

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background to conduct this research. This includes background, statement of problem, research question, research objective, research significance, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background

Literature has never been a static or permanently bounded category; rather, it has continually migrated across successive technologies of transmission, with each new medium reshaping what stories could be told, who could author them, and how audiences could receive them. The earliest literary traditions were entirely oral, sustained through epic poetry, communal recitation, and mnemonic devices long before any system of writing existed to fix them onto a durable surface. The invention of writing systems, and later the rise of manuscript culture, allowed narrative to detach itself from the living voice of the storyteller and exist as an object that could be copied, transported, and preserved independently of its original speaker, although access to these manuscripts remained the privilege of a narrow literate elite. A genuinely decisive rupture occurred with Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the movable-type printing press in the mid-fifteenth century, an innovation that transformed literature from a scarce, hand-copied artifact into a mass-reproducible commodity. Print culture standardized the very notion of "the text" as a fixed, linear sequence of words bound between two covers, a notion so deeply naturalized that it would later organize the entire discipline of literary criticism around the close reading of static pages.

Throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the printed page hosted an extraordinary diversification of literary form, from the rise of the novel as the dominant vehicle of social commentary, to the experimental fragmentation of modernist prose, to the politically charged realism and

naturalism that exposed the material conditions shaping human behavior. Yet even as these printed forms multiplied, literary theorists increasingly recognized that the linear, fixed page was only one possible architecture for narrative, not its essential or final form. The arrival of electronic computing in the latter half of the twentieth century reopened this question with unprecedented force. Hypertext fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, in which readers clicked through branching nodes of text rather than turning pages in a predetermined order, demonstrated that narrative sequence itself could be made variable and reader-dependent. Espen Aarseth (1997) theorized this shift by introducing the concept of “ergodic literature,” texts that demand a non-trivial effort from their “operator” simply to traverse them, in direct contrast to the trivial, page-turning effort required of a conventional reader. Around the same historical moment, Janet Murray (1997) argued in *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* that digital environments were not a betrayal of literary tradition but its next evolutionary stage, a “cyberdrama” capable of absorbing and extending the participatory, immersive impulses that had always existed, in latent form, within older storytelling traditions.

It is precisely at this historical juncture, where the fixed printed page gives way to the ergodic, operator-dependent text, that the contemporary video game enters the lineage of literary history. If literature is understood not as a fixed set of physical objects but as a continuously evolving practice of narrative meaning-making, then the interactive, audiovisual, and rule-governed worlds of digital games represent the most recent, and arguably the most structurally complex, link in that historical chain. Understanding this trajectory, from oral epic, to manuscript, to print, to hypertext, to the fully simulated cybertext, is essential before this research can justify its own object of study: a contemporary open-world video game read and interpreted through the inherited tools of literary and sociological criticism.

Having situated digital, ergodic texts as a legitimate continuation of literary history, the second question this research must address is why a video game,

rather than a film, a graphic novel, or any other contemporary narrative medium, was selected as the specific object of analysis. Video games occupy a genuinely unique position among modern storytelling forms because they integrate the textual, the visual, and the procedural simultaneously: a player does not merely read about a character's choice or watch it unfold on a screen, but is structurally compelled to enact that choice through direct input, however constrained that input may ultimately be by the game's underlying programming. This convergence ignited a sustained scholarly disagreement, often labeled the ludology-versus-narratology debate, between theorists who insisted that games must be studied primarily as rule-based systems of play and theorists who maintained that narrative remained central to how players experience and interpret those systems. Gonzalo Frasca (1999), writing from the ludological position, cautioned against uncritically importing narrative theory into game studies, while Janet Murray and other narratologically inclined scholars continued to insist that story remained inseparable from the player's experience of many games, particularly those built around character, dialogue, and dramatic causality.

