

16 *Lies of P*

Victorian Posthuman and Metamorphic Bodies

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Introduction

The Industrial Revolution, Darwin's evolutionary theory, and the birth of new and astounding technologies: all make the Victorian Age an historical convergence of changes and transformations that still affect our own time and that brought forth questions on the relationship between science and humanity, on technology and its implications, and on hybridity and the body. Many themes that now deeply interest posthumanist theories and representations have their origins in Victorian contexts and discoveries.

The unceasing employment of Victorian topics, aesthetics, and settings in the new digital medium of the video game stresses this strong connection between the preoccupations of our own time and the concerns born in nineteenth-century England. The video game *Lies of P*,¹ despite being aesthetically and thematically affected by Japanese pop culture,² presents substantial influences coming from late nineteenth-century Europe. It overtly adapts the Italian novel *Le Avventure di Pinocchio* (1883) by Carlo Collodi, hybridizing it with themes and literary sources of Victorian origin.

Lies of P's Victorian influences, discussed in this chapter, bring to the fore body-centred posthumanist concerns as products of Victorian cultural and scientific contexts. The main focus is indeed on matters of the body, its relationship with new technologies, its possible alterations, its deviance, and its connection with the human mind. We will show how the medium-specific affordances help video games adopt, adapt, and therefore popularize these contemporary but born-Victorian themes. In particular, we discuss how the recasting of Victorian conceptual and visual tropes in a new medium shows the contemporary relevance of concerns born in Victorian times regarding the topic of the posthuman body and all its complex theoretical implications.

After a brief summary of the game, the article develops into three main sections. First, we highlight how the Victorian Great Exhibition introduces themes concerning technology and its consequences and implications for

human bodies—and for the meaning of “humanity” itself—and how these themes are recast in the game. In the following section, we concentrate on bodily metamorphoses, and on how they are represented in *Lies of P* through the re-elaboration of Victorian literary influences. Third, we talk more specifically about the posthuman body of P, focusing on its complex ontological status in-between a puppet and a boy, and analyzing in particular the game’s three possible endings.

Lies of P: A Summary

In a rainy and foggy Victorian setting, a pale boy with a prosthetic arm is fighting against grotesque mechanical puppets, aided by a turquoise-haired girl/fairy with steampunk attire. In the fictional city of Krat, site of the “Grand Exhibition” (strongly reminiscent of the London Great Exhibition of 1851), players of *Lies of P* embody this dark-haired boy, a puppet hunter but half a puppet himself. Already in the initial scenes of the game, it is apparent how the Victorian influence plays a significant role in its content and aesthetics: the Gothic atmosphere, the outfits, the setting, and in particular, the focus on unusual and uncanny bodies. *Lies of P* capitalizes on the original story of Pinocchio to make new meanings and nuances manifest.

“Pinocchio is a quintessentially nineteenth century creature,”³ a fictional expression of typical nineteenth-century concerns—the mechanical body, the limits/boundaries of the human, the role of technology. Collodi’s *Pinocchio* already foregrounds the posthuman implications that *Lies of P* further expands and re-elaborates.⁴ As expressed by Zoe Jaques, Pinocchio’s materiality holds a potency as “a posthuman agent, a puppet who mimics but also parodies human forms.”⁵ The main narrative surrounding the wooden toy exhibits a “demonstrably humanist drive,”⁶ since the story’s happy ending sees Pinocchio becoming a human boy who has learned to behave according to proper standards of morality. Nevertheless, together with the focus on Pinocchio’s increasingly human traits, the story also expresses what Jaques defines as a “counteracting attentiveness to his more-than-human-ontology in which many of the debilitating fantasies . . . of humanism are highlighted in a manner that accords . . . with the possibilities of the cyborg.”⁷ *Lies of P* makes use of these two conflicting narratives, reversing their role and relevance, as we shall see: the righteous path towards humanity is revealed as the darkest one, while the posthumanist nature of the boy-puppet comes to disclose unexpected positive sides.

