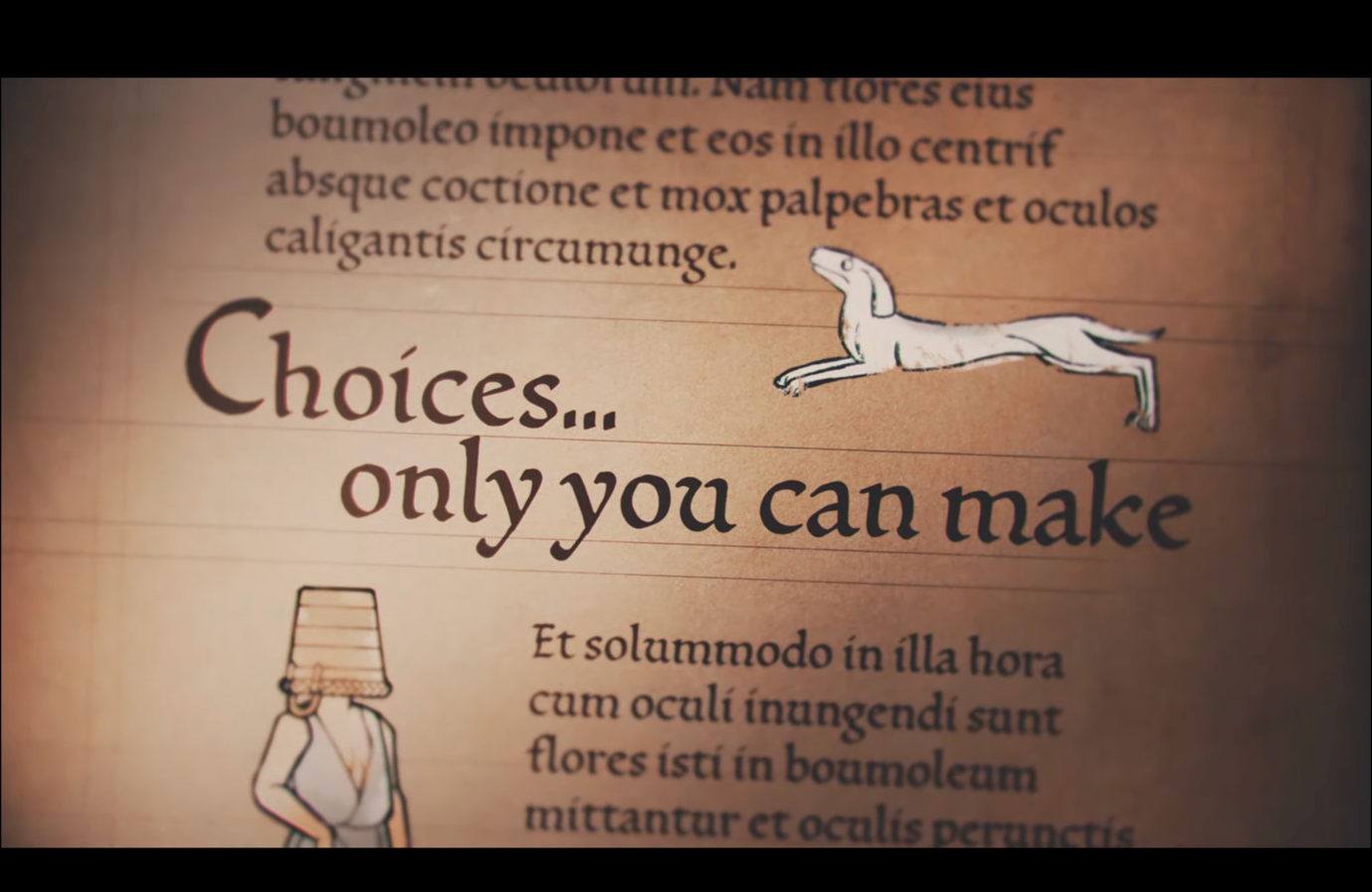
In Obsidian Entertainment’s *Pentiment* (2022), the player takes on the role of artist Andreas Maler. Andreas (and therefore the player) begins the game working on his masterpiece, anxious for success, while simultaneously working in the scriptorium of Kiersau Abbey on the outskirts of the fictional sixteenth-century Bavarian town of Tassing. Andreas soon becomes embroiled in a series of murders that players must work to solve, their potential lines of investigation influenced by decisions they make about the protagonist’s experience, European wanderings, and educational background. *Pentiment* therefore highlights the role of player choice and divergent (though still limited) narrative outcomes. To this end, the game’s launch trailer promotes the game with lines such as “mysteries … only you can solve,” “choices … only you can make,” and “a story … only you can uncover” (fig. 1).[[1]](#endnote-1)

**Figure 1**

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Obsidian Entertainment, “Pentiment—Official Launch Trailer,” November 14, 2022, YouTube video, 1:31, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfYryKWkNfw (Screenshot courtesy of author)

But as the narrative unfolds, it becomes apparent that players are really investigating the mysterious true origins of Tassing and Kiersau—and the stakes in telling the town’s (hi)story. Both characters and the player in *Pentiment* interpret, remember, and represent the past, for numerous (often personal) reasons. But these reinterpretations and representations coexist and compete with other interpretations, claims, and negotiations of the past in the present, creating, as one review put it, “layers of history.”[[2]](#endnote-2) The game’s very title reflects that this is its central preoccupation: a pentimento, from the Italian *pentirsi*, “means to repent or change your mind.” Thus, as an artistic technique, it “is a change made by the artist during the process of painting … usually hidden beneath a subsequent paint layer.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

As a contemporary historical game made by a known developer (and backed by Microsoft), *Pentiment* is remarkable because of its deliberate reflexivity on the nature of history as a process and practice and of the writing of history as layers built up over time by different people with competing perspectives and motivations. The game appears to be an attempt by developers to embody a deconstructionist approach to historical engagement, and to do so in a more thoughtful way than many other mainstream historical games. As defined by Alun Munslow, such an approach is considered more critical and reflective than outmoded and conservative reconstructionist approaches which claim to represent the past so-called objectively because deconstructionism is “characterised by its concern with pointing to the subjective nature of historical representation itself.” As Adam Chapman further expands, “few, if any, historical games” seem to have been made with a deconstructionist approach in mind, for reasons related to both the medium itself and individual games’ commercial viability.[[4]](#endnote-4) As a result, *Pentiment* has already drawn historians’ attention.[[5]](#endnote-5)

Even before the game’s release, promotional and critical discourse around *Pentiment* sought to engage potential players in the construction (and value) of the game’s historical representation and its complexities. Marketing emphasized, and reviewer discourse reinforced, that the game makes the player feel part of history. As articulated by both the development team and subsequently reviewers, history was not characterized as something static, much as it is understood by those who study the past professionally. History is not a fixed outcome of a stable past that is still possible to know or locate. History, and historical discourse, is always layered and complex, competing and shifting—grappled with and used for a variety of different purposes by different people at different times.[[6]](#endnote-6) Such an approach strongly reflects broader understandings of historical practice and writing as an interpretation always already composed from the vantage point of the present and based on individual choices of interpretation and selection—discussed as part of the philosophy of history as far back as the work of E. H. Carr.[[7]](#endnote-7)

