

Cloud Cathedral 77

travel logs

Dossier

Pre-production and Design Journal

Echoing

Hallways

Mythopoetic

Ballad

Journey

Dusty, Rainy

Sound attentive?

Input

Use stable diffusion and Dall-E to create scenery?

Goat the Oat kind of adventure?

Output

Old-school storytelling/poetry with minimal technological interference or noise

Voice acting using AI idea?

KEY MOMENT #1

Interactive storybook website example that I showed during class include:

- <https://exp-my-little-storybook.lusion.co/>
- <http://oatthegoat.assemblyltd.com/>

Commentary

I started with a brainstorming mindmapping poem as usual.

I submitted the following project description and statement to SPG: “Project Statement. The project is a digital mythopoeia based on the Grande Noirceur Mythistory. The goal is to explore and reposition the myth behind decline or incline in religious practice in the context of past and present Quebec culture, and how modernity, memory and storage recounts these in collective culture. How does the Quebecer self-upload in a world of endless configuration, data-ism and other forms of beliefs inside and outside of belief systems? How might we re-imagine mythos in THE video game?

The project targets the students in the Concordia Community who subscribe to religious heritage or anti-religions, and somewhere in between.”

“Project Description. I will re-create a short historical myth in the digital interactive narrative format. The work is materialized in miniature frames of a re-imagined past and present Quebec low-poly 3D steampunk world which is far cuter than reality. The intended experience is that of going through a storybook, and visiting visually remarkable scenes of a theatrical myth-play based on historical myth. The experience requires minimal user interaction to advance through the story (i.e., a semi-guided exploration). The game follows two characters belonging to each timeline (1940s and 2030s Quebec). (TBD) - The narrative does not have to be “standard linear”, could be more freeform/de-assembled (free thought).

The Unity game engine will be used to create the stage, Threejs website format, and Blender will be used to create the 3D content.

Text in-game will use dialect that suits the context in Quebec (a bit different). The poetry and language in dialogue will also be emphasized. Art assets will try to have some “enchantment”. This is done to capture the beauty in the myth. Low-poly 3D characters will possibly be voiced through the use of AI voice-acting technology software (Replica Studios).

Low-poly 3D models of important sites in Quebec will be based on real-life data and architecture, especially the churches. Some character elements may also be based on Jungian frameworks and archetypes as these are part of the theme.

Storyboard-wise, myth moments will depict historical and geopolitical ideas following a hero character, who interviews, logs and uploads his encounters with people of the past and present Quebec. Other “representational of the work” scenes include digital church attendance, and as a stretch goal, a metaphorical murder mystery to solve.

Mechanics-wise, the game will have a simple point and click adventure interface, a dialogue system, and a simple time travel mechanic which will be used to establish a continuity between past and present narratively.

Finally, a simple interview and branching self-data journaling/logging mechanics through the UI will allow the player to engage with past mythistory.

Interviews may be conducted to gather accurate historical information about the time (mainly from professors at Concordia).”

Candidates Sketches

- Scene showing the boy looking at the sky, snow falls, it's dark in the town
- Poetry About the snow
- Poem about the light in the windows at night
- Poetry about the trodden road leading to the forest
- Scene showing a person looking through a window (45 degrees), someone is walking outside on the road, looking down, going to work
- Poem about departure to work in the morning vs. at night (dad works at night)
- Person smoking a cigarette close up
- Poem about smoke
- Whole story is about the beauty in the common routine of lower/middle class in 1930s vs. 2030 (like those paintings, but just interactive moments)
- Empty scene (or one or two dead trees, wind blowing)

January 25th, 2023

I refined the idea in class during my research presentation. Had conversations with classmates and teacher. During the presentation, I was suggested by Sarah that I could just use AI to generate/parse all the objects in my scene and generate poetry from it. I agreed that you could do that, but I replied that I wanted to do my poetry myself :-)

Fred suggested I could do a bit of both later. He also mentioned using UberDuck and Splice for voice acting and other assets later on. Professor Bradd suggested I could make a connection between my interest in religion/God with AI. Where is our place, and God's place, in the clouds? The location of that answer may be the Cathedral in the Clouds... We also discussed other artwork that incorporated cathedral structures, which could be parts of the sketches or website. Where is our place in all this... big questions... meaning

I also mentioned the idea of simulating an open mic or poem recital in public. The intended experience of this project could be to "feel" as if attending a poetry reading. For this to happen, though, I either have to read the poetry or let the AI do it...

