

“This Is Hardly the Happy Ending I Was Expecting”: *NIER*’s Rejection of the Heteronormative  
in Fairy Tales

Video games are popularly viewed as a form of escapist entertainment with no real meaning or message. They are often considered as unnecessarily violent forms of recreation that possibly incite aggressive tendencies in their players. Overall, they are generally condemned as having no value. However, these beliefs are fallacious, as there is enormous potential in video games as not just learning tools but also as a source of literary criticism. Games have the capacity to generate criticisms that challenge established narratives through content and form. Thus, video games should be viewed as a new medium that demands serious analysis. Furthermore, the analysis generated by video games can benefit from being read through existing literary forms of critique. For example, the game *NIER* (2010, Cavia) can be read through a critical lens to evaluate its use of the fairy tale genre. More specifically, *NIER* can be analyzed using queer theory for the game’s reimagining and queering of the fairy tale genre.

Queer theory, which grew prominent in the 1990s, is a critical theory that proposes a new way to approach identity and normativity. It distinguishes gender from biological sex, deconstructs the notion of gender as a male-female binary, and addresses the importance of performance in gender identification. That is, historically and culturally assigned mannerisms establish gender identity, and in order to present oneself with a certain gender one must align their actions with the expected mannerisms of that history and culture. Queer theory resists the normative regime that is white, male, cisgender, and heterosexual. These are the labels of society that are often considered “unmarked.” Queer theory also goes beyond discussing gender

and sexuality; it can refer to any sort of lifestyle that goes against what is expected. For instance, referring back to video games, losing on purpose can be considered queer. The standard is to win, so in purposefully losing, the player opposes the set expectations of video games.

Essentially, queer theory provides a means to question and destabilize the “norm.”

When analyzed through a queer lens, *NIER* can be seen to contain thoughtful critiques of binaries and norms in its gameplay, characterization, and especially its narrative. The game pays attention to certain binaries and seeks to deconstruct them. It also questions the normative “happy end” of fairy tales. In this way, we can see how *NIER* begins a critique of fairy tales through queer theory. However, while it inaugurates a critique, *NIER* itself fails to truly queer the structure of white supremacy, heteronormativity, and the patriarchy that serves as the foundation for dominant literature and fairy tales. In this way, *NIER* ultimately leaves it to the player to complete the task of critiquing fairy tales.

To show what *NIER* can teach us about the reimagining of fairy tales, it is important to establish the fairy tale genre, the assumptions associated with it, and the ways in which these tropes have been overturned. In this thesis, I first define and explain the fairy tale genre will be defined and explained. Important aspects such as binaries, gender roles, and expectations for certain types of characters will be outlined to understand their function in the canon. Next, I examine the renarrativizations of these tales to show how the practice of reimagining can either uphold or destabilize these binaries and expectations. I build on scholars and authors who have challenged the assumptions of fairy tales to situate *NIER* as part of the ongoing criticism and reimagination of these familiarized tales. Through using *NIER* to create a literary analysis, I argue that the critical reader can engage with it to understand how *NIER*—and video games in

general—can have the potential to make social critiques and generate critical ways of thinking about race, gender, and sexuality in one's approach to taken-for-granted narratives such as fairy tales.

### Queering Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Fairy Tale Canon

Investigating the structure of fairy tales is key to understanding the binaries and norms of fairy tales. Fairy tales typically employ a young female protagonist who enters into some form of predicament caused by an antagonist for various reasons. The male protagonist, often a prince-like figure, enters to save her from her problem. Fairy tales almost always end happily ever after with the antagonists defeated and the main male and female characters typically in a romantic relationship. The antagonists are decidedly evil while the protagonists are always good. Fairy tales often create binaries through aspects such as heterosexuality, gender, ageism, and morality; the fairy tale canon relies on these binaries to create its strict formula. The “male” and “female” roles are constructed as opposites that are meant to play opposite roles in the stories. Male characters take an active role in the stories, serving as the fighter or protector, while the female characters tend to be passive “damsels in distress” that are restricted to the household. These roles are almost never exchanged: males are rarely domestic while females do not usually fight. Female characters are often further separated into “old” and “young.” This particular binary cannot exist together peacefully usually due to jealousy, typically from the older female towards the younger female, generally centered on beauty. The younger female is usually desirable and innocent while the older woman is wicked and is often associated with evil sorcery. Many fairy tale plots are driven by the older woman's jealousy and her attempts to sabotage the younger woman. Perhaps the most important aspect of these gender roles is that they are

enduring: these expectations are established because they are continuously performed in different fairy tales. The fairy tales that appear in *NIER* tend to follow tropes from this canon.

The fairy tales that *NIER* uses are “The Little Mermaid,” *Pinocchio*, *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, “Snow White,” “Hansel and Gretel,” and *One Thousand and One Nights*, specifically the frame story and “The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor.” All of these tales rely on binaries, heteronormativity, and white supremacy. *Pinocchio* and *Peter Pan* explicitly rely on normative performances for males and females. *Pinocchio* and *Peter* play the roles of boisterous, adventurous, and misbehaving boys while the Fairy and Wendy become domestic, motherly figures to them. “Snow White” and *Sleeping Beauty* rely on the “wicked older woman” image and female jealousy; “Snow White” in particular focuses on female jealousy of beauty. While “Hansel and Gretel” ends with female leadership and does not include female jealousy, the invocation of the “wicked older woman” image appears twice within the text, thus upholding the norm of innocent young female versus evil older woman. The mermaid of “The Little Mermaid” changes her identity several times, performing the “mermaid,” “human,” and “daughter of air” identities; however, each iteration additionally requires her to perform the “female” identity as well, which does not change. Like the female protagonists of the other tales, she must serve others: first the prince, then all of humanity. *Alice in Wonderland* explicitly questions the notion of a fixed identity, but only in a heteronormative context. Alice questions who she is, but her possibilities are limited to the gender binary: she only considers other women as a potential new identity. *Peter Pan* and *One Thousand and One Nights* both contain depictions of racist imagery. *Peter Pan* explicitly disparages Native peoples through using derogatory terms to refer to them, depicting them as “savages” and calling Peter “the Great

White Father.” *One Thousand and One Nights* is more subtle, but associates Blackness with slavery and savagery in both the frame story and “The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor.” Since white editors have contributed to the text, *One Thousand and One Nights* could be argued to uphold white supremacy, as it derogates Black people through its racist depictions. In this way fairy tales depend on sexism, heteronormativity, and racism in their narratives.