In the typical style of the *soulslike* genre this game belongs to, *Lies of P* presents its players with a scattered story that must be reconstructed by piecing together the many bits of information provided (cf. formal complexity of narratives⁸ and the concept of “archaeogames”⁹). The

protagonist is P,¹⁰ a puppet created by Geppetto to resemble (and bear the “soul” of) his dead son Carlo. The game is set in the fictional city of Krat, once a fisherman’s village turned into a rich steampunk metropolis after the discovery of a precious material in its vicinity. This material is Ergo, a powerful energy source which prompted the creation of advanced puppets capable of carrying out all sorts of works by themselves. The technological marvel of the puppets is put to an abrupt end by two related crises: a rebellion of puppets against their creators, and an epidemic transforming people’s organs and skin into crystals and stone scales, eventually leading to their death. The sect of the “Alchemists” is tightly connected to both fortune of Krat and the two catastrophes. Depending on player’s choices, the figure of P evolves in different ways, and three alternative endings are reachable.

The game features a Victorian-inspired aesthetic with steampunk fashion, incorporating technological elements like modified, mechanical, and hybrid body parts—hallmarks of the steampunk culture. It may be worth highlighting that steampunk aims at embodying the multiple metamorphoses and contradictions characterizing the Victorian period, “like a two-faced coin that signifies this quickly changing historical era, steampunk fashion is also about highlighting contradictions.”¹¹ This seems to be the focus of *Lies of P*, too.

Crossing Categories and Transgressing Human Boundaries: *Lies of P*’s “Grand Exhibition”

Mikael Andersson (game director of *Victoria 3*) argues that it is precisely the complex cultural climate of metamorphosis, transformations, and contradictions that makes the Victorian Era such an interesting setting for a video game.¹² The important role in the story of the game of the “Grand Exhibition” is, in this sense, significant. In the game, the Grand Exhibition is planned to be a crucial event for the city of Krat, celebrating the magnificent power of technology and human creation. This was also the idea behind the actual Victorian Great Exhibition was about. However, the puppet rebellion stops the Exhibition from actually happening, revealing its potential dark sides. Isobel Armstrong writes that in the London Great Exhibition, the different artefacts presented to the viewers a surprising and shocking amalgam of crossed-species and crossed-categories, providing a mixture of animate and inanimate, technological and natural, and violating basic ontological distinctions. This “language of mixed categories” created “an ambivalent space, caught between a series of contradictions.”¹³

In *Lies of P* the conundrums and dangers of transgressing and blurring categories are recurrently brought to the fore by revealing the darkest sides of technological hazards: the Grand Exhibition never takes place, stopped

by the rebellious puppets; the risky experiments of the Alchemists have often unpredictable and deadly results; the pandemic itself, the second main catastrophe occurring in *Krat*, is indeed a result of one of these experiments, attempt to create a novel form of (post) humanity. Simon Manus, the leader of the Alchemists and one of the villains of the story, eventually successfully transgresses his own human nature by technologically modifying his and others' bodies (Figure 16.1) with extreme consequences. Significantly, we first meet Simon in the Grand Exhibition Conference Room, representative of the liminal space between humanity and post-humanity.

The 1851 Great Exhibition displayed in the Crystal Palace a number of uncanny *mirabilia*, bringing together specimens from natural history, artistic artefacts, and technological experiments. The magic/scientific space of the Crystal Palace was “a place of desire, phantasmagoria and transience—a magic world typically linked to modernity.”¹⁴ Just as magic are several techno-natural creations in the game, like the Gold Coin Tree, whose fruits are embedded with a magical restoring and healing power: it is a natural thing, a tree, but it is scientifically manipulated by the Alchemists, and it is also a posthuman entity—the arboreal form of a previously human creature. As it is observed in the game, the Gold Coin Tree is “tragic, but useful.”¹⁵

The preoccupation with the multiple sides of technology and its effects on human bodies, with its miraculous potentials and its possible obscure dangers, such a constant contemporary concern, was symbolized in the



Figure 16.1 Simon Manus bowed on his knees, after having obtained a semi-divine body. Screenshot from the game *Lies of P* (Neowiz Games and Round8 Studio).

Victorian Age by the Crystal Palace and its displayed artefacts. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas has pointed out, with the Great Exhibition, “the discourse on the marvels of science remains ambivalent, epitomizing the Victorians’ mixed feelings with regard to science, progress and humans’ capacity to control nature.”¹⁶ *Lies of P* utilizes the reference to the Great Exhibition, we argue, precisely to highlight these ambiguous feelings, connecting them to contemporary technology-related anxieties.