But the experience for the user, at this point, is a bit more clarified: they should feel as if part of the reading of the poem, hopefully moved by the words on the screen and curious about the rest...

I also mentioned using multimedia in the website as context to the experience (articles, essays, video clips, sounds, etc. around). The whole experience is almost like a research creation paper-website documentary with a nice example in the center, or is the stuff led by it more wholesomely?

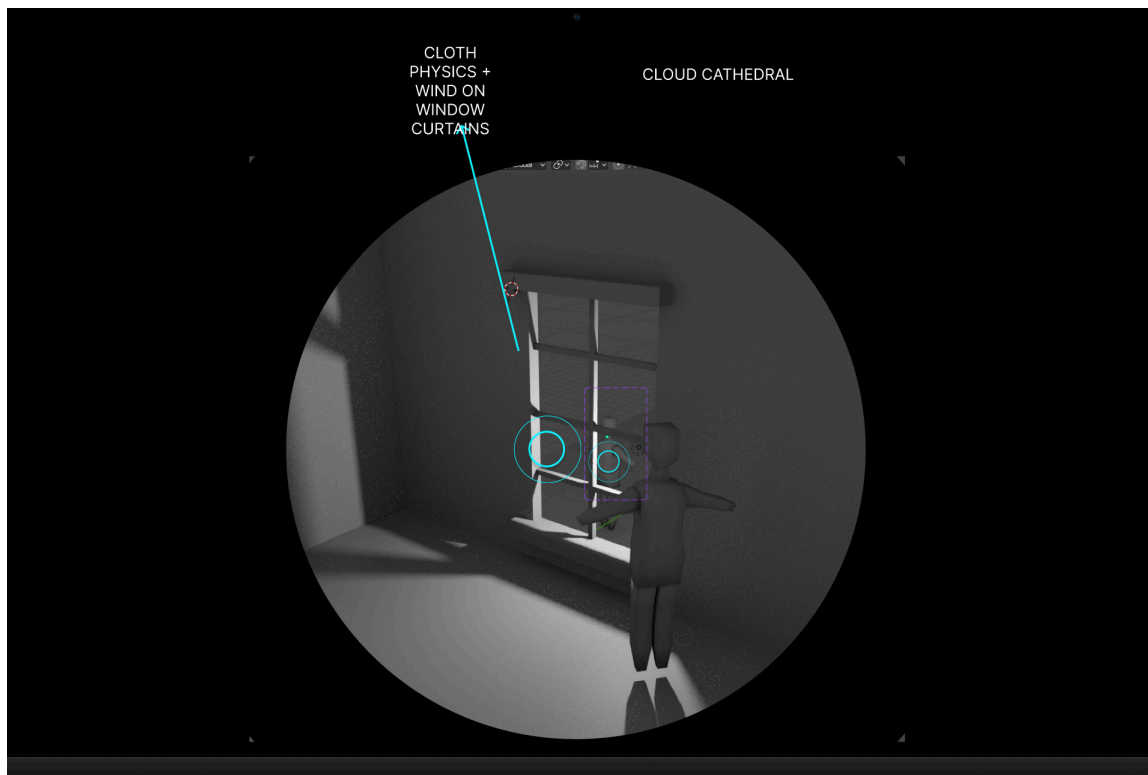


Image 1. An early Figma prototype showing basic interactable elements (turquoise circles) of a scene of the storybook. A 3D character walks outside in a loop, while another character looks outside a window from a building. Clicking on the window or character outside triggers a poem. The presentation is a bit cinematic and mysterious. A basic question is, should the user be able to alter the camera's position or rotation in this scene?



Image 2. The user has clicked on one of the interactable elements in the scene, triggering and showing a pop-up containing the poem read by an AI. The background becomes blurred and/or black. The user can click away to return to the scene.