That said, and despite the importance of this complexity to the game’s identity and critical reception, much of this promotional and review discourse also sought to make a claim for the authenticity of the game’s representation of the early modern world—that Obsidian had created a game that remained faithful to historical source material. The notion of authenticity hangs like a specter above the marketing of many historical games.[[8]](#endnote-8) It is an important but equally amorphous concept for historical game reception, with little stable consensus on how the term is perceived and applied by different stakeholders, and it is often used interchangeably with other terms that lack shared meaning (such as *accuracy* or *realism*).[[9]](#endnote-9) The term’s slipperiness and subjectivity results in the need to understand authenticity not as an inherent property of a game but as a claim made on behalf of it by someone (developer, marketer, reviewer, player, etc.) that might be received positively or negatively—an active process Richard A. Peterson refers to as “authenticity work.”[[10]](#endnote-10)

Some explicit declarations of authenticity surrounded the discourse on *Pentiment*. For example, one review’s subtitle indicated that “despite a few blemishes, Pentiment delivers an authentic, realistic portrayal of 16th-century Bavarian life with a gorgeous art style,” elsewhere also remarking that its “academic appreciation for historical authenticity through its dialogue and art style is impressive and original.”[[11]](#endnote-11) Yet even when they did not use the term directly, developer-generated promotional materials and subsequent reviews and other forms of commentary can still be understood as attempts to construct, or weigh up, the game’s authenticity. This article discusses the way that developers, marketers, and reviewers alike sought to construct a discourse of authenticity around *Pentiment* before and after its release, and how they did so by layering different historical discourses onto foundational explanations of what experience players could expect from the game

A layered approach to the use of history—with an overarching goal of negotiating expectations for authenticity—is something we can observe in the promotional discourses around historical video games more broadly, a trend that *Pentiment* fits neatly into. I have elsewhere proposed that we can consider three distinct but interlocking conceptual ways in which history is used in the marketing of historical video games. These different layers create discourses we might broadly categorize as *history* *of*, *history* *around*, and *history* *in.*[[12]](#endnote-12) To summarize this framework briefly, *history* *of* encompasses the range of references often “made in paratextual spaces to a company’s previous products, as a way of creat[ing] expectations for ‘authenticity’ (and quality) by association with brand image.”[[13]](#endnote-13) Second, *history* *around* involves paratextual discourses that make “intertextual connections out to other cultural reference points,” perhaps to other games or wider media, and how this fleshes out the game’s historical representation or experience.[[14]](#endnote-14) Finally, *history* *in* involves highlighting “historical anchor points,” by a developer, critic, or other stakeholder, offering players insights and creating expectations for the representations of the past that they might find within a given game, and the developer’s approach to doing history.[[15]](#endnote-15) These layers work together to create multiple historical access points for audiences, but they also shore up claims about a game’s quality and supposed authenticity in different ways.[[16]](#endnote-16) They often intertwine with each other, but much of the discourse we might characterize as *history* *of* and *history* *around* tends to support and underpin the weight of *history* *in* and the legitimacy of a developer’s engagement with the past.

This article explores the ways that the paratextual discourses around *Pentiment* emphasized the inherently constructed nature of historical representations while paradoxically selling the reconstruction of an authentic history of sixteenth-century Europe via stress on the replication of visual and material culture from the period. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of research that takes the paratextual discourses around historical video games seriously, considering them vital to our understanding of the way games negotiate meaning from the past.[[17]](#endnote-17) The corpus of material for this article consists mainly of two distinct types of digital paratext: (1) those generated by the developer (Obsidian Entertainment) and publisher (Microsoft); and (2) critical reviews of the game,[[18]](#endnote-18) or pre- and postrelease features published in the gaming and entertainment press, including interviews with members of the development team.

These sources of paratextual content, which players may encounter before, during, or after experiencing a game, speak to and about it: one produced and managed by developers, publishers, and marketers, and another that arises in response to game releases. Though the product of adjacent industries, they are intrinsically related, and the principal function of both kinds of content overlaps significantly: to frame and shape player expectations and experience. Game promotional materials generated by developers and publishers, and reviews and features written by critics and published by gaming and entertainment media outlets, both work to create and manage expectations as gatekeepers or intermediaries who attempt to negotiate meaning for potential players.[[19]](#endnote-19) In this sense, both kinds of sources are what Martin Barker describes as “prefigurative” or “performative” framing content, Jonathan Gray as “entryway paratexts,” and Jason Mittell as “orienting paratexts.”[[20]](#endnote-20) In all senses, these texts have an ultimate goal of engaging an audience, and negotiating and influencing the potential experience, meaning, and value of a game—whether they do so successfully or not. These sources are distinct but ultimately connected points in a wider discursive web that forms the terrain of video game production and consumption. They are part of “the whole range of wider connected textual phenomenon [that] draws our attention to [a game] as an object of and for play,” as Ed Vollans summarizes, drawing on a broad range of theoretical explorations of video game and media (para)textuality from Mia Consalvo to T. L. Taylor, Stephen Heath, and Nick Couldry.[[21]](#endnote-21) Making connections between their content is a vital aspect of the “need to study how all the circulating prior information, talk, images and debates generate and shape expectations which will influence” how an audience responds to any form of media.[[22]](#endnote-22) In this sense, paying attention to how these sources reflect and layer different historical aspects of any given game and its wider historical context, and how they work (explicitly or otherwise) to create expectations about authenticity, allows us to understand reception of this concept as an active process of perception management rather than a static value. Such paratextual sources then have both “pragmatic” and “evaluative” functions in that they are attempts at both “controlling and managing the work’s overall public reception,” as well as “claiming or demanding value and cultural significance” for a game, as Annika Rockenberger argues.[[23]](#endnote-23)

A primary focus on these sources helps us to move beyond often-implicit assumptions that the game itself is the central object of importance and most significant site of meaning when we explore the relationship between games and history.[[24]](#endnote-24) It recognizes that gameplay “doesn’t exist in a vacuum” and that a range of different texts do as much, if not more, to explore what it means to represent and engage with the past in video games.[[25]](#endnote-25)

***History*** ***of*: “I Don’t Know the First Thing about 16th Century Europe, but I Believe What Obsidian’s Telling Me About It”[[26]](#endnote-26)**

Promotional materials that feature developer commentary are particularly important for understanding the role that the *history* *of* a developer plays in the game’s marketing and reception. Foregrounding the company and/or individuals involved in a game’s production figures prominently in game promotion and criticism. It is often used as a guarantee of quality (or occasionally, statements to the opposite effect) but also provides insights into “important information about the influences and the history of the production.”[[27]](#endnote-27) Leora Hadas’s notion of “promotional authorship” underscores that individuals’ or entire studios’ identities are often mobilized to tap into “deeply embedded cultural ideas and narratives about genius and expression, the authentic and the fake, and power relations in the construction of meaning around the texts of popular culture.”[[28]](#endnote-28) Likewise, Nick Webber has conveyed the importance of authorship within understandings of (para)textuality relating to historical games.[[29]](#endnote-29) Thus, the *history* *of* a company can guarantee quality (or specific qualities) and manage expectations.

