

Majora's Mask (2000): eco-horror in The Legend of Zelda

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Abstract

This study analyzes the elements of eco-horror in the narrative of the video game *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, released by Nintendo in 2000 for the Nintendo 64 console. Diverging from the rest of the franchise with its traditional landscape of the Kingdom of Hyrule, *Majora's Mask* sets the protagonist Link in a parallel world called Termina, forcing him to delve into the dangers of this realm to avoid the fall of the Moon in the next three days, before he can finally find his way back to his home world. In light of the theories of ecocriticism as originally presented by Glotfelty (1996), as well as video game studies and scary games as studied by Thabet (2015) and Perron (2018) respectively, the discussion here focuses on the eco-horror of environmental disasters, which materializes in the otherworldly representation of Termina and in the hybrid bodies created by the use of shapeshifting masks.

Keywords

Eco-horror. Extinction. The uncanny. Supernatural. Haunting.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa os elementos de eco-horror na narrativa do videogame *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask*, lançado pela Nintendo em 2000 para o console Nintendo 64. Divergindo do resto da franquia e da paisagem tradicional do Reino de Hyrule, *Majora's Mask* coloca o protagonista Link em um mundo paralelo chamado Termina, forçando-o a mergulhar nos perigos desse reino para impedir a queda da Lua nos próximos três dias, antes que ele possa finalmente encontrar seu caminho de volta ao seu mundo nativo. À luz das teorias da ecocrítica originalmente apresentadas por Glotfelty (1996), assim como os estudos de videogame e de jogos de terror estudados por Thabet (2015) e Perron (2019), respectivamente, a discussão aqui foca o eco-horror dos desastres ambientais mostrados nesse outro mundo de Termina e nos corpos híbridos criados por meio do uso de máscaras de metamorfose.

Palavras-chave

Eco-horror. Extinção. O insólito. Sobrenatural. Assombração.

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Introduction

This text uses eco-horror as a frame to read the video game *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (NINTENDO, 2000), engaging with different elements (characters, scenario, themes) to discuss how some of its key features resonate with eco-dystopian discourses of extinction. *Majora's Mask* can be read primarily as an ecological disaster narrative given that its aim is to prevent the Moon from crashing into Earth. The discourse of imminent disaster is an integral part of eco-horror, as it prefigures biopolitical tropes materialized in primordial scenes of destruction which involve the end of the world. Moreover, there are several aspects that continually point to haunting elements in Nature, including Link's morphing into different species, whose process of body hybridization provokes terrifying suffering. The haunting, the uncanny, and the supernatural, which are central to the rhetoric of disaster, emerge here in the form of environmental decay, landscapes of fear, bodily violence and, ultimately, death.

The amalgamation of video game studies and ecocriticism is a somewhat new area of study, representative of the "ethical turn" brought about by cultural studies. The importance of these two subjects in this day and age is hard to contest: video games are an almost ubiquitous cultural item in this digital era and, as socio-cultural products, they also undertake debates about the future of the environment, clashing with neoliberal models of exploitation and depletion of natural resources. Regarding the different strands of ecological criticism dedicated to the discussion of environmental overexploitation, Cheryll Glotfelty affirms they all share

[...] the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman (1996, p. xix).

At first sight, the digital, industrial, and artificial dimension of video games seems to be at odds with the natural experience. Although seemingly antithetical, both worlds can be bridged when one considers the cultural dimensions of gaming beyond the limiting idea of "either/or". In other words, when the notion that you either go outside to experience nature or stay indoors playing in the virtual world of video games is surpassed, a broader understanding can be achieved regarding the socio-

cultural contribution of playing games. In this sense, Alenda Chang argues that rather than seeing video games as “[...] a barrier to understanding, we can see the particular realization of an environment—whether textual, visual, or procedural—as a filter that helpfully selects certain aspects for consideration while excluding others [...]” (2011, p. 78). Chang’s idea that video games provide “filters” for understanding or interpreting an “environment” is very suitable for the analysis of eco-horror texts in *Majora’s Mask*. Lawrence Buell affirms that ecocriticism “[...] is not politically monolithic, not hermetically confined to the sphere of the ‘natural,’ not necessarily ‘realist,’ and neither oblivious nor unsympathetic to the phenomenon of change” (2005, p. 41). Therefore, it is our argument here that video games are not strictly limited to virtual concerns unrelated to reality, having a vast range of subjects and interpretations available in each gameplay experience and narrative, offering different ways to think and rethink the world. Moreover,

Ecocritical play, should we attempt it, would recognize that to play is always in some way to inhabit, and in acknowledging the ecomimetic properties of games as environmental texts, we might begin to erode the oft-positd but little-experienced divisions between the real and the virtual, the ecological and the literary, the visual and the textual (CHANG, 2011, p. 78).