Mythopoeia

I did some research and digging about mythopoeia and came upon the book:

Modernist Mythopoeia: The Twilight of the Gods

...Which interestingly (this was after deciding on the whole religious theme backdrop), introduces the subject with the character of Buck Mulligan, an atheist impersonating a priest. This echoes last class's discussion of exploring what an AI priest would be like - what is in their soul? How would catholic ritual intersect with mathematical algorithms?

Concept

From the book: "Modernist Mythopoeia argues that the experimental modernist form of mythopoeia was directed towards expressing a range of metaphysical perspectives that fall between material secularism and dogmatic religion. The book is a timely addition to the 'post-secular' debate as well as to the 'return of religion' in modernist studies."

Some reviews (that I feel envious about):

"Stylish, sophisticated and scholarly." - Professor Phil Shaw, University of Leicester, UK

"Modernist use of myth went from the enigmatic to the banal without the intervening stage of being understood. Recent resurgence of interest in myth, however, allows for more searching and discriminating treatment as Scott Freer's book shows. His close discussion of a variety of modernist writers (Nietzsche, T. S. Eliot, Kafka, Lawrence, Hilda Doolittle and Wallace Stevens) brings out the differing conceptions of myth in literary writers of the period and places the topic within a larger context of modern philosophical aesthetics." - Emeritus Professor Michael Bell, University of Warwick, UK

Concept (cont')

My slow, languinous google research this morning also led me to the PhD thesis titled:

THE OUROBOROS SEIZES ITS TALE : STRATEGIES OF MYTHOPOEIA IN NARRATIVE FICTION FROM THE MID-FIFTIES TO THE MID-SEVENTIES : SIX EXAM- PLES

In which Mythopoeia is analyzed and compared to literature.
The following website was also resourceful.

<https://sites.google.com/site/mythopoeiclit/>

Potential setting: a recorded Myth in which a man goes to church for the first time but this time, with “snow in his hair and dust on his shoes”. Also the church is found in the digital realm, its sculpted frames spanning ordered windows of pixels that don’t care about wind or the low tremor in the ground.

Website idea: To serve the mythopoetic agenda, the website would feed the mythmaking, worldbuilding layer, in which every element of the website serves to indicate the realness of the myth and poem. For this to sort of work, the website’s elements would feel like part of the point-and-click “gamified” layer. The website pretends it is part of the myth’s fantasy world.

In other words, the myth’s worldbuilding IS the website. Mythwebsite? Myth webbuilding? Cloud cathedral (the architecture of the website is the myths’ world). The website is NOT ABOUT the myth, but IS the myth. So this is just the equivalent to staging the scene of an installation, but in the virtual.

Conceptual implication: the poetry reading (AI) does not have to happen strictly in the 3D canvases -- it can happen anywhere in the website, since the website is the cathedral in this new structure or frame. Can add sound effects and animations to support this effect.

Gamified implication: The experience is closer to an interactive “choose your own adventure” + “point-and-click” if interactions in the website ARE part of the mythopoeia.

Technical implication: The threejs 3D embeds would need to feel as part of the structure of the cathedral, so we need to drop the “frame” (the rounded borders shown in the figma sketch) and make the embed woven in the stiches or trenches. Part of the background.

“Man-documentary-travel to a Cathedral in the Clouds”

Experience or feeling of intrigue, awe, immersion, intense beauty (like reading a high fantasy novel or particularly evocative poem). 3D objects and structures, poetry and fictional narratives build on that.

KEY MOMENT #2

Wed Feb 1, 2023

I wrapped up with Figma prototyping tests and started working on a moodboard and storyboarding.

I also experimented with 2.5D environments.

Fred asked a lot of questions about my views on religion (presumably for his project's worldbuilding efforts) and my interpretation of the Cathedral. From that discussion, I was interested in the idea of using trees to form architectural elements.

There are a few basic design questions I need to answer for the first prototype: how does the poetry in the vertical scrolling container + 3D sketch feel? Is it interesting already at this stage? How do the elements balance out each other?