This research does not attempt to resolve that long-standing debate but instead adopts the now widely accepted position that narrative and ludic structure are mutually constitutive rather than opposed, especially in narrative-driven, mission-based open-world games. Henry Jenkins (2004), in his influential essay on game design as narrative architecture, demonstrated that even games organized primarily around spatial exploration and player-driven action construct meaning through environmental storytelling, embedded objects, and the deliberate sequencing of encounters, much as a novelist sequences chapters to control the reader's accumulating knowledge. Espen Aarseth's (2001) declaration of a "Year One" for computer game studies further legitimized the video game as an object worthy of sustained humanistic inquiry in its own right, rather than as a derivative or diminished cousin of cinema or the novel. Video games, in this sense, were chosen as the object of this research precisely because they compress narrative, character, environment, and

ideology into a single interactive artifact, offering a denser and more demanding text than print literature alone could provide, while still remaining fully amenable to the established critical vocabularies of narratology and sociological literary criticism that this study employs in the chapters that follow.

Equally important to this choice is the sheer cultural and economic scale that video games have attained in the contemporary moment. Far from being a marginal or niche entertainment form, the video game industry now reaches audiences and generates revenues that rival or exceed those of the film and music industries combined, meaning that the ideological content embedded within popular games circulates through global culture with a reach that few printed novels could ever achieve. A medium capable of shaping the social imagination of hundreds of millions of players cannot be responsibly left outside the purview of literary and sociological analysis simply because it is interactive rather than static. It was on these combined theoretical and cultural grounds, namely the convergence of narrative and play, the legitimacy game studies has earned within the humanities, and the unprecedented cultural reach of the medium, that this research determined the video game, rather than any other contemporary narrative form, to be the most appropriate object through which to investigate the economic and social conflict at the center of this study.

A clarification is still required at this point, since establishing the video game as a legitimate ergodic descendant of literary history does not by itself explain why this research selected a video game over a conventional work of literature, such as a novel, a short story, or a play, that could just as easily narrate poverty, gang violence, and betrayal within a socially grounded plot. Printed literary fiction, however sociologically astute its realism, remains fundamentally representational in nature: a novelist can describe a character calculating the cost of loyalty against the promise of illicit capital, but the reader only ever encounters that calculation secondhand, mediated entirely through the author's chosen words and filtered through the reader's imagination rather than through any direct participation of the reader's own. Ian Bogost (2007), in his

theory of procedural rhetoric, argues that interactive, rule-based media possess a persuasive capacity unavailable to purely representational forms, because such media do not merely describe a system of cause and effect but compel the user to operate that system directly, internalizing its logic through repeated action rather than through description alone. *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* exemplifies this distinction precisely: the game does not simply tell the player that Carl Johnson requires capital to survive within a hostile socio-economic environment, it structurally obliges the player to generate, spend, and lose money through the same mission-based economy that eventually drives Big Smoke and Ryder toward betrayal, so that the player comes to inhabit the economic pressure of the narrative rather than merely reading a description of it. This procedural, participatory dimension, wholly absent from the novel, the short story, or any other printed literary form, constitutes a mode of ideological argument unique to the playable medium. It is precisely this irreducible difference, between narrating an economic condition and structurally compelling an audience to enact it, that finally justifies the selection of a video game, rather than any work of conventional print literature, as the object of the present study.

Having established the video game medium as a legitimate and theoretically justified object of literary inquiry, the next consideration concerns why the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise, and more specifically *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, was selected from among the thousands of titles available within that medium. Not every video game offers a text dense enough to sustain rigorous literary and sociological analysis; a great many commercially successful games are organized around abstract objectives, sport simulation, or minimal narrative scaffolding that would offer little purchase for the kind of close reading this research intends to perform. The *Grand Theft Auto* series, by contrast, has been continuously built around character-driven crime narratives set within richly detailed, socially stratified fictional cities, making it one of the few open-world franchises whose narrative ambition has consistently matched, and at times self-consciously imitated, the conventions of literary and cinematic social realism.