Modern and popular depictions of these stories such as Disney films and other types of retellings often uphold or create problems through the use of the gender binary and expected gender performance. Disney clearly creates roles for its characters that must be followed. For example, the secondary male characters are meant to be comic relief, such as the dwarfs from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The young male protagonists are adventurous and impish while the older male characters are depicted as mature and chivalrous. In contrast, the female protagonists are written to always be beautiful and pure; Snow White, for instance, even from her very name exemplifies these expectations through her performance of delicacy associated with femininity. They must also be domestic, regardless of age, a trait that Wendy performs in *Peter Pan*. Female antagonists are older and often target the younger female protagonist. Each character has a specific role to play, generally dependent on their gender and age; these factors determine their performance.

Popular retellings of fairy tales in dominant cultural forms such as Disney films further establish heterosexuality as the norm, which is a point already promoted in the fairy tale canon. In fact, because these reimaginings have been changed to appear more “kid-friendly,” they expunge any topics that might be counter to what is considered “normal.” This censorship insidiously leads to censorship of topics such as nonheteronormativity and preservation of ideas

such as misogyny. For example, Disney's depiction of *Alice in Wonderland* clearly expresses Disney's distaste for the nonheteronormative. While Alice more or less accepts her situation in the original tale, Alice complains throughout the film about the "queerness" of her nonheteronormative situation. Disney thus sends a message about societal norms, encouraging its viewers to conform to heteronormativity.

Furthermore, the imagery that Disney films and other popular retellings buttress the racial logic white supremacy. That is, Disney assigns certain color schemes to its heroes and villains to create a racial hierarchy. Through perpetuating the assignment of colors to certain moral alignments, Disney implements the racist notion that whiteness equals goodness in their fairy tale retellings. For instance, Disney upholds and even worsens the racist imagery found in the original *Peter Pan* in its depiction of Native characters. In DreamWorks's animated retelling of "The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor,"<sup>1</sup> the film changes the setting from Baghdad to a more European environment with European characters. The erasure of Baghdad blatantly ignores the history and culture of the original text in favor of a setting that would theoretically appeal more to white audiences. Retellings thus have the capacity to amplify the issues of the original texts; these films are proof of such.

In contrast to dominant renarrativizations such as Disney films, some contemporary retellings of fairy tales attempt to overturn some of the stereotypes from the original tales. Many of these retellings subvert aspects of race, gender, or sexuality in the characters, or queer the narrative to critique the fairy tale canon. For example, author Emma Donoghue provides a critical rethinking of gender roles and stereotypes such as the "wicked older woman" image in

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<sup>1</sup> *Sinbad: Legend of the Seven Seas*.

her retellings of “The Little Mermaid,” “Hansel and Gretel,” and “Snow White,” often reversing them to make the older female characters sympathetic or initially misunderstood.<sup>2</sup> Jane Yolen’s writings comment directly on the gender binary in *Peter Pan*, identifying the different performances expected of male and female characters and how J. M. Barrie, the original author, refuses the possibility of gender exchangeability.<sup>3</sup> The 1941 performance of “Cindy Ella,” a blackface rendition of “Cinderella” performed by Japanese American women while they were forcibly displaced in the Santa Anita Assembly Center during WWII, contains a commentary of race relations in the United States and abroad and troubles the black-white binary way of thinking about race, albeit through the racist form of minstrelsy.<sup>4</sup> These retellings present many different ways to view and destabilize the original stories. In some ways they create more compelling arguments than *NIER* while *NIER*’s criticism also makes visible new angles that are absent in these retellings.

Critics have also commented on the fairy tale canon, highlighting the binaries and stereotypes upon which the canon relies. As the belief in gender binary is a crucial aspect of fairy tales, critics note its function and the arguments it makes about gender roles in real life. For example, critics note the emphasis on female domesticity. In *Peter Pan*, Wendy continuously tries to let Peter take the lead in their relationship, displaying courting techniques expected of a

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<sup>2</sup> “The Tale of the Voice,” “The Tale of the Cottage,” and “The Tale of the Apple.” *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*.

<sup>3</sup> “Lost Girls.”

<sup>4</sup> Emily Roxworthy. “Blackface Behind Barbed Wire: Gender and Racial Triangulation in the Japanese American Internment Camps.”

female of her class.<sup>5</sup> Critics note the deference to men that women display in these fairy tales, suggesting that men are the dominant force of the male-female binary in a normative society. According to Joanne Campbell Tidwell, *Peter Pan*—though this pertains to other tales, as most female protagonists take on a domestic role—argues that “the ultimate adventure for a girl child is being a pretend mother to seven little boys, rather than fighting with pirates or hunting for bears” (62).<sup>6</sup> The need for female characters to perform the domestic, motherly role not only provides for the male characters, it also provides an image for readers to follow. Fairy tales perpetuate the expected performances for the normative gender binary in society.

Heteronormativity is another important component of fairy tales that critics explore; the normalized performances of gender and sexuality in the fairy tale canon uphold the expectation for society. However, this overarching assumption creates issues by presuming heterosexuality as the “norm” and ignoring or denying nonheteronormative communities, which by default casts them as “deviant.” Critics have looked at how authors who have reimagined fairy tales destabilize heteronormativity and fairy tale stereotypes as a genre in nonheteronormative retellings.<sup>7</sup> For instance, “The Tale of the Shoe”<sup>8</sup> rejects the binaries of the original tale in favor of more nuanced roles. These criticisms identify the problems within the original tales and present an example for how to compare these texts.

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<sup>5</sup> Ann Wilson. “Hauntings: Anxiety, Technology, and Gender in *Peter Pan*.”

<sup>6</sup> “Found Girls: J. M. Barrie’s *Peter & Wendy* and Jane Yolen’s ‘Lost Girls.’”

<sup>7</sup> Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère. “Queering the Fairy Tale Canon: Emma Donoghue’s *Kissing the Witch*.”

<sup>8</sup> Emma Donoghue. *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*.