Obsidian’s experience as a studio, and some of its well-known games, are a core part of *Pentiment*’s *history* *of* discourse. A behind-the-scenes video uploaded to Obsidian’s YouTube channel promises to take viewers “behind the ink,” exploring the design and development of script, font, and art style vital to its narrative and visual design. The video opens with Josh Sawyer, *Pentiment*’s creative director, discussing his desire to make the game, connecting it specifically to Obsidian’s profile as a developer: “When I got in the game industry, I was like ‘you know, I’d really like to make a historical game.’ Obsidian is kind of known for making very complex, mechanical games. Games that are focused on story, focused on characters.”[[30]](#endnote-30) Reviews and features likewise describe the studio as a “renowned role-playing game developer,” with Sawyer as their “star director.”[[31]](#endnote-31) Articles similarly refer to the game as “a passion project for lead designer Josh Sawyer” or otherwise “a passion project for the developers at Obsidian,” including art director Hannah Kennedy’s Deep Dive feature for website Game Developer.[[32]](#endnote-32)

**Figure 2**

A screenshot of a video game

Description automatically generated

Screenshot from “Behind the Ink,” showing a Brotherhood of Steel suit of armor from the *Fallout* franchise. Obsidian Entertainment, “Behind the Scenes of Pentiment—Behind the Ink,” November 11, 2022, YouTube video, 9:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjIfxeNhrj4&t=1s (Courtesy of author)

Sawyer is central to this discourse not simply because he was *Pentiment*’s creative director but also because of his own experience and reputation as lead designer and project director of the “much loved” *Fallout:* *New* *Vegas* (2010).[[33]](#endnote-33) That game isn’t specifically mentioned in “Behind the Ink,” but a shot early in the video (while Sawyer narrates Obsidian’s history as a developer of story-focused games) zooms in on a model of a Brotherhood of Steel suit of armor—a prominent icon from the franchise looming large over discussion of the developer’s brand identity (fig. 2).[[34]](#endnote-34) Critical discussions of *Pentiment* frequently mention *Fallout:* *New* *Vegas*, and Sawyer’s involvement in it, often name-checking it in titles of features or reviews. For example, a review for Polygon is titled “Obsidian’s Murder Mystery Pentiment Is Full of Tough, Fallout-Style Choices,” and subtitled “As in New Vegas, There Are No Perfect Outcomes.”[[35]](#endnote-35) The reviewer judges that the game’s conclusion feels “very much in keeping with the best of Obsidian’s previous work, like *Fallout:* *New* *Vegas*, in that there’s no easy choices, no ‘best’ options that will lead to the ‘good’ ending.”[[36]](#endnote-36) *New* *Vegas* is elsewhere held up as an example of the sorts of games Obsidian is good at making: “known for producing high quality stories and characters through its storied history as a developer” with a “blend of combat and dialogue trees that place[s] an emphasis on choices and their impacts.”[[37]](#endnote-37) An IGN interview with Sawyer noted that *Pentiment* will explore “a number of the same themes” as games like *New* *Vegas*, such as “death, social transformation, and class conflict.”[[38]](#endnote-38) *Pentiment* is viewed as a game that very much follows in these footsteps and “plays to their strengths.”[[39]](#endnote-39) A popular, existing product is here emphasized as an example that proves Obsidian’s mettle in developing nuanced, narrative-driven games, laying the groundwork of expectation for what *Pentiment* hoped to achieve in reception.

But this discourse can work in the opposite direction, too, while still in *Pentiment*’s favor. That the game has “a much narrower scope than Obsidian’s other RPGs, which strive to depict entire cities, states, even continents” is viewed positively, in that “Pentiment can spend more of its time on making the small things matter.”[[40]](#endnote-40) Indeed, elsewhere the game’s uniqueness and rarity are praised: “A game like Pentiment doesn’t come around often. Top developers like Obsidian Entertainment usually leave smaller productions like this on the editing floor.”[[41]](#endnote-41) That *Pentiment* is unlike many of Obsidian’s grander scale projects links to another important way in which a discourse of authenticity was being constructed: that it was developed in an intrinsically different way from most AAA games. One review described it as “heedfully crafted,” while noting that “a small team of thirteen developers at Obsidian Entertainment” worked on it.[[42]](#endnote-42) Even if the reviewer didn’t enjoy the game’s art style, they still appreciated that “you can feel the experience and craftsmanship.”[[43]](#endnote-43) Critics ultimately saw that *Pentiment*’s production limitations—a small development team, no voice acting, and a minuscule budget—aided rather than detracted from the game.

This discourse also attempts to draw some of the legitimacy, and indeed authenticity, from the aesthetic and identity of independent game development. It suggests that a small team, working with care and passion, could elevate a game’s value and achievements. As Jesper Juul notes, while definitions of independent game are far from agreed upon, independent digital games operate in relation to particular “early twenty-first-century ideas of authenticity” that revolve around qualities such as “the analog, the local, the personal, the physical, and the handcrafted.”[[44]](#endnote-44) *Pentiment* also tries to capture much about the early modern period’s visual and print culture through the care and attention the developers paid to emulating the handcrafted appearance of the myriad details of illuminated manuscripts.

The game is replete with elements that connote the craft and artistry of books and other forms of visual and material culture. For example, the pages of an imagined manuscript are the platform upon which the game unfolds. The game first requires that players remove the existing layer of script and artwork from the manuscript’s first page by rubbing a stone against it, rendering it blank to craft their own new layer of history upon it. At specific points during play, they can choose to zoom out of a given scene, revealing that it is an illustration for a chronicle of Andreas’s life and deeds and is written on these pages in Latin script. Marginalia comprising illustrations and text accompanies each frame, and page, providing the player with broader historical context, such as explaining the relevance of people, places, and events to the way the game interfaces with the larger history of sixteenth-century Europe (fig. 3). Some marginalia, however, historicizes fictionalized elements of the game—invented, but narratively significant to the history of Tassing and Kiersau—affording them a veneer of authenticity alongside annotations that describe real historical details (fig. 4).

**INSERT FIGS. 3 & 4 HERE.**

Animations that seem to turn these pages mechanically depict the player’s progress and navigation around the game world, giving the overall effect of the player advancing Andreas’s story and constructing this chronicle as they interact with the game and make choices about narrative progress and game-space exploration. In this sense, there are dual functions here: to create an analog, handcrafted look and feel and to emphasize the player-historian’s role in constructing this (hi)story.[[45]](#endnote-45)

Calling *Pentiment* an *independent* game seems tenuous given Obsidian’s status as an established developer of commercial games that had been acquired by no less than Microsoft in 2018.[[46]](#endnote-46) Nonetheless, website Destructoid’s feature connects these diverging threads in one paragraph:

The one thing about *Pentiment* that comes across the strongest after only minutes of playing it is that this [game] was made with so, so much love. The game is the love child of Obsidian game designer and *Pentiment* director Josh Sawyer, who worked on classics like *Fallout:* *New* *Vegas* and *Pillars* *of* *Eternity*. The game was pitches [*sic*] years ago, but the fact that it was finally made after all this time and with such care is a testament to the strength of the premise, and to the dedication that went into bringing it to life. …