Thus, being able to explore a more or less mimetic virtual environment can potentially expand players’ worldview beyond virtuality, towards the real world, which, in turn, enables possible intersections between ecocritical thinking and video game studies. The concept of storytelling games come into play here, a gaming experience which, according to Tamer Thabet (2015, p. 21), “[...] gravitate[s] toward the category of performative narratives because of the player’s actions and their quasi-filmic nature”. Following this perspective, in order to understand the structure of a videogame narration, Thabet introduces the term “game composition device” (GCD), “[...] the overall agency that creates and manages the fictional world” (2015, p. 27), which functions as the narrator of the game world, simultaneously allowing players to act as co-narrators. In this sense, the players hold part of the agency in this fictional world by controlling the main actions of the protagonist of the game, as well as other aspects, to a limited degree, such as the camera and the decision making. Thus, the GCD

[...] creates the mimetic stratum, but it cannot be described simply as mimetic. It also functions as a diegetic device in various ways: it is able to stop events and run filmic scenes that show events in the past (thus performing a kind of diegetic summary); it is able to project narrative voiceovers or commentary in printed text, and in many instances, it can control the camera and the player's actions (THABET, 2015, p. 29).

As such, in a storytelling video game like *Majora's Mask*, the GCD has more general control over the narrative than the player, enacted particularly through cutscenes that must be narrated so the player can advance in the game. The player, then, "tells" the story by challenging the GCD narration of an imperiled protagonist by means of the player's own skills in solving puzzles, fighting and talking to other characters, hence acting as a co-narrator. This illustrates the particular game genre of *Majora's Mask*, which, like the franchise of *The Legend of Zelda* as whole, is considered a hybrid by Clara Fernández-Vara (2014, p. 303), sharing traits of both action-adventure games and roleplaying games.

Considering the aforementioned aspects, Bernard Perron (2018) theorizes the videoludic emotional elements of what he calls "scary video games", examining how every control, mechanic and structure of such games are as much "[...] designed to stir up a gamer's actions as to shape their experience" (2018, p. 91). More importantly, he stresses that the gameplay experience of fear induced by a scary video game is similar to the real emotion of fear, echoing this emotion on several levels.

Perron's view of spatial fear is of utmost importance for our discussion, in which "frightening game-worlds propose a topographical structure that is fractured and altered" (2018, p. 324), generating the anxiety of a maze-like world. In the videoludic experience of a scary game, the players are expected to explore the dark and horrible environments "for the simple reason that it is all too often the place where they will find an item necessary to get out of the house, or another way out" (PERRON, 2018, p. 325). In this sense, avoiding engagement with the sources of horror leads to a failure to move on to the next dark place. In video games fear lies in the players' hands and in their skills to explore and solve the puzzles, surviving the unexpected horrors that lurk in the area.

Another connection between scary video games and ecocritical theory is the concept of eco-horror, which, according to Stephen Rust and Carter Soles can be defined as "[...] analyses of texts in which humans do horrific things to the natural

world, or in which horrific texts and tropes are used to promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly” (2014, p. 509). Following this definition, we have been discussing here some key concepts from ecocriticism, game studies and scary games, elaborating a framework to the discussion of eco-horror narratives. Next, we will argue that the combination of videoludic features and ecocritical discourses create an eco-horror gameplay experience in *Majora’s Mask*, with several layers of meaning connecting the video game world and the real world.

