incredibly reclusive, as "no one was spoken of as frequenting the house" [10, p. 186]. One of the witnesses also mentions that "the old lady and her daughter seemed on good terms" [10, p. 185], dismissing the possibility of internal conflict.

The 'criminal' of the story is introduced in a similar fashion. Apart from the French-speaking voice, the second one was regarded as being foreign, rough and unintelligible. The killer is later recognized by Dupin as being an animal, and its only connection is with its owner. No other role, however, plays such an important part in the narrative as the detective. As shown before, the two longest segments of the tale are all focused on Dupin and his process of reasoning. Lastly, the number of characters which are involved with the crime but are unable to solve it is large, comprised of the narrator, the police and the suspect who has been arrested and falsely accused; but the only way in which these characters become relevant at all is in their relation to the detective figure. The narrator only exists to narrate the detective's adventures, the police cannot perform their job fully without him and the suspect direly needs him to solve the case so he can be set free. As a result, most other characters in the story revolve around the detective himself.

Finally, there remains the matter of setting. Regarding the crime scene, the witnesses' testimonies reveal the story's 'locked-room mystery' pattern, "a type of crime story whose central mystery is that a crime (usually a murder) has occurred in a room which seems to be hermetically sealed, allowing the criminal neither entrance to nor exit from it" [2, p. 146]. Additionally, there is the theme of reclusion and isolation which dominate all the tale's locations. The two women were seen to live "an exceedingly retired life;" their house was located in a "bye-street—very lonely;" Dupin and his roommate themselves lived a reclusive life and only left it during nighttime [10, p. 179]. The moments of isolation contrast with the bustling crowd of witnesses which testify to the event, suggesting that both crime and the detective inhabit the inner world of logical reasoning and quiet observation.

Unsurprisingly, Poe's first tale of ratiocination is an iconic example of the detective story formula. All of Cawelti's categories are present in the narrative, following the classic structure identified by the scholar. The next section will turn the analysis to the realm of videogames, drawing comparisons between both formats and how they construct detective stories in similar, yet contrasting ways.

IV. INVESTIGATION OF THE OBRA DINN

Return of the Obra Dinn is comprised of many interconnected stories inside one longer narrative. It focuses on the mystery of the Obra Dinn, a ship which disappeared at sea in 1803 along with its entire crew and passengers. The ship suddenly returns to the port of Falmouth, England, in 1807, completely empty of any living souls. The player, an insurance inspector, must go into the ship and determine what happened in its voyage. By means of a magical pocket watch (fig. 1), players can see someone's moment of death, as long as they have access to the person's remains. The player also receives a book (fig. 2) in which notes regarding the investigation are taken. Both items are sent to the player character by the ship's surgeon, one of the four remaining survivors of the tragedy who managed to escape and are still alive in Africa. Through examination of the ship, the player discovers the many details of the Obra Dinn's adventure, which involve accidental deaths, murders, and even attacks from sea monsters. After discovering the fates of all crewmen and passengers, the game comes to its resolution.
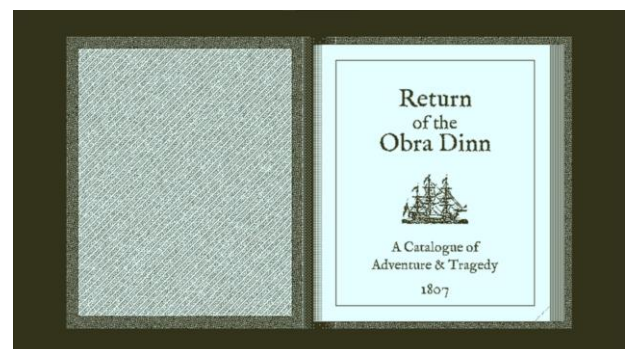

Fig. 1. The magical pocket watch.

Fig. 2. The ship's book.

