



Revisiting World War I in Contemporaneity: The Myth of the War and the Game *Battlefield 1*

Releituras da Primeira Guerra Mundial na contemporaneidade: O Mito da Guerra e o jogo Battlefield 1

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Abstract: What is left of World War I a hundred years after the Armistice? Besides monuments and national holidays, texts are, in their various forms, among the remains of WWI. Together, they write what Samuel Hynes calls “the Myth of the War,” a narrative of signification that gradually became what and how we know about the war. A look at the relationship contemporary recreations of WWI establish with this myth is important to understand our sense of historical consciousness and collective memory. In this article, we propose a study of the single-player campaign mode of the video game *Battlefield 1* (2016) to inquire into its treatment of the myth. We claim that this narrative, partially constructed by the player, simultaneously reiterates and denies Hynes’s Myth of Disillusionment. We also argue that this paradox derives from an attempt at retelling the traditional version of the war through the first-person shooter (FPS) game genre.

Keywords: World War I; the myth of the war; *Battlefield 1*; first-person shooter.

Resumo: O que resta da Primeira Guerra Mundial cem anos após o Armistício? Além de monumentos e feriados nacionais, textos, em suas mais variadas formas, estão entre os resquícios dessa guerra. Juntos, eles escrevem o que Samuel Hynes denomina “o Mito da Guerra,” uma narrativa de significação que, aos poucos, se tornou o que

conhecemos sobre esse conflito e como o conhecemos. Observar a relação que recreações contemporâneas da guerra estabelecem com o mito é importante para compreender nossas noções de consciência histórica e memória coletiva. Neste artigo, estudamos o modo de campanha para um jogador do videogame *Battlefield 1* (2016) através da análise de seu tratamento do Mito da Guerra. Propomos que essa narrativa, parcialmente construída pelo jogador, simultaneamente reitera e nega o Mito da Desilusão. Também alegamos que esse paradoxo deriva da tentativa de recontar a versão tradicional da Primeira Guerra através do gênero de jogo de tiro em primeira pessoa (FPS).

Palavras-chave: Primeira Guerra Mundial; mito da guerra; *Battlefield 1*; jogo de tiro em primeira pessoa.

For a hundred years, November 11 has been celebrated as the date when the Allies and Germany signed the agreement for the cessation of hostilities on the Western Front, signaling the end of the Great War, which after the second world conflagration, came to be called World War I. Every Armistice Day, as that date came to be known, red poppies and silences have paid tribute to the lives lost in the four-year war. This period, to historian Eric Hobsbawm (1989), represents the collapse of the “Age of Empire,”¹ a time in human history, from 1875 to 1914, marked by a large number of empires: the British, Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman, Persian, Russian, and Japanese, to cite a few. The most powerful among them practiced unprecedented forms of simultaneous economic, political, social, and cultural imperialism that expanded their frontiers and their dominance but also exacerbated the power disputes and nationalist rhetoric that paved the way for WWI. When the dust settled in the trenches, according to Hobsbawm, at least five empires had disappeared. It is in this sense that Hobsbawm considers 1914-1918 the end of what he terms “long nineteenth century,”² an interval, beginning in 1789, characterized by a shared set of positivist values and industrial capitalism. He claims that the Great War not only closed this era, but inaugurated a new one, “the age of extremes”³ with catastrophic failures of autocratic, capitalist, and socialist governments. Still, as we look back

¹ HOBBSAWM. *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, p. 2.

² HOBBSAWM. *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, p. 6.

³ HOBBSAWM. *The Age of Extremes*, p. 4.

on that now distant November 11, 1918, a question arises: what is left of WWI at a time when its combatants are no longer alive, its technologies are obsolete, and consumerism, transportation, and communication are remarkably different from that epoch? Besides monuments and national holidays, the answer seems to lie in texts.

Linda Hutcheon (1988) claims that “*history* does not exist except as text,” not in denial of the existence of the past, but in acknowledgement that

its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are texts. Even the institutions of the past, its social structures and practices, could be seen, in one sense, as social texts.⁴

Texts are not only how we learn about the past, but also what we still know about it, both means and content. This may seem evident in the case of an event such as the Great War because it dates from a time so distant that witnesses are no longer with us. Even if they were, however, or if the war had taken place last year, our access to it would still, from Hutcheon’s perspective, be mediated by language in its most varied textual forms. This view equates the status of historical and literary accounts in relation to the truth, or to a reality, to which neither holds a claim. To Hutcheon, the real, the truth of an event, is unattainable. What we have are equally valid versions of that event, some of which are, for a variety of reasons, accepted and reiterated, thus becoming an insufficient substitute for the truth.

