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The Modern Role-Playing Game's Relationship to the Medieval Welsh Dark Souls and the Mabinogi: Ties to Medieval Literature in Videogames

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The “Cowardly” King Jeremiah as a Dark Spirit

Context to the Issue: The lore of *Dark Souls* is notorious for being very difficult to understand as its story is mainly told environmentally and through brief in-game item descriptions. However, further inspection of the lore, it is clear that Dark Souls is heavily inspired by medieval Welsh mythology.

- What can we learn about the relationship of the medieval to the modern through close analysis?
- Can a videogame accomplish feats of storytelling in the same way a text would be able to?

Connections between the Mabinogi and Dark Souls: Rhiannon and Priscilla; Flash and Jeremiah

- The First Branch of the Mabinogi states that Rhiannon, our abused main heroine of the story, was to be married against her will to Flash, an antagonist. This text also states that Rhiannon “[i]n her present form... while magically gifted, is not a goddess” (24-25)
 - Priscilla is a divine creature, who also does not have god status despite being a descendent of the gods. She fled to another world to escape the unwanted marriage of Jeremiah.
- Later in the story, Rhiannon was framed and punished even though she “did not commit the crime for which she [was] punished [for].” Rhiannon’s servants are the one who framed her.(Hemming 22-25)
 - The guardians of Priscilla have turned into her jailers and are in charge of seeing out her sentencing.
- Flash, a wealthy noble, was interested in marrying Rhiannon. He tricked her and was nearly able to marry her through deceit. Flash was then punished for his lies by being sealed in to a bag and beaten to near death. The only reason Flash did not die was because Rhiannon recommended he pay reparations instead of being murdered on the condition he would also not seek vengeance.



The Divine Dragon Priscilla

Dark Souls’ version has Jeremiah die, as shown by his corpse that is found behind Priscilla; Jeremiah later returns as a dark spirit to take vengeance. Jeremiah is still seen with the bloody bag partially sealed on his body.

The Modern Role-Playing Game’s Relationship to the Medieval Welsh

Dark Souls and the Mabinogi: Ties to Medieval Literature in Videogames

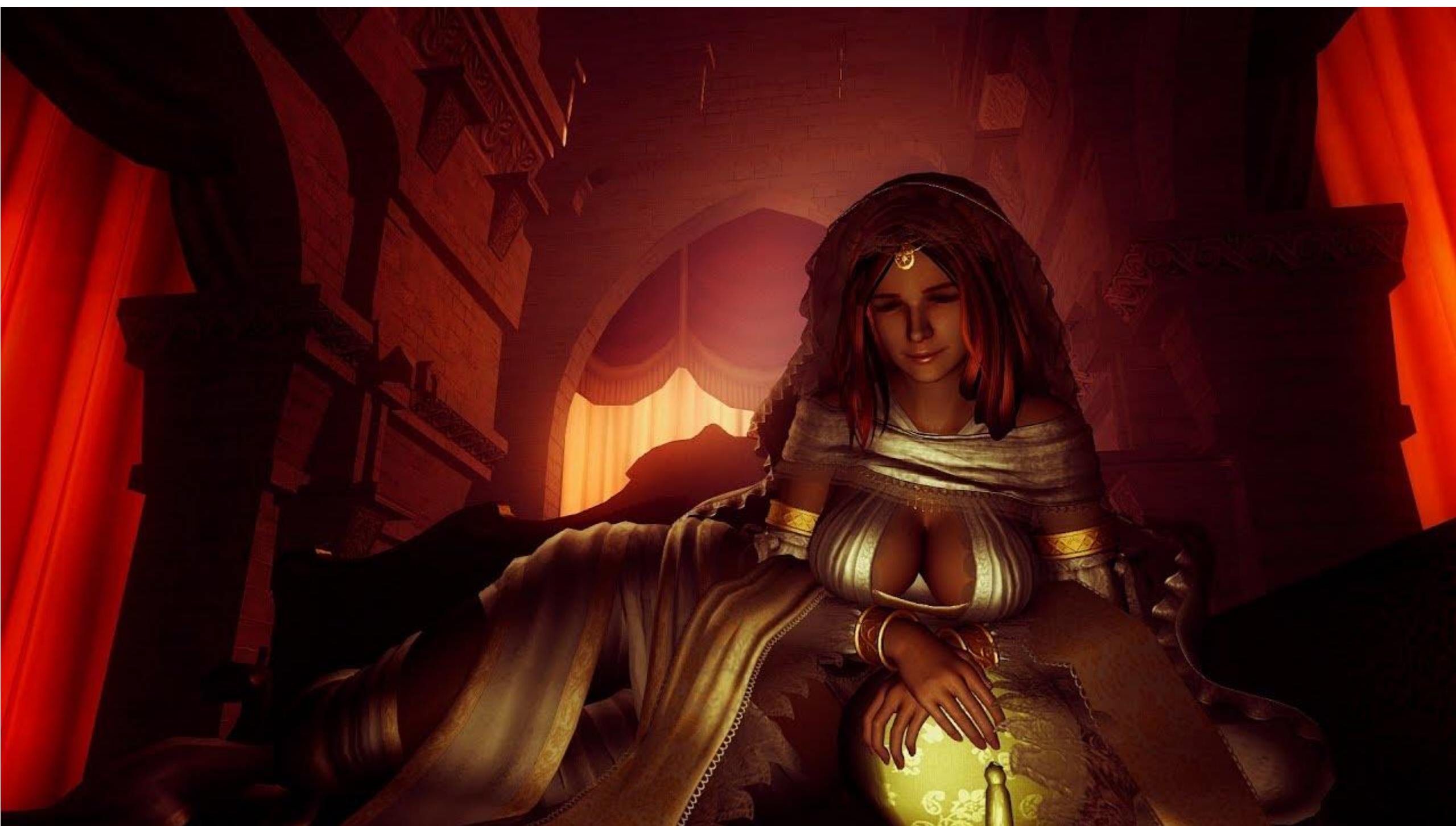
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Methodology