Contextualizing *Majora’s Mask*

The Legend of Zelda: Majora’s Mask (NINTENDO, 2000) is part of *The Legend of Zelda* franchise, originally released for the Nintendo 64 console, with a portable, graphically improved remake for the Nintendo 3DS in 2015. The version analyzed here is the Nintendo 64 original, for the gameplay experience in a television console is different from the one in a handheld device in terms of immersion and playability.

Majora’s Mask has attracted a great deal of attention since its release, both from critics and players due to its unique mechanics and innovative storyline, which is considered one of the quirkiest and most original of the franchise. It differs in a number of ways from the other *Legend of Zelda* titles, particularly in regard to Link’s eerie bodily transformations through the use of masks.¹ Although it is a pioneering game, *Majora’s Mask* also emulates characters, artwork, and some game mechanics from its predecessor, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (NINTENDO, 1998), more particularly, the interface and the use of songs in-game.

Combining both expansions and overlaps in gameplay, the narrative of *Majora’s Mask* waives the usual quest of saving the princess and the kingdom of Hyrule – common to almost all *Legend of Zelda* games – replacing it with an apocalyptic event, which involves the Moon crashing into the alternate world of Termina. This new plot significantly affects the gameplay experience, as the whole

¹ Transformations would only appear again in *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (NINTENDO, 2006), in a much more limited form, as Link was only able to transform into a wolf. The masks continued to appear in later games of the franchise, but never again accompanied by a transformative mechanic.

narrative of *Majora's Mask* focuses on avoiding the falling of the Moon in 3 days². To succeed, players either have to rush through the main dungeons of the game (which are complex maze-like structures) or travel back in time.

Nintendo 64's 4 MB memory Expansion Pak brings significant improvement in relation to the graphics from previous titles, allowing for a more in-depth experience of the game environments, an aspect that expands upon an already strong feature of its predecessor; Rune Klever stresses that the new graphics

[...] demonstrated how in-engine cinematics could be used very effectively, not just conveying the plot but also as a way of rewarding the player with scenes of great atmosphere and spectacle, not least by introducing a host of beautiful and terrifying bosses, and depicting each one's majestic downfall when the player had beaten them (2014, p. 303).

Nonetheless, the graphics certainly look outdated for modern players, with its sharp angles and slightly blurred details, especially in the human characters' faces. *Majora's Mask* also has a darker color palette in comparison to the other titles, which suits its dystopian, nightmarish world and adds to the game's harrowing mood. Arguably, the graphic limitations and the dark hues may actually improve the gameplay experience in terms of angst and horror, for they create a gloomy and melancholic atmosphere which complements the grim tone of the narrative, immersing the players in the prefiguration of a calamity.

The 3-day cycle of the game, which is equivalent to 54 minutes of real time, presents a different take on the standard battery save method, as saving involves time traveling to the first day of the cycle by playing the Song of Time on Link's ocarina. However, that makes the player lose all the non-essential items accumulated in gameplay, like bombs, money, and arrows. Furthermore, the scarce presence of Owl Statues throughout the game world – special statues that allow for a one-time only save that disappears once the player turns on the game again – create a sense of urgency, as the clock is literally ticking towards an apocalyptic end of the world.

² The idea of the heavens falling down to earth is related to a very ancient fear, exemplified in *The Geography* of Strabo (ROLLER, 2014, p. 297): "Ptolemaios the son of Lagos says that on this expedition the Kelts around the Adria joined with Alexander for the sake of friendship and hospitality. The king received them in a kindly fashion and asked, while drinking, what they feared the most, thinking that they would say him. They answered that it was no one, except perhaps that the heavens would fall on them [...]".

The face on the Moon in the title screen also brings forth another element of eco-horror through the idea of the satellite being sentient, mischievous and with a will to destroy the people of Termina. As the days pass in-game and the ill-intentioned Moon draws closer and closer to the world of Termina, its face becomes more threatening (Figure 1), urging the player to act quickly or to time-travel to the past, resetting the clock all over again. The soundtrack intensifies such feelings, becoming more ominous with the passing of the days. The name Termina itself encompasses the idea of an impending doom, suggesting the idea of end-game and extinction, a world in a terminal state, which is represented not only by the crashing of the Moon but also by the many ecological disasters present in the narrative.

