It’s All Greek to Me: A Case for the Classics in Game Development Education
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ABSTRACT
This article provides an overview of Classical Greek literature as a parallel for the game development industry: we outline how the historical developments of Greek storytelling and literature inform the developmental history of video games. As the Greek storytelling medium evolved, the sense of the tragic hero and narrative complexity evolved. Similarly, as generations of video game players evolve, their demand for more complex characters and more fully developed storylines will also evolve. We attempt to provide a vantage point that future game designers may consider during the design of future game-based story elements. While we epitomize our case using Greek Literature, the same elements and structure are found throughout the evolution of storytelling in many ancient civilizations. It is our assertion that good education in game design and development requires a good technical background and a solid foundation in narrative storytelling. As such, it is recommended that game-oriented curriculum include the study of the Classics.

1. INTRODUCTION
Blockbuster movies like 'Troy', 'Alexander', and '300' indicate that Classicism, and Greek Classicism in particular, are still relevant to today's audience. The latter two deal with historical events, with '300' inspired by Herodotus's Histories, the former, 'Troy', from the Homeric poetry of Ancient Greece. This has been a resurgence of sorts for the sandal and skirt brigade who seemed to have been laid waste by a generation of post-modern scholars claiming such fare responsible for the hegemony that enveloped Western thought: An admission that speaks to the influence of Greek culture and why its study is so valuable. This paper seeks to explore the development of Greek Tragedy as the seminal development in Western storytelling through Form and Content as a metaphor for the development in the video game industry in order to establish correlations that exist and to possibly predict future developments in storytelling for video games as the genre evolves.

In light of this discussion, this paper seeks to establish the importance of Classicism within a standard video game development curriculum (be it technical or artistically orientated); as well as offering video game producers a potential strategy to access untapped gamers and/or grooming their present audience into what we call: Late Period Gamers. While we acknowledge the tension between story and game play elements, this work is intended to outlay the issues pertaining to the story telling elements of the modern video game.

In this work we first examine the Greek world-view and the influence of imitation in Greek literature. We follow with an analysis of form and content and the categorization of Greek literature. From there we look at the developmental history of the Greek tragedy followed by an analysis of character. Throughout this exposition, we will relate said developments to games, game stories and characters. Finally we conclude with an examination of topics taught in the classics and show how these types of courses are invariably an important part of any game development curriculum: both technical and artistic.

2. THE GREEK WORLD VIEW
The modern reader is struck by how human the Greek religion was. Their gods were conceived as man writ large: complete with all our virtues and vices, led by Zeus, whose temptations drove his long-suffering wife, Hera, to distraction and caused no end of compromised actions. Olympus is populated by a dysfunctional brood, who squabble incessantly, and are just as likely to be motivated by pettiness as nobility. The event that sparks the Trojan...
War and Homer's great poem: the Iliad [1], centers on jealousy borne out of a beauty contest among the Gods, with the hapless Paris caught as judge.

This imitative conception of the “universe based upon man” was manifest in their cultural output. In Art, the Greeks departed dramatically from the formalized, abstracted forms found in Mesopotamian cultures in their realization of three-dimensional, fully realized, naturalistic forms [2]. This imitative ethos is perhaps best exemplified by the myth of Pygmalion; the sculptor whose creation is so beautiful and realistic that the Sculptor falls in love with the stone and desires no other. The story ends with the goddess Aphrodite taking pity upon him and bringing his stone woman to life. This story found its way into popular culture again via the 1987 film “Mannequin” which collected a litany of awards and nominations, particularly in the fantasy film areas (but also an Oscar). However, to our knowledge there has not been a modern video game taking on the same story idea.