Thur, Feb 2, 2023

I listened to piano music and thought about what I was mulling on yesterday - how to weave the narrative together nicely in the website? I thought about a fake newspaper outlet, which could fit with the poems in the dynamic vertical scrolling container idea. Basically, the generated parts of the vertical scrolling container are the dynamic portion of the experience - they are generated according to some database. Like a Facebook, Twitter or Instagram wall, but peppered with "news! poetry!" and occasionally the 3D scene + interaction or model begging for attention. There is an element of surprise there. Addictive to scroll down..

In other words, a fictional social media page in a myth world - what would its inhabitants tweet or post about? Maybe that very familiar, modern format could be used to tell poetry, storytelling, and more? Is it outrageous to imagine high fantasy villagers post about ravens eating crops, low-birth soldiers courting nobles, and bandits laying waste? What would farmers in that myth tweet about? The speculation with regards to the daily lives of common, famous and infamous inhabitants of that little simulated mythworld is the concept. Technical reflection is put on understanding the interaction of the infinitely scrolling vertical container used to display content and how this may be used to re-invent digital interactive narrative. Note: The original project description are not completely the same now.

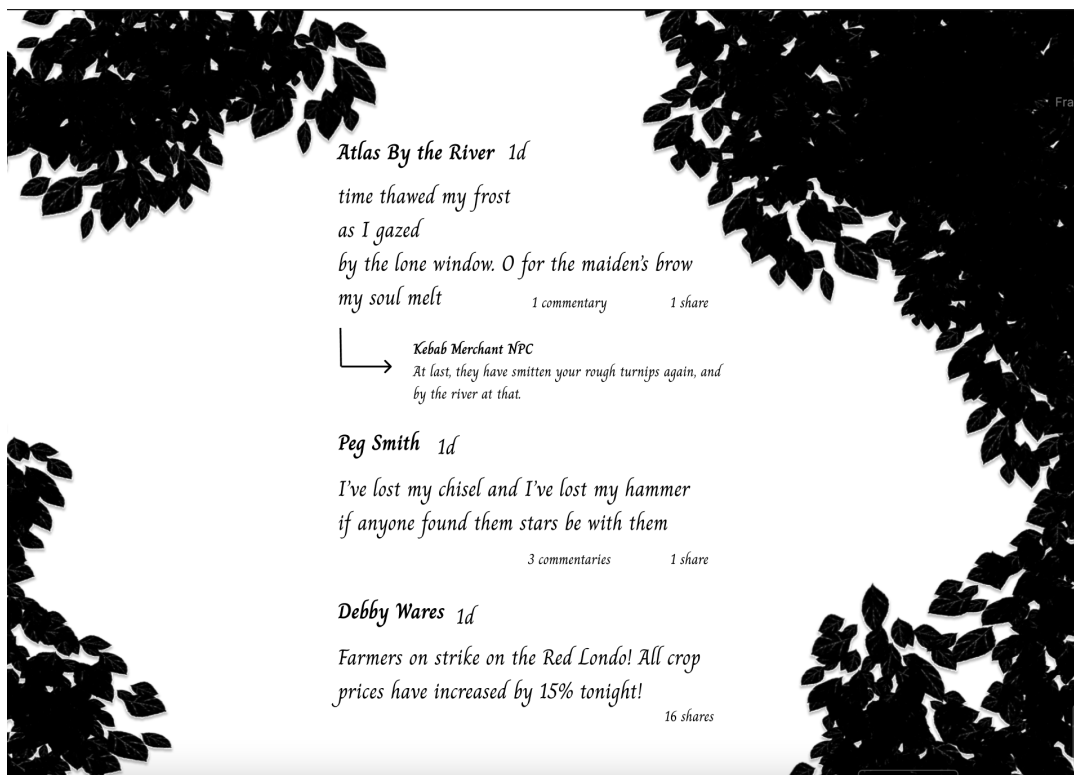
DESIGN QUESTION: Is the experience fully generated or semi-guided or fully guided? I'm thinking to divide the story into chapters, using the social media format, but to put breakpoints or pauses in the story marked by interactive moments (3d interactions and others).

KEY MOMENT #3

Format of the medium as the message: creation of a myth in social media format.