Figure 1 - The Moon



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

Moreover, the shapeshifting masks, the most glaring change in gameplay in relation to *Ocarina of Time*, introduces another element of horror which is connected to disaster and the ecological uncanny. The masks allow Link to morph into the other humanoid species of the game, transforming his body into the body of a Deku Scrub, a Goron and a Zora, each of them related to a specific environment or ecosystem. The Dekus are plant-like creatures living in a swamp, the Gorons are rock-like creatures living in the mountains, and the Zoras are fish-like creatures living on a rocky island in the middle of the sea. Each mask embodies the dead spirit of an

important or legendary member of that specimen: The Deku Butler's Son, Darmani III the Goron hero, and Mikau the Zora musician. It is possible to interpret these characters as both haunting and haunted figures, whose dead and disappeared bodies point to the ruination of Nature itself, the different ecosystems which their bodies once depended upon now the place in which they are embedded.

As Link puts on the masks, a process of embodiment takes place and the transformation has the protagonist screaming and suffering to mutate into a different creature (Figure 2): a portrayal that brings forth questions of body horror and the supernatural.

Figure 2 - Transformation



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

We have argued here that as an eco-horror narrative *Majora's Mask* relies on themes, aesthetics and discourses of haunting, supernatural and uncanny. On a broader level, this may resonate as a "haunting of the survivors", wherein players are dreaded by the fact of their potential failure, of their inability to act against ecological disaster as a ticking bomb. This too is a form of haunting that *Majora's Mask* potentially casts on reality, stemming from the diegesis into the exegesis. In other words, the tropes of environmental collapse and ruination can serve as an alert to act against such an end.

The haunting of nature and bodies

Link's morphing and shapeshifting into the characters Deku Link, Goron Link, and Zora Link arguably stresses ontological differences in other species, as players must learn new commands and understand the characters abilities and weaknesses. This biological awareness involves becoming sensitive about the vulnerability of each character-specimen, conveyed by the controls and game mechanics. Moreover, the painful body-merging process that results from putting on a mask, as well as the hybrid body that emerges afterwards, is also an assertion of the haunting and the uncanny. It is a "potential body", given that its characteristics manifest themselves according to their natural environment, or, in other words, these are bodies adapted to certain ecosystems in terms of resilience and sensitivity.

In the beginning of the game, Link is cursed by the Skull Kid – a playful trickster in *Ocarina of Time*, and now under the control of Majora's Mask (Figure 3) – transformed into a Deku Scrub, forcing the player to experience the first part of the game in a new body. This opening highlights the ontological aspects of embodying another specimen, creating a unique gameplay experience since, like any other Deku, Link cannot use a sword, shield or any other weapon in this form, relying solely on the Deku species' ability to blow bubbles, spin around and protect themselves with a husk made of a nut.

Figure 3 - The Skull Kid/Majora's Mask



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

Deku Link's movements are limited. Without the ability to roll or to swim, he has to hop over water a maximum of five times or use special flowers to glide over bigger areas. This particular circumstance requires that players put themselves in another character's situation, learning new ways to use the controls. From an ecocritical perspective, forcing players to experience new modes of playability can be interpreted as putting oneself in place of another sentient being.

Each of the three main masks that Link can wear has specific characteristics (Figure 4). While embodying a plant-like Deku, Link becomes vulnerable to fire, so much so that a single strike from a flame can knock him out, calling attention to the character's plant-like nature. Goron Link, on the other hand, is a creature related to rocks and minerals: he is tall and heavy, with powerful punches and pounds, and an ability to curl into a ball and roll at amazing speed, growing spikes the faster he goes. However, like Deku Link, Goron Link cannot use weapons, a shield, or swim: his weight makes him sink, resulting in an instant knockout. The controls and movement of this form emulate the heaviness of the character, slow and steady as a creature of the mountain. Finally, Zora Link can breathe underwater and his abilities encompass several characteristics of aquatic animals, such as the jumping and swimming skill of a dolphin and raising an electric barrier based on the discharge of electric eels. Zora Link can also use the fins on his arms as weapons, hurling those at enemies, like boomerangs. Still, this aquatic prowess, although advantageous in terms of gameplay, comes with a price: Zora Link is vulnerable to flames, being instantly knocked out by a fire attack.