In this line of reasoning, official documents and historical reports construct our notion of WWI as do memoirs, novels, short stories, and movies. All these productions form an extensive intertextual network within which, for example, are poems by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, novels such as Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* (1924), Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), and Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), and autobiographies such as Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to All That* (1929) and Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* (1933). This web is not limited to the writings of the

⁴ HUTCHEON. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, p. 16.

first-half of the twentieth century. In fact, it continues to expand to include contemporary productions that, in different media, carry on a dialogue with the textual past while also narrating the Great War as it has come down to us. That is the case, for instance, of new novels, graphic novels, movies, TV series, and video games. In the first and second categories, for instance, one finds, respectively, Nick Dybek's *The Verdun Affair* (2018), the story of the relationship between two young Americans in the war-devastated city of Verdun, and Dave McKean's *Black Dog: The Dreams of Paul Nash* (2016), a retelling of traumatic events in the war painter's life. *Parade's End* (2012), *Frantz* (2016), and *Au Revoir Là-Haut* (2017) are, in turn, examples of TV series and movies set in WWI. As for videogames, a contemporary narrative form, although World War II is often the preferred theme, there are some games that revisit WWI, such as *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (2014), *Assassin's Creed Syndicate* (2015), and our object of analysis in this article, *Battlefield 1* (2016), developed and published by the American company Electronic Arts for several platforms, including Windows, PlayStation 4, and Xbox One. *The Verdun Affair* and *Battlefield 1* particularly contribute to the American textual legacy of WWI.

The most accepted and reproduced version of WWI that these texts construct amounts to Samuel Hynes's (1992) definition of "the Myth of the War," a phrase by which the author refers not to "a falsification of reality, but an imaginative version of it, the story of the war that has evolved, and has come to be accepted as true."⁵ In an argument bearing similarities to Hutcheon's textual understanding of the past, Hynes proposes that the myth is a "collective narrative of significance."⁶ It does not necessarily correspond to war in its entirety, but to "a tale that confirms a set of attitudes, an idea of what the war was and what it meant."⁷ This myth has gradually become the frame within which we read, write, and discuss WWI. It was supposedly inaugurated by some of the above-mentioned texts that today compose the canon of the literature of the Great War. It continues, however, to be constantly reworked in contemporary texts that, as we will see, inevitably relate to this myth, either reinforcing or challenging it.

⁵ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p. 74. This and subsequent page numbers correspond to the location of the quotation in the Kindle edition of the book.

⁶ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p. 78.

⁷ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p. 77.

A look at how contemporary recreations of WWI revisit the myth of this conflict seems important for a better assessment of our sense of historical consciousness and collective memory. With that in mind, we propose to examine the single-player campaign mode of *Battlefield 1* to inquire into its treatment of the Myth of the War, as stipulated by Hynes, as well as into the influence of its video game genre on this relationship. We claim that the narrative in *Battlefield 1*, partially constructed by the player, simultaneously reiterates and denies the myth of the Great War. We also argue that this paradox derives from retelling the traditional version of the war through the first-person shooter (FPS) game genre. In the first part of this article, we will discuss Hynes's notion of the myth of WWI further, explaining its historically textual construction and acknowledging criticism of it. Then, we will analyze *Battlefield 1* to discuss the presence of the myth in each of the stories that make up its campaign.

For the purposes of this article, it is pertinent to explain how *Battlefield 1* may read in relation to American literature, since "literature" and "American" are debatable realms in the contemporary world. Perhaps following the tendency of literature to extrapolate from definitions imposed upon it, literary studies have increasingly expanded to accommodate narratives in other media, including, but not limited to, video games. As for a geopolitical categorization, it can be rather difficult to place video games because they are often products of multinational companies. *Battlefield 1*, for instance, is developed by Electronic Arts Digital Illusion CE (EA DICE), a Swedish subsidiary of Electronic Arts (EA), the American videogame company that publishes the game. In this sense, *Battlefield 1* could be considered, although this is a conjectural classification, as a Swedish-American production in the English language.