Race—more specifically, whiteness—is an essential aspect of European tales; they are written for a white audience. The original tales and even retellings often fail to include diversity or offer harmful stereotypes of nonwhite characters. For instance, Marilyn Shearer’s retelling of “Snow White” includes Black imagery, but fails to incorporate Black culture. She begins to wade “into the waters of assimilative practice,” which defines one culture as “better” than another (191).<sup>9</sup> This enters into the notion of hierarchical binaries that appear in fairy tales. In a criticism of Shearer, Tyler Scott Smith sees the undertones of whiteness in Shearer’s iteration of the “Snow White” story, which highlights the issues of the lack of understanding of cultural diversity and upholds whiteness as the “unmarked” race. Other critics have also noted the importance of paying attention to cultural diversity in retellings, as merely inserting racially diverse characters does not form an adequate criticism.

#### Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the Destabilization of Binaries in *NIER*

As books and films have transformed, retold, and critiqued fairy tales, so too do video games have these capabilities. *NIER* opens certain insights to the player through its content and form. Specifically, the game’s gameplay and narrative create a critique of the fairy tale genre. *NIER* revises the fairy tale genre through providing ways to think about gender and sexuality, but ultimately falls short with its discussion of race. It must be noted that the discussion below examines the localized version of *NIER*. References to the Japanese version, entitled *NieR: RepliCant* (shortened to *RepliCant*) will be made to note translation issues, as the localization contains conflicting characterizations that affect the game’s critique of heteronormativity. By reading *NIER* through a critical lens, I propose to complicate it, not to condemn it. The purpose

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<sup>9</sup> Tyler Scott Smith. “‘Snow White in Africa:’ Afrocentric Ideology in Marilyn Shearer’s Tale.”

of my analysis is to observe what the game does well and what it does not do so well rather than to attack it.

Before beginning the critique, I will provide necessary background on *NIER* so that I may clarify several aspects of the franchise. *NIER* does not provide the player with all of the background surrounding the game's events, so the supplemental text *Grimoire Nier* was published to provide that information. This book contains interviews with the director, concept art, short stories, and more to further develop the game's world. References to *Grimoire Nier* will be made in this thesis, especially the short stories, as they further develop the characters and help to clarify the game's universe. These short stories tend to depict characters often before, but sometimes during or after, the events of the game. They provide insight into these characters' motivations and histories and even contribute to *NIER*'s fairy tale aesthetic. The interviews in the text will be essential in clarifying conflicting information between the game and the director's intent. *Grimoire Nier* offers more insight into *NIER*, which allows for a more thorough analysis.

Furthermore, in order to understand *NIER*'s unconventional story and narrative, the game's director must additionally be discussed. Unlike American games in which the director is less prominent, Japanese games rely heavily on directors for their content. Yoko Taro—I will use the Japanese naming convention when referring to Yoko Taro, which is to use the surname first, then the first name—is a Japanese video game director who is well-known for making games with unusual narratives and characters. Some of his other titles include *Drakengard* (2003, Cavia), *Drakengard 3* (2013, Access Games), and *NieR: Automata* (2017, PlatinumGames). One of the most prominent aspects of his works are his characters' sexualities, which tend to be

nonheteronormative. While these characters seem to stand out in his work, his goal in creating *NIER* was to reflect reality through including them. In fact, he says, “People like that exist. It’s just the way the world works” (Square Enix). His inclusion of Kainé and Emil are an attempt to reflect reality, as is his lack of world-building information in the game: “We didn’t explain everything because that’s just how reality is.” Since Yoko Taro’s stances are essential to the way he depicts the characters in his games, it is necessary to establish what his beliefs and his background are. It will be especially important to bear Yoko Taro’s background in mind when observing the function of whiteness in *NIER* later in this thesis.

The overt triumph of the fairy tale antagonist in *NIER*’s rendition of “Hansel and Gretel” critiques the role of the “wicked older woman” through a switch in gender and gender roles and further deconstructs the reality of the fairy tale’s happy ending. As in the original tale, Hansel is ripped from Gretel’s side and Gretel must fend for herself. However, it is shown very differently: Hansel is killed early on in the first part of the game. The male protagonist (henceforth referred to as “Nier,” though the player can choose his name) comes in the form of the witch that successfully destroys Hansel, overturning the normal story of the hero prevailing. While Nier seems to be the hero, he is in truth the villain. He and Weiss manage to swallow up Hansel in the form of blood, leaving Gretel to carry on alone. Nier later returns five years later to subject Gretel to her brother’s fate. The witch character has always been shown as a malicious, unsympathetic, and unsuccessful female villain in the original tale. While fairy tales generally depend on an older female character to be a force of evil, in *NIER* it is the male protagonist who is embodying the witch in this case. The player expects Nier to be a hero; he is fighting to save his daughter. However, he also occupies the role of the villain, but as a male.

*NIER* suggests that not only is good and evil subjective, but males can take on the role of villain in fairy tales as well. The game rejects the “wicked older woman” image in favor of the male antihero, subverting the expected gender roles of the fairy tale canon and questioning the achievement of a happy ending through destruction.

The game further destabilizes gender roles through directly critiquing binaries and the dangers of heteronormativity through the use of *Peter Pan*'s clear divides of gender roles and performance. The Aerie, the area based on *Peter Pan*, is a xenophobic, unsociable village that depends on binaries. They resent anything that is “different” and abuse it. For example, Kainé being intersex is outside the villagers' realm of “normal,” and the villagers ostracize her for it. The villagers represent the hegemonic society that supports heteronormativity and the binary. Kainé exists completely outside of this due to her sex and her later being Shade-possessed. Kainé's differences are important in this context as they set her apart from the rest of the Aerie villagers, but these differences will be explained in full when discussing gender roles and gender performativity in *NIER*. This exclusion is like *Peter Pan*, in which the identities of “adventurer” and “domesticity,” “good and “bad” do not interact. The boys are daring explorers; Wendy is a timid homemaker. The pirates are evil; the Lost Boys are good. *Peter Pan* depends on binaries that the Aerie reflects; it needs the characters to align with the performance assigned to specific genders in the gender binary. Since Kainé shifts between performances, she cannot exist in the Aerie's binary and is therefore cast out. At this point Kainé becomes a sympathetic character while the Aerie is depicted as ruthless. The Aerie acknowledges the requirement of binaries in fairy tales and exaggerates them to the point of cruelty, therefore creating the argument that heteronormativity is exclusive and dangerous.