The general situation of the game, then, is set out from its very beginning. Players are encumbered with answering the question of what happened to the people aboard the Obra Dinn. However, since there were sixty people on board, the assignment is divided into smaller tasks, and players must investigate and discover the fate of all disappeared crewmen and passengers. The matter is further complicated by the fact that the crew list (fig. 3) has no pictures attached to the names, which results in players having to identify each person through the drawings (fig. 4) of an artist who was also aboard the ship and who portrayed all sixty members. Therefore, although the general situation of the game remains the same, there are multiple questions which must also be answered throughout the entire game, concerning the identity of each individual person as well as what happened to them. Nevertheless, as different as it may seem from Poe's tale, the pattern of situation in the game remains quite similar to the classical detective story formula, since the player is still being tasked

with answering questions regarding people's identity and cause of death, mysteries which are also common to the literary form.

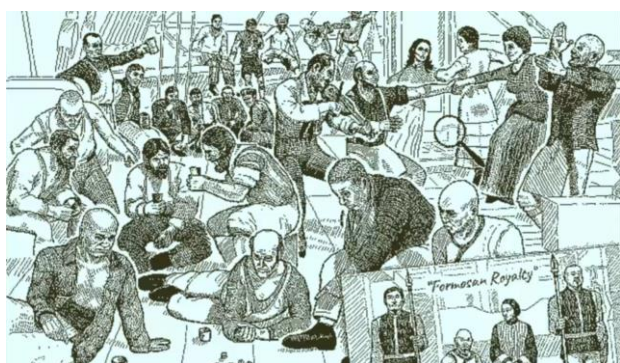Fig. 3. Part of the crew and passenger list.

Fig. 4. Some of the artist's drawings.

The game's structure, however, starts to show the changes brought about by the different medium, which relate more specifically to the detective figure and its importance within the story. The player controls an insurance inspector, an unnamed character with no background information other than his/her profession. Additionally, the game is played in first-person perspective, and players are only able to see the inspector's hands in the screen. Therefore, the player character is a blank slate, to be inhabited by the many diverse types of players who control it. This is particularly different from Poe's literary tale, in which Dupin becomes the most significant character of the story, receiving a pompous introduction by a first person narrator, and then given voice to make a full-blown explanation of the case.

This change in character relevance also alters the two other parts of Cawelti's pattern of structure, which rely largely on the powerful figure of the detective: the announcement and the explanation of the solution. Because the detective is no longer recognized as the influential, quirky analyst, these two moments lose their purpose within the story. It is no longer a third-party detective who solves the case, but players themselves who are responsible for exploring, observing, and rationalizing what they see. The player character which they control is simply an interface, a way with which to interact with the digital world of the game.

Consequently, in *Return of the Obra Dinn*, the whole purpose of the detective story formula is altered by the omission of the detective figure. In the classical detective story format, readers are generally not expected to solve the crime on their own. Rather,

the puzzle or riddle aspect of the detective story depends less upon the reader's own ability to solve the mystery than on giving him enough participation in it to enable him better to appreciate the wit of the detective and to understand the new perspective on which the explanation depends. [1, p. 89].

In other words, readers are invited to watch as the detective unfolds the mystery through their special abilities. In games, however, players are put in the role of the detective themselves and are given the tools needed to solve the proposed mystery. Consequently, the rationale of the format is altered in the new medium because of the changes made to the most important aspect of the formula: the detective figure.