For years, one of my biggest hopes for the games industry is that larger studios with big teams and seemingly endless resources would break off into smaller teams and bring their passion projects to life—it seems that’s exactly what Obsidian did in this situation.[[47]](#endnote-47)

Ultimately, such a discourse works to legitimize the game as a product of, effectively, a safe pair of hands. For an untested intellectual property—and something unconventional for both the developer and industry more broadly—this is crucial. Indeed, as one reviewer remarked, “For a not insignificant portion of my time with it, I wondered if I’d be giving Pentiment the benefit of the doubt to this extent if it wasn’t made by Obsidian. The answer is that probably I wouldn’t, and that ironically I’d probably have given up on it just before the legendary RPG studio’s qualities really come to the fore.” Ultimately, the review judged that “it’s hard to imagine this game conveying such authority in its historical detail if it came from another developer, either. I don’t know the first thing about 16th century Europe, but I believe what Obsidian’s telling me about it.”[[48]](#endnote-48) It is not just a general value and sense of authenticity being ascribed to the game’s development, then; more importantly, the game’s historical representation is trusted because the team behind it can be trusted.

***History*** ***around:*** **“Pentiment Feels Like an Umberto Eco Novel Drawn to Life.”[[49]](#endnote-49)**

Alongside the importance of a developer’s brand identity and history, explicit reference to other popular media texts is also a key part of the discourse around any forthcoming video game. Both a game’s promotion and critical reception often clearly attempt to place the new title within a broader intertextual web of popular culture. In part, this contextualizing is an attempt to convey certain qualities of a potential game experience, based on assumptions potential players might have from previous experience of, or interests in, popular media.[[50]](#endnote-50) In no small part, this is due to the fact that developers of historical games, “with and without scholarly training[,] employ a broad set of sources, including other games, to design and build historical events and processes.”[[51]](#endnote-51) But it is also an attempt to ensure quality—or indeed, construct claims of authenticity. *Pentiment* was no exception to this.

*Pentiment* reviewers bring a broad array of texts into their discussions. For instance, given the game’s murder-mystery framing, several reviews reference well-known literary-historical detectives. These range from Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot and Frogware’s recent *Sherlock* *Holmes* series to other famous pop-cultural sleuths: “You’re running around the village like Columbo in a tunic.”[[52]](#endnote-52) One review alludes to *Cadfael*, a late-1990s British television mystery series based on Ellis Peters’s series of historical mystery novels, *The* *Cadfael* *Chronicles*. It portrays a twelfth-century Benedictine monk as a murder-solving detective, a premise closer in some respects to *Pentiment*’s setting and characters than the other notable modern sleuths.[[53]](#endnote-53) Such examples broadly position the game within the genre of murder mystery and investigation, suggesting that it would be a satisfying take on expected generic conventions.

However, Sawyer repeatedly locates *Pentiment* more widely into the history of narrative-focused video games. Interviews and other features mention that the 1992 MicroProse title *Darklands*, with its fifteenth-century setting and reliance on historical source material, served as Sawyer’s primary inspiration for the way *Pentiment* incorporates traditional historical knowledge.[[54]](#endnote-54) One feature notes that Sawyer “fell in love with [*Darklands*’s] approach to historical fiction, and as he went on to get a degree in history and subsequently work in games, the idea of a historical fiction game stuck with him.”[[55]](#endnote-55) The game uses social classes so that players can use their specific backgrounds and skills to “*speak* *common,* *speak* *Latin,* *ride* *horse*,” and so on. These are reflected in the way that, in *Pentiment*, the players are told explicitly that their choice of background, education, and interests will “affect your character’s choices going forward,” influencing dialogue options and narrative outcomes (fig. 5)*.*[[56]](#endnote-56)

**[Insert Figure 5 here]**

There are thus other traces of *Pentiment*’s discursive positioning as an indie game in its promotion. As Juul writes, when indie games reference “older visual styles,” this “carries a deeper meaning because independent games, though new, tend to claim, explicitly or implicitly, to go back to an earlier and better time: to the beginning of video game history,” to “simpler games” made by fewer people.[[57]](#endnote-57) Taking design cues from a (much) older game Sawyer had a personal connection to, and this being a frequently repeated talking point, is an attempt to construct *Pentiment*’s authenticity as a successor historical fiction and role-playing game.

But beyond the game’s important influence on Sawyer, his experience of*Darklands*’s paratextual materials alsoinspired a notable feature of*Pentiment’s* promotion. In an IGN feature interview with Rebekah Valentine, Sawyer noted that

Arnold Hendrick, [the lead designer on *Darklands*] ... included a bibliography in the manual for Darklands, and a number of the books in his bibliography I bought and have on my shelf … I could find where he got his information, and get that source myself, and then use that for my own work. I just wanted, if someone at the end of [*Pentiment*] is like, “Wow, I love this, history sounds great.” I want them to be able to have the same opportunity I had where I played Darklands, and I'm like, “Oh, where did all this stuff come from?” It came from here, here’s all the reference material, just check it out.[[58]](#endnote-58)

The game here functions as a jumping-off point for a player interested in expanding their knowledge of the historical period that it speaks to. Moreover, such a strategy also positions a game within a wider web of legitimate historical research that it is based on and inspired by, conferring the authority of historical scholarship onto the game’s reinterpretation of it. Following in *Darklands*’s (and Hendrick’s) footsteps, five days before the game’s release, the *Xbox* *Wire* blog published “A Recommended Reading List of Late Medieval History from Pentiment Game Director Josh Sawyer.”[[59]](#endnote-59) Among screenshots from the forthcoming game, the article mentioned a range of academic books, accompanied by Sawyer’s commentary, which offered a personal perspective on their relevance and significance. Prominent among these recommendations were Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The* *Return* *of* *Martin* *Guerre* (1983), Carlo Ginzburg’s *The* *Cheese* *and* *the* *Worms:* *The* *Cosmos* *of* *a* *Sixteenth-Century* *Miller* (1976), and Umberto Eco’s historical novel *The* *Name* *of* *the* *Rose* (1983), the latter designated “a huge inspiration for Pentiment.”[[60]](#endnote-60) Reviews and interviews with Sawyer frequently evoked this work of historical fiction.[[61]](#endnote-61) Christian Donlan went so far as to observe that, at least to begin with, “Pentiment is a bit of a Name of the Rose simulator” (fig. 6).[[62]](#endnote-62)

**[Insert Figure 6 here]**

But beyond just being points of interest a player might decide to further explore, these recommendations have a common, microhistorical approach to their subject matter. Many descriptions explicitly detail how the featured books value the experiences of singular ordinary-yet-remarkable people and explore them (and their immediate geographic or social context) in extreme depth.[[63]](#endnote-63) Each book touches on a different aspect of *Pentiment*’s interpretation and representation of early modern Europe—from traveling artists, to the mysterious disappearance and reappearance of so-called changed men (in a quest called “The Return of Martin Bauer” that deliberately nods to Zemon Davies), peasant uprisings, and a variety of atypical or eccentric individuals. Sawyer’s commentary on the books also offers a sense of a particular historiographical intervention, with Sawyer occupying the position of “developer-historian.”[[64]](#endnote-64) Discussing *The* *Cheese* *and* *the* *Worms*, Sawyer writes that “*Ginzburg* *was* *one* *of* *the* *first* *historians* *to* *start* *popularizing* *micro-historical* *examinations* *of* *what* *could* *today* *be* *classified* *as* *weird* *little* *dudes*” (emphasis in original).[[65]](#endnote-65)