I

The Myth of the War, the inherited textual construction of the history and meaning of WWI, according to Hynes, is the story of:

[A] generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory, and England, [that] went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that

their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance.⁸

This definition finds support, throughout Hynes's book, in particular words and notions he recurrently employs in his discussion of the myth, such as butchery, treason, discontinuity, distrust, protest, pessimism, emptiness, anonymity, disenchantment, artificiality, gap, disability, loss, death, skepticism, irony, pity, stupidity, lies, indifference, beastliness, brutality, waste, machinery, and cacophony. Some of these terms, as we will see, still summarize the war in contemporary writings that echo the myth.

As a collective narrative, the Myth of the War developed gradually throughout the twentieth century, even though its inaugural and canonical contributions, among which one might cite Owen, Sassoon, and Remarque's texts, date from the 1920s. The writings and paintings of this decade emerged in opposition to the monuments raised immediately after the war. They did not necessarily replace these monuments but co-existed in striking contrast with them. This is still the case nowadays, since, although we have long accepted the myth of the Great War, we read Owen as much as we visit war memorials in our studies of WWI. Hynes claims that "[a] monument records the dead, and so gives dignity to their undignified deaths ... They reassure non-combatants that the dead died willingly and do not resent or repent their sacrifice."⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that these monuments would promptly appear after 1918. As Hynes argues, monuments "preserve – artificially, anachronistically, like objects in a museum – the spirit in which these young men went to war ... they swell with emotion and pride at the end, and the Big Words sound out again, as though they had never been doubted,"¹⁰ the "Big Words," of course, referring to the abstract rhetoric of glory, pride, heroism, and honor that had once filled the young soldiers' dreams. In this argument, rulers resorted to monuments to channel popular emotions and control tempers, avoiding

⁸ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p.79.

⁹ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p.5543.

¹⁰ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p. 5715.

insubordination and potential upheavals, justifying polemical actions, and sustaining traditional discourse. Alternative views of the war, in turn, would take longer to surface, for they depended upon one's willingness and ability to cope with trauma, organize imagination and experience into narrative form, and confront official versions of events. Most of the Anglo-American novels, for instance, were published a decade after the end of the war. It is in this sense that the literature of the 1920s and early 1930s would later be known as the writings of the Lost Generation for its unmatched pessimism, feeling of emptiness, anti-heroism, and its portrayal of men as passive and defenseless victims.

The WWI of the Lost Generation was not, however, undisputed at that time. Hynes himself considers concurrent retellings of the war ignored by the myth. Discussing R.H. Tawney's "Some Reflections of a Soldier" (1916), he points out, for example, that "men at the Front continued to believe in the ideals for which they had enlisted, because only if those ideals were valid could their sufferings be justified."¹¹ These ideals were not the empty abstractions of a Rupert Brooke but plainer hopes of protection and peace. We may also cite Hynes in his later work on war narratives, *The Soldiers' Tale* (1997), which builds the argument that:

[T]he Myth of Disillusionment is the product of civilian-soldiers, middle-class intellectuals like Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Ernest Hemingway, and Henri Barbusse, men who retained their civilian peacetime values during the war and therefore saw it as an outrageous affront to humanity and a betrayal of their generation by their elders. These are the men who wrote the classic literary accounts of the war – memoirs, poems, novels – the books that are still read, because it is the middle-class that is the "self-recording class," those men who keep diaries and journals, and, in modern times, it is the also the "imagining class," those who write the novels, poems, and plays of western literature.¹²

¹¹ HYNES. *A War Imagined*, p. 2497.

¹² BURNS. *A Myth of Disillusionment?*, p. 2.

One may infer from the passage that there is a social-class component to the myth. As in every prevailing narrative, extrinsic, contingent elements, such as class, gender, and geopolitics, determine the reception, acceptance, and reproduction of particular stories to the detriment of deviant versions. In this sense, one of the reasons for the construction of the Myth of the War as it came to us might relate to the fact that its founding, classic texts spoke to the Modernist, *avant-garde* tendency that was on the rise in the first decades of the twentieth century.