The remaining parts of the pattern of structure, however, are not severely altered by the videogame. Regarding the investigation process, players must look for clues by exploring the ship's many areas, interacting with the dead bodies they find. A crime (if there was any) is revealed with the use of the pocket watch: whenever players are near a person's remains, they are able to activate the watch and see the moment of death through a still picture (fig. 5) and audio of their last moments alive (fig. 6), which helps them identify who the person was and how they were killed. Because of the ship's numerous crew and passengers, these foresights are quite convoluted, and players must alternate between identifying a crime, looking for clues and investigating the events through logical thinking.
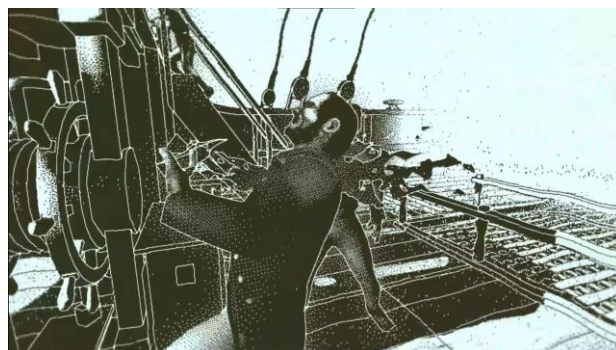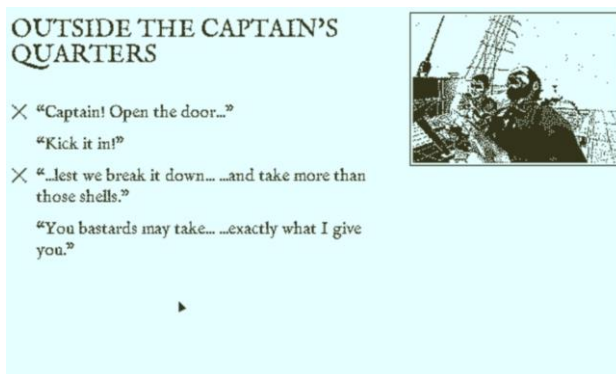

Fig. 5. A still of a character's death.

Fig. 6. The description of its audio.

To recreate the role of the detective in an interactive narrative, *Return of the Obra Dinn* makes use of many game mechanics, such as the logbook and pocket watch, but it also relies on the player's ability to explore and rationalize. For

example, in the second part of the book's ninth chapter, 'Escape," the player sees a man stabbing another crewmate, while a few people try to escape the ship on a smaller boat, among them the two women which have not yet been identified. Looking at the list of names, the player sees that there are two female names, two passengers aboard the ship: Emily Jackson and Miss Jane Bird (fig. 7). In order to identify which woman is which, the player must pay attention to this scene and notice the presence of a wedding ring in one of the women's hands (fig. 8), meaning that the other passenger is the one identified as 'Miss' Jane Bird.
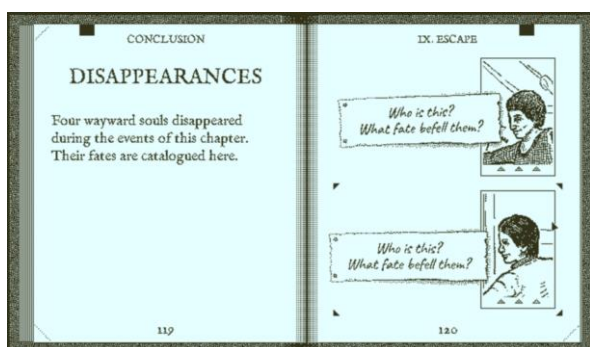

Fig. 7. The book page containing the fates of the two women.

Fig. 8. A wedding ring can be seen on the woman's hand.

The remaining part of the structure, the *denouement* of the story is presented similarly to the classical detective formula, but its revelation depends on the player's ability to solve the cases properly. While they are unraveling the narrative's many cases, players notice that the eight chapter, "Bargain," is inaccessible to them for the time being (fig. 9). If they manage to solve all of the ship's events correctly, they are then awarded the *denouement* of the story: the remaining hidden chapter, which contains information that was previously inaccessible but key to understanding the full events of the story, finally connecting the missing pieces. Therefore, the *denouement* of the game has a purpose comparable to that of Poe's tale, and remains consistent with the classical detective story structure.