*NIER* further critiques gender roles through its subversion of the “wicked older woman” trope in the town of Seafront, which resembles the setting of “The Little Mermaid.” *NIER* revises the familiar tale through a destabilization of stereotypes, particularly through the character Ursula, who is based on Disney’s Ursula in this remake. In the original tale, the nameless sea-witch functions as a vehicle for the mermaid to gain feet—she is neither good nor evil. In the Disney film, her role is transformed into a force of evil, representing the danger of female ambition. In *NIER*, known in the town as “the lighthouse lady,” Ursula initially appears cantankerous and verbally abusive, invoking the “wicked older woman” trope. However, soon the player learns that the entire town, led by Hans the postman, is oppressing her through perpetuating a fifty-year-old lie. Instead of the old woman using the naive protagonist to achieve her nefarious aims, as in Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, the seemingly kind townspeople are using the naive old woman to attain their goal of keeping the lighthouse lit, thus sacrificing Ursula’s need to search for her lover. *NIER* takes the opportunity the movie misses to subvert the “wicked older woman” trope and turns Ursula into a sympathetic character.

*NIER* directly opposes the expectations of female domesticity in fairy tales and acknowledges the possibility of a woman not fitting into a domestic role. This is most prominently seen in the Junk Heap, the area representing *Pinocchio*. The first half of the game introduces an interesting family dynamic absent in *Pinocchio*; there is an attempt for female independence that does not go unpunished. In the original tale, the Blue Fairy actively finds ways to install herself as Pinocchio’s mother. However, in *NIER*, rather than being stuck in the Junk Heap, the mother, Blue, abandons her children, Jakob (Jiminy in *RepliCant*) and Gideon, to run away with a man. Blue is vastly different from the fairy character in the original tale and

Disney counterparts. Unlike the gentle motherly figure, she is abusive and rarely cares for her children. She does not want to be where she is. Blue recognizes her aversion to domesticity, but takes it out on her children. She eventually finds a man and runs away with him. However, she is killed by a robot, Defense System Geppetto, in the mountain. The game punishes her for many things, such as child abuse and abandonment. It also seems to begin to punish her for her attempt at independence. Weiss, for example, is disgusted by her actions and insults Blue upon finding her body. However, later on, the player sees that Jakob is understanding. He recognizes Blue's frustration with domesticity and forgives her for it. The game understands that while Blue did inexcusable things, she had a need for independence from the household. It condemns her actions rather than her intentions. The game does not push for conventional and normative gender roles and criticizes maltreatment rather than a female need for independence.

*NIER* critiques the man versus nature conflict in “The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor” in *One Thousand and One Nights*, effectively destabilizing the idea of nature and the “big, bad wolf” image as insentient, vicious entities in fairy tales and further pushing the game's theme of miscommunication. The citizens of Facade have had a long-standing, violent feud with the wolves in the desert, beginning thousands of years ago when the desert used to be a forest. This retelling of Sinbad's stories, specifically the story of the clash between the humans and apes of the Mountain of Apes in his fifth voyage, adds the dimension of the futility and destructiveness of violence through misunderstanding through giving nature a consciousness. In Sinbad's fifth voyage, the apes and humans have a violent, senseless conflict as well. The apes overtake the humans' village every night, killing any human who is unable to escape to the boats. However, during the day the humans throw rocks at the apes, hoping to make a profit off the

coconuts the apes throw back. While both sides partake in violent actions, only the humans are depicted with any sympathy: the apes are characterized as feral beasts. In the first playthrough of *NIER*, the player sees only the humans' side; the game renders the wolves as partaking in senseless violence. The use of wolves is a strong allusion to fairy tales, as they are often the villains of the canon. For example, "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Three Little Pigs" all utilize the "big, bad wolf" antagonist. However, in the second playthrough and on, the wolves' side of the conflict is revealed; the humans are being equally unfair to the wolves. Thus, instances like Fyra's (Vier in *RepliCant*) death during her wedding, when the wolves retaliate to the Men of the Mask having killed several of their comrades the night before, are just acts that motivate and are motivated by violence against the wolves. This clash of man versus nature, reminiscent of the Studio Ghibli film *Princess Mononoke*, introduces the notion that neither side is completely justified in their actions. Furthermore, the Shade Roc depicts the relationship humans used to have with nature, which is intended to incite empathy in the player. Starting in the second playthrough, the player sees that Roc used to be a dog, which destabilizes the feral wolf image and further turns Roc into a sympathetic character. With his dying breath, Roc asks, "What have we done to deserve...such a fate?" (*NIER*). This appeal to emotions deconstructs the original insensate image of the wolves and casts the humans as inhumane, directly opposing the rendering of the man versus nature conflict of "The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor." Thus, through humanizing nature and brutalizing humans, *NIER* challenges the fairy tale notion of animal savagery and deconstructs the "big, bad wolf" image, casting the animals as sympathetic and utilizing the lost relationship between humans and canines to push the theme of miscommunication and the senselessness of violence.

*NIER's* use of *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* highlights the significance of language and communication, which emphasizes the issue of one-sided storytelling and the dangers of singular perspectives. The importance of language is first demonstrated in the Forest of Myth, the area alluding to *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, when Nier and Weiss are pulled into the mayor's dream. Hearing the words "those who dream" cause them to catch Deathdream, an illness running rampant throughout the village that causes the victim to live in their dreams forever. Deathdream is characterized through a text adventure, and words are how Nier and Weiss escape and rescue the villagers. Throughout the level, the narration and actions of the characters do not seem to match. That is, the text will say one thing while Nier or Weiss will protest they are doing another thing. While generally humorous, this clash of actions serves a significant purpose. The breaking of the fourth wall indicates that the narrator is not listening or paying attention to Nier and Weiss, thus emphasizing the issue of miscommunication that pervades throughout the game. This sequence hints to the player that words and language are important in the game, especially in the context of the inability to translate between different groups. The Shades make noises that sound like some form of language, but their words are not translated for the player until the second playthrough and on. However, in this case, Nier and the protagonists (save Kainé, who can understand them) are the ones drawing often incorrect conclusions about Shades through this lack of communication. Though Kainé knows what the Shades are saying due to her Shade-possessed state, she chooses to follow Nier's revised script. While fairy tales show only the one side of the story through the protagonist, this makes the assumption that there is only one "correct" way to tell the story. The use of the text adventure and the breaking of the fourth wall in the Forest of Myth foreshadows the miscommunication between the Shades and

Replicants that is essential to the plot of the story, effectively destabilizing the notion of a singular “correct” version of stories that is found in the fairy tale canon.