Similar to Art, the Aesthetic principle that governed Greek literature, as expressed by Aristotle in the Poetics, was imitation. The Greek storyteller employed language and meter in order to better imitate the Greek world. As Aristotle notes: “For the medium being the same, and the objects the same, the poet may imitate by narration- in which case he can either take another personality as Homer does, or speak in his own person, unchanged- or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us.” [Part III]

We posit that the video game industry is soon to arrive at a crossroads where the future lies in story-telling and narrative. If all graphics are equal (that ultimate realism), the sole differentiator will be the quality of the narrative. The common thought among video game producers is to continue to give more of what has already been successful. However, this continued path of sequels leads to a phenomenon of franchise fatigue commonly found in the film industry where the formulaic action or buddy movies reach out to three, four or even five sequels, and in most cases the quality degrading ever so obviously. Recently, successful franchise sequels in the video game industry have been spectacle based with improvements in graphics, rendering techniques, 2D to 3D engine bases to name a few. The franchise fatigue phenomenon has not occurred much in the game industry as a result of these spectacle based improvements, however it is a distinct possibility when spectacle based enhancements plateau. Two good examples of this are the Grand Theft Auto Series and the Ratchet and Clank Series. The core story line in GTA III, GTA Vice City, GTA Liberty City Stories, and GTA IV are arguably the same with each game presenting a simple change in scenery. The subtle game play differences do not change the overall arcing of the story line not the progression of the main characters. In the Ratchet and Clank series, the storyline elements are reduced and the missions become formulaic in nature with an uncanny similarity to pervious titles. In fact, in the 3rd installment of the series story elements were dramatically reduced in favor of tournament style arena battles.

The video game industry, and the medium itself, has an opportunity to evolve with the video gamer and the criteria by which video games will succeed will eventually be on its narrative, story-telling form and content. We continue with an examination of the Greek Form and Content within Greek literature.

3. GREEK FORM AND CONTENT

In around 347-342 BC, Aristotle collected a series of lecture notes together under the title Poetics, “whose influence and authority in succeeding centuries has been out of all proportion to its length” [3-Part VI], according to Beardsley [4]. Aristotle is credited with opening a new field of inquiry, mapping it, and offering terms and a system of classification that was “independent of its moral and political connections” [4]. The text covers in concise and clearly delineated manner the what, how, and why of critical literary study. Everything from plot, character, even phrasing and grammar, is dissected and proscriptions offered as one might expect from an Academician.

Aristotle offers his definition of Tragedy as “an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude...in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.” [Part VI]. The more the hero is “like ourselves”, the more successful the identification. For the modern reader and video game enthusiast, Aristotle’s definition of action needs clarification: an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify the actions themselves. It is thought and character that are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on actions again all success or failure depends. [Part VI].

Personal Agents and Action are intertwined for Aristotle and from these the Plot must necessarily relate: “Plot is the imitation of the action- for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents...[for] the plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place.” [Part VI]. It is in the plot/incidents that character is revealed: “[c]haracter is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids.” [Part VI]. In order for there to be effective Tragedy, the personal agents in video games, their avatars, must talk the talk but more importantly walk the walk. Otherwise the structure crumbles and the story is less compelling.

Aristotle offers a very cautionary note to the video game producer, noting: “The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry. For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors. Besides, the production of spectacular effects depends more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet.” [Part VI]. Effectively, Aristotle is saying that emphasis on visual assets and graphics should not be the sole criteria of quality; that poetry yields a more enriched and emotional experience. It is an assessment shared by Graeme Devine, who has made games for Atari, Lucasfilm, Activision, Virgin, Id and Ensemble: “We're at a point now where we can just about represent anything well in a computer/console game...Unfortunately, as an industry we make far too many games with poor designs.” Devine notes, "An increased focus on story can only be a good step....because we're not using real storytellers yet." [5]. Devine's candid assessment explains the recent video game industry's preference for sequels which have as their main selling point an enhanced visual experience (Spectacle) but the storylines (Poetry) remain much the same. Eventually, the players will want more from the “art of poetry” to be satisfied. We see this trend in the film industry, where modern visual ef-
fects become the expected norm, and viewers demand better storylines and character development in order to be satisfied.

The Greeks separated the art of the story from the art of the spectacle showing that the art of the story proves more important than the presentation. What we can learn from the classics at this point would be that serious attention on the art of the game-based story is necessary. Most game players have experienced this phenomenon themselves with recent game sequels being an enhanced visual experience (Spectacle) but the storylines remains much the same (Poetry). The enhanced graphics are compelling; however they don’t always hold the attention of the player throughout the game. Until now, priority focus for video game development and the race between video game producers has been to achieve ultimate realism via graphical improvements and technological enhancements: what the Greeks referred to as Spectacle. We are closer than ever to realizing a fully realistic immersive environment: what the Greeks called imitatio. However, much effort is still required to perfect the imitation of the non-visual characteristics such as Narrative and Character.