Concerning the pattern of characters and relations, because of how the much the detective figure has been altered in the game, becoming merely a vessel for the player to inhabit, the detective role in *Return of the Obra Dinn* is much less prominent than in Poe's tale. Conversely, this allows the other roles to become more relevant in the game, balancing out the equation. In the tragedy of the Obra Dinn, not all aboard the ship were criminals, but everyone was a victim at some point,

either of murder (sometimes attempted only), accidents or even attacks from sea monsters (fig. 10). As previously mentioned, the entire purpose of the game relies on discovering what happened to all these souls. As such, criminals and victims become the roles most prominent within the game. This can also be attested from the simple fact that, unlike the detective, we know their names and are able to see their faces as well, which grants them more personality than the player character has. The final role, however, continues to be scarcely represented: the only other parts involved in the case are the East India Company, which holds the insurance for the ship, and the family and friends of the victims which are able to claim their insurance. These parties are only mentioned in passing and are never showed in the game.
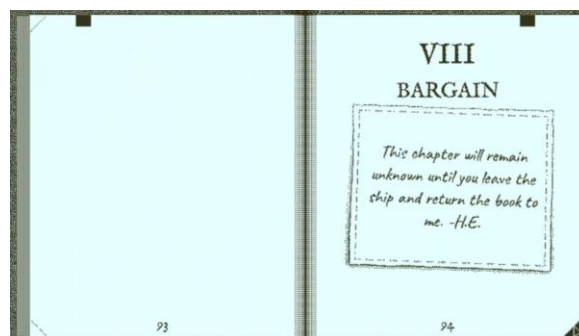

Fig. 9. The hidden bargain chapter.

Fig. 10. The ship is attacked by a kraken.

Finally, there remains the pattern of setting to be analyzed. Much like in Poe's tale, the game's setting is constructed around the sense of isolation as well. The Obra Dinn being a ship at sea, all the events surrounding it happened in seclusion, in areas where no one else but the crewmen and passengers could witness its tragedies. The player's investigation of the empty ship contrasts with the scenes portrayed by the use of the pocket watch, which sometimes contain more than fifteen people crowded in the same frame. However, the scenes are three-dimensional still frames, not animated scenes; therefore, the sensation of loneliness inside the ship remains. As for the game's audiovisual elements, the developer's choice of graphical style presents a high contrast between lighter and darker tones, drenching the world of the videogame in strong shadows which give it a sensation of suspense. The game's sound design also follows a similar pattern. While exploring the ship, the player does not hear much other than their own footsteps, creaking floorboards and the occasional sounds of the ocean. While operating the pocket watch, various sound effects and short music is heard, all dominated by suspenseful

notes and combinations. Therefore, the setting of the game remains parallel to the one present in the classical detective story formula, and simply adapts the literary creation into a navigable world.

V. FINAL REMARKS

The goal of this paper was to analyze and compare the narrative elements of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "Murders in the Rue Morgue," and Lucas Pope's videogame, *Return of the Obra Dinn*, under the light of John Cawelti's detailing of the classical detective story formula. Through the analysis of these mystery tales, this study aimed at explaining how the game adapted this literary format into an audiovisual and interactive digital experience.

The investigation of the fictional works revealed that the videogame's biggest alteration of the formula concerns the detective figure, so important to Poe's tales of ratiocination and its predecessors. In the classical detective story format, readers are not meant to solve the case together with the detective; they are simple observants, supposed to admire the detective's work. However, this changes significantly with videogames because of the role that interaction plays in their narratives. *In Return of the Obra Dinn*, as in most other detective games, the player substitutes the detective figure of the literary formula, becoming detectives themselves. As such, the role of the player is completely different from that of the reader, since they are the ones who must explore, investigate, and eventually solve mysteries on their own.

Unlike many other detective videogames, *Return of the Obra Dinn* constructs an experience which allows players to feel like they are in fact performing the same tasks as a literary detective would. By relying on the player's abilities to find the clues scattered around its locations and to interpret them into logical answers, the game builds a narrative which is still quite similar to the classical detective story formula, while adapting its most significant features appropriately into the new medium. Ultimately, "the process of adaptation in digital games is not reproducing a series of events, but creating a set of actions of behaviors that parallel those in the original work" [4, p. 12]. Therefore, by opting to transfer the detective's actions into the player role, *Return of the Obra Dinn* develops a satisfying experience of solving mysteries.

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