The monstrous body of Simon Manus (Figure 16.1), the hazardous experiments of the Alchemists, the manipulated and transfigured body of the beautiful turquoise-haired girl/fairy Sophia (Figure 16.2), the technologically induced pandemic: in *Lies of P* these elements may all seem to point towards the darkest, more perilous and uncontrolled side of science and technology, exposing the collapse of the Anthropocene as a consequence of the “conceit of anthropocentric dominion.”¹⁷ And yet, it cannot be forgotten that P is half a puppet, that Sophia is not entirely a human being, and that most of the puppet characters in the game turn out to be positive, *humane* figures (the puppet rebellion itself is most probably man-induced).

The metamorphoses of the meaning of humanity in an increasingly technological reality started to acquire a prominent role in theoretical discourses with the Victorian Age, and they occupy a crucial subject in today’s academic and non-academic conversations. *Lies of P* merges these two interconnected historical discourses dealing with the same pressing topic in his fictional

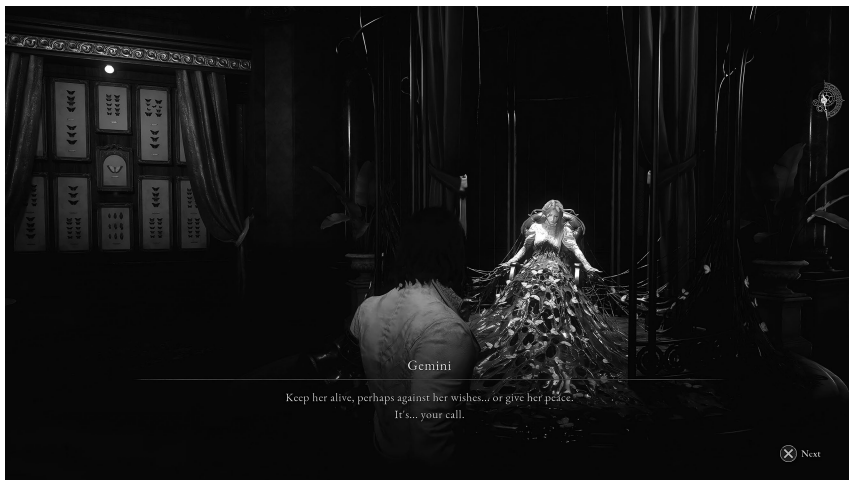


Figure 16.2 The blue-haired Sophia lies on a chair, connected to a machine extracting her powers. The lower part of her body is slowly dissolving into blue butterflies. Screenshot from the game *Lies of P* (Neowiz Games and Round8 Studio).

scenario, representing these ambiguities and related concerns in a way that does not force a specific, conclusive answer. The negative, destructive aspects of technological imperialism are shown side by side with the possibilities of a posthuman world that embodies technological advancements in a positive scenario. P himself is thus defined in the game as “a new type of humanity,” suggesting the need to re-think the boundaries of humanity in light of a novel universe affected by different types of incessant transformations.

Therefore, *Lies of P* reinterprets but also epitomizes crucial features and preoccupations characterizing the Victorian Age, also extremely relevant for today’s world, such as the challenge of coping with fast-paced technological changes, the exploration of categories’ boundaries, and, above all, the interrogation on the limits, peculiarities, and complexities of the human nature—focusing on its blurred contours and analyzing the human and the posthuman body. The medium of the video game on the one hand helps to popularize these themes in a novel and more accessible way, leveraging their engagement and aesthetic potential. On the other hand, the embodied experience made possible by the medium¹⁸ brings the attention more specifically to the body and invites reflections on the body-mind nexus, fostering and displaying the potency and relevance of this very Victorian theme.

Victorian Literary References: Bodily Metamorphoses

In this section, we pay attention to how the Victorian fascination with the body, its complexities, and its possible modifications and metamorphoses is highlighted by *Lies of P*, also in light of current reflections on posthumanism. We focus in particular on how *Lies of P* employs and re-elaborates specific Victorian literary sources.

The Victorians were fascinated by the body, its anomalies, its transformations, and the interconnection between bodily reactions and mental processes.¹⁹ Various emerging fields of knowledge provided new conceptions of the body, challenging previous notions and introducing more and more the idea that the body plays a fundamental role in our social and biological existence. Evolutionary theory and its consequences on the study of biology increasingly rooted human nature in its material components. At the same time, novel ways of conceiving ethnicity and race saw them as embodied states, and “mechanized labor produced one new kind of body,”²⁰ fostering novel reflections on mechanized, metamorphosized bodies. This widespread interest in *somatic* matters also had noteworthy and important consequences for the newly born discipline of mind studies. Inheriting questions on the essence of the human mind from the Enlightenment, the Victorians started to elaborate a conception of the mind surprisingly in line with today’s directions in neuroscience research, one which implies a strong, indissoluble intertwinement of mind and body.