The game continues to overturn female stereotypes in fairy tales through destabilizing the concept of female jealousy. The story of “Snow White” is told through the character Emil in *NIER*, turning a meek young boy into a weapon of mass destruction; this creates an interesting change from the original story through combining the roles of Snow White and the queen. Emil will be discussed in further detail when I observe the destabilization of gender performativity and gender identity in *NIER*; here, it is important to focus on how his characterization subverts the use of female jealousy in “Snow White.” In other retellings, the roles of Snow White and the queen are often kept separate. Neil Gaiman’s “Snow, Glass, Apples” perpetuates the rivalry between the two characters while Emma Donoghue’s “The Tale of the Apple” reconciles their relationship. However, *NIER* is innovative in its combination of these two roles in Emil. Emil has a strange and almost unstoppable power that turns whatever he looks at into stone. Later, he gains his sister’s abilities as the ultimate weapon at the cost of his physical form. In a way he is jealous of Halua’s abilities, but instead of killing her he decides to combine with her. Emil acknowledges strength in numbers, choosing to align himself with Halua instead of killing her. In a way, this is mutually beneficial: Halua is no longer trapped in the underground facility and Emil gains control over his powers. *NIER* acknowledges that the jealousy in the original tale is pointless; cooperation is preferable to envy. Additionally, Emil has Snow White’s gentle demeanor, but he also has the ruthless queen’s abilities. The player sees this mismatch of personality and abilities when Emil accidentally wipes out the entire Aerie. The game decides to give the most gentle character the most devastating power. Emil’s personality makes him—and

the player—feel guilty for what happened. Thus, Emil’s conflicting demeanor and abilities create a clash that perpetuates misfortune and remorse.

*NIER* opens the conversation of identity and the sense of self, embracing the nonheteronormative and therefore criticizing Disney’s lack of attention and refusal to discuss nonheteronormativity. Disney rejects any pondering of identity and asserts heteronormativity as the preferred way of life. Unlike in Lewis Carroll’s telling of the story, Disney’s Alice begins to wish for things to return to normal. She originally eschews the heteronormative lifestyle her tutor sets out for her, wishing to turn to a life that defies the norm. However, while in Wonderland, Alice wants to return to a heteronormative lifestyle, where things make sense to her due to her heteronormative background. Wonderland is portrayed as a rather terrifying and frustrating place with aggravating inhabitants, which therefore vilifies nonheteronormativity and those that choose to ascribe to it. Disney sends an anti-nonheteronormative message through its portrayal of Wonderland and Alice’s distaste of it. In contrast, in *NIER*, Popola and Devola, the twins that govern Nier’s village, force questions of identity upon the player. They closely resemble the Queen of Hearts, as they oversee Project Gestalt in Nier’s area. They are the ones who add another layer of identity to all of the characters and challenge the definition of humanity. No one in the game is truly considered human, including the two of them: Popola and Devola are androids. However, the game finds ways to humanize everyone, allowing everyone to label themselves as “human.” Popola and Devola identify the Shades as “true humans,” as they are human souls. Still, Replicants also have humanlike emotions and are still cast as sympathetic. Popola and Devola themselves have feelings, as evidenced through Devola’s death and Popola’s reaction. They try to strip Nier and his friends of the identity of “human,” yet they

manage to attach that identity to everything in the game. Popola and Devola effectively blur the lines between “good” and “evil,” acknowledge the fluidity of identity, and encourage self-determination in identity, which fairy tales assign rather than explore.

While *NIER* tends to overturn conventional male and female gender roles, its area associated with *One Thousand and One Nights* upholds the “damsel in distress” stereotype through *Grimoire Nier*’s short story “A Little Princess.” Fyra functions as the female requiring rescue in this tale while the prince, Sechs, saves her. He protects her from an angry man upon her arrival in Facade and later from her demanding boss. The prince literally performs the role of the prince-like figure from the fairy tale while Fyra, the titular “princess,” performs the role of the damsel in distress. They even end up in a relationship: first as friends and later married in the game. While they do not end up living happily ever after, their story follows the fairy tale genre very closely, supporting the expected roles and performances along with gender.

The game’s denial of the fairy tale’s happy ending in favor of a queerer narrative effectively rejects the heteronormative version of reality that fairy tales attempt to present. The player starts as the character that will eventually become the antagonist; for the majority of the game the player controls the original protagonist’s double. The main goal of the game is to cure Nier’s daughter Yonah’s disease, but the player never achieves this; in fact, the game makes this impossible. The antagonist is the only way to cure Yonah’s illness, and the player is forced to kill the antagonist in the end. Furthermore, killing the antagonist prevents the secret goal, to save humanity, from coming to fruition. The game forces the player to lose entirely, creating a nonheteronormative plot in accordance with queer theory and calling into question the reality of the fairy tale’s happy ending.

The game further queers fairy tales through its frustrating difficulty in completing its subplots and using its gameplay, preventing the player from feeling a sense of completeness associated with the ending of a fairy tale. It is nearly impossible to upgrade all of the weapons and complete all of the side quests. For example, three of the weapons require an extremely rare material that is found in only one area in the entire game. The easiest way to obtain it is to continuously jump off the side and deplete Nier's health until the player reaches game over; even then, there is no guarantee that the item will be there when the player restarts the game. This false hope creates incredible frustration, but also forces the player to lose on purpose in order to "super-complete" the game. The game further destabilizes the notion of a set narrative structure through the game's use of genre-shifting. For the majority of the game, *NIER* is an open-world, hack-and-slash third-person JRPG. However, in some places, *NIER* becomes a two-dimensional side-scrolling platformer, a top-down perspective bullet hell, and even a text adventure. Through the video game's unique ability to change the gameplay genre, *NIER* challenges the norm of the fairy tale's strict genre and structure. Additionally, unlike the typical prince of a fairy tale, Nier is not a capable combatant; this is showcased through the clunky and rather unresponsive gameplay. Combat is slow and most of the magic spells the game provides are useless. That further queers the game through making the act of playing itself difficult to master, which goes against the norm of smooth, responsive gameplay. Through the inability to win and the difficulty of navigating the ever-changing, clumsy gameplay, the game presents a queer criticism of the neat narrative of the traditional fairy tale, highlighting the implausibility of its simple route to a happy ending.