We next examine the ideas of Narrative and Plot as a part of the development of Greek literature and draw the correlations between these periods and the relatively short history of video game development.

3.1 Narrative and Plot in Greek Literature
Aristotle notes the divide in Ancient Greek Poetry based on content: "Poetry now diverged in two directions, according to the individual character of the writers. The graver spirits imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men. The more trivial sort imitated the actions of meaner persons. Initially this was done through satire."[3–Part IV]. It is clear that Aristotle has a bias towards the former at the expense of the latter, a preference which does not need to be shared in order for one to acknowledge the usefulness of his categorization. The Grand Theft Auto (GTA) franchise has been criticized by some, echoing Aristotle’s view, that the game offers objectionable moral fare. It is a game that is ‘meaner’ and has a highly satirical and edgy component within the plot. Some may argue that the GTA series is not satirical, however in the classical sense it is. GTA is satire, and not truly tragic because it is an exaggerated caricatured version of law and order. Based on Aristotle’s core revelations GTA has the following aspects of Greek satire:

- You play as a villain rather than an archetypical hero.
- There is no redemption, the main character remains unchanged.
- There is a lack of emotional engagement resulting in cartoon style violence that evokes little or no empathy for the victims.

On the other hand, Splinter Cell, Medal of Honor, or City of Heros is clearly within Aristotle’s criteria of ‘good men’ doing ‘good deeds’ under the general guise of good vs. evil. What unites both is the luxury each form allows their respective audiences to experience and thus provide a ‘cathartic’ experience which cleanses or purges the player.[3]

Aristotle lists four main plot devices used by authors in order to structure their narratives: "There are four kinds of Tragedy: the Complex, depending entirely on Reversal of the Situation and Recognition; the Pathetic (where the motive is passion); the Ethical (where the motives are ethical) and the Simple (where Spectacle compensates for missing Poetry). The poet should endeavor, if possible, to combine all poetic elements; or failing that, the greatest number and [those] the most important; the more so, in face of the caviling criticism of the day. For whereas there have hitherto been good poets, each in his own branch, the critics now expect one man to surpass all others in their several lines of excellence."[3–Part XVIII]. We argue that the majority of video game story and character development are most often Satirical in conception and those that seek a more Tragic conception opt for a Simple plot, with reliance on Spectacle to appease the player rather than a complex set of interactions between complex characters.

Instances of games just burgeoning on the Ethical or Pathetic do exist as a more recent phenomenon. For example, in GTA IV the user is presented with ethical dilemmas such as to kill or extend mercy towards a character from the game and a dating component has been included within the game which are tentative attempts at the Pathetic plot. While laudatory, these plotlines are more incidental and not essential to the story. They have the feel of being added on, which, in many ways they were, to the GTA formula, instead of being incorporated in any meaningful way.

Part of the problem may be conceptual. In [5], Bob Bates discusses the moment-to-moment experience of video games as a series of verbs and the verbs cited are move, shoot, climb, rappel, zip-wire, set explosives, unlock, build, researches, with adverbs like quickly, slowly, stealthily. "No matter what the genre, the more verbs you can give a player, the more you allow him [sic] to do. It's the doing that's at the heart of good game play and a positive moment-to-moment experience."[5]. Perhaps tellingly, emotional and/or psychological verbs are not included on that list. In analyzing the video game design, Bates reveals the fundamental issue that perhaps explains the preponderance of spectacle in video games. During conception, video games are conceived as the active life at the expense of the contemplative life. Homer’s world was not without action and incident (indeed a first time reader will be shocked at Homer’s graphic descriptions of battle) but it also had a corresponding emotional and contemplative experience. Sacrifice, mercy, honor, loss, grieving being a few. Take for example the video game Medal of Honor, which in subject matter is very similar to the movie Saving Private Ryan. In the former, it is a classic first person shooter game where friend and foe are one-dimensional while in the latter the war serves as a backdrop for a rescue mission, the ‘saving’ in Saving Private Ryan, with fully realized characters interacting with each other and the enemy. More importantly, the main protagonists are changed from beginning to end: Capt Miller cares little for his orders, it is but one more mission removed from his return back home. However, when Hank’s character confronts Ryan, and the latter’s determination to fight on even though he has his ticket out of the war, Hank’s character is made to reassess his own motives and moves from reluctant everyman to hero. This transformation makes his ultimate demise more heroic and more tragic. There is absolutely no corresponding narrative within Medal of Honor.