In this sense, Victorian culture and aesthetics responded also to these widespread reflections on the centrality of the body. Cultural and aesthetic artefacts were often imbued with references to the physical body, in particular to its possible irregularities and metamorphoses, and its implications for the meaning of human nature. Starting with pre-Victorian works such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, what mostly interested the Victorians appears to be "transformations," the "turning into something else," and "the transgression of typological boundaries, as species cross categories."²¹

If the body is so important for the architecture of our mind and for the whole history of civilization, in so many different but interconnected ways, what can happen if the body is manipulated? How many types of bodies do actually exist? Is there a normative version of the body and can it actually be challenged? What are deviant, unusual bodies and what do they represent or entail? All these questions find a place in Victorian artistic and literary productions, and they are extremely critical and pressing also for today's sensibilities. The Victorian inspiration of *Lies of P* is particularly evident in the game's focus on the nature of the human and posthuman body, on its meaning and its potential modifications. As said, the game capitalizes on and thus makes visible the importance of these Victorian themes, which are especially compelling for a contemporary audience, and particularly on the importance of the body in the definition of human (and non-human, beyond-human, anti-human, posthuman) nature.

Posthumanist approaches are indeed currently being suggested as ways to inquire into several aspects of the multi-faceted Victorian culture.²² Cary Wolfe famously wrote that "posthumanism names a historical moment in which the decentring of the human by its imbrication in technical, medical, informatics, and economic networks is increasingly impossible to ignore."²³ Even though the formulation of the term "posthumanism" is recent, the Victorian Age can be aptly described as a posthumanist period. Wolfe similarly states that

it registers its Western historical moment when industrial technologies are vastly transforming the cultural landscape, exacerbating the incoherence of the humanist image by simulating human physical performances with machines and surpassing spatial limitations of the human through various media technologies.²⁴

We argue that applying the theoretical lenses of posthumanism to the Victorian Age means in particular to pay attention to the vast consequences the body-centred theoretical approach had in various disciplinary fields, and how it translated into literary and artistic representations. This obsession with the body is highly present particularly in literature. Shrinking and elongating bodies of little girls (Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures*

in *Wonderland*), mechanical princesses (Mary de Morgan's "A Toy Princess"), portraits that incorporate bodily changes (Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), monstrous uncontrollable bodies (Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), immortal, non-decaying bodies of boys (J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*), half-children half-watery beings (Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*): these are just a few examples, among many many others, in which Victorian and early Edwardian literature focuses on deviant and unusual types of bodies. As aptly highlighted by Sarah Alexander et al.,

The Victorian posthuman (. . .) is constituted by the many shapes that body forth the essential incoherence of humanist images — for instance, man-made monsters like Frankenstein's creature, moral metamorphs or degenerates like Mr. Hyde, or the legions of the literary undead that crawl through the nineteenth century on the way to *Dracula*.²⁵

Lies of P emphasizes this "Victorian posthumanism" also through its vast use of references to a number of Victorian literary works dealing with unusual bodies. We name just a few examples here. During his journey, P finds a portrait of Carlo, the boy whose soul he bears. This portrait changes depending on the behaviour of P, as attitudinal modifications in P impact the physical aspect of the boy in the portrait. In particular (and this is in line with Pinocchio's tale) the more the player decides to lie, the more a wooden nose grows out of the picture. We are told the painter is a phantomatic "D. Gray," who is claimed to be able to create particularly vivid, life-like representations. Oscar Wilde's character Dorian Gray is therefore a very short step away from the game—here the painter rather than the painted. The theme of the changing painting and its mysterious connection with a "real" body is therefore intertwined with Pinocchio's most characteristic trait. By interlacing Pinocchio's feature with the story of Dorian Gray, designers not only further stress the Victorian influence of the game, and the focus on the enigmatic status of bodily modifications, but they thus retain the distinctive trait of the growing nose and its functionality as a marker of P's (and the player's) behaviour.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books are notoriously highly concerned with bodily modifications and with reflections/satirical remarks on Darwinian evolution. This makes it unsurprising to find in *Lies of P*, several clear allusions to Carroll's work. One of the most interesting is the presence of a Red Actress, Adelina, and her sister, Patricia, the White Lady, mimicking the Red Queen and the White Queen from Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. Adelina and Patricia are opposite mirror images of each other: Adelina is malicious and greedy, and Patricia is benevolent and loving. While they are both human, Adelina is affected by the Petrification Disease, so her body is suffering from