The scale of the franchise's cultural reach further reinforces its suitability as an object of study. Across its main installments and expansion packs, the Grand Theft Auto series has shipped close to 470 million units worldwide, placing it among the best-selling and most critically acclaimed video game franchises ever produced, with its third-generation entry, *Grand Theft Auto III*, frequently credited with redefining the open-world genre for the entire industry that followed it. A text consumed by such an extraordinary number of players, across multiple generations and continents, exerts a measurable influence on how those audiences understand crime, urban poverty, race, and institutional corruption, which makes its underlying ideological content a matter of genuine sociological consequence rather than purely aesthetic curiosity.

Among the individual titles within this franchise, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was selected specifically because it represents the series' most sustained and most explicitly sociological narrative achievement. Where earlier entries such as *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Vice City* centered their stories on individual revenge or personal ambition within comparatively thin social backdrops, *San Andreas* was deliberately constructed around the lived texture of a specific historical place and time, namely Los Angeles in the early 1990s, drawing directly upon real social conditions including racialized gang rivalry, the crack-cocaine epidemic, and institutional police corruption. This deliberate grounding in documented social history, discussed in greater depth in the following section on the game's production background, gives *San Andreas* a degree of sociological verisimilitude that few other open-world titles, within the Grand Theft Auto series or otherwise, have attempted to replicate with comparable depth. It is this combination, narrative ambition, cultural reach, and documented sociological grounding, that makes *San Andreas*, rather than any other entry in the franchise or any competing open-world title, the most appropriate text through which to investigate the specific phenomenon of economically motivated betrayal that lies at the heart of this research.

A literary-critical reading of any text benefits from situating that text within the history of its own production, in much the same way that a study of a novel typically considers the author's body of work and historical period before proceeding to close analysis. The Grand Theft Auto franchise originated at the Scottish studio DMA Design, where development began in 1995 under the working title *Race 'n' Chase*, a project initially conceived around a police officer pursuing criminals from a top-down perspective. During development, designers discovered that play-testers found far greater enjoyment in evading the police than in upholding the law, a discovery that prompted the team to invert the entire premise of the game and allow players to control the criminal rather than the officer. The resulting title, simply named *Grand Theft Auto*, was released for MS-DOS and Windows in November 1997 and for the PlayStation console the following month, establishing the series' foundational format: a top-down, mission-based open city in which players accumulated points by completing increasingly difficult criminal jobs.

The franchise expanded modestly through *Grand Theft Auto 2* in 1999 before undergoing its most consequential transformation with the release of *Grand Theft Auto III* in 2001. This third installment abandoned the original two-dimensional, top-down perspective entirely in favor of a fully three-dimensional, over-the-shoulder world, a shift widely regarded within the games industry as a landmark moment that effectively defined the modern open-world genre and influenced a generation of subsequent titles. Developed by Rockstar North, the renamed successor to DMA Design, under its American publisher Rockstar Games, the series continued its rapid evolution with *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* in 2002, notable for introducing the franchise's first fully voiced protagonist and a setting modeled closely on 1980s Miami.

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas followed in October 2004 as the fifth main entry and the most ambitious project the series had attempted to that point. Developed over nearly two years by a team of roughly seventy-five people, *San Andreas* constructed a single, continuous map encompassing three distinct

cities, Los Santos, San Fierro, and Las Venturas, modeled respectively on Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Las Vegas, connected by open countryside and desert, producing a game world several times larger than that of either of its immediate predecessors. Beyond its expanded geography, *San Andreas* introduced systems that had not previously appeared in the franchise, including customizable player appearance, physical attributes that responded to the player's actions, gang-territory mechanics, and a far more extensive cast of voiced characters than any prior installment, all of which were placed in service of a narrative built explicitly around the protagonist Carl "CJ" Johnson's attempt to rebuild his family's gang, the Grove Street Families, after returning to a Los Santos transformed by years of decline.