The aesthetic qualities of *NIER* lend a sense of reality and despair to the game, which directly opposes the fairy tale's depiction of fantasy and happiness. The graphics and art style of the game are intended to be realistic—in fact, the graphics for the game are quite good for the time in which the game was made. The protagonists are meant to look like real humans while the enemies, the Shades, are meant to look out-of-place; this stark difference indicates the Shades' lack of survivability in a heteronormative world. The drab backgrounds and dull color schemes, especially when paired with the critically acclaimed soundtrack, emit a melancholic tone. The soundtrack is composed of typically acoustic pieces, usually accompanied by lyrics in a nonsensical language. These songs tend to be in a minor key, which lends to their sense of sadness. The song “Ashes of Dreams (New)” stands out in particular because it is the only song in a meaningful language rather than lyricist and singer Emi Evans's nonsensical language—in this case, English. While there are four different versions of this song—“Ashes of Dreams (New),” “Ashes of Dreams (Nouveau),” “Ashes of Dreams (Nuadhaich),” and “Ashes of Dreams (Aratanaru)” —only “Ashes of Dreams (New)” is in an intelligible language. “Ashes of Dreams (New)” plays at the end of Route A, which is a strategic placement for that song for English-proficient players. The lyrics are essential in setting the tone for the rest of the game, as they allude to the futility of Nier's battle, further instilling the idea that *NIER* will not have a happily-ever-after, fairy tale ending. The final line of the song is especially poignant: “Have we been fighting in vain?” (Square Enix Music). This exemplifies the unforeseen consequences of Nier's actions, as he has been slaughtering innocent Shades and additionally has doomed his daughter, himself, and the rest of the Replicants to die of Black Scrawl. Thus, “Ashes of Dreams (New)” works as a form of foreshadowing of the events to come, causing the player to anticipate a non-

fairy tale-like ending. The music and art style of *NIER* fit the game's bleak aesthetic, which straightforwardly challenges the hope for a happy ending in the fairy tale canon.

*NIER* parodies the role and stereotypical attributes of the male character through the protagonist's overperformance of male-assigned tendencies in fairy tales, exposing and criticizing the issues of fixation and antipathy that are implicitly present yet not explored in fairy tales. Nier overtly takes the role of the "prince" from the fairy tale canon through his personality, yet he exaggerates this performance. His goal throughout the game is to rescue Yonah—whose role in upholding the conventional gender roles of fairy tales will be discussed later in this thesis—first from her terminal disease and later from the antagonist, the Shadowlord. He is overly kind towards other Replicants, but loathes the Shades. He takes his goals to the extreme, vowing to destroy all of the Shades and do whatever it takes to save Yonah. He is a caricature of the fairy tale prince who will do anything to rescue the princess. Nier's conflicting nobility and ruthlessness highlight the lack of perspective in fairy tales. Male protagonists are often portrayed as gentle and dignified; they are justified in their fight against evil. Nier portrays the darker side of this trope through his obsession with saving his daughter. Rather than appearing gentle, Nier is characterized as violent. His quest causes the slaughter of innocents, which in later playthroughs is condemned and criticized. Nier subverts the prince figure of the fairy tale canon by exposing the dark side of male performance: singular perspectives and a lack of empathy.

The issues of the normative fairy tale are exemplified and destabilized through Grimoire Weiss; while he reinforces the fairy tale canon's ideals through his disgust with nonconformity, he shows that the fairy tale canon presents an impossibility with his inability to survive in such a

setting. Grimoire Weiss, known commonly as Weiss, Nier's talking book companion and the source of his magic, is the only main character to have knowledge of the pre-apocalyptic world, as he has existed since long before the game takes place. He has a general idea of what "normal" used to be; in fact, his sole purpose is to return everyone to that "normal." However, after suffering from amnesia at the beginning of the game, he loses his definition of "normal" and instead adopts the binary, heteronormative "norm" of the fairy tale world in which they live. Thus, his attitudes towards certain topics reflect the antiquated ideals of the fairy tale genre. For example, Weiss repeatedly insults Kainé based on the way she dresses, often calling her a "hussy." This insult upholds the fairy tale notion that the ideal woman is pure and desexualized. Nier comments on the way Kainé dressed briefly upon meeting, but never after; he also does not say anything insulting. Emil does not say anything about Kainé's appearance, even after regaining his sight. Weiss's fixation and contention with Kainé's appearance reflects the fairy tale opinion of how women should be portrayed. Furthermore, his refusal to combine with Grimoire Noir not only dooms humanity, it also symbolically upholds the black-white binary with white being considered "dominant," since Grimoire Noir is characterized as "evil." However, it is later seen that Weiss cannot survive in this environment, as he is the first to die. He first starts to break down in the Shadowlord's castle, where the binaries and norms start to unravel. The world that Weiss had accepted as true has been proven false; now that Weiss is dependent on the binaries of the current order, he cannot continue. He eventually sacrifices himself to help Nier kill the Shadowlord. This act upholds the current status quo, which in turn condemns everyone. Weiss proves that fairy tales create unlivable conditions for the characters, thus creating a critique denouncing the binaries and heteronormativity of the fairy tale canon.

*NIER* questions and subverts masculinity and masculine performance through the character Emil: his exhibition of performances of genders other than “masculine” challenges the role of the male and asserts the survivability of nonheteronormativity. Emil is known for his softheartedness and strong emotions. He cries often throughout the game, which is an action the fairy tale canon typically deems “feminine.” The typical boy hero of the fairy tales is rambunctious; for instance, Peter and Pinocchio exemplify this trait. Emil, however, is more reserved, which is unusual in the fairy tale canon. Furthermore, Nier first encounters him in his manor while playing the piano. The house is a domestic sphere generally reserved for female characters, and musicianship, as has been demonstrated in Perrault’s *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* and Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, is conventionally assigned to femininity. Encountering Emil in a domestic setting performing feminine actions while still being depicted as male destabilizes the notion of masculinity belonging outside of the house. Furthermore, Emil is voiced by female voice actresses in both the localization and *RepliCant*. Though this may be attributed to his youth, his high-pitched voice is unique in the visual realm of fairy tales: typically, male actors voice male characters in films. While he does not always perform typically “male” roles, he is universally accepted as male. This mismatch of performance and gender identity destabilizes the typical fairy tale characterization of the young boy character. Furthermore, Emil demonstrates the survivability of unmatched gender roles, which challenges the canon of intolerance for nonheteronormativity. Though he sacrifices himself towards the end to save Nier and Kainé, the player sees after a few playthroughs that Emil survives. In fact, he appears in the game’s sequel, *NieR: Automata* (2017, PlatinumGames), which takes place several millennia after the events of *NIER*. He is still voiced by the same actresses and is depicted as

singing often, which perpetuates his “feminine” performance. Through producing an enduring image of conflicting gender and gender performance, *NIER* dismantles the heteronormativity of the fairy tale and creates a space for nonheteronormativity to exist in the canon.