terrible alterations. However, while Adelina is bodily transfigured, she is clear-minded. On the other hand, Patricia exhibits a perfectly healthy and quite fit and agile human body, but she is mentally clouded by her obsession with killing puppets. Their presence in the game introduces additional reflections on bodily modifications and their potential relation to mental states, and on the good or bad nature of humans and non-humans. P has to fight the “loving,” beautiful, but obsessed Patricia, who wants to kill him just because he is a puppet, but is benevolent with the “malicious,” disfigured, but rational Adelina, in a double contrast that is somehow even difficult to summarize.

Lies of P also contains evident references to another important story for Victorian time, emphasizing in particular its darkest traits and the focus on the creation of posthuman bodies. Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* clearly epitomizes the preoccupation with transgressing the boundaries of humanity, and with the definition of what exactly constitutes “human nature.” One of the bosses of the game is a former wrestling champion who has died from an incurable illness and has been resurrected from the dead with the help of technology (and alchemy). The appearance of this entity shows several large stitches, hinting at a patchwork done on the dead body of the once human, now monstrous, creature. These details, coupled with the name of the monster being Victor (like Victor Frankenstein) clearly point towards a Victorian posthuman being, a patched-up monster once dead and now alive thanks to technological advancements. The Darwinian discourse on evolution and its impact on the human body, and on what will come next, is connected to the figure of Victor in the game. He is described as the “Champion of Evolution” and states sentences like “I am evolved, a better man!” Like him, several characters seek an evolved, posthuman form through alchemical and technological alterations of their humanity, including not only alchemists but also clergymen and geniuses. Thus, the very Victorian interest in evolution of the human body and its ambiguous aspects has been adopted by the game designers very profoundly, making it one of the main engines of the story. In the end, Darwin can be thought of as one of “the original posthumanist thinkers.”²⁶

The posthumanist approach to Victorian culture therefore proves helpful to talk about the Victorian features of a new cultural object that centres on metamorphic, altered, and unusual bodies. We have here demonstrated how several inputs on this topic are filtered in *Lies of P* through the influences of Victorian fictional scenarios and characters. What we are going to address in the next section is more specifically the *puppetry nature* of many of the characters (particularly of P, the one the player embodies). The roots of it, again to be found in Victorian origins, and the implications of this for the posthuman perspective on the game.

“I Need Your Unique Perspective, You Exist Somewhere between Human and Puppet”²⁷: P’s Body and P’s Lies

The Victorian Age witnessed a veritable proliferation of marionette and puppet theatres.²⁸ Significantly, the Victorians were particularly interested in the apparent reality of puppets, and in how they could enact human-like movements and evoke human emotions through their acts. The use of waxworks, automata, marionettes, and puppets as widespread forms of entertainment testifies once again to the transposition in many different cultural manifestations of the inquiry into altered bodies, non-human bodies, almost human bodies. Puppets and automata were in the Victorian Age complex manifestations of the concerns with the human and the technological body, and their relation. Puppets “confuse boundaries between body and machine in a way which is emblematic of a wider contemporary concern with the relation between the organic and the mechanical in Victorian technological culture.”²⁹ This Victorian fascination is made topical in the fact that *Lies of P* capitalizes on puppets and their similarities/dissimilarities with humans. This, together with the fact that the player character holds a highly ambivalent status in-between a puppet and a man, serves the purpose of dealing with elaborated reflections on the posthuman body.

In this respect, the ontological status of P is never made completely clear in the game. P’s appearance is extremely similar to that of a human and dissimilar to that of a normal puppet, also when compared to other puppets found in the game—this leaving aside his left arm, which is clearly mechanical and not that of a human boy. Nonetheless, some of P’s abilities are super-human: his skin is untouched, even after many fights, and parts of his internal organs (at least his heart) are mechanical. However, we are also told that “puppets cannot lie”—which since the very beginning seems to set P apart from being a marionette, notwithstanding his many machine parts. A further blur of his ontology comes when we discover, towards the end of the game, that his ability to lie comes not from human nature, as we believed throughout the game, but from P being manufactured without the constrictions that prevent puppets from lying. This piece of information seems to sanction the complete mechanical nature of P, despite his stunningly human appearance. Yet again, during that which is considered the “true ending” of the game (see below), we see a tear wetting the cheek of the puppet, with great surprise of the dying Geppetto, which makes him (and us) discover that P is, indeed, partly human—a posthuman being.