Crucially for the purposes of this research, the production history of *San Andreas* reveals that its narrative was never intended as pure fantasy. The development team conducted on-site research across Los Angeles and consulted local cultural figures to ensure an authentic representation of the city's gang culture, while the writers drew explicit narrative inspiration from social-realist films of the era, including *Boyz n the Hood*, *Menace II Society*, and *Colors*, and deliberately wove real historical events, namely the 1992 Los Angeles riots, the Rampart corruption scandal within the Los Angeles Police Department, and the Bloods-and-Crips gang rivalry of the late 1980s and early 1990s, into the fabric of its fictional plot. Even the game's antagonistic police unit, C.R.A.S.H., borrows its name directly from a real Los Angeles Police Department anti-gang task force whose own officers were later implicated in widespread corruption and civil-rights abuses, a scandal that led to the unit's disbandment in the year 2000. This historical grounding transforms *San Andreas* from a purely escapist crime fantasy into something closer to a fictionalized social document, a quality that, as the following section will demonstrate, draws it directly into dialogue with the literary and sociological traditions this study employs.

The historical grounding described above is what allows *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* to be read productively alongside the literary tradition rather than

merely alongside other video games. Literary history has long made room for fiction that draws its emotional and moral force from documented social conditions rather than invented ones, a tendency most closely associated with the realist and naturalist movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in which authors situated their characters within concretely rendered economic systems, urban environments, and class structures, treating those material conditions as active forces shaping behavior rather than passive scenery. *San Andreas*, in constructing Los Santos as a fictionalized but historically grounded mirror of early-1990s Los Angeles, performs a strikingly similar operation within an interactive medium, embedding its protagonist within a city whose poverty, gang structures, and institutional corruption are not incidental details but the very mechanisms that drive the plot forward.

This continuity between print literature and the interactive game becomes still clearer when examined through the specific theoretical apparatus this study employs in its second chapter. Mieke Bal's (2017) narratological framework of focalization, originally developed to analyze who controls the "vision" of events within written narrative, transfers with remarkable precision onto an interactive text in which the player's own field of knowledge is deliberately restricted by the game's camera, dialogue system, and mission structure, exactly as a novelist restricts a reader's knowledge through a chosen narrative perspective. Likewise, the Marxist concept of economic determinism, developed within literary criticism to explain how a society's material base shapes the ideological choices of its characters, requires no significant modification to be applied to a digital narrative in which characters' loyalties and betrayals are explicitly tied, mission by mission, to their access to capital. The same critical vocabulary developed for the printed novel, in other words, proves directly transferable to this interactive object, confirming Espen Aarseth's (1997) broader claim that the cybertext is not a wholly new category divorced from literary history but a further point along its continuum. Based on paragraph 3 in the *Game Studies* journal titled "*Game Analysis: Developing a Methodological Tool Kit* there is

the statement "we can play ourselves," which is quoted directly from Aarseth (2003, page 3).

This convergence has, in recent years, been formalized into its own area of academic practice. Edmond Chang and Timothy Welsh (2025), in *Video Games, Literature, and Close Playing: A Practical Guide*, explicitly position video games as texts that can, and should, be subjected to the same interpretive tools long reserved for novels, poems, and plays, including attention to characterization, plot structure, theme, symbolism, and ideological critique, while acknowledging the additional procedural and ludic layers that the interactive medium introduces. Their work treats the act of playing a game closely and reflectively as a natural extension of literary close reading rather than as a separate or lesser methodology, a position this research adopts directly in its treatment of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* as a primary literary text. It is on this combined historical, theoretical, and methodological foundation, namely the demonstrated continuity between literary realism and the game's sociological world-building, the direct transferability of narratological and Marxist concepts onto interactive narrative, and the formal recognition of close playing as a literary-critical practice, that this study justifies its treatment of a contemporary video game as an object fully deserving of the same rigor traditionally reserved for the printed page.