This latter point is particularly important. A thread about the oddity of the past and people’s lives runs through many of these citations. It is elsewhere reflected in other forms of promotion, like the “Behind the Ink” YouTube video, very early in which Sawyer states “if I’m really focusing on telling a story more than mechanics, the weirdest fiction we can come up with in some cases just doesn’t hold a candle to the weird stuff that’s actually happened in history.”[[66]](#endnote-66) Rebekah Valentine’s feature/interview for IGN echoes this point and refers to the recommended reading list: that in drawing inspiration from such works’ cast of interesting historical figures, *Pentiment* is “a game that promises to be chock full of such ordinary extraordinary tales.”[[67]](#endnote-67)

The incorporation of these historical texts into the game’s promotional surround, and their framing as recommendations from a game’s creative executives, is strikingly similar to the use of such discourse in the marketing of other historical games.[[68]](#endnote-68) It functions essentially as an annotated bibliography, seeking to both gain player interest and establish another level of historical authenticity around the game by demonstrating that it draws heavily on traditional, academically produced historical knowledge. Some features note that the use of historical consultants (“with PhDs”) and the team’s “robust amount of research” make *Pentiment* “ripe for usage in an academic environment.”[[69]](#endnote-69) But this discourse still chiefly hinges on the sort of *history* *of* discourse that center Sawyer in the capacity of developer-historian, or perhaps also auteur: “While he’s had a storied career working on hits like Fallout: New Vegas … Sawyer’s been ruminating on an historical game for a long, long time. His published reading list for Pentiment enthusiasts hearkens back to his college days; he tells me that working from it to develop Pentiment is ‘like going back to the greatest hits of my tour of studying early modern Europe in college.’”[[70]](#endnote-70) Sawyer’s own study of medieval and early modern history is emphasized in other postrelease interviews, too, such as a feature with *Wired* in which he recounts his college days. In doing so, Sawyer takes time to dispel some of the myths and misunderstandings of the period as “one long, uninterrupted period of nothing happening, or just wars or whatever,” and that actually, it is one that is much more complex than collective understandings of it might suggest: “There’s so much social change going on. Changing religious institutions, academic institutions, social structures. Capitalism starts to sort of barely emerge. There’s a lot of cross-cultural contact, because of trade that takes people across the world. So this period has always been really interesting to me, just because of everything that’s going on.”[[71]](#endnote-71) Valentine describes the recommended reading list as having “the joyous feel of a syllabus, based around preparing for a course on 16th-century European history and life.”[[72]](#endnote-72) Likening such a piece of promotional material to a pedagogical exercise is further evidence of the role the developer, as historian, occupies in promotional discourses explicitly designed to mobilize historical evidence and connote authenticity.[[73]](#endnote-73) Doing so, on the one hand, entices players—particularly those already interested in history. But it also works to induct them into the developer’s specific interpretation of a particular historical event—or in this case, style of historical writing to which the game also aspires. This works in close contact with the kinds of promotional and critical discourses that elevate individual or a small number of creative executives into an authorial role; here, a key figure like Sawyer speaks with authority about the game’s historical touchstones and his own knowledge of the past it engages.

Mirroring the prerelease recommended reading list, the game itself also has a bibliography of references in its closing credits (fig. 6). Much greater in volume and scope, this list bookends the prerelease annotated bibliography with further assurances of research, and thus historical quality. The broader inspiration that the development team has taken from the history *of* historical games—particularly RPGs like *Darklands—*works to not only authenticate *Pentiment*’s engagement with the past by association with other video games, but also with other, more legitimate historical source material. The bibliography mimics the conventions of academic history by providing references to support the game’s overall argument. Making a direct connection to *Darklands* and its precedent-setting inclusion of a bibliography, and how unusual it is for contemporary games like *Pentiment* to follow suit, Austin Suther notes that the “credits of Pentiment is [*sic*] proof of Obsidian Entertainment’s dedication to historical accuracy” (fig. 7).[[74]](#endnote-74)

**[Insert Figure 7 here]**

In an interview with Waypoint Radio, Josh Sawyer described *Pentiment* as “*Night* *in* *the* *Woods* meets *The* *Name* *of* *the* *Rose*.”[[75]](#endnote-75) This epitomizes attempts to draw on both the cultural capital of a narrative RPG style established by other acclaimed indie games (an identity that *Pentiment* was consciously positioned as sharing, albeit paradoxically), with the established historical capital of respected works of microhistory. This demonstrates the importance of a discourse designed to curate a constellation of sources that form a layer of *history* *around* a game and, indeed, its importance to constructed claims and reception of an authentic engagement with *history* *in* *Pentiment.* It is also where we begin to feel the tension between the game’s de- and reconstructionist epistemological positions—wanting it both ways in accounting for and eschewing historical complexity.

***History*** ***in:*** **“*Pentiment* Is about History as a Force, as Well as a Moment.”[[76]](#endnote-76)**

Most of the discussion we might position within the *history* *of* and *history* *around* layers directly informs the way that *history* *in* a game is discussed and marketed. The build-up of identity for the game’s studio and director, and their history and experience, as well as the web of historical and cultural intertextual reference points that encompassed the game’s release all create specific access points that construct a sense of authenticity around *Pentiment—*both as a worthwhile game experience and as a historical intervention with something meaningful to say about its subject matter.

But as noted, at its core *Pentiment* also strongly reflects on the practice of history itself, deconstructing the relationship between a past that existed and what we come to remember and represent about it, for conflicting reasons. This is also fundamental to the game’s narrative and the way such an approach frames the choices that players can make about piecing it together. For example, at the outset of the third act of *Pentiment*, the player witnesses a conversation between father and daughter Claus and Magdalene Drucker, the owners of a printing shop in Tassing. In consultation with the town council, Claus has been made responsible for painting a memorial in the town hall immortalizing Tassing’s history. For various reasons linked to the overarching story of the game—as it spans almost three decades between 1518 and 1543—what this memorial should include about the town’s past and present has become contentious and a source of frustration for Claus. The conversation proceeds as follows:

**Claus**: Those men don’t know what they want. When I tell them what I’m trying to do, they get scared. … They talk all day and we’re never any closer to a decision. I’m sick of it, sick of the whole thing. … I’ve spent my whole life illustrating and printing other peoples’ stories. For the first time, I feel like this is my story to tell.

**Magdalene**: I didn’t know it was so important to you.

**Claus**: We hear all of these stories about what this place was, how it came to be. And it feels like history is something that happened before, happened to other people. But eighteen years ago, we lived through something, you and I—everyone in Tassing. Everyone wants to forget about it, pretend it didn’t happen.