3.2 Character and the Influence of Homer
Discussion of Greek Tragedy cannot ignore the influence of Poetry and specifically the poetry of Homer. Aristotle cites Homer
as the forefather of Greek Tragedy, " for he alone combined dramatic form with excellence of imitation" [3–Part IV]. As much in the Poetics, Aristotle proves a wise judge of storytelling. He notes that less can frequently mean more when it comes to plot and incident. Homer is again, cited with approval by Aristotle, for his decision to restrict the events narrated during the Fall of Troy within Homer's epic poem the Iliad: "It would have been too vast a theme, and not easily embraced in a single view," [3–Part XIII].

But what of the tale? When we open the text, we are plunked right in the middle of the action. The Greeks have been laying siege to Troy for seven years and those looking for a resolution to the conflict at the end will be disappointed for Homer leaves the matter unresolved: he ends his tale with King Priam burying his beloved son Hector behind the walls of Troy. Cue the credits. Contrast these choices with the Hollywood adaptation and then ponder Aristotle's opinion on the matter: " Here again, then, as has been already observed, the transcendental excellence of Homer is manifest. He never attempts to make the whole war of Troy the subject of his poem, though that war had a beginning and an end. It would have been too vast a theme, and not easily embraced in a single view. If, again, he had kept it within moderate limits, it must have been over-complicated by the variety of the incidents. As it is, he detaches a single portion, and admits as episodes many events from the general story of the war- such as the Catalogue of the ships and others- thus diversifying the poem. All other poets take a single hero, a single period, or an action single indeed, but with a multiplicity of parts." [3–Part XXIII] This clever bit of editing allows Homer to narrate the events in a manner which Aristotle strongly approves: Homer is, in Aristotle’s estimation, worth "special merit [for] being the only poet who rightly appreciates the part he should take himself. The poet should speak as little as possible in his own person, for it is not this that makes him an imitator. Homer, after a few prefatory words, at once brings in a man, or woman, or other personage; none of them wanting in characteristic qualities, but each with a character of his own" [3–Part XXIV]. And Homer was especially noteworthy in creating exceptional characters.

What is clearly of importance to Homer is character. For Homer, events are a means to exploring character and nobility in the face of war. Aristotle has praised Homer's powers of imitation and Homer's powers of storytelling but as important is Homer's 'nobility' - "Homer, for example, makes men better than they are" [3–Part II]. For the modern reader and gamer we recognize that this nobility is the articulation by Homer of the hero's code. What is striking about Homer's poem is there are many heroes eager to play this part: Patroclus dons Achilles armor in order to rally the troops who are overrun by Hector and the Trojans even though it leads to his death. Hector finds himself leading a cause he finds beneath him because his brother, Paris, has stolen another man's wife, Helen, from the Greeks and seconded her to Troy which is presently besieged by the vengeful Greeks: King Priam must kiss the hands of the man who murders his most beloved son so that he may bury him. And of course the agent of King Priam's misery, Achilles, who trades immortality for a mortal death in order to avenge Patroclus.

As Denby notes, the main protagonist is Achilles, the most gifted and blessed warrior on both sides who confesses on the eve of his entry into the war: "Fate is the same for the man who holds back, the same if he fights hard. We are all held in a single honor, the brave with the weaknesses. A man dies still if he has done nothing, as one who has done much." [6] A startling admission from the most gifted and blessed warrior. Achilles concludes "but a man's life cannot come back again, it cannot be lifted, nor captured again by force, once it has crossed the teeth's barrier" into death. [1] It is this dissonance that transforms Homer's tale from testosterone-war romp into an internal dialogue of self-doubt and the modern, tragic figure, grasping to understand some sense of place within the world.