Establishing that a video game can be read as a literary text resolves only half of the methodological burden this research must carry, since printed novels and interactive cybertexts differ sharply in how an analyst is meant to access them in the first place. A literary critic may responsibly analyze a novel entirely through reading, because the printed page presents an identical sequence of words to every reader regardless of who turns its pages. A video game offers no such guarantee. Espen Aarseth (1997) specifically defined the cybertext as a textual machine requiring "non-trivial effort" from an "operator" merely to traverse it, meaning that the sequence, pacing, and in some cases even the content of the narrative the analyst encounters depends directly on the choices

made during play. A game such as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, in other words, does not fully exist as a literary object independent of an act of play; its cutscenes unlock only after specific missions are completed, its environmental details are only encountered by an operator who chooses to explore them, and its climactic betrayal only registers its full dramatic weight to a player who has personally undertaken the labor the narrative requires of Carl Johnson.

This structural condition is precisely what licenses, and indeed necessitates, a methodology in which the researcher becomes the player. Aarseth (2003), in his foundational methodological essay on game analysis, argued that the aesthetic and academic study of games could not proceed through the same observational distance available to film or literary criticism, because games are not fully manifest until they are performed; he proposed instead an empirical, performance-based approach in which the analyst's own structured, sustained play stands as the legitimate equivalent of the close reading session in literary studies. Where the traditional humanities have generally separated the roles of author, reader, and critic into distinct positions, Aarseth's framework collapses the reader and the critic into a single figure, the researcher-as-player, whose direct engagement with the cybertext is not a contamination of objectivity but the very precondition for any meaningful analysis to occur at all.

Subsequent scholarship has extended and refined this position rather than abandoning it. Edmond Chang and Timothy Welsh's (2025) concept of "close playing," introduced earlier in this chapter, explicitly models itself on the literary practice of close reading while insisting that the interpretive labor of close playing can only be performed by someone who has personally played the game under analysis, since the interpretive object, the played experience, simply does not exist prior to that act. Sarah Stang (2022), writing on close reading methodology within feminist game studies, likewise affirms sustained personal play as an established and rigorous analytical practice, while encouraging researchers to remain self-aware about the subjective position such proximity inevitably creates, a caution this research takes seriously without treating it as

grounds for rejecting the method itself. Taken together, this body of methodological theory establishes that a researcher analyzing a cybertext is not merely permitted to play the game personally but is in fact required to do so, since no substitute, whether a secondhand walkthrough, a recorded playthrough produced by someone else, or a purely textual plot summary, can reproduce the operator-dependent traversal that constitutes the game as a literary object in the first place.

It is precisely this theoretical license, granted by the cybertextual nature of the medium itself, that allows the present study to adopt direct, personal gameplay of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* as its primary method of data collection, a methodological choice elaborated more fully in Chapter III of this research. Having traced literature's migration from oral tradition through print into the ergodic and procedural form of the contemporary video game, having justified the selection of the video game medium and of this franchise and title in particular, and having established the theoretical grounds on which a researcher may legitimately treat personal gameplay as primary literary data, this study now turns to the specific narrative occasion that motivates its inquiry: the betrayal of Big Smoke and Ryder within the fictional city of Los Santos.

Within this historical and theoretical lineage, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (2004) stands as a monumental testament to this narrative sophistication. By engineering a meticulously detailed fictionalization of 1990s Los Angeles, the interactive text constructs a relentless microcosm of urban decay. The city of Los Santos operates not merely as a passive backdrop, but as an active, oppressive socio-economic landscape. It is a territory paralyzed by systemic deprivation, racialized gang warfare, and deeply entrenched institutional corruption. Within this hyper-capitalist framework, the narrative completely denies any semblance of an idealized escapist fantasy. Instead, it aggressively forces its characters into a fractured reality where basic survival routinely necessitates the complete sacrifice of moral integrity.