Also, the content wouldn't be just poetry, but fictional posts too made by the inhabitants of that mythological world/village. Where appropriate. **EXPERIENCE: Lurking on Myth Media**





Prototype example of the Myth Media



Prototype example with a 3d interaction in a post made by one of the villagers. Note the last post by Merlin, a mythological figure - the player/user could actually pull out the sword of myth in a 3d canvas in the post (not shown here), and then later get a private message “thanks” from Merlin. Bridging the gap / crossing mythology and interactive media... More interactions may be planned out next.

Wed, Feb. 8th, 2023

I spoke with Sabine at the CLAB.

She suggested that I look into server side functionality to display different walls for different users... She suggested I expand the thing because it may be too flat right now - add more procedural or algorithmic things beneath the scene (more grouping, ranking, ordering...). The idea is that the more shares for a post's myth, the more real the myth becomes. A direct correlation!

Thu, Feb. 9th, 2023

I spoke with Jonathan Lessard about the project. He was interested in what the other characters might have to say in the posts about each other. He reminded me of the "funny" side of the experience.

He mentioned the 3d aspect may take away from the experience actually (to be careful with take, or at least see where it takes you). In the sense that the user can't really interact with the myth...

He also discussed about making it more clear now who the user is and what they have to do. Their role in the experience. Can they generate content?

He also mentioned needing more feedback - what does the user do these things for and what do they get in return? Ranking, feedback, social status? Taking some parts / mirroring real life uses of social media makes sense here.

He also pointed out a reference about Twitter and Dracula letters.

He said something about letters being fixed in the past, and that with Twitter you could tell about actions moment to moment, and it could still be happening as you tweet it (the instancy / urgency of things / actions / climax).

He also mentioned narrative design as a field. Overall he liked the idea and said it was a good one...

Collabs with other students.

Different character/profiles RPG...

Social media algorithms that aim to prioritize content that users are more likely to engage with sort of imply that all our relationships are not equal or important... Interesting that we add people anyway...

News feed

Interests

Self-invention - Who am I through the posts/myths in the web-site

Engage with the myth... as user... what does this mean?

Content quality, sorting algorithms

Tags

Relevant topics

Compelling images and videos

...

The way to tell a story...

MIMIC what people do in a novel... or tv show...

You follow a character.... in a video game.... you do that on social media too

--- That continues the arc of the story.... in a certain way....

Maybe all the myth figures post their stories from ch1. then you as a user or fan, decides how to pursue that story in what order and structure.... and the result is the experience. The unpursued stories do not develop...

Fri, Feb 10th, 2023

Final notes on 3d use: use it to show key moments in myths but using modern language, behaviour (tone of voice) and style. E.g., selfie when picking up Excalibur

Sometimes key moments are shown in a frenetic fashion through successive posts and interruptions

Make use of branching x posting mechanics because duh it's a computer

The story is told according to social media language : emoticons, memes, troll/hate posting, comments, shares, likes, dislikes, reactions, tags, interruptions and random posts

pov: from characters' social network/friends, followers/fans' perspectives (using their phones), character profiles accounts

content: text, images, video, questions, hyperlinks

Sun Feb 26th, 2023

I managed to implement the previous iteration's design. But I must have spent around two weeks tinkering with the posting algorithm. In the end, I don't think I'm going to use it.

I had two major issues: one is that the scope for covering those myths is overblown (e.g., the legend of arthur, old, new testaments...) **KEY MOMENT #4**

I accidentally found a solution to this issue at the Webster library, where I had ordered a book on mythology. I found a book on Aesop's Fables. fables are shorter in nature and have a "moral punch-line", so the idea is to use these instead of bigger myths.

If this is the case, the focus would be less based on "game designing" the experience and more on the content... being satisfactory and funny to read in the cloud cathedral's interface.

The playful and reflective use of the posts, which have some morality in their content, would be the focus. For example, how can modern cultural behaviours (e.g., selfies, memes) on social media enhance or change the meaning of the old fables?

The act of retranslating or rewriting those fables, and even interpreting them according to today's standards, is an old topic. There is the moral embedded inside the story itself, and there is the moral appended before and after the story has been told. In social media, one could extend the paradigm to "reverbate" the meaning of the story by other forms of appending, such as extended comments and reactions, or more...

I also found a reference to the cathedral in an old book on drama (page 222).