Figure 4 - The masks



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

The strength and vulnerability of each character-specimen can be accessed in ontological, ecological, and environmental terms, given that their body characteristics manifest themselves in terms of biological sensitivity, resilience, and adaptability. In this sense, we argue here that the morphing into the dead spirit of a species calls attention to the haunting of Nature and bodies, highlighting impending risks of biodiversity loss and extinction. Ultimately, the excruciating pain of putting on the mask thematizes death in the face of environmental disaster.

It should also be stressed how the relation between humans and animals plays a role in eco-horror, where the ecosystem itself – plants, mountains, forests, seas, air, planet – becomes the villain. This subverts and re-inscribes the conceptual separation between human and animal. The fact that this division is not reinforced in *Majora's Mask* indicates that the construction of humans v. non-humans (as beings

existing in separate worlds) is always on the verge of collapsing, precisely because the differences perhaps are not so significant as some wish them to be.

Anthropomorphism is positively encoded in the videogame, underscoring the fusion between different species, making them more understandable, more resembling humans. It might be added to this observation that, despite efforts like this in the entertainment industry, and also the important work of activist groups, animal welfare organizations, and environmental legislation, there is no guarantee that political, economic, and cultural practices will improve or change. Nonetheless, cultural items such as *Majora's Mask* may facilitate a better understanding and appreciation of how ecological and environmental affairs affect our lives in the Anthropocene.³ Exploring scenarios where pollution, climate collapse, biological disaster, and other forms of anthropogenic damage can make us imagine the dangers of a post-human world.

Natural and supernatural dimensions

The element of horror is stressed in the beginning of the game, as the Skull Kid/Majora's Mask tells Link that, after stealing and riding Epona, Link's trustworthy horse from the previous game, he freed it because Epona could not understand or would not do what it was commanded to do. There is, in this sense, a pervasive idea in the game that the supernatural dimension is in opposition to the natural world: Epona has no difficulty understanding Link or other characters, it is only with Majora's Mask that the communication breakdown occurs. That is to say, Majora's Mask and its minions' unnaturalness are the causes for the distortion in natural phenomena observed throughout the game, including the appearance of the mischievous Moon and the collapse of the gravitational field.

An exemplary scene of this supernatural haunting is when Link is surrounded by angry Deku Scrubs and then gets swallowed by a giant version of them; after that, seeing himself turned into a Deku Scrub, he screams in shock and despair. This cutscene marks the weight of the curse put upon Link, who must literally carry the dying ecosystems of Termina in his body. The scene also foreshadows the future embodiments he will have to go through not only by means of the game as narrator, but also the players' co-narration. Considering that the gameplay involves shifting

³ Anthropocene: the 'new geological era, an era in which human beings act as a force determining the climate of the entire planet all at once' (CHAKRABARTY, 2012, p. 9).

between forms by the use of masks, one can argue that Link is haunted both by the creatures he embodies as he is by players' never-ending cycle of forcing transformations upon him.

Later on, Link discovers the frozen Goron Village and the ghost of Darmani III, a hero of the Gorons, who died trying to break the freezing curse of his kingdom and, consumed by regret, was doomed to haunt his own grave. The ghost asks Link to follow him into the secret graveyard of the Gorons, and the players must heal Darmani by playing the Song of Healing. He gives Link the Goron Mask – or, more specifically, becomes the mask. A similar situation occurs with Mikau, a Zoran guitarist and hero who Link encounters almost dying on a beach, gravely wounded after trying to rescue the eggs of the lead singer of his band, Lulu, from the Gerudo Pirates. Once again, Link has to soothe his soul using the Song of Healing and by promising to recover Lulu's eggs, who lost her voice because of this predicament; Mikau, like Darmani, then becomes the Zora Mask.

More to the point, the contrast between the natural with the supernatural echoes of the past, represented by Darmani and Mikau, thematizes regret and the disappearance of particular ecosystems (Darmani's struggle against a glacial curse and Mikau's death on the beach). From this perspective, both deaths are related to ecological interferences that lead to disasters – as well as the idea of unfinished business, common to ghost stories. The latter is a consequence of the former, as natural downfall ensues supernatural lingering, be it literally, as is Darmani's case, or symbolically, as is Mikau's transformation into the Zora's Mask to continue his failed mission in life.

