

Game Narrative Review

Your name: Anna Green

School: Kennesaw State University

Email: agree269@students.kennesaw.edu

Month/Year: October 2025

Game Title: *Bayonetta*

Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Nintendo Switch, PC

Genre: Action / Adventure / Hack-and-Slash / Beat em' Up

Release Date: October 29, 2009 (Japan), January 2010 (Worldwide)

Developer: PlatinumGames

Publisher: Sega / Nintendo (Switch)

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: Hideki Kamiya

“Don’t fuck with a witch!”



Overview

Tall, dark, handsome, quippy, oozing with sensual charm and armed with her iconic weapons; Bayonetta is not unlike most other strong and idolized video game protagonists. However her unique status as a female character, and an unapologetically feminine one too, in the male dominated hack and slash genre has cemented her as the envy and idol for gamers of all kinds.

Our story begins with the titular Witch's grand reveal and showcase of her abilities and style, as well as the introduction to the early stories main beats. The "Angels" she faces are vicious, unrelenting foes, yet her amnesia prevents her from understanding why she's been fighting them for decades. As the narrative unfolds, fragments of her forgotten past begin to surface, revealing secrets tied to the enigmatic Umbra Witches and their long standing conflict with the secretive Lumen Sages.

Drawing heavily from religious iconography, Judeo-Christian mythology, and Euro-Catholic aesthetics, the game explores the intertwined histories of these two ancient factions. The Lumen Sages draw power from the holy light of Paradiso, while the Umbra Witches harness the dark forces of Inferno. For centuries, they've maintained balance through their respective possession of the "Eyes of the World," relics capable of controlling creation and reality itself when united. This fragile equilibrium collapses when a forbidden romance between a Sage and a Witch sparks a devastating war that nearly annihilates both lineages.

In a genre long dominated by stoic, battle-hardened male leads, Bayonetta stands apart. Not as a token gesture toward diversity, but as a richly developed character supported by deep lore and a compelling narrative. Unlike her counterparts such as Snake, Dante, or Leon—whose tragic pasts are well established before the game begins—Bayonetta's amnesia allows players to discover her identity alongside her. This narrative choice invites the audience to share in her journey, piecing together her mystery in real time. As the story progresses, ancient rivalries, divine secrets, and infernal alliances unravel through exhilarating combat, sharp wit, and striking visual flair; all within a world that feels at once alien and strangely familiar, as if remembered from a dream.

Characters

Main Characters:

- **Bayonetta**
 - **Character**

Bayonetta's story begins with her awakening in a coffin in the bottom of a lake, suffering from amnesia. With no memory other than her name, a mysterious watch, and a penchant for justice and



ass-kicking, the Umbra witch spends the next twenty years working to regain her memory and defeating angels. Her journey truly begins when she encounters a mysterious woman with powers and weapons strikingly similar to her own, sparking a quest to uncover the secret behind the jewel in her watch and to reclaim her lost memories.

It's unknown to both the player and Bayonetta until later in the story that she is in fact the child of the forbidden union of a Lumen sage and Umbra witch— a violation of the tribes' most sacred tenant. Despite her lonely childhood with an imprisoned mother and exile from her peers, Bayonetta still forms a deep bond with Jeanne, the heir to the Umbra throne, and the two form a profound relationship that shapes the game's lore and emotional core. Despite the trauma and isolation of her upbringing, Bayonetta confronts her fate with unwavering confidence and a commanding sense of self.

- **Style**

Bayonetta's unmistakably iconic outfit consists of her signature skintight black bodysuit composed entirely of her hair and decorated with intricate rose detailing, gold chains and arcane summoning scripts. Her glossy black hair is wrapped into a towering beehive hairdo accented with gold chains and twin red ribbons trailing behind. Her famous halfmoon glasses are embellished with butterfly wing motifs that rest near her golden cat shaped earrings, and frame her sharp face above her distinctive beauty mark. One of Bayonetta's quintessential powers is her Wicked Weave, which allows her to use her hair to summon demons from Inferno. During these summons her outfit temporarily unravels, leaving her more exposed as her powers increase. This creates a rare fusion of costume design and gameplay mechanics, in which visual vulnerability signifies strength rather than weakness. The result is a design philosophy in which fashion, magic, combat and inextricably intertwined.