If we view video games through Aristotle's lens, we see an industry that is visually imitative (three-dimensional immersive environments) however the narratives are less imitative of reality: largely populated with what Aristotle deems satirical narratives, perhaps personified by the successful Grand Theft Auto franchise, in which the player inhabits a highly caricatured view of the legal system. It is a walk on the wild side which satisfies a lurid fascination not unknown to Aristotle. But consumer needs, even in Aristotle's time, demand more variety in experience. For the Greeks, such a development was initiated by Homer and found full development under Attic Greek Tragedy. For the modern video game producer and their clientele, a potentially untapped market segment who demands more sophistication in their entertainment has yet to be addressed. And the following examination of the narrative developments in Greek tragedy may prove instructive to the video game producer. We continue by examining the basic stages of Greek literature and compare each to stages we have identified in the video game development history.

4. STAGES OF GREEK LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

Essentially, Aristotle realized the development of Greek Tragedy centers on the number of characters, which increase over time, at the expense or role of the Chorus (See Appendix A), which decreases over time. The characters themselves evolve from more stock characterizations with gods giving way to fully nuanced humans which Aristotle cites as the imitation of reality; and the role of the “deus ex machina” (See Appendix B). Three core periods were identified, the Early, Middle and Late periods. We discuss each in turn next.

4.1 The Greek Early Period: Sisyphean stasis

In Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound the characterization of Prometheus is markedly different from the earlier accounts found in Hesiod's Theogony and Works and Days. Hesiod's Prometheus was essentially a trickster and semi-comic foil to Zeus' authority in contrast to Aeschylus's martyred hero. Aeschylus's tragedies were composed during the Persian invasion of Greece, and it is this historical backdrop which accounts for such Ethical tragedies as Prometheus Bound, which is characterized by high moral content - Aeschylus draws inspiration, quite literally, from the gods. These are relatively uncomplicated plots in comparison to the later developments in Greek Tragedy.

As one might expect from an Ethical Tragedy, the hero quest and code articulated by Homer among others is largely intact even if Aeschylus has chosen the martyred aftermath of the protagonist’s quest. The play is based on the Titan hero Prometheus, who supported the Olympians in their overthrow of the Titans but subsequently ran afoul of Zeus over his sympathies for the creature
Man. The play deals with Prometheus's Sisyphean punishment on the order of Zeus, who has the hero fastened to the rock and an eagle sent daily to eat the regenerative hero's liver. When we join the play, Prometheus is being fastened to the rock, and the play consists of narrating the events that led to his punishment through characters who enter the stage. It is very much the great man doing great deeds who is wrongfully punished.

Prometheus Bound was the play cited by Nietzsche as proof of Greek pessimism: the hero, Prometheus, represented the ideal of individuation, who is made to suffer for his gift of knowledge. However, the Aeschylus's narrative has been criticized. The ancient Greek playwright claimed this never-ending 'loop' a personification of the abiding virtue of the hero who endures a series of trials. The player is 'immortal' and regenerative and usually of ethical virtue. Early transition games include archetypical hero characters on the side of good such as Duke Nukem. These themes remain in many a modern game still in which the hero character is fighting on the side of good and possess some supernaturally regenerative capabilities (often a regenerative health bar). The flaw within these games is that the characters are too good; and the game actually prevents questionable or morally ambiguous actions. For example, in Medal of Honor the idea of friendly fire is impossible. Just like Prometheus, the player is prevented from doing any wrong. As such the reality of the tragic consequence of war cannot be fully realized. This level of abstraction from reality hinders the full emotional engagement of the player and prevents a full tragic experience. The plots are either Simple, or Ethical, or Pathetic with little or no combination.

4.2 The Middle Period: Sophoclean Narrative

Sophocles was the playwright who introduced many innovations into the storytelling narrative. In Sophocles' time, the Greek art of the drama was undergoing rapid and profound change. It had begun with little more than a chorus (Appendix A has an expanded description of chorus), but earlier playwrights had added first one, and then two, actors. As a result, this shifted the action of the plays away from the chorus. Among Sophocles' earliest innovations was the addition of a third actor, further reducing the role of the chorus and creating greater opportunity for character development and conflict between characters. The common cut scene in today's modern videogames provides the opportunity for multi-player perspectives. If Non-Player Characters are limited since Prometheus remains essentially the same throughout and this may be due to the subject himself, as Greene notes: "For Prometheus, though overpowered, is a full immortal god, not a man. This use of omniscient indestructible deity in place of the faulted human hero presents its dramatic difficulties. It makes the action static." Aristotle points out another flaw with the indestructible deity as tragic figure: he is too virtuous - "the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity...moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us". [3-Part XIII]