*NIER* calls for a different understanding of how women can be portrayed in fairy tales through the character Kainé, who functions as a main source of destabilization of gender roles and sexuality in fairy tales and video games through gender performance. Kainé is a foul-mouthed, Shade-possessed young woman who, as the player discovers in the second route, is intersex. Her body serves as a major source of discomfort and self-loathing due to abuse from Aerie villagers in her childhood. However, she chooses to identify as female; performing her femininity through wearing lingerie. The game further asserts her gender through associating her with the Lunar Tear, a flower in the game’s universe. According to critic Judith Butler,

“To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman,’ to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project.” (522)

Lingerie and flowers are historically and culturally aligned with femininity, therefore allowing Kainé to assert her gender through continuously performing stereotypically female actions. However, while Kainé retains the fragility of a typical female character of both fairy tales and video games, she is also aggressive and protective like Nier and other male characters. She does not shy away from battle like Wendy, but rather rushes into and relishes battle like Michael and the Lost Boys from *Peter Pan*. She even refuses to perform any sort of familial role typically

associated with femininity. When Emil attempts to explain how camping with Kainé is fun, she says, “Emil, that’s enough! ...I got a fucking image to maintain” (*NIER*). She acknowledges her performance of the “tough” aspect of masculinity, which challenges the notion of historically and culturally defined gender-based performances. While she performs both male- and female-assigned performances, her gender is never questioned; she is always identified as female. In this way the game acknowledges nuance in gender identity and the possibility of difference between sex and gender, a topic never discussed in fairy tales, and the fallacy of assigning roles and performances based on gender. That is, Kainé can be both intersex and female; she can exhibit masculine and feminine performances while still being seen as female. With Kainé as almost explicitly intersex, it provides a possibility for that community to be present in a setting such as *NIER*. However, it is undeniable that her design is intended for the heterosexual male gaze. The camera angles in certain shots emphasize her physique. Thus, *NIER* treats Kainé as both a woman and an object. Intersexuality and blending of gender performances can exist in *NIER* and women can be sexual beings, but as long as a character is defined as a woman, she will still sometimes function as an object like in fairy tales.

While the game effectively blends the stereotypical gender roles of fairy tales and video games through Kainé’s function and personality, it struggles to destabilize the “damsel in distress” image through her. As previously explored, her ability to fight and her toughness align with male-assigned roles in the fairy tale canon, which conflicts with her female-assigned image and thus questions the history of male- and female-assigned gender norms in popular culture. However, she still arguably functions as a damsel in distress often throughout the game, as she needs to be rescued the most out of all of the protagonists, though this role is subverted in

*Grimoire Nier*. The endings of the game depend on whether the player wishes to save her one final time or not. Should the player choose to kill her, Kainé's role as damsel in distress is solidified, as she cannot truly be saved. If the player chooses to save her, all of the player's save data is deleted, as Nier must give up his existence in order for Kainé to live. Kainé must once again be rescued by the male main character. However, in *Grimoire Nier*, Kainé swaps her status of damsel in distress with Nier in the side story that functions as the game's true ending, entitled "Ending E—The Lost World." Nier becomes the damsel in distress in this story, requiring Kainé to become the hero and rescue him. While the in-game content upholds the stereotype, Ending E successfully destabilizes the damsel in distress trope through switching genders. In this way, Kainé is able to pass between and destabilize expected male and female performances in fairy tales and video games while still somewhat conforming to gender roles within the game.

*NIER*'s use of Yonah upholds the stereotypes of gender in fairy tales, therefore failing to destabilize the gender roles found in typical fairy tales. In fact, she is the epitome of the damsel in distress trope. Yonah's entire function is to serve as motivation for Nier to kill the Shadowlord. While she is not a love interest, it is difficult to call a father-daughter relationship subversive. There is a component of familial love that drives the protagonist to save the damsel in distress that sometimes appears in fairy tales. For example, the princess's father in Perrault's *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* attempts to save his daughter from the curse through destroying all of the spindles in his realm. The desire to protect in familial and romantic love does not destabilize hegemonic notions. Yonah confirms her status as the damsel in distress at the ending of the first route, saying, "It's like I'm a princess from some fairy tale!" Additionally, she is confined to the household, which invokes the domestic female image. She can mostly be found

inside Nier's house for the first half of the game, with one or two scenes inside the library. She even cooks for Nier—though, as a source of humor, she is a terrible chef—which further solidifies her domesticity. The game falls back on stereotypes to drive its plot, thus missing the opportunity to be subversive.

*NIER*'s localization replicates the heteronormativity of the fairy tale canon through Emil's conflicting characterization and gendered assumptions in dialogue. The localization explicitly censors Emil's sexuality, reflecting America's stance on nonheteronormativity in 2010. During the wedding in the localized version, Emil and Nier have a conversation about Nier's long-dead wife. Emil makes a statement about hoping to find a girl who does not mind how he looks, which clashes with what was said in *RepliCant* and what the director has confirmed about Emil. In *RepliCant*, Emil directly expresses his romantic interest in Nier. The localization denies Emil the possibility of romance with the main character, thus upholding the norm of heteronormative relationships. Furthermore, there are small pieces of dialogue that assume heteronormativity throughout the game, such as references to gendered clothing and Emil and Yonah's presumed heterosexuality. Upon hearing that Yonah has a male pen pal, Nier immediately gripes, "Great. My kid's got a boyfriend." Not only does this comment assume Yonah's sexuality, it also suggests that male and female relationships can never be outside the realm of romantic or sexual. Other retellings of fairy tales, such as Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch: Old Tales in New Skins*, include a variety of nonheteronormative relationships, suggesting that nonheteronormativity does, in fact, have a place in fairy tales. *NIER*'s localization fails to address the existence of nonheteronormative relationships, instead favoring heteronormativity at the cost of characterization.