The idea of metamorphosis is a constant in the game. Not only does Link physically morph into other species, but he also embodies the souls of the members of the species he transforms into. The supernatural element is reinforced when Link learns and utilizes a song that allows him to create up to four, static copies of himself, one for each form he assumes in the game, including his own original body. As Figure 5 shows, the copies represent the souls of the Deku Butler's Son, Darmani, and Mikau, according to each mask Link is wearing when he plays the song, and not Link's own forms when wearing the masks, as it would be expected. The demonstration comes from the title of the song, *Elegy of Emptiness*,⁴ which explains

⁴ An elegy is a poem or song lamenting the dead.

the appearance of the original people who became the masks, with their dead-like expressions and eyes, empty shells of their living selves. In fact, the game underscores this interpretation at the moment Link learns the song: “I grant to you a soldier who has no heart. One who will not falter in the darkness. This soldier who has no heart is your twin image. A shell of yourself that you will shed when your song commands it.” (NINTENDO, 2000).

Figure 5 - Elegy of Emptiness' Statues



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

However, the reason for creating a copy of regular Link with this song is left completely to the players' conjectures: although similar to the main character's human form, his copy bears an unnerving grimace, with eyes that eerily misrepresent Link's own eyes. From this point of view, Link could be considered a “dead” character himself, in the sense that he is not a part of the world of Termina; this is perhaps hinted by the fact that Link has no Terminan counterpart, as many Hyrulians have. Moreover, the eeriness of his copy may be a representation of Link's dislocated and unnatural presence in this world, which could mean that Link is a supernatural figure in Termina's ecosystem.

The prefiguration of disaster

The four areas of the game (the Southern Swamp/Woodfall Temple, the Goron Village/Snowhead Temple, the Great Bay region, and the Ikana Canyon region), which are connected by the main dungeons, present an environmental

disruption caused by the direct influence of Majora's Mask on Nature. When Link arrives to the Southern Swamp, the water has been poisoned,⁵ making it a dangerous environment not only for Deku Link (who cannot swim) but also for regular Link, who takes damage if he enters the waters of the swamp. When arriving in the Deku Palace located in the swamp, Link finds out that the Deku Princess and her monkey friend went to Woodfall Temple (Figure 6) to try and figure out why the waters have been poisoned, only for the Princess to be captured and the monkey jailed by the Dekus as a criminal. Only after defeating Odowa, the boss of Woodfall Temple, can the water go back to its former state, changing color from a purple to a light-blue hue.

Figure 6 - Woodfall Temple



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

⁵ It is worth mentioning here an illuminating reading about ecosystem poisoning which is *Bhopal's Ecological Gothic* (2017), by Pramod K. Nayar, about a leakage from Union Carbide, an American pesticide manufacturer, in the city of Bhopal, India. In one of the world's worst industrial disasters, the aftermath of Union Carbide's criminal actions left an aftermath of 30,000 deaths and 500,000 injured, including inherited health conditions, genetic mutation-linked illnesses, and delayed onset of diseases.

In Goron Village (Figure 7), the situation is of a climate calamity,⁶ as the Gorons species are more connected to hot and volcanic climates, the never-ending winter takes its toll on the population, with many frozen on the spot or in forced hibernation because of the excessive cold. Only by defeating the boss of Snowhead Temple, Goht, can the source of this winter disappear, changing the season to spring and saving the Gorons and their village.

Figure 7 - Goron Village



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

A similar idea of ecological struggle happens in Zora Link's storyline, but in this case the situation is twofold: the boss of Great Bay Temple, Gyorg, is responsible for the pollution and the dangers of the waters of Great Bay Coast (Figure 8), and the Gerudo Pirates are responsible for stealing Lulu's eggs in order to get a treasure in the Temple, disrupting the life of the Zoras. The situations are connected, as Zora Link has to recover the eggs so Lulu can regain her voice, allowing her to show Link the path to the Great Bay Temple; again, defeating the boss Gyorg clears the waters of the region.