The punishment of Prometheus is similar to the punishment given to Sisyphus, the figure who is condemned to roll a stone up a hill only to be thwarted and sent back to the base again. Albert Camus claimed this never-ending 'loop' a personification of the absurdity of human life, but concluded "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" as "The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." [9]

Camus' insights on Sisyphus can serve as the essential description of early video games and the casual game genre: the player is forced through a loop of events which inevitably trip them up and force them to restart an action with one level of events replaced by another. Moreover, if the player reaches the end there is the option of replaying the entire game on advanced. Think of the world's most popular games, and then think how the Sisyphean model applies: Tetris, Super Mario, Space Invaders, Pac Man all have at their root in an endless loop of Sisyphean huddles where the hero dies and is reborn. There is little or no emotional engagement with such tragedy and if one may paraphrase Grene and Latimore, the action or engagement is static. Not surprisingly, these games and others of their ilk were played in bars and arcades where time and player engagement with story presented limitations. They have made the transition nicely to cell phones, pda's, and blackberry's. If we can make generalizations: the more informal the use; the less intricate the game story elements will be. The less intricate the game story elements, the more Sisyphean the action (in the Aristotle sense) is. In other words, games that do not reveal character and storyline elements through action (events) are more likely to lack player engagement in the story and result in a Sisyphean style. This is aptly shown in the casual game area of the industry as the games are intended for shorter (more informal) play periods where the presentation of story is minimized or avoided altogether and the games levels and game play have minor (if any) variation as the player progresses.

As video games progressed with the advent of more sophisticated game engines, software, and video cards, the games became more visually realistic and illusionary, but the plots were static like Prometheus Bound: a martyred/vindicated first person shooter who endures a series of trials. The player is 'immortal' and regenerative and usually of ethical virtue. Early transition games include archetypical hero characters on the side of good such as Duke Nukem. These themes remain in many a modern game still in which the hero character is fighting on the side of good and possess some supernaturally regenerative capabilities (often a regenerative health bar). The flaw within these games is that the characters are too good; and the game actually prevents questionable or morally ambiguous actions. For example, in Medal of Honor the idea of friendly fire is impossible. Just like Prometheus, the player is prevented from doing any wrong. As such the reality of the tragic consequence of war cannot be fully realized. This level of abstraction from reality hinders the full emotional engagement of the player and prevents a full tragic experience. The plots are either Simple, or Ethical, or Pathetic with little or no combination.
who clings to the reasoned counsel of the witches’ visions that forecast Macbeth's destiny only to discover that his reasoning was inverted and result is his ruin.

What is unique about Oedipus Rex is the inversion of the traditional storytelling narrative where the audience and character experience events in ‘real’ time when a story unfolds chronologically before the audience's eyes. In the case of Oedipus Rex, the narrative is like a snake eating its tail; we move forward by going backwards until we confront the start of the action which is its conclusion. Because the narrative is a series of riddles and clues which lead to a denouement at the end, the sophistication in Narrative has been increased. The viewer is less passive and must employ more cognitive engagement with the material, a key indication of the Greek Middle Period. This type of element was found more often in film than in games, but in games such as Metal Gear Solid III: Snake Eater, and to a certain extent Uncharted these elements are explored by the developers. For example, in Metal Gear Solid III, the designs use a Complex plot device with clues leading the player to the discovery that your enemies are lead in part by your family (your mother). Similarly to Oedipus Rex, you move forward through the game by exposure to the past that helps understand your current situation and existence. However, in the end the main characters remain unchanged leaving this game in the Early middle period because of the lack of development.

An interesting side bar in Metal Gear Solid is that there is a sequence in which the player, near death, finds themselves trapped between life and death and is visited by ghosts people they have killed throughout the game. The player is helpless and can only accept and endure the feelings of all the pain and agony he has caused, facing each and every enemy soldier he has killed, all barreing the scars of exactly the way the player chose to kill them. While alluding to a possible self-reflection moment in the game, the outcome really ends up being a romp down memory lane for the player unchanged, the player themselves remain unchanged as well.