It's not surprising the development for the design of Bayonetta took character designer Mari Shimizaki over a year to perfect with all its intricacies; with the pages of the concept design book looking more like spreads from a fashion designer than a game designer. However, throughout all the design she followed the four guiding tenants given to her by game developer Hideki Kamiya, stating Bayonetta was "female", "fashionable", "wears glasses", and wielded "four guns".

Beginning with the fashionable and female points, Bayonetta is unique in the fact that she is unmistakably a sexy woman but she doesn't always express this by showing the most amount of skin (ignoring demonic summons). Bayonetta instead relies on cutouts, skintight clothing, and her posture and silhouette— which all exude confidence and glamour but also a sense of modernity.. Bayonetta's constitution, biology and structure alone provides us with enough sophistication, elegance and grace to prevent the outfits from steering too raunchy; instead elevating the outfits with her natural aura. Elements of Bayonetta's outfit that intricately tie to her fighting style (her gun heels and hair) further solidify that

her outfit is a reflection of her own personality and personal fashion sense. Her clothing is a crucial part of her that acts as both expression and a weapon.

"Mummy is a witch, and witches protect people and are very strong!"



- **Cereza**

- **Character**

Cereza appears a couple hours into the game as a younger version of present Bayonetta, transported to the present by the antagonist Balder. Emotional, Cereza is described as a “cry baby” and often clings to Bayonetta who she believes to be her mother Rosa. Cereza accompanies Bayonetta along for the journey, and despite the fear she feels from being able to see the angels and monsters, gains a sense of confidence and bravery and is eventually able to awaken the latent Left Eye that resides within her.

When she returns to her original timeline after her adventures with her other self, she is inspired by Bayonetta’s strength and develops into a more capable and courageous version of herself. This instigates a time loop in which Bayonetta continually shapes her own future self. Beyond the narrative function, Cereza’s storyline serves as a poignant metaphor for nurturing your inner child, emphasizing compassion, protection and acceptance to the self that once was. Cereza’s journey ensures that Bayonetta will always have a strong, capable, and loving role model: herself.

"I am here to reclaim my Umbran sister!"



- **Jeanne**

- **Character**

Arguably the second most important character to the story of *Bayonetta*, Jeanne first appears as a mysterious adversary mirroring Bayonetta’s style and abilities. Like Bayonetta, her memory has been altered, and she now serves Balder in his quest to obtain the Eyes of the World. Once inseparable childhood friends, Jeanne and Bayonetta’s bond was forbidden due to their contrasting statuses—Jeanne as the heir to the Umbra Witches, and Bayonetta as the daughter of an outcast.

It is later revealed that Jeanne sealed Bayonetta in the coffin centuries ago to protect her during the Witch Hunts, and gifted her the jewel in her watch to prevent her awakening the Left Eye prematurely. Jeanne’s loyalty and sacrifice form one of the emotional anchors of the story, representing love, trust, and fate interwoven through time.

- **Style**

Despite having almost an identical silhouette and outfit shape to Bayonetta, Jeanne distinguishes herself with her more luxurious approach to fashion through an equally commanding but distinct

aesthetic. Her signature red bodysuit and lipstick contrast Bayonetta's darker palette, while a fur collar and feathered details evoke high fashion and elegance. Her silver pixie cut and Twiggery-inspired lashes blend retro glamour with rebellious sophistication, reinforcing her status as both a rival and an equal.