⁶ The situation can be linked here to climate fiction genres (a.k.a. cli-fi) which are narratives that deal with environmental catastrophes, usually assuming a dystopian outlook, to alert about natural or human-induced climate issues.

Figure 8 - Great Bay Coast



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

Finally, the Ikana Canyon region of the game is an example of a completely ecological catastrophe leading to the imagination of a wasteland: a dry and rough landscape, where the only inhabitants are the crows waiting for those who enter to attack, and the undead themselves, the Gibdo “species,” mummified corpses walking around the landscape. Once more, the cause for the apparition of the undead is a disruption of a natural element, in this case, a disruption caused by the father of a little girl called Pamela, who studies the Gibdo and other supernatural phenomena and lives together with his daughter in the Music Box House (Figure 9), in the middle of Ikana Canyon. He goes to a nearby well to continue his research and gets cursed by a ghost, which causes the river to dry and transforms him into a half-human half-Gibdo creature (Figure 10). Without the energy from the river, the giant phonograph on top of the house stops playing the song that kept the Gibdos away, and now they surround the house thinking Pamela’s father is one of them.

Figure 9 - Music Box House



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

Figure 10 - Pamela's father as a Half-Gibdo



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

The only way for Link to solve this situation is by learning the Song of Storms, and playing it inside the Spring Water Cave (Figure 11), which has been corrupted and contains a deadly purple mist and no flowing water. After playing the song, the spirit is banished and the water is restored, causing the river to flow again, which, in turn, activates the phonograph on top of the Music Box House, banishing the Gibdos. In this sense, by using a song that activates an environmental effect, i.e. of rain, the

balance of nature in the canyon is restored, with the natural elements cleansing the supernatural.

Figure 11 - Spring Water Cave



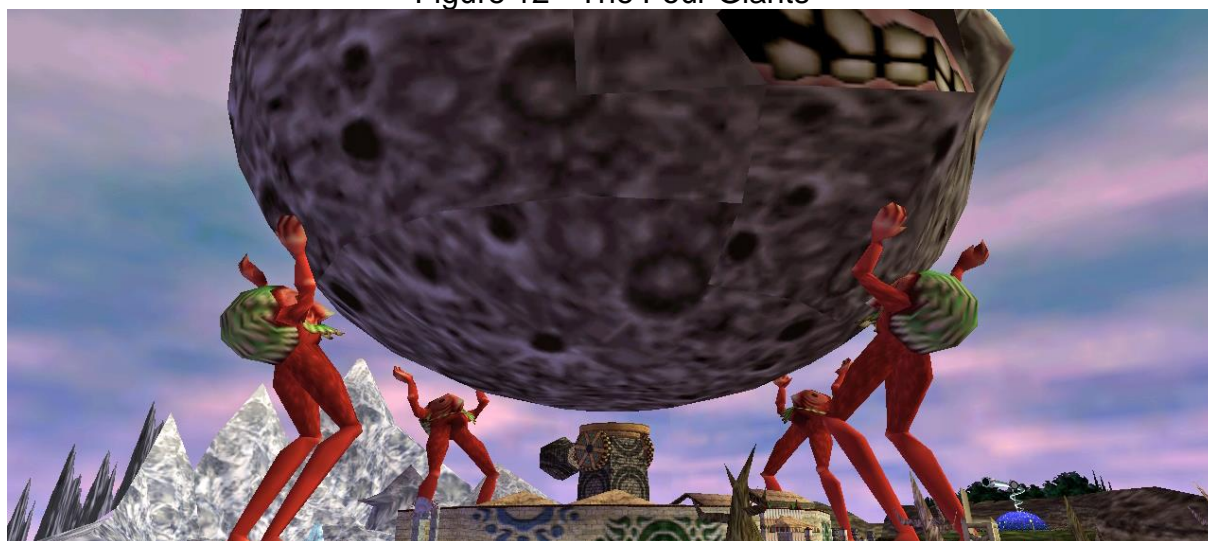
Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

This part of the game highlights a pervasive element in the narrative of *Majora's Mask*, which is the fear of a dead, absent Nature. In this case, more specifically, Nature's corpse coming back to haunt the previously living landscape in the form of the Gibdos and the region of Ikana itself: the unnaturalness of a devastated Nature taken to the point of no return. After this, the only way Nature can reappear is as an undead version of itself, terrible in its ability to swallow and absorb everything that is still alive, represented by Pamela's father and his half-conversion into a Gibdo, as well as the way the Gibdos can latch onto Link and start sucking his life force if he gets too close to them. This understanding is reinforced by the fact that cleansing the well (or even killing the boss of the region) only restores the flow of the river, but does nothing to resuscitate the rest of Ikana's ghostly and haunting landscape.