Wednesday March 8th, 2023

To summarize: Myths are too big (arthurian legends) - so I decided to use fables instead

My experience reading through fables was to eventually flip through to the conclusion asap. I wanted to be playful with this and remove the instant satisfaction: Jokes have a punch line, fables have a hunger line, so let's make the user hungrier

Problem of cannot change content of fable (endomythium), but can change or allow the user to change the promythium and epimythium: Adaptive or dynamic hanging punchline

March 16th, 2023, 4:54 PM

So I continued R&D with the fables, and experimented with the twine game to follow... I think I need to recenter.

I think it'd be best if I only added AI generated content for the social media experiment and cut the 3d stuff?

There is already a lot of "creative" content to play with for modern aesthetics.

And another question remains: how related should the fables/experiences be, or should I leave that to the audience to decide for themselves?

I think, though, that the "Cathedral" theme from the beginning of the game could be interesting to keep. It's representable in all the formats on the website (maybe less obviously in the social media stuff).

I should probably go deeper in there and add more characters per fable if possible. I do want, however, to finish the twine game, too, for completion and to have the "big thing at the end" done. In some ways I feel this project has been about studying and preparing to create my own stuff, from translation to a bigger creative writing prompt. Like a writing portfolio/sandbox, too.

March 17th, 2023, 3:51 PM

Email sent to Jonathan Lessard:

Following our discussion and receiving a SPG fund, I expanded the ambition of it a bit and included DALL-E image generation and AI voice acting. I didn't use GPT-3/4 yet. The project sort of became a "playful tech translation of classics and... a series of text-based meditations on "The Cathedral". It's a collection of writing endeavors geared towards producing writing samples in different tones, but that all converge on a single theme.

In thinking about who the user is... they are a person travelling inside the psychological structures of their own soul (The Cathedral). The Cathedral's myth is the ever-happening myth of a man's religious conversion to God. It refers to an interior state of mind (the metaphysical-psychological structures of identity and religion) and all the experience is divided in that structure's "floors":

F0 is the social media experiment we talked about (seems more about something related to the saying that nothing is new under the sun (i.e., today's social media content and object of politics are a diluted reflection of old fables, but where morals of old are concerned these might be missing in form today)

F1 is a twine game in progress

F2 is a 3d walking simulator/poetics in progress (not uploaded yet)

Fri Apr 7, 2023

I got feedback for the 3d cathedral in class. I am going to address them next week before delivery.

Add Atmospheric Sounds / gregorian chanting?

Consider windows build

For the social media experiment, remember to hide the scrollbars

Change the "d" to 'days'

Add like button?

Sprinkle more stuff related to SM

Finish twine game

Fix cathedral models

Match 3d skybox mood to the twine's blue fog

Finish the poems (add those below f0 as well)

Add ending at the top

Add cheat codes

Tick decompression feedback for build

Tue, April 11th, 2023

The 3d representation of the Cathedral. It was originally only about walking up fifteen floors up (or down). However, I wanted to make the game more accessible and usable to a more general population (this required a more meditative attitude after all), so I decided to tweak the modality of the experience into a voice-acting heavy experience and direct the AI voice actors. @BRAD I needed to spend more credits for the SPG as well!

But really, why? Why add dozens of hours to the work? Aside from Michael H's and Brad's crucial feedback last week on the issue of audio in the walking simulator, again, I thought about the general experience. The Cathedral is after all a pretty complex subject, so I thought GUIDES would be a good idea. Guides on a tour, in the Cathedral. I

Wed, April 12th, 2023

I presented the three installations and the game's teaser.

I'm really not sure how the class received it (almost received no comments), but Brad said the British accent gave a comical tone to the second guide. I told him that was the purpose - the devil/antagonists portrayed as a humoristic figure/in tone is a common and chilling myth (E.g., Nordic god Loki, The Joker, etc.).

The professor also asked if the walkie-talkie's buttons were interactive - no they aren't. But there's no need for now. The game has only one primary action: walking. And choosing. More would be distracting...

The walkie anchors or grounds the player's attention and since they don't have a body, this is helpful. It also makes the experience more about the communication and relationship with the two guides seem more material.