

JRFM 2023, 9/1 CALL FOR PAPERS

Paradise Lost

Presentations of Nostalgic Longing in Digital Games

“Ah, why should all mankind
For one man’s fault, be condemned,
If guiltless?”

John Milton: Paradise Lost

Paradise Lost is not only the title of John Milton’s famous epic poem (1667), but also a philosophical-theological notion linked to and emerging from the ‘Fall from Eden’ in Genesis. It expresses – or imagines – the human experience of a definite rupture in history, the inextinguishable urge to return to the period before the rupture and – unable to do so – thus constructs an idealized version of this past to long for. Throughout history, this longing has been expressed in artwork, architecture, literary works and is, perhaps, best observed in the Romantic era with its preference for the past, the future, and the contemporary exotic. Today, the notion of ‘Paradise Lost’ has far from disappeared but finds postmodern manifestations in the revival of (secular) nationalism and (religious) fundamentalism. In addition to literature and art, the 20th and 21st centuries have seen a new arena for narratives and iconographies of ‘Paradise Lost’ emerge: digital games.

When applied to the field of digital game studies, the notion of ‘Paradise Lost’ can be traced in three different ways:

- *Present.* In the past decade, the game industry has been witnessing a surge in retro-gaming as a kind of narratological, ludological, visual, and technological longing for the early age of gaming. For example, some modern games have (re-)introduced the concept of perma-death (*Wasteland 2*, *Hades*, *Xcom*, *Diablo* series) and retro-graphics has become a deliberate design approach in contemporary games (*Cuphead*, *Celeste*, *Undertale*). The

industry – and consumer – has also witnessed the emergence of various re-makes of old-school classics (1942, *Baldur's Gate*, *Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus* as *Oddworld: Soulstorm*). In other words: the *present* longing for the past, or the early (or golden) age of gaming, manifests itself in and through the game. Papers could explore this longing for a(n idealized) past in all its diversity, including the social, philosophical, theological, and psychological mechanisms associated with this, either because they occur in the game or because the game itself is part of such a romanticization of the past.

- *Past*. Some games explicitly and deliberately employ and reflect on the idea of a rupture in human history; that is, the loss of an earlier (potentially utopian) state one strongly longs for but is beyond reach (for example *Horizon Zero Dawn*). This lost period could be medieval times, paradise, 9/11, the pre-Corona time in light of prolonged lockdowns, and so forth. It also includes the romanticization of earlier periods and pre- and non-Christian traditions, societies, and a pre-Christian age. Papers could explore the presentation and interpretation of such a perceived rupture in human history, including its ramifications for contemporary philosophical and/or theological debates on ethically-sensitive issues, like race, gender, or religion.
- *Future*. Other games speculate about what will happen if we die; that is, they speculate if we can regain – and at the same time could be seen as the expression of hope to regain – the paradise once lost to us. Examples are the in-game portrayal of afterlife, either heaven, hell or something in between in games such as *Limbo*, *Dante's Inferno*, or *the Doom* series. But such speculations do not remain confined to in-game narratives. Instead, they spill over into lived religious practices and can become part of how religious practitioners imagine the afterlife. Papers could explore topics such as religious life/practice as playful life/practice, the afterlife as game, gaming in the afterlife, the practice of gaming as symbol for innocence that was lost.

We invite contributions that explore the theme of 'Paradise Lost' in the context of digital games from various cultural and religious backgrounds that take the debate beyond a western and Christian context.

We invite contributions from scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including – but not limited to – religious studies, theology, game studies and media studies, sociology, digital anthropology and cultural studies.

We also welcome contributions that employ a range of approaches to the study of digital games including both game-immanent (text-immanent author/reader) and actor-centered (real reader/author) approaches.

We also encourage the exploration of games from all platforms, including mobile ones.

The issue also includes an open section for articles on other topics linked to the profile of JRFM. The deadline for all submissions is 15 August 2022. Contributions of 6,000–8,000 words (including notes) should be submitted for double-blind peer review through the journal homepage www.jrfm.eu. We kindly ask authors to register and consider the instructions for submitting contributions, especially the stylesheet. Publication is scheduled for May 2023. For any questions about the issue or possible contributions, please contact the issue editors: Dr. Frank Bosman (F.G.Bosman@tilburguniversity.edu) and Dr. Alexander Darius Ornella (alexander@ornella.info).