**Magdalene**: You don’t.

**Claus**: No, I don’t.

Claus has been deeply affected by his role in traumatic past events that involved people from both Tassing and Kiersau. He laments the way that people seek to portray the history of those events in a sanitized way so that it won’t anger the local lord or visitors. When Magdalene reminds him that he “can’t change it,” he affirms: “I know. The least I can do is make sure it’s not forgotten. Something happened, we were part of it. I need to help people remember that. If I don’t do it, who will?” Instances like this throughout *Pentiment* continually foreground that this game is keen for players to understand that the relationship between the past and representations of it is not uncomplicated but always a product of interpretation and alteration—what someone chooses to remember allows others to remember, and why. The eventual mural representing the history of Tassing is unveiled at the close of the game. The specific images memorialized in each of the triptych’s panels are subject to change, determined by the choices the player makes about what to include, who they speak to, and what they spend time exploring throughout *Pentiment*’s final act. In this sense, gameplay action also foregrounds the subjective, constructed nature of history and the consequences of the decisions made in the process.

This approach was part of the game’s promotion, too, especially when drawing other prominent historical voices into this discourse. For example, Sawyer evoked Hilary Mantel’s approach to writing historical fiction in two interviews, citing the following quote while making a point about *Pentiment*’s construction of the past: “Facts are not truth, though they are part of it—information is not knowledge. And history is not the past—it is the method we have evolved of organizing our ignorance of the past. It’s the record of what’s left on the record.”[[77]](#endnote-77) He also points out that “history doesn’t really exist,” presumably making a broader claim that the past is already something that we have lost and cannot hope to reconstitute with the completeness that many official, dominant historical narratives—and, indeed, historical media—may claim. As a result, the team’s approach to creating a meaningful historical fiction was less about deferring to so-called facts than it was to create a believable historical place, informed by the records available to them. The game espouses a more nuanced engagement with the fundamental question of what history is, how people relate to it, so a more critical look at its inherent subjectiveness was thus vital to the developer-generated discourse around the game, using the work of historical writers like Mantel (and Zemon Davis, Ginzburg, and Eco) as a source of legitimation for their design choices.

This is also a thematic engagement that resonated strongly with critics in their experience of the game, and it became a central observation of many reviews. One feature wrote that the game, and the kinds of historical texts it draws inspiration from, “invite[s] audiences to examine history through something other than the lofty lens we’re used to it being filtered through.”[[78]](#endnote-78) Referencing the game’s title, another feature noted that “*Pentiment*’s aim is to show how history, like oil on a canvas, can be covered, then rediscovered or forgotten.”[[79]](#endnote-79) Jordan Rameé added a personal layer to their reflections on the game, and history:

I loved reading history books growing up, especially those written more like a storied account of what happened as opposed to straight facts on the page. There’s an implied truth to history when it’s told moreso as a story, as it admits that there’s no objective truth to the past. History is simply what we make of it. Pentiment is written around this idea, providing a means of exploring a point in history from an outsider’s perspective—the protagonist is not native to the region and we, the player, aren’t native to the time period. Rather than simply retell history, Pentiment affords the chance to influence it, and in doing so, delves into the subjectivity of historical record.[[80]](#endnote-80)

Donlan extends this broader point about power and history to how the game seems to argue more specifically about aspects and agents of the period, such as the power of the Catholic Church to control accepted narratives. By focusing on “the act of writing” and situating Andreas as an artist working in a scriptorium, the game argues that “this room and rooms like it were once key to the church’s power. They owned the books and they made the books. And they could make books disappear.” Ultimately, as Donlan writes, “the pleasures and the politics of text and of books are everywhere” in *Pentiment*, but the game is also concerned with larger questions about authorship, power, and history: “Who gets to decide what is true? Who gets to write it down, and what lies beneath those words?”[[81]](#endnote-81) Referring to the influence of the “engine of class struggle” as an underlying factor (and a key theme of the game itself), Joshua Wollens likewise notes that “the people of Tassing make their own history, but they don’t make it as they please.”[[82]](#endnote-82) Indeed, some reviews link the game’s critical look at history to its success; for example, Jay Castello observes that “even though Pentiment is set in the past, it demonstrates how history is never static, and how it influences places, communities, and individuals. That’s something that’s easily lost when we look back through time, but Pentiment’s living characters and spiralling mystery won’t let you forget it.”[[83]](#endnote-83) Rob Zacny maintains that “this is the more mature and interesting version of ‘historical accuracy’ than we so often get, complicating an image many of us have of the past but without resorting to facile winks at modern sensibilities.”[[84]](#endnote-84) A high proportion of critical perspectives on the game then convey a sense of the game’s success in making the reviewers (as players) reflect on the notion that neither games, nor any other kind of historical representation, have an uncomplicated relationship to the alleged facts of the past and the complexities of the process of making history to begin with.

However, in acute tension with this, aspects of *Pentiment*’s promotional discourse were simultaneously attempting to construct a sense of the game’s authenticity vis-à-vis a real past—projecting more of a reconstructionist epistemological approach. As explored by Chapman, games that adopt a “realist simulation” style (as *Pentiment* does, like many successful mainstream historical games) “aim and claim to *show* the past ‘how it was,’” captured objectively and authentically by the developer-historian, a claim often reinforced in promotional materials.[[85]](#endnote-85) The “Behind the Ink” feature historicized the game’s context in this way, suggesting that *Pentiment* would be educational and capture an authentic sense of the period, from era-appropriate artwork and art style that Obsidian was attempting to preserve, to the social, cultural, and political context of sixteenth-century Bavaria (fig. 8).[[86]](#endnote-86) The game’s official reveal trailer claimed that *Pentiment* was “a narrative adventure that brings the past to life.”[[87]](#endnote-87) The *history* *around* discourse that emphasized the team’s research in the development process clearly attempts to confer authority on the way the game engages and represents the period.[[88]](#endnote-88)

**[Insert Figure 8 here]**

Perpetuating this, reviewers also praised the developer’s representation of a very specific past, despite the game’s fictionalizations. Echoing developer-created promotional materials, many reviews praised *Pentiment*’s success in offering a kind of “living history” (a term that frequently reappears), and how it embodies a microhistorical approach— that the player spends a large amount of time among the people of these small microcosms learning a great deal about their daily lives.. Reviewers noted that Pentiment’s fictions of both the people and the setting appeared convincingly real: “though the characters are inventions of the writers, they give voice to the real people who lived through these unforgiving times,” that the game accomplishes something “rare among historically set video games. … it gives you the feel of the *real* personality of its era,” making it more “believable” than many other games with historical settings.[[89]](#endnote-89)

*Pentiment*’s visual design also lends credibility to this “effect of reality” and its supposed basis in historical truth:[[90]](#endnote-90) “Like every other aspect of the game, the basis of the visuals is painstaking research, and it shows.”[[91]](#endnote-91) Leana Hafer’s review exemplifies the often lavish praise for the developer’s achievement in creating something that resonated with players: “The whole production really feels like a love letter from some serious medieval history fans to all the like-minded players such as myself. … Every step of the way, I felt like I was geeking out about one of my special interests alongside the writers and artists.”[[92]](#endnote-92)