According to this notion, “[w]hat is left out by this myth of the middle-class junior officers is the war stories of the other class extremes, the lower ranks and the elite, which ... were not tales of disillusionment.”¹³ In the first group, on the one hand, one would find, for example, Frank Richards’s *Old Soldiers Never Die* (1933). The second group, on the other hand, would hardly record the horrors of the trenches because “these men saw themselves as a part of a continuous line of warriors fighting for king and country within celebrated historical regiments and were indifferent to the politics that brought war about.”¹⁴ Hynes’s theory of the Myth of Disillusionment, nevertheless, acknowledges the existence of alternative accounts to it by responding that “the Myth tends to ignore other war stories that do not conform to its central tenets, namely, those from other fronts (Africa, the Middle East), other spaces (the air war), and other participants (women).”¹⁵ In time, the myth engulfs and discredits different versions of WWI as it becomes the truth.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the campaign in *Battlefield I*, we would like to restate that any contemporary recreations of WWI will, perforce, revisit the myth, reaffirming it, contesting it, or both. While narratives that reiterate the myth revalidate its status of truth, those that deny it, in turn, may, for instance, rewrite war as illogically terrible but beautiful, and draw dangerously close to pro-war, propagandist rhetoric by exalting, intentionally or not, abstractions of heroism, glory, honor, nationalism, and individual value. In this regard, we want to highlight the risks of challenging the myth of WWI. In spite of its dismissal of alternative stories, if compared with other myths, such as that of World War II as the “Good War,” the struggle of good (Allies) versus evil (Nazi

¹³ BURNS. *A Myth of Disillusionment?*, p. 2.

¹⁴ BURNS. *A Myth of Disillusionment?*, p. 3.

¹⁵ BURNS. *A Myth of Disillusionment?*, p. 4.

Germany), the myth of the Great War in English imagination is more consonant with peaceful, non-violent discourses because it emphasizes the brutality and ultimate futility of wars, regardless of how compelling the arguments to justify them. It is in this sense that the approach to the myth in contemporary narratives tells as much about our sense of historical consciousness and collective memory as about war itself. If these retellings contradict the Myth of Disillusionment, they could also be flirting with the “Big Words,” which are potentially harmful if these narratives, as it is often the case of films and video games, are directed to a younger and more vulnerable audience.

II

Battlefield 1, despite the name, is the fifteenth installment in EA’s *Battlefield* series. It is a first-person shooter (FPS) video game, that is, a game centered around armed combat against other players and/or artificial intelligence, experienced by the player through a character’s eyes. As in any first-person narrative, during the action the player takes over the deictic “I”. The difference is that, while the reader only observes events unfolding from this perspective, the player acts: he may walk, run, explore, hide, interact, and shoot. In this sense, therefore, in some games each player may construct a different narrative. This is not the case of the campaign mode of *Battlefield 1*, however, because a series of mandatory objectives lead to a pre-determined closing of the stories, even though there may be small variations on the path to achieve this end. Besides the single-player campaign, *Battlefield 1* offers several other game modes, especially within the online multiplayer, but these will not be object of study in this article. This article focuses on *Battlefield 1* as a narrative in relation to the myth of WWI. Therefore, we will not evaluate or discuss gameplay except when it is relevant (as it will show itself to be) to the proposed theme.

The single-player campaign mode in *Battlefield 1* comprises a prologue and five shorter chapters recreating historical battles, several fronts, and different forms of war. This is a relatively short campaign, as it takes approximately seven hours to successfully complete the six stories, namely, “Storm of Steel,” “Through Mud and Blood,” “Friends in High Places,” “Avanti Savoia,” “The Runner,” and “Nothing is Written.” The prologue, “Storm of Steel,” and the first story, “Through Mud and Blood,” recreate the 1918 land war in France and trace intertextual links with

other WWI references. *Storm of Steel* is the English title of the memoir that the German officer Ernst Jünger wrote about his experiences on the Western Front, first published in 1924. Besides, Jünger participated in the Battle of Cambrai, reimagined in “Through Mud and Blood,” which, in turn, may derive its name from the unofficial motto of the British Army’s Royal Tank Regiment, “From mud, through blood to the green fields beyond,” as well as from the title of Frank Owen and H. W. Atkins’s (1945) book on the history of the Royal Armoured Corps.

Before the prologue begins, a message on a black screen warns the player that “What follows is frontline combat. You are not expected to survive.”¹⁶ A subsequent cutscene, showing a wounded soldier at a hospital, reveals itself as an illusion as this same character, now controlled by the player, wakes up to the sound of artillery in the middle of the battle. The soldier, one may later learn, belongs to the Harlem Hellfighters, an infantry regiment of the New York Army National Guard consisting mainly of African-American men. This prologue is the part of the game that introduces the player to the gameplay and explains how they should perform the most basic commands: run, shoot, crawl, jump, pick up and change weapons. “Storm of Steel” is, in this regard, difficult and potentially frustrating to play because one’s character dies several times, being replaced by another Hellfighter, while a male voiceover laments the brutality and the death toll of the war. In this sense, this story echoes the Myth of the War by tracing a parallel between the newness of the soldier and the inexperience of the player at this first moment of the campaign, for both suddenly see themselves amid an unexpectedly savage and pointless battle, with little chance of survival. To epitomize this blunt disillusionment, at the end of this story, in-game cinematics show the encounter between the last Hellfighter the player had been controlling and a German soldier in the debris of no-man’s land (Figure 1). After holding each other at gunpoint, both lower their weapons in exhaustion, as if realizing the futility of their situation and the emptiness around them.