This posthuman, double nature of P is arguably what allows the character, and with him the story, to progress. He seems to take advantage of the benefits of both his human and puppet sides. The human nature

of the puppet allows him to continue his journey on multiple occasions, mainly by lying. While the ability to lie turns out to be not directly due to his human nature, his bearing a human's soul (that of Geppetto's son) is what prompted Geppetto to craft him without the puppets' limitations. Therefore, the human side of P is still what allows him to progress in crucial parts of the story, at least indirectly. Apart from the different circumstances where his ability to lie opens doors for him (literally and metaphorically, but mostly literally), also his human appearance saves him several troubles. Many characters seem not to realize that he is indeed a puppet, and approach him with benevolence, which would have not been the case if he would have been more puppet-like.

P's lies though are not only strategic for the development of the game: very often the character can answer with "kind lies" to other (non-player) characters, if the player chooses to please them with a lie instead of revealing a harsh truth. In this sense, the choice of a kind lie appears to be a completely human trait, again problematizing the meaning and peculiarities of the human nature. P's disposition to lie stands in clear contrast with the glorification of truth done by the Alchemist Simon Manus, who is trying to forge a sort of "god-like superhuman being" under whose supremacy can exist a "world with no lies."³⁰ This contrast between the kind lies of P and the negative truths of Simon makes us wonder what is more "human-like": truths or lies?

If the complex bodily status of P has huge conceptual implications in the game, P's nature has several consequences also with regards to game mechanics. The most evident of these is the possibility of equipping different arms, granting different powers, and modifying the approach to combat. In addition, while it is a long-established custom of role-playing games to allow the allocation of points to different statistics of the characters, in most games this custom is featured without a narrative justification, being there extradiegetically. In *Lies of P*, this fundamental game mechanic is made relevant and diegetic through P's posthuman nature. Puppets are powered by Ergo, and Sophia is capable of manipulating Ergo: this allows her to empower one or the other feature of the puppet by "allocating" Ergo to different functions.

The complex posthuman bodily nature of P also actualizes another custom feature of role-playing games, or in general of story-heavy games: the multiplicity of endings. *Lies of P* features three possible ways to end the story. In one of the last scenes of the game, Geppetto asks P to hand him his heart, so that he (Geppetto) could finally revive his lost son Carlo. If P answers positively to this request, the ending "Real boy: They all lived happily ever after" is shown, where Geppetto extracts the heart from P and places it in a case from which eventually emerges a child's hand. The game then ends with Carlo, identical to P, killing all the last survivors in Hotel Krat. In the very end, we hear the voice of Sophia asking: "Is this truly the

future you wanted?” If players keep playing after this ending, they will find all characters in Hotel Krat replaced by puppet look-alikes.

If P answers negatively to the requests of Geppetto, the puppeteer unleashes a “Nameless Puppet” against P. After P defeats the puppet, Geppetto protects P with his own body from a mortal stab—with the declared purpose of protecting P’s/Carlo’s heart. After destroying the other puppet, P embraces the dying Geppetto, whose last words are “I knew it . . . you’re just a useless puppet.” This is the “Free from the puppet string” ending.