What elevates the dramatic weight of this storyline is the narrative's unique capacity to construct a profound illusion of agency, only to systematically dismantle it through structural determinism. The narrative architecture intricately tracks the protagonist, Carl Johnson, as he seemingly reclaims his impoverished neighborhood through immense physical effort, loyalty, and territorial expansion. This intensive labor fosters an internal narrative expectation of communal triumph and upward mobility. Consequently, the sudden defection of his closest allies Big Smoke and Ryder registers as a catastrophic fracture of both personal loyalty and the protagonist's accumulated efforts. The text deliberately engineers a stark "Paradox of Freedom" purely within its internal logic. While the narrative universe grants the characters expansive agency to navigate the city and generate superficial wealth, they remain entirely powerless to halt the scripted, deterministic moral decay of their inner circle. This profound contradiction exposes the core tragedy of the text: individual ambition and gang loyalty are ultimately crushed by systemic socio-economic forces.

When scrutinized through a sociological lens, this central betrayal completely sheds the characteristics of a generic plot twist or an isolated act of villainy. Instead, it is revealed as a highly deterministic response to overwhelming economic and social conflict. Trapped within a marginalized urban vacuum where legitimate avenues for upward mobility are systematically eradicated, the antagonists are inevitably seduced by the massive, unregulated capital generated through the illicit crack-cocaine trade. This intense social friction is aggressively weaponized by C.R.A.S.H., a predatory and corrupt police unit that deliberately manipulates the impoverished underclass to consolidate its own political dominance.

In such a severely fractured, hyper-capitalist ecosystem, maintaining organic loyalty to a decaying street gang transforms into a fatal financial liability. The decision to betray the brotherhood is thus reframed as a ruthless, yet economically logical, transaction for survival. By utilizing this expansive

medium to demonstrate the erosion of kinship under the crushing weight of systemic poverty, the narrative warrants sophisticated academic investigation. Recognizing this tragic dissolution of brotherhood strictly as a byproduct of material desperation forms the foundation of this analytical inquiry. Driven by these theoretical intersections, the researcher is compelled to conduct a comprehensive study entitled: "*THE BETRAYAL OF BIG SMOKE AND RYDER IN GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS AS AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONFLICT.*"

1.2 Statement of Problem

The historical parameters of literary criticism have traditionally been bound to static, printed mediums such as canonical novels, traditional poetry, and conventional drama. For centuries, textual analysis operated under the assumption that serious narrative critique required a fixed page. However, the rapid acceleration of digital technology in the twenty-first century has profoundly disrupted these classical paradigms, forcing a substantial re-evaluation of narrative criticism. In the modern media landscape, storytelling has evolved past passive consumption. Open-world video games have firmly asserted themselves as intricate, multi-layered cultural artifacts defined by expansive storylines, nuanced character development, and sharp social critiques. These digital settings do not merely present a static plotline; they construct highly interactive fictional worlds where literary elements are experienced dynamically. Consequently, the narrative architecture governing these modern digital texts demands a rigorous, sophisticated investigation using the established critical frameworks of literary studies.

While *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* is widely celebrated within popular culture for its open-world design and cultural impact, the underlying depth of its narrative specifically the catastrophic betrayal committed by Big Smoke and Ryder is frequently misunderstood or oversimplified. Existing literary and media commentary often reduces this profound breach of brotherhood to generic villainy, treating it as a superficial plot device designed solely to surprise the audience or advance a standard revenge plot. The fundamental flaw

in these reductive interpretations lies in the total oversight of the structural socio-economic pressures that systematically dictate the characters' actions within the storyline.

When analyzed through a closer, text-centered reading, this betrayal ceases to look like a sudden, isolated moral failure. Instead, it exposes itself as a desperate, deterministic response to a failing economic base within the game's universe. The characters are narratively trapped in an impoverished urban ecosystem actively manipulated by corrupt institutions, specifically the rogue police unit known as C.R.A.S.H.. Within this marginalized setting, abandoning communal loyalty and turning toward the illicit drug trade becomes portrayed as the only viable mechanism for capital accumulation and social mobility. Therefore, a critical need exists to analyze this narrative structure through a synthesized sociological and economic lens. Interrogating the text in this manner clarifies how diegetic hyper-capitalist structures and systemic urban poverty actively erode human morals, culminating in the tragic of the Grove Street Families.