¹⁶ EA DICE. *Battlefield 1*, cap. Storm of Steel.

FIGURE 1 – A Harlem Hellfighter and a German soldier hold each other at gunpoint in no-man’s land.



EADICE. *Battlefield 1*, cap. Storm of Steel.¹⁷

In the chapter “Through Mud and Blood” the player controls Daniel Edwards, an English chauffeur assigned the task of driving “Black Bess,” a Mark V tank, through German lines towards the French city of Cambrai. Besides Edwards, inside the tank are Townsend, the tank crew’s commander, McManus, a more experienced but cynical gunner, Pritchard, another gunner, and Finch, a boyish and friendly mechanic. Similarly to the prologue, this campaign may be said to subscribe to the Myth of Disillusionment because it denounces the waste of young lives in the war as both Pritchard and Finch die abruptly. Finch’s death is particularly harsh, not only because he is an amicable character with whom the player might empathize, but also because he is killed while following Townsend’s order to fix the tank under enemy fire. When he dies, Edwards and, therefore, the player must fulfill this and other dangerous demands that, in turn, suggest the commander’s incompetence. This is, in fact, another point in which the story touches the myth, betraying the amateurism and potential negligence of those in charge. In this sense, in his defiance of the officer and later desertion of the mission, McManus embodies the skeptical, pessimistic tone that distinguishes classic WWI texts. It is important to acknowledge, however, that a note of redemption

¹⁷ *Battlefield 1* and screenshots of it are licensed property of Electronic Arts, Inc. We thank EA DICE for granting us permission to use these images.

echoes when McManus later returns to help Edwards and as Townsend sacrifices himself to allow his remaining soldiers to reach Cambrai.

Clyde Blackburn, an American con man, is the narrator and protagonist of the third chapter, “Friends in High Places.” A short in-game sequence at the start of the campaign shows Blackburn and George Rackham, a pilot of British nobility, betting their planes in a game of cards in France, 1917. Blackburn, who does not actually have a plane, cheats Rackham and steals his aircraft and identity to enter the war via the British Air Force. He does not do this, however, out of abstract values of glory and sacrifice, but simply and egocentrically to prove himself a skilled pilot. This vacuous arrogance, in fact, deals more with the anti-heroism of the myth than Blackburn’s insistence on reassuring others that he is not a hero even as he, controlled by the player, discovers a secret German munitions base, faces air combat, and carries his injured gunner all the way through no-man’s land and back to British lines after they crash. Perhaps because the air war is often romanticized in popular culture, the emphasis on individual abilities and morals in this story seems to contradict the myth. In addition, background music increases excitement in battles in which the player must shoot down enemy aircrafts and zeppelins.

This impression dissipates, however, as the campaign draws to a close. In a series of cutscenes, Blackburn is arrested and deported to London accused of fraud. His narrative then becomes increasingly cinematographic when, upon his arrival, he is allowed into a plane to help protect the city from a blitz (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 – Blackburn’s plane is shot down during a London air raid.



EADICE. *Battlefield 1*. cap. Friends in High Places.

Shot down into the Thames, Blackburn resurfaces to end his tale on a metanarrative note:

And that's my story. A selfish man who risked his own life to save another – and in doing so, found he was saved himself. Things get mixed up in wartime though and you'll probably hear other versions. A rogue pilot who stole a plane, who killed his buddy. Then lied, cheated and murdered his way across half of the Western Front — only to escape court-martial in the chaos of an air raid. But don't listen to any of that. What you heard from me is the truth. I wouldn't tell you if it wasn't. Would I?¹⁸

These final lines cast doubt on his entire narrative of unwilling but redeeming heroism by presenting a less glorious version of events that, in turn, conforms to the Myth of the War. This ending also recalls Hutcheon's and Hynes's ideas that there is no unmediated access to a real past, but numerous versions of it, one of which, for a variety of reasons, may acquire the status of truth.