Several different elements of the game were positioned in promotional materials as important to its success in building a sense of the historical world and Andreas’s perspective. This included, as a frequent observation, discussions of the use of font and script in the game to connote Andreas’s perceptions of other characters’ status, class, and education: “My god, the fonts. Never before has a game made such conscious and incredible use of fonts.”[[93]](#endnote-93) Music was equally important given the lack of voice acting in the game: one review praised the game’s incorporation of “a few achingly authentic bits of hymnal music.”[[94]](#endnote-94) *Pentiment*’s limited score was also a feature of the game’s marketing postrelease, with an *Xbox* *Wire* article promoting the forthcoming release of a vinyl recording comprised of original music created for the game, a collaboration between the development team and “early music ensemble Alkemie.” The blog post highlighted their use of “shawms, hurdy-gurdies, and myriad other period instruments” to compose and adapt “historical pieces from the 14th to 16th centuries for pivotal moments throughout the story.”[[95]](#endnote-95) The blog speaks of attempts to take “the commitment to authenticity further” by incorporating not only artwork by art director Hannah Kennedy, but also a painting by artist Benjamin Vierling, “who uses a renaissance-inspired Mischtechnik, alternating layers of oil paint and egg tempera” and creates a portrait of Andreas that included a pentimento beneath it “for full thematic resonance.”[[96]](#endnote-96) Once again, the analog and discourse of handcrafted content are brought to the fore to make explicit claims about authenticity.

In these promotional materials, such audiovisual aspects of *Pentiment* were transformed into discrete “capitalizable elements,” to use Barbara Klinger’s term—multiple points of interest (or “digressions”) that might entice an audience.[[97]](#endnote-97) But these parts ultimately all work together to promote a game experience with constituent, authentic parts and make subtle claims about the game’s authenticity because of their connection to analog processes and things. For instance, the game space looks like the pages of a manuscript, complete with illustrations and marginalia, while Latin script retells the game’s story. The sound of quill scratching on paper accompanies the animation of dialogue between the characters. Likewise, the game uses historical instruments and music, ultimately pressed onto vinyl, as a product for players to purchase..[[98]](#endnote-98) The marketing of this game, as a product of this most contemporary digital medium, sought to rely on some of the oldest forms of analog media to stake a claim for its authenticity. Much like the clams of the game’s production being similar to that of independent game development, this is also a fundamental marker of quality and meaning [[99]](#endnote-99) This emphasis also reduces the complexities of history, and the history of early modern material and visual culture, into an authoritative look and feel, suggesting that this is possible to do at all.. The necessity of developing *Pentiment*’s unique audiovisual design requires a simplification and approximation of a broader, multifaceted history of artistic technique and print culture, as well as a specific kind of music that seem authentic to the time and place, rather than allowing for greater historical variety. Trying to capture the essence of a particular historical style presumes, and implicitly suggests, that *a* *singular* historical essence exists. In this sense, while a significant proportion of the discussion of the approach to doing *history* *in* *Pentiment* sought to account for historical complexity, the demands of crafting a unique and commercial historical game push promotional and review discourse toward reconstructionist tendencies and away from truly consistent deconstructionist approaches.

*Pentiment* has thus sparked a variety of discussions and evaluations of its engagement with a certain past. In ways distinct from other mainstream historical games, critics reflected on the nature of history itself and the role memory, selection, and power play in its construction. It is an impressive feat for a mainstream game to encourage such critical reflection rather than general observations about a game’s supposed authenticity. However, neither the game’s promotion nor critical reception escape the need for authenticity to be the standard by which historical games are judged. Even though not all reviews or promotional materials deployed the term, it still casts a shadow as a benchmark used to connote *Pentiment*’s successes and ultimate value as a contemporary video game. It therefore aptly reflects Chapman’s lament that commercial video games rarely adopt deconstructionist approaches.[[100]](#endnote-100) Understanding the way that developers promote and reviewers evaluate *history* *in* a video game, we see the importance of understanding the way the other kinds of historical discourse are key to the production and reception of the past in a game and, in particular, its perceived authentic qualities.

**Conclusions**

The potential of games to function as a form of historical representation has long been explored, and games are often found to be wanting in their engagement with the past because they are so often unlike academic history.[[101]](#endnote-101) *Pentiment* is noteworthy because it is a game that sought to shed light on the complexity of history and memory and thus engage with the past in a way that was more critical than usual. Moreover, these ideas featured prominently in the promotional discourse around the game. Considering the ways that different aspects of a historical game are identified, isolated, and dispersed through a range of digital paratexts allows us to see that history in games is complex and can be interpreted in several ways but always requires a layered approach.

By applying this framework to *Pentiment*, I endeavor to propose a way of conceptualizing the myriad ways that history, and historical discourses, are used in the promotion of historical video games. Doing so recognizes that when game makers, marketers, and/or critics discuss a game’s historical resonances, this is not a neat and simple process of merely pointing our factual historical aspects and where they may (or may not) appear in a game; it is, rather, as complex as the very nature of what history is, as a discourse built up of multiple competing representations of the past. Moreover, these categories of historical discourse—*of*, *in*, *around*—are not neat themselves. They often overlap and collide, combining in multiple ways, because history itself is not inherently neat and isolated—it is always a process and result of of subjective interpretation.

By acknowledging, as part of its branding, marketing, and gameplay, that history is not the past, that evidence is incomplete, and narratives are created and codified for different reasons,*Pentiment* ultimatelydemonstrates the potential for historical games to embody deconstructionist historical approaches. However, this is complicated by considering that even when a game like *Pentiment* tries to offer a more nuanced understanding of history’s relationship with the past, the promotion and critical reception of the game do not shed certain kinds of baggage. Namely, a game is still judged and positioned amid claims of authenticity, ultimately appealing to a broader sense that there is a past to be reconstructed. There are clear declarations made—by different agents—about an interpretation based on facts, an attempt (however in vain) to approach some kind of truth about the past, and the critical response to the game conferred authority on the developer to do so in a way that seemed believable. As Sawyer explained, “we tried to make it as accurate as possible … while also understanding we are making a fictional story to kind of illuminate the truth of the of the time period.”[[102]](#endnote-102) There is an inherent tension then between what we might read as deconstructionist and reconstructionist intentions and impulses and how they guide both design decisions and the creation of marketing discourses.

This is therefore a paradox of historical video games—that they still need to trade on the currency of their claimed authenticity to assert their worth, despite attempts to move more thoughtfully beyond what is usually expected of a mainstream game’s engagement with the past. To do so, competing kinds of history are mobilized, deployed, and layered on top of each other, in the hope that the game will be perceived by potential players as a valuable engagement worth their investment—to play in the version of the past that, with all of its limitations, a developer has (de)constructed.