- close reading of primary text
- comparative research into *Dark Souls* lore vs. *The First Branch of the Mabinogi*
- Secondary research into character significance and backstory of both primary texts

Results



Gwynevere

Gwynevere and the Queen of the Otherworld

The physical description of the queen of the Otherworld in the Mabinogi says that she is “the most beautiful woman anyone ever saw ... wearing a golden outfit of luminous brocaded silk” (18)

- The visual inspiration is clear in this depiction of Gwynevere from Dark Souls. Gwynevere has the same color, fabric, and style inspiration of the character above.

The Mabinogi describes the queen of the Otherworld as a character who speaks and acts in a “most gracious” way.

- Of the few characters that converse with you in Dark Souls, Gwynevere speaks in an beautiful and elegant way; characters in Dark Souls usually speak and act in a grim, dark, and depressing tone.



Anor Londo, the city of Gods

Anor Londo and The Otherworld

The First Branch of the Mabinogi has Sage, our main hero, become the King of the Otherworld through illusion magic. He disguises himself as the true king of the Otherworld, Arawn.

- Gwyndolin, governs Anor Londo by creating magical projections of the people who rule over Anor Londo. He does this only as long as the rulers are absent, unfortunately we do see the rulers return. (Soul of Gwyndolin)

Our main character is the Lord of Hollows, he is a rival king to the rulers of Anor Londo. We fight Gwyndolin and his protectors not knowing of his illusion until we slay him. Through slaying Gwyndolin the kingdom falls to ruin.

- In the original story, Sage disguised as Arawn defeats a rival king in the Otherworld while disguised. Arawn only notices the deception once he is defeated by Arawn’s inhuman strength. Sage unites the Otherworld through the defeat of the rival king. (19)

Conclusions

- **Dark Souls writes its story in a way that mirrors the characters and relationship in Welsh mythology.**
- **Many storylines from The First Branch of the Mabinogi are transferred to Dark Souls with a twist ending that is often a contradiction of the events they are based off of.**
- **There are many slight references to medieval Welsh, these include features like character names.**

Jessica Hemming’s *Reflections on Rhiannon and the Horse Episodes in “Pwyll”* (1998)

Broadview Press’ “The First Branch.” *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, (2017)

Namco Bandai’s *Dark Souls* (2011)



Gwyn, the Lord of Sunlight