In this sense, there appears to be a frequent opposition of the natural and the supernatural in the game, with Majora's Mask representing the ultimate supernatural

presence in Termina: a seemingly inanimate object, similar to a demon in its need to possess the Skull Kid to fulfill its goal. Therefore, it is fitting that the mask's enemies are the four godlike Giants (Figure 12), the Guardians of Termina, each connected to one of the aforementioned regions and adored by Terminans to bring fruitful harvests; so much so that Majora's Mask first action when arriving in Termina is to seal the giants, thus creating natural disasters in each region. However, defeating the temples and freeing the Giants and even the Skull Kid from the power of the Majora's Mask does not solve the situation, as the Giants struggle to stop the Moon from crashing into Termina once the mask abandons its host and goes inside the Moon, corrupting it even further.

Figure 12 - The Four Giants



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

When the players go to the Moon after Majora's Mask, a different scenario of eco-horror begins in the game, as despite the rocky appearance of the Moon, its surface is covered by a grassy field with a single big tree at its center. The game visuals change slightly, with an atmosphere that recreates a dreamlike landscape. Furthermore, running around the field are four children, all white in color – showing their supernatural otherness – and donning the masks of the four bosses that Link has defeated throughout the game, as well as a fifth child sitting, lonely, under the tree, wearing the Majora's Mask. The four lunar children who are running around offer a game of hide and seek in the form of mini-dungeons (modeled after the regions of Termina), that Link can explore in order to obtain the final and most powerful mask, the Fierce Deity's Mask. Although the lunar children's origin is left

unexplained in the game, a later answer given by the developers of *Majora's Mask* (using the alias of the Happy Mask Salesman, a character in the game) in the Miiverse forum may help shedding some light to this mystery:

I'm not too sure, but judging by the fact that they live on the moon, surely they cannot be normal children...? I have not met them in person, but I am pretty certain they must be some figment created by Majora's Mask. Perhaps they look like children because Link is himself but a child? (MIIVERSE, 2015)

These children (Figure 13) highlight the unnaturalness of the *a priori* natural environment, an uncanny copy mimicking the landscapes of Termina and even Link himself. The children can be seen, in this sense, as the embodiment of the four dead bosses, themselves figments of Majora's Mask's power, in a supernatural mockery of Link's ability to embody dead heroes by wearing their masks.

Figure 13 - Lunar Children



Source: *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (2000).

However, all of those accomplishments mean very little in terms of satisfaction for the players, for once they choose to go back in time using the Song of Time in order to save their progress, all the changes disappear: the water of the Southern Swamp goes back to being poisonous, Goron Village is again frozen in an eternal winter, Great Bay crawls once more with dangers, and so does the Ikana region; only Link remembers what has passed, with his fixed items and the bosses' masks as proof of the player's advancement in the game. Like the fight for environment itself

and climate change, *Majora's Mask* is a game about an uphill battle, where every small step towards change is focused on the future accumulation of improvements which, hopefully, will culminate in measurable results.

Conclusion

Cultural texts about ecopolitics are becoming increasingly popular in recent years, coinciding with the events and consequences of the environment decline on Earth. Apocalyptic narratives emerge more and more in different types of media, thematizing landscapes of fear, ecological ruination, extinction, and other forms of haunting that sets the tone for discourses of disaster. In *Majora's Mask* this thanatopolitics manifests itself as a continuous nightmare of racing against time, impending apocalypse and the recognition of hybridization between human and non-human elements, implying that any form of division between natural beings is mere illusion. By giving voice to urgency, hauntings, the relation between human and animal, disaster, and extinction, the video game reverberates (in the exegesis) the recognition of eco-horror, promoting awareness about ethics and the continuation of life in the Anthropocene.

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