- **Balder**

- **Character**

Balder serves as the primary antagonist of *Bayonetta*. A Lumen Sage and bearer of the Right Eye of Light, he once married Rosa, Bayonetta's mother, as part of a grander scheme to summon Jubileus—the creator goddess who would merge Paradiso, Inferno, and the Human World into one single reality, erasing existence as we know it. Exiled for his heresy, Balder resurfaces 500 years later as the CEO of the Ithavoll Group, a powerful corporate empire that controls the city of Vigrid and promotes the worship of the Lumen Sages and the Hierarchy of Laguna.

- **Style**

Balder's skin is unusually pale with an underlying blueish tint, perhaps to indicate his unnaturally long life. His main color palette is white gold and purple; all colors associated with magic and monarchy. He wears a long white coat inscribed with golden script, a gilded mask over his left face, and a single monocle to reinforce his calculated and aristocratic menace. Peacock imagery appears throughout his design—both in his feathered cloak and eventual wings—symbolizing his vanity, immortality, and divine arrogance, all reinforcing his godlike aspirations.

"My name is Balder. But if you so choose, you may address me as... father."



Secondary Characters:

- **Rodin**

- **Character**

Rodin, the weaponsmith behind Bayonetta's arsenal, crafts her signature Scarborough Fair guns and operates The Gates of Hell, a bar that doubles as a player hub for upgrades, mini-games, and purchases. A fallen angel, Rodin has lived through countless ages, now preferring to observe world-changing events from a detached position. Despite his immense power, he maintains casual friendships with human characters like Luka and Enzo, which suggests a deliberate distance from divine politics and an appreciation for human simplicity due to his unique perspective on the three spheres of reality.

- **Style**

"You here for business, or pleasure? Either way, I'll hook you up."



Rodin's attire is fashionable and edgy, yet understated: black sunglasses to conceal his demonic red eyes, a long brown leather coat with a popped collar and rolled sleeves, complimented by big black boots and a red scarf make up his rugged but refined appearance. His distinct tattoos, textured coat and jewelry subtly indicate Rodin's sense of personal style, even if he isn't as forthcoming about it as the other characters. His ensemble communicates effortless coolness, fitting for an immortal whose seen it all but still appreciates good style.



- **Luka**

- **Character**

A tenacious journalist on the hunt to find the secret of his father's death, Luka hunts down Bayonetta believing her to be the murderer. When it's revealed that Balder was responsible, Luka is forced to reassess his beliefs. Luka's inability to see beings from Inferno or Paradiso leave him skeptical of Bayonetta until Cereza lends him her glasses, allowing him to witness her supernatural battles firsthand. From that point onwards Luka firmly aligns himself with the Umbra witch and assists her while in the human world. Luka is rather protective of Cereza, and maintains a sense of protectiveness over the young girl along with Bayonetta, and it's suspected her affinity for lollipops comes from when Luka gives her one.

- **Style**

Perhaps the least flashy out of the cast, Luka's toned down attire reflects the gravity of his quest and his attachment to the human world. His clothing is dark and functional, blending in with his environment, with the exception of his long striped scarf serving as his only notable stylist flourish. As Luka is the most narratively grounded and normal character, it makes sense for his modest outfit to reflect his position as the most ordinary character in this extraordinary world.

- **Enzo**

- **Character**

Enzo, a sleazy yet dependable information broker, befriends Bayonetta after her long slumber. Though greedy and self-serving, his loyalty and street smarts make him a reliable ally when it counts. Like Luka, Enzo is human and unable to perceive the supernatural conflicts around him, although his loud and exaggerated hatred for angels provides comic relief. Despite his questionable ethics, Enzo consistently helps Bayonetta when she needs it and provides what assistance he can; for the right price of course.



- **Style**

Also a human, Enzo dresses more casually than the other main characters, but adds more flair to his outfit than Luka. His attire reflects his gaudy personality and obsession with wealth. His flashy jewelry, slicked hair, heavy accent, and love for expensive cars all evoke the glamorized image of a mid-century Italian mobster. His fashion sense is an eclectic blend of 1930s through 