The detriments of the fairy tale's bias towards heteronormativity are further critiqued through Popola and Devola's attitudes towards Emil and Kainé; however, while the criticism is initiated, *NIER* fails to complete it, therefore upholding the canon's problematic averseness to nonheteronormativity. When Emil rescues Kainé from petrification in the second half of the game, Devola and Popola exile the two of them from the village, citing the villagers' fear as the reason. Here, Popola and Devola represent the heteronormativity requirement of fairy tales. Much like in fairy tales, anything outside of the heteronormative cannot be allowed in a heteronormative space—in this case, the village; even protagonists are no exception. However, at this point, Nier finally recognizes his privilege as a member of the heteronormative space. After his argument with the twins, he remarks to Weiss, "Kainé always sleeps outside. I never thought about that till just now." Nier's comment creates a self-aware moment in which the privileged protagonist recognizes their position. Normally, fairy tales do not consider the perspective of those outside the normative. Nier is even willing to accept the blame for playing a part in upholding the hegemonic normative regime: "If Devola and Popola are to blame... Then I am equally at fault. For not stopping for a moment to think about Kainé and Emil..." However, after Devola, Popola, and Nier all apologize to each other and acknowledge that they are wronging Kainé and Emil, they do not attempt to change the situation. They continue to leave Kainé and Emil outside of the village. Though Emil attempts to reassure Nier that being exiled is all right, the short story "The Narrow Gate" in *Grimoire Nier* reveals Kainé and Emil's true feelings. The reader sees how harmful exclusivity based on heteronormativity is to those who do not conform. While the game comments on the problems of heteronormative privilege in fairy tales, it does not attempt to destabilize it, therefore failing to present a full, cogent critique.

*NIER*'s conversation with race is both critical and absent; while it destabilizes imagery found in fairy tales, it fails to address and subvert the notion of whiteness as the "unmarked" race. Its cast, though full of characters with names outside the typical white naming convention, is predominantly white. The game's imagery falls back on the stereotype of black as "bad" and white as "good," a type of coloration popular in fairy tales. For instance, Disney relies on colors to characterize its heroes and villains. Heroes are customarily associated with lighter colors while villains have a darker color scheme. This imagery is similar in the game: the main characters tend to have a lighter color palette while the Shades are associated with darker colors. However, the game destabilizes this notion in subsequent playthroughs with creating sympathy for the Shades. Even Nier, the "hero," has a mixed color scheme of black and white, reflecting the fallaciousness of associating colors with the concepts of "good" and "bad." Still, there is still an overarching sense of whiteness present in the game. Context is essential in understanding the negligence towards racial representation. It must be noted that "Japanese popular culture often draws upon Western imagery of [B]lacks," meaning that Japanese entertainment companies may draw inspiration from racist imagery and stereotypes set by white people about Black people (Shaw 178). This subtly indicates that whiteness maintains the popularized illustration of race and is therefore used as a reference when depicting minorities, since whiteness does not "mark" itself. While Yoko Taro attempts to destabilize racialized imagery upon which other Japanese video game companies may rely for their nonwhite characters, his game fails to acknowledge whiteness as the root of the racial and racialized rendering of minorities. That is, because whiteness actively marks nonwhite cultures, it assumes itself as the "default" race. For example, *NIER* has roots in all European tales with the exception of *One Thousand and One Nights*. Even

more telling is the naming convention: nearly everyone, including the different race of people in Facade, uses European words as names. The nonsense language of the game's soundtrack was written using mainly European languages; the lyricist and singer Emi Evans mentions she drew inspiration from languages such as English, French, and Gaelic, among others. There is use of Japanese in the game; for instance, the language of Facade is constituted of jumbled-up Japanese phonology, and Emi Evans cites Japanese as a language from which she drew inspiration for the music's nonsensical lyrics, especially for "Ashes of Dreams (Aratanaru)," the song that plays at the end of Route D. However, the fact that whiteness subtly predominates all other depictions of other cultures is telling. While perhaps not intended, *NIER* sends a subtle message that mainly whiteness will prevail through the apocalypse. It does not allow much room for other cultures as a possibility in its world, which is a dangerous and discriminatory suggestion.

The game has a tendency to subvert its players' expectations through role reversals, though only sometimes through fairy tale stereotypes. The game does not often rely on tropes that other retellings use, such as the "wicked older woman" or the "innocent young girl." Rather, it merely shows the antagonists' perspectives to the player. This creates guilt in the player, since the "villains" become sympathetic and the "heroes" become antagonists. This simple switch creates a sense of losing rather than victory in the player: not only do they obstruct the objective of curing Yonah, they slaughter many innocents throughout the game in a vain attempt to win. The game tricks the player in the first playthrough into a sense of complacency and victory, only to take it away through subsequent playthroughs. The game wants the player to empathize with the antagonists while also recognizing the main characters' problems and desires. The game

comes across almost automatically as “queer,” since there is no way to please both sides and therefore win.

Overall, *NIER* queers fairy tales to an extent, but does not create a critique as well as other retellings do. It acknowledges the differing perspectives of both sides very well, creating conflict in the player as to the nature of right and wrong. It does not allow the player to leave feeling a sense of victory. However, its representation is iffy at best. It presents a realm of possibilities for some marginalized groups, specifically regarding gender and sexuality, but censorship and objectification create problems with these characters. The game has some racial diversity, but it overall suggests whiteness as the prevailing race. *NIER* provides a strong possibility for critique in certain areas while having problems in others.

How strong, therefore, is the critique generated from *NIER*'s use of the reality of fairy tales? In current society, marginalized communities are becoming more prominent. Binaries are starting to be deconstructed in favor of spectrums, especially centered around gender and sexuality. Race is being recognized as more than just a Black-white binary. Overall, voices that were previously being ignored by the hegemonic order have started to grow louder. *NIER* acknowledges the existence of some of these groups and critiques the fairy tale's favor of heteronormativity. In other cases, *NIER* aligns with the fairy tale canon and omits these groups in favor of binaries and heteronormativity. Overall, for a game that is meant to take place in an imagined future of this universe, it partially succeeds in replicating a realistic space for these marginalized voices where fairy tales fall short.

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