1.3 Research Questions

Driven by the structural gaps and thematic tensions identified in the socio-economic landscape of the text, the analytical trajectory of this paper is guided by the following specific research questions:

1. How is the betrayal of “Big Smoke and Ryder” shown in the gameplay through economic and social conflict?
2. How do economic and social conflict become the main cause of Big Smoke and Ryder’s betrayal?

1.4 Research Objective

The broader academic value of this critical inquiry extends beyond the simple interpretation of a popular media artifact, providing both theoretical and practical interventions:

1. This study serves to theoretically validate the video game medium as a highly sophisticated interactive text capable of sustaining rigorous socio-economic and literary analysis. By treating digital narratives with the same academic rigor traditionally reserved for canonical printed texts, this research successfully bridges the gap between traditional literary criticism and modern game studies. It demonstrates how interactive narrative arcs can effectively mirror real-world class struggles, systemic exploitation, and the corruption of the 'American Dream.'
2. On a practical level, this research offers a profound critical insight into the complex social mechanics of betrayal. It moves completely away from a superficial reading of simple villainy to expose how external environmental pressures and hyper-capitalist structures can erode human morals. By dissecting how marginalized characters navigate the painful tension between roots-based community loyalty and individual financial survival, this study provides a clear sociological blueprint for understanding moral decay in poverty-stricken urban settings.

1.5 Research Significance

Beyond its immediate objectives, this research is expected to offer significance for the academic community and for future researchers in the following ways:

1. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the field of literary studies by offering a concrete example of how sociological and Marxist frameworks can be productively applied to an interactive digital text, thereby contributing to the still-developing body of scholarship that treats video games as legitimate objects of literary and sociological inquiry.
2. Practically, this research is expected to serve as a reference for students of the English Literature Department who wish to conduct similar game-based literary research, and to offer general readers and players a deeper understanding of how narrative betrayal in popular media can reflect real socio-economic pressures rather than simple villainy.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To make sure there is no misunderstanding while reading this research, the following terms are defined:

1. **Economic Determinism:** A theory showing that the economic base (like poverty and the need for money) shapes a person's behavior. In this study, it explains why Big Smoke and Ryder betray their friends for financial survival.
2. **Ergodic Engagement:** A unique type of interaction in video games where the story is not just read, but actively played and enacted by the player's own effort.
3. **Paradox of Freedom:** A contrast found in open-world games. Players are given the freedom to explore everything, but they still have zero power to change the destined betrayal in the story.
4. **C.R.A.S.H. (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums):** A group of corrupt police officers in the game that takes advantage of poor neighborhoods and manipulates gang members for their own political gain.

1.7 Review of Previous Studies

Scholarly engagement with *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* has, to date, concentrated overwhelmingly on the game's representation of race, violence, and youth reception, rather than on the specific economic and social mechanics of its internal narrative of betrayal. This section reviews the two most directly relevant academic studies identified in the course of this research's literature search, situates them in relation to the present study's object and method, and specifies the gap this research is designed to address.

Barrett (2006), in "White Thumbs, Black Bodies: Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Fantasies in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*," published in *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, argues that the game invites a predominantly white player base to inhabit and consume a spectacularized, disposable version of Black urban masculinity, and that this dynamic is

inseparable from the game's broader neoliberal narrative logic. Barrett's analysis is directly relevant to the present research because it establishes, at the level of the game's overall representational politics, the same neoliberal and economically determined social world that this research locates more narrowly within the specific betrayal of Big Smoke and Ryder; however, Barrett's study does not analyze this betrayal as a discrete narrative event, nor does it apply a Marxist base-superstructure model or a structuralist narratological framework to explain how the game's procedural and formal architecture, rather than only its representational content, encodes this economic determinism.