The last ending is referred to as the “true ending,” meaningfully titled “Rise of P.” It is obtainable only by gaining enough “Humanity points” and by letting Sophia die. In this ending, identical in the first part to the previous one, the dying Geppetto sees a tear running on P’s cheek, and his final words are “I’m sorry, son.” In the following scene, a blue butterfly flies over P looking at the sunrise on Krat. P then walks towards a female puppet resembling Sophia, who sits on a bench in a ruined environment. He imbues her with life and passes out. Shortly after, she awakens and holds him in her lap. The camera then zooms out, showing the two puppets in a pose extremely similar to the *Madonna della Pietà* by Michelangelo Buonarroti, but specular (see Figure 16.3). This reference is of particular symbolic interest: just as in the original statue Mary was holding the “saviour of humanity” after his toughest test, here Sophia is suggested to be equally holding “the saviour of posthumanity,” about to wake up after his final effort. The *Pietà* is also featured in the game in another moment: in the site of the Grand Exhibition we find a room with what is called “Saintress of Mercy Statue,” a sculpture depicting Mary (in her Michelangelo’s appearance) holding a puppet. This statue can be considered a “midway” between the original sculpture and the final version of it as displayed in the game, symbolizing a midpoint in the process of posthumanization. This is further reinforced by the fact that the “Saintress of Mercy Statue” is found middle way throughout the game. The posthumanist angle is stressed by these clear visual and symbolic references to, and progressive substitution of, Michelangelo’s *Madonna della Pietà*, which originally epitomized the values of Renaissance culture, focused on a celebration of the *human* and of the harmonious balance of the human body. Here, this visual echo is employed to suggest a *new* Renaissance, focused instead on the *posthuman* body.

Lies of P’s three possible endings problematize the role of the puppet’s body and its relation with a human body/nature. While playing, one is often inclined to believe that the more human P becomes, the better, and that the best ending is his transformation into a “complete” human being. And yet, as seen, P’s becoming a human boy represents the worst ending, with tragic deathly consequences for everyone (apart from Carlo and Geppetto), revealing a bleak reality created by the illusion of anthropocentric supremacy. The “true ending,” on the other hand, sees a glorification of the posthuman body: in probably the first and only scene without a foggy and dark surrounding



Figure 16.3 Three pictures delineating the visual similitude between (A) the Madonna della Pietà by Michelangelo Buonarroti. File by Stanislav Traykov; (B) the Saintress of Mercy Statue in the game. Screenshot from the game; (C) the ending scene of the game. Screenshot from the game.

environment, P revives Sophia as an Ergo-powered puppet, hinting at the possibility of a harmonious posthuman future in which technological bodies are incorporated in a world beyond anthropocentric obsession of control.

Another element in this direction is the presence of the shiny, glittery blue butterfly. Blue butterflies are always accompanying Sophia's manifestations, and they offer guidance and comfort to P; they are among the only extremely luminous elements in the game. Here, the butterfly introduces the posthuman scene of the "Rise of P." They strongly resemble the blue flower of literary German origins, a well-known aesthetical emblem

in Victorian times symbolizing mysterious revelations, transcendence, and beauty (see e.g. the use done by George MacDonald). The blue butterfly associated with Sophia (a name which, meaningfully, derives from the Greek word for “wisdom”) points here to a transcendent dimension of posthumanism hope. The entire figure of Sophia, *Pinocchio*’s Blue Fairy, teaches the character (and the player) a polysemantic message touching upon the meaning of compassion, humanity, and the abuses and uses of technology. Being both exploited to serve men’s technological purposes and revived as a mechanical puppet, she embodies possible novel ways to employ technological powers, not controlled by an anthropocentric will. As Massimo Riva argues, the Blue Fairy is “a guardian angel (the *dea ex machina*) of an alternative, echological (approach to) technology” (211).

Conclusion

Lies of P is an extremely rich and complex game, imbued with multiple literary and theoretical references that we only started exploring in this chapter. The Victorian period as an epoch of conflicts, dynamic transformations, and metamorphoses provides a huge number of creative and conceptual inputs for this game focused on staging and discussing posthuman, altered bodies. This posthuman reading of Victorian motives therefore shows its strength and relevance for today’s sensitivities. The story of *Pinocchio* turns in *Lies of P* into a Victorian-inspired tale that suggests the problematic, ambiguous aspects of the puppet’s posthuman body: “a paradoxical revenge of the puppet as an artificial life form, or an artificial intelligence capable of becoming human, all too human (as Spielberg’s retelling in *AI* has shown)” (Riva, 209).

Ultimately, *Lies of P* is about human nature: what makes us human, and what “posthumanism” may actually mean for us. As Riva has put it, “the story of the puppet who became a boy invites us to ask ‘what makes us who we really are?’” (209). In this sense, it should be noted, in concluding, that *P* never lies *on his own*. All choices to lie to other characters go through a *human* decision-making: that of the player. All *lies of P* are therefore actually lies of the *player*. In this metaleptic process of choosing, the motives of the player and that of the character blur and merge (Ensslin, Ryan), further problematizing the ontological status of the character—and that of the player, who themselves becomes part of the posthuman nature of *P*. To this end, all kind actions of the character are kind actions of the player, just like all fights against the deranged use of technology and against the megalomaniac aspiration of forced evolution. This brings even closer to contemporary audiences all the Victorian-born themes and preoccupations we have discussed so far, by making them nearer to the player’s heart. In the end, is not *P* a puppet whose strings lie in the hands of the Player?