In Uncharted: Drakes Fortune, the plot is presented through numerous character interactions, the Complex plot device of recognition is employed and the story unfolds through characters interactions. Of interest is the main character’s attitude change from looter/adventurer to a man who is simply trying to survive. While in the end the character is not significantly changed (to allow sequels, of course) we do see some steps towards the middle period here.

4.3 The Late Period – Euripidean Reality

Aristotle explained the difference between the Middle and Late Period by noting that Sophocles portrayed men as they ought to be; Euripides portrayed them as they were [3] and a larger degree of sophistication and understanding of the Narrative models was needed. The characters are noted for their high degree of realism in contrast to the early and even middle periods. “The spectator now actually saw and heard his double on the Euripidean stage, and rejoiced that he could talk so well.” [7].

One of the significant differences in the Late Period Narratives is that they have a higher degree of self-critiquing of medium within medium as the writers played with form and content. Euripides is known primarily for having reshaped the formal structure of tradi-tional Attic tragedy by showing strong women characters and intelligent slaves, and by satirizing many heroes of Greek mythology. His plays seem modern by comparison with those of his contemporaries, focusing on the inner lives and motives of his characters in a way previously unknown to Greek audiences against a backdrop of sparse staging with limited dazzling effects (Spectacle in the Aristotle sense) that other plays often had. The modernity of Euripides is exemplified in plays like “Hippolytus”, whose main characters struggle with language and sight through-out the play: Phaedra laments her inability to see clearly and wishes her eyes were covered; letters, oaths, and secrets have the opposite effect than intended. Euripides offers a disquieting assessment of how language and sight assist understanding in a civilization entering its twilight. [11]

Another feature, less laudatory in the eyes of critics in his time and subsequent, was Euripides penchant for artificial contrivances or the deus ex machina, in order to resolve his complex storylines. The phrase describes an artificial or improbable, character, device, or event introduced suddenly in a work of fiction or drama to resolve a situation or untangle a plot (such as an angel suddenly appearing to solve problems). The term is a negative one, and it often implies a lack of skill on the part of the writer [3]. However, these throw backs to early period mechanisms are a sign of the writers inability to completely mimic reality. Movies such as “The Truman Show”, “Pleasantville”, are modern equivalents, sometimes dubbed ‘postmodern’ in their critique of society and the resolution of their plots. In the Truman Show the central character paddles to the end of the artificially created world and rips away the facade to reveal the deus ex machina literally. Games such as Metal Gear Solid III are a good example of this postmodern critique of the medium within the medium phenomenon. The game, while not very popular, forecasts the convergence of film and games as “films that you, the viewer, actually participate in” as well as making several wry commentaries on the time and place setting. It sold half as many as previous incarnations in the series and the reasons may be that structurally the narrative is flawed because of too much reliance on the deus ex machina (ghosts appear in an otherwise realistic narrative). Such a use of spectacle in place of proper character self realization through recognition results in a disjointed collection of experiences rather than a well thought and logical narrative. As such, the game players’ response to the Spectacle is still a predominant factor in acceptance.

Of interest for this period here are games like The Sims, or environments like Second Life where we are taking on the role of everyday man, interacting with everyday people. The attempt to imitate everything real through simulation brings us closer to the Late stage development. However, as Aristotle also complained about late stage Greek poetry, stagnant action is broken up by the deus ex machina to force action and move the story along. For example, in The Sims, lightning can kill your character. These random acts of the gods that spur action forward are often found in the Early period, but also in the Late period as a way to explain away plot holes or to move the action forward.

5. CONCLUSION

The evolution of the Greek Tragedy as a form of story telling has greatly influenced modern western story telling techniques in television, film, and as we have just discussed, games. The classic literary models influenced Shakespearean theatre, which in
turn influences modern literature, television and film. Our newly chosen medium will be governed by a similar evolution. This paper has focused on the developments of Greek Literature in the hope that a similar parallel path can be constructed for video game developers. As outlined, there are significant similarities in world view and aesthetic between the two realms. The Greeks blazed a trail through their chosen medium of Tragedy which the modern video game producer can utilize. The core similarities with our early stage Greek counterparts are:

1 **Spectacle** should not preclude Narrative. Graphic enhancements and visual effects being equal, Story, what the Greeks called Poetry, will become the differentiator.