Whereas the first campaigns in *Battlefield 1* establish a dialectical relationship with the myth by revisiting some of its central tenets but also, as we will soon argue, by valuing players' individual abilities, the last three tales more explicitly contradict this widely accepted narrative. Because their treatment of the myth is somewhat similar, we shall consider them together. "Avanti Savoia," "The Runner," and "Nothing is Written" tell, respectively, the stories of Luca Cocchiola, member of the Italian Arditi unit in the Dolomites in 1918; Frederick Bishop, an Australian message runner in the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915, a possible allusion to Mel Gibson's character in the film *Gallipoli* (1981); and Zara Ghufran, a Bedouin rebel working with British officer T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) to undermine the Ottoman occupation of the Arabian Peninsula in 1918. Cocchiola and Bishop are, again, narrator and protagonist, controlled by the player. Ghufran and Lawrence, however, co-star the final story, the former as the player's character and the latter as the voiceover. The three combatants stand out as talented and experienced lone fighters, one-man/woman armies, even if inserted within a unit: Cocchiola, for instance, defeats a whole bomber squadron alone with an anti-aircraft gun in one of the most difficult moments of the game; Bishop is known as

¹⁸ EA DICE. *Battlefield 1*, cap. Friends in High Places.

“the pride of Australia”¹⁹ and dismantles entire enemy lines in his lonely communication missions; finally, Ghufraan infiltrates Ottoman camps to alter the course of trains and facilitate a rebel attack. In addition to their fighting skills, these characters are also fearless, dependable, and morally correct: they kill in the name of family, younger generations, community, and nation. Cocchiola, for example, puts himself at risk in search for his twin brother Matteo, also a member of the elite special force. Bishop, in turn, although an already famous ship commander, takes over the role of message runner to spare Jack Foster, a solicitous but inexperienced young soldier, in whose place he dies at last.

It is true that Foster is as cynical towards the war as McManus and that Cocchiola still mourns Matteo’s death years later, as he retells that story to his own daughter, recalling his “Lost Generation.”²⁰ This reiteration of the myth, nevertheless, is belittled in the face of the emphasis on heroism and other values that compose and reinforce the set of “Big Words” that often attempt to legitimate the war. Besides, these three campaigns, unlike the previous ones, rewrite WWI as a coherent event, one in which participants could foresee and understand the causes and consequences of their actions, instead of the senseless confusion more often reported in traditional narratives. Ultimately, survivors or martyrs, Cocchiola, Bishop, Ghufraan, and even Lawrence achieve the glory the Myth of Disillusionment denounces as snaring and fallacious.

The analysis of the single-player campaign mode of *Battlefield 1* reveals a paradoxical relationship with the myth of the Great War, since the stories manifestly support some of the main principles of this collective narrative of signification, but also implicitly comply with propagandist discourse. We want to argue that this dialectic relation derives from an attempt at retelling the traditional version of the war through the FPS game genre. Even if we do not go into a discussion of FPS potential stimulation of violence, we contend that *Battlefield 1* owes to this genre the instances in which it contests or escapes the Myth of the War to resemble the old rhetoric of illusions and “Big Words.” That is because FPS is a genre centered around the player as protagonist and, thus, dependent upon his/her individual skills for the completion of objectives that, in turn, may lead to a pre-determined

¹⁹ EA DICE. *Battlefield 1*, cap. The Runner.

²⁰ EA DICE. *Battlefield 1*, cap. Avanti Savoia.

ending over which one has no control. In this sense, it is incorrect, or at least insufficient, to conclude that *Battlefield 1* is a pro-war game even in its most heroic campaign. The issue lies instead within a game genre that tends to generate contradictions to the myth. If, however, one does consider the question of the promotion of violence, one might need to acknowledge that, although FPS is common among war games, it is not the most appropriate or ethical form of reimagining war in video games because it often falls back on propagandist ideals. We do not want to assign to games the function of helping avoid wars, or any other role beyond themselves, but, when it comes to recreating conflicts of such a destructive power, it is important to consider the possible effects of particular forms of representation. In this regard, research is still to reveal how to retell WWI in a videogame, aimed at entertaining a large audience, without reverting to jaded master narratives. After all, what remains of the Great War a hundred years later are texts and we must be attentive to them.

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Recebido em: 31 de dezembro de 2018.

Aprovado em: 16 de abril de 2019.