Notes

- 1 Neowiz Games & Round8 Studio, *Lies of P* [Soulslike; PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows, MacOS, Xbox One Xbox, Series X/S], Neowiz Games, 2023.
- 2 The game draws from manga and anime, such as *Ergo Proxy* (Geneon Entertainment), *Fullmetal Alchemist* (Hiromu Arakawa et al. Fullmetal Alchemist, VIZ Media edition, Viz Media, 2005), and from video games like *Final Fantasy VII* (Square).
- 3 Katia Pizzi, "Introduction," *Pinocchio, Puppets and Modernity: The Mechanical Body*, edited by Katia Pizzi (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.
- 4 It may be also worth remarking that *The Adventures of Pinocchio* dates back to the nineteenth century, so it is a literary product contemporary to the Victorian times, influenced by its cultural trends and preferences (see Ann Lawosn Lucas, "Puppets on a String: The Unnatural History of Human Reproduction," *Pinocchio, Puppets and Modernity: The Mechanical Body*, edited by Katia Pizzi (New York: Routledge, 2012), 49–62).
- 5 Zoe Jaques, *Children's Literature and the Posthuman: Animal, Environment, Cyborg* (New York: Routledge, 2015.), 217.
- 6 Jaques, 217.
- 7 Jaques, 217.
- 8 Mattia Bellini, "Formal Organization and Complex Responses to Video Games Narratives," *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 5.CHII PLAY (Oct. 2021), 275:1–275:17. September 2021.
- 9 Andrew Reinhard, *Archaeogaming: An Introduction to Archaeology in and of Video Games*, 1st ed. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018).
- 10 Players are led to believe that "P" stands for "Pinocchio," although his identity is never made clear. "P" may also stand more generally for "Puppet" or even for "Player" (see below). For the purpose of this article, we will refer to him as "P."
- 11 Diana M. Pho, "Introduction," *Anatomy of Steampunk: The Fashion of Victorian Futurism*, edited by Katherine Gleason (New York: Race Point Publishing, 2013), 9.
- 12 This information results from a private discussion with Anderson, held while we the authors were writing this article.
- 13 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 217.
- 14 Laurence Vielmas-Talairach, *Fairy Tales, Natural History and Victorian Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 83.
- 15 Neowiz Games & Round8 Studio. *Lies of P* [Soulslike; PlayStation 4, PlayStation 5, Windows, MacOS, Xbox One Xbox, Series X/S]. Neowiz Games, 2023.
- 16 Talairach-Vielmas, 83.
- 17 J. Jason Wallin, "Dark Posthumanism, Unthinking Education, and Ecology at the End of the Anthropocene," *Posthumanism and Educational Research*, edited by Nathan Snaza and John Weaver (New York: Routledge, 2014), 134.
- 18 Bernard Perron and Felix Schröter, eds., *Video Games and the Mind: Essays on Cognition, Affect and Emotion* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016).
- 19 See William Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Banfield, Marie Banfield, "From Sentiment to Sentimentality: A Nineteenth Century Lexicographical Search," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 4 (2007), 1–11; and Francesca Arnavas, "'Feeling a Little Giddy': Nonsensical Emotions and the Body in Lewis Carroll's Alice books," *Victorians* 139 (2021), 75–88.

- 20 Cohen, 1.
- 21 Armstrong, 206.
- 22 See Sarah Alexander et al., “Should Victorian Studies Be Posthuman? A Panel Discussion,” *Victorian Review* 48.1 (2022), 53–68.
- 23 Cary Wolfe, *What Is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.
- 24 Alexander et al., 54.
- 25 Alexander et al., 54.
- 26 Alexander et al., 57.
- 27 Neowiz Games and Round8 Studio.
- 28 John McCormich, *The Victorian Marionette Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004).
- 29 Catherine Waters, “‘Fairy Palaces’ and ‘Wonderful Toys’: Machine Dreams in ‘Household Worlds,’” *Dickens Quarterly* 25.4 (2008), 216.
- 30 Neowiz Games and Round8 Studio.