2 **Satire** should not be construed as Tragic or Real. Exaggerated archetypes, rag-doll physics that make us laugh or hyper-sexualized content in order to elicit an audience response through shock are inhibiting the telling of a truly imitative story.

3 **Form and Content**, by necessity, demand more realistic narratives. In order to be truly imitative, video game producers seek higher realism in graphic presentation but are negligent in corresponding narratives. That gap between visual presentation and content will need to be closed for true integration of form and content.

It is important to note that this article is not stating that there is no market for early Greek style stories and spectacle. There will always be a market for these types of games just as there is always a market for blockbuster action films. However, there is an opportunity to grow with an evolving generation of gamers who appreciate complexity within the medium and this will necessitate a more sophisticated narrative. The experience of other mediums like movies, graphic novels, and Greek Theater prove this. It is an opportunity for game producers to expand into a market of sophisticated interactive storytelling.

Much of the development in the video game industry is centered on graphic presentation - more real; more immersive. Visually, we have achieved the Greek aesthetic. However, this preoccupation with graphic content has come at the expense of narrative. The realism in presentation has no corresponding realism in narrative content. The result is less real. The Greeks offer video game producers a path forward. They encountered the same questions; solved them in similar means. The solution lies in how well video game producers can adapt these lessons in Narrative to their chosen medium. We believe that games need to be built around good stories rather than trying to shoehorn a story into a good game concept. This is likely going to require a reconsideration of the design and development practices currently in use and a certain shift of mindset in order to open the possibilities of interactive literature that will appeal to the late stage gamer.

The real lesson to be learned is that study of the medium is as important as the execution of the story telling. Much in the same vein as Aristotle, the core study of video game development needs to offer an in-depth study of the story telling component. Currently, most video-game-based curricula is focused on technical merit and graphic presentation at the expense of story telling and narrative. Therefore we put forward that any curriculum around game development, either technical or artistic will be well served by a study component in the classics. Topics such as Greek and Roman history, literature, and art are often available in most comprehensive universities. In particular, our Classics department has a course titled: Greek and Roman Literary Genres with the following description. A study of the various genres of Greek and Latin literature, especially those which influenced later European writings: epic, drama, the ode, pastoral poetry and satire. Without change, this course (among others) could be rolled into any game-based curriculum to help future game designers better understand the literary horizons of this medium.

**APPENDIX A – The Chorus**

Strange for the modern reader perhaps is the presence of the chorus in Greek theater. It grew out of the Dionysian Baccus ritual and its presence within Poetry and Tragedy was gradually curtailed over time. A development which Aristotle, for one, notes with approval for the Chorus contradicted his criteria of imitation from life as the chief criteria for successful tragedy. "The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles.[1 – Part XVIII]. For Nietzsche, the Chorus represented the view of the people and the mores against which the protagonist conflicts [6]. The trace of the Greek Chorus manifests itself in our modern theater with the presence of the Common Man in Robert Bolt's "A Man For All Seasons". This enigmatic character is never engaged by the characters but frequently casts asides and aspersions on the incidents the audience is witnessing. In film, we could look at the Chorus as a soundtrack that plays behind the action of a video game or movie; sometimes offering commentary on the events that transpire within the lyrics themselves or simply as a way to establish the era/mood/Zeitgeist of the action as in Grand Theft Auto: Vice City which makes great use of 80s music and "Miami Vice" style to establish the context, morality and period of the game. Films such as “Stand By Me” and games such as Metal Gear Solid III engage in the Chorus style treatise that help to expand the viewers understanding of the characters.

**APPENDIX B – The Deus Ex Machina**

In literal translation, it means "god out of a machine" and refers to an improbable contrivance in a story. Our perceptions controlled by a higher power that is controlling the events (almost algorithmically) creating the illusion of reality.

In the case of the Iliad, the presence of the gods within the narrative whose actions shape events in an artificial manner like Apollo taking the form of Hector and luring Achilles away from the retreating Trojans. Or other gods plucking their favored soldiers away from certain death and placing them out of harms way. For Aristotle, and subsequent critics, this plot device was criticized as "artificial" because it was not a true imitation of observable actions. However, the game designers of today often act as the “gods” giving life when most needed and providing assets as necessary by design.

6. REFERENCES

University of Chicago Press. 1951