1. Obsidian Entertainment, “Pentiment—Official Launch Trailer,” November 14, 2022, YouTube video, 1:31, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfYryKWkNfw>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Jordan Ramée, “Pentiment Review—Layers Of History,” GameSpot, November 14, 2022, https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/pentiment-review-layers-of-history/1900-6417998. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. National Gallery, “Glossary,” s.v. “pentimento,” accessed May 25, 2024, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/pentimento>. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Adam Chapman, *Digital* *Games* *as* *History:* *How* *Videogames* *Represent* *the* *Past* *and* *Offer* *Access* *to* *Historical* *Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 61–68, 81. For more on this historiographical approach regarding games, see Tara Jane Copplestone, “But That’s Not Accurate: The Differing Perceptions of Accuracy in Cultural-Heritage Videogames between Creators, Consumers and Critics,” *Rethinking* *History* 21, no. 3 (2017): 417–20; and Manuel Alejandro Cruz Martinez, “The Potential of Video Games for Exploring Deconstructionist History” (PhD diss., University of Sussex, 2020), http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/90194. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. # “Gemalte und gedruckte querverweise—Stimmen aus dem AKGWDS zu ‘Pentiment,’” *Gespielt* (blog), April 19, 2023, <https://gespielt.hypotheses.org/5490>.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. For recent disciplinary discussion of this, see Suzannah Lipscomb and Helen Carr, eds., *What* *Is* *History* *Now?* *How* *the* *Past* *and* *Present* *Speak* *to* *Each* *Other* (London: Orion Publishing House, 2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. E. H. Carr, *What* *Is* *History?* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 20–22, 24–26. See also Helen Carr and Suzannah Lipscomb, “Prologue: Ways,” in Lipscomb and Carr, *What* *Is* *History* *Now?*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For discussion of various games, see Emil Lundedal Hammar, “Counter-Hegemonic Commemorative Play: Marginalized Pasts and the Politics of Memory in the Digital Game Assassin’s Creed: Freedom Cry,” *Rethinking* *History* 21, no. 3 (2017): 5; Esther Wright, *Rockstar* *Games* *and* *American* *History:* *Promotional* *Materials* *and* *the* *Construction* *of* *Authenticity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022); Pieter J. B. J. Van Den Heede, “Experience the Second World War ‘Like Never Before!’: Game Paratextuality between Transnational Branding and Informal Learning,” *Journal* *for* *the* *Study* *of* *Education* *and* *Development:* *Infancia* *y* *Aprendizje*, July 31, 2020, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02103702.2020.1771964; and Pieter J. B. J. Van Den Heede, “Replaying Wartime Résistance? Studying Ludic Memory-Making in the Open World Game *The* *Saboteur*,” *Games* *and* *Culture* 19, no. 2 (2024): 178–98. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. See, for example, Adrienne Shaw, “The Tyranny of Realism: Historical Accuracy and Politics of Representation in Assassin’s Creed III,” in “Game Studies in Media Res,” ed. Michael Hancock and Steve Wilcox, special issue, *Loading…* 9, no. 14 (2015): 4–24; Copplestone, “‘But That’s Not Accurate’”; Eve Stirling and Jamie Wood, “‘Actual History Doesn’t Take Placeʼ: Digital Gaming, Accuracy and Authenticity,” *Game* *Studies* 21, no. 1 (2021), http://gamestudies.org/2101/articles/stirling\_wood; Jacqueline Burgess and Christian Jones, “Exploring Player Understandings of Historical Accuracy and Historical Authenticity in Video Games,” *Games* *and* *Culture* 17, no. 5 (2022): 816–35; and Esther Wright, “Still Playing with the Past: History, Historians, and Digital Games,” *History* *&* *Theory* 61, no. 4 (2022): 166–77. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Richard A. Peterson, “In Search of Authenticity,” *Journal* *of* *Management* *Studies* 42, no. 5 (2005): 1083–98. For application within game studies, see Jesper Juul, *Handmade* *Pixels:* *Independent* *Video* *Games* *and* *the* *Quest* *for* *Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Nick Tan, “Pentiment Review: God Willing,” ShackNews, November 14, 2022, https://www.shacknews.com/article/133113/pentiment-review-score. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Esther Wright, “Paratexts, ‘Authenticity,’ and the Margins of (Digital) Game History,” in *(Not)* *in* *the* *Game:* *History,* *Paratexts,* *Games*, ed. Regina Seiwald and Ed Vollans (Berlin: Dr Gruyter, 2023), 33–53. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Wright, “Paratexts,” 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Wright, 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Wright, 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Wright, 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, Hammar, “Counter-Hegemonic”; and Tom Apperley, “Counterfactual Communities: Strategy Games, Paratexts and the Player’s Experience of History,” Open Library of Humanities 4, no. 1 (2018), https://olh.openlibhums.org/articles/10.16995/olh.286/; Esther Wright, “On the Promotional Context of Historical Video Games,” *Rethinking* *History* 22, no. 4 (2018): 598–608; Van Den Heede, “Experience the Second World War”; chapters in Histories section by Benjamin Beil, Suvik Mukherjee, Richard Cole and René Glas in *Paratextualizing* *Games:* *Investigations* *on* *the* *Paraphernalia* *and* *Peripheries* *of* *Play*, ed. Benjamin Beil, Gundolf S. Freyermuth, and Hans Christian Schmidt (n.p.: Transcript, 2021), 55–164; Van Den Heede, “Replaying Wartime Résistance?”; and Seiwald and Vollans, *(Not)* *in* *the* *Game*. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Especially the critical reviews published on or just after November 14, 2022, which seems to have been the review embargo date. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Wright, *Rockstar* *Games*, 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Martin Barker, “News, Reviews, Clues, Interviews and Other Ancillary Materials—A Critique and Research Proposal,” *Scope*, February 2004, http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2004/february-2004/barker.pdf; Jonathan Gray, *Show* *Sold* *Separately:* *Promos,* *Spoilers,* *and* *Other* *Media* *Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); and Jason Mittell, *Complex* *TV:* *The* *Poetics* *of* *Contemporary* *Television* *Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ed Vollans, “[Para]Textually Here: Paratexts and Presence in Games—How Paratexts Extend the Game’s Network,” in Beil, Freyermuth, and Schmidt, *Paratextualizing* *Games*, 320. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Barker, “News.” [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Annika Rockenberger, “Video Game Framings,” in *Examining* *Paratextual* *Theory* *and* *Its* *Applications* *in* *Digital* *Culture*, ed. Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2014), 263. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Mia Consalvo, “When Paratexts Become Texts: De-Centering the Game-as-Text,” *Critical* *Studies* *in* *Media* *Communication* 34 no. 2 (2017): 177–83. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Mia Consalvo, *Cheating:* *Gaining* *Advantage* *in* *Videogames* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 176. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Phil Iwaniuk, “Pentiment Review—A Holy Roman Quagmire,” PCGamesN, November 14, 2022, https://www.pcgamesn.com/pentiment/review. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction* *to* *Game* *Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 64. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Leora Hadas, *Authorship* *as* *Promotional* *Discourse* *in* *the* *Screen* *Industries:* *Selling* *Genius* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 11; see also Wright, *Rockstar* *Games*, 104–7. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Nick Webber, “The Past as (Para)Text—Relating Histories of Game Experience to Games as Texts,” in Seiwald and Vollans, *(Not)* *in* *the* *Game*, 90–94. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Obsidian Entertainment, “Behind the Scenes of Pentiment—Behind the Ink,” November 11, 2022, YouTube video, 9:58, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjIfxeNhrj4&t=1s>. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
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33. Bedingfield, “*Pentiment*’s Director.” [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Obsidian Entertainment, “Behind the Ink.” [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
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