DeVane and Squire (2008), in "The Meaning of Race and Violence in Grand Theft Auto," published in *Games and Culture*, take a reception-oriented approach, investigating how socioeconomically diverse groups of young players actually interpret the game's racial and violent content, and finding that players' own lived economic circumstances substantially shape the meanings they construct from the game text. This finding lends indirect empirical support to the present research's central premise, namely that the game's economic and social themes are salient enough to shape real players' interpretations, but DeVane and Squire's study is reception-based and empirical-sociological in method rather than textual and narratological, and it does not focus specifically on the Big Smoke and Ryder betrayal or on procedural rhetoric as a mode of argument.

Beyond these two academic studies, the specific betrayal of Big Smoke and Ryder has received extensive discussion in gaming journalism, fan wikis, and video essays, which consistently identify greed and ambition as Big Smoke's stated motive and catalogue the narrative's foreshadowing clues in considerable descriptive detail. This body of popular commentary, however, is not academic in method: it does not apply a sustained theoretical framework, does not distinguish systematically between narrative-level and gameplay-level evidence, and does not situate the betrayal within a sociological or economic-determinist model of the kind developed in Chapter II of this research. It is

precisely this gap, between rich popular description and a comparatively thin academic literature specifically on the Big Smoke and Ryder betrayal, that the present research is designed to address, by combining the sociological and neoliberal-economic concerns raised by Barrett (2006) and DeVane and Squire (2008) with a structuralist-narratological and Marxist textual analysis of the betrayal itself as both a narrative and a procedural event.

1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Research

This research is deliberately scoped to a single, bounded narrative episode within *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, namely the sequence of missions leading to, and immediately following, “The Green Sabre,” in which the betrayal of Big Smoke and Ryder is disclosed and its immediate consequences unfold. The analysis does not attempt a comprehensive reading of the game's entire storyline, nor does it address the game's later missions in Las Venturas or San Fierro except where they are directly necessary to trace Big Smoke's and Ryder's final characterization. This narrowing of scope is a deliberate methodological choice consistent with the Close Playing procedure described in Chapter III, which privileges depth of textual and procedural analysis over breadth of narrative coverage.

Several limitations follow from this scope and from the research design more broadly. First, because the primary data are drawn from the researcher's own gameplay sessions, the findings are necessarily filtered through a single player's configurative choices; while Section 4.1.1 argues that the core disclosure itself is cybertextually fixed regardless of player choice, the pacing, order, and emotional register of the surrounding side content may differ for a different player, which means the field-note-based observations in Sections 4.1.1 through 4.1.3 should be read as reflectively descriptive rather than as claims about how every player necessarily experiences the same sequence. Second, this research analyzes the English-language version of the game as its primary object, using the Indonesian subtitle track only as a transcription-

verification aid as specified in Table 4.1; it does not undertake a full translation or localization analysis of how the Indonesian subtitles themselves might inflect meaning for Indonesian-speaking players, which remains an open avenue for further research. Third, the theoretical framework developed in Chapter II, comprising cybertextual determinism, the sociological approach to literature, Marxist economic determinism, structuralist narratology, literary-sociological betrayal theory, interpersonal trust theory, and Simmelian-Coserian conflict theory, is applied specifically to explain this single betrayal; it is not advanced as a general model claimed to explain every narrative betrayal across the video game medium.

Finally, this research is qualitative and interpretive in design, as specified in Section 3.1, and does not claim statistical generalizability. Its contribution is to demonstrate, through a rigorously theorized close reading of one significant case, that a video game narrative can encode economic and social critique simultaneously at the level of story and at the level of procedural rule, a claim that is offered as a substantiated interpretation rather than as an empirically generalizable finding across the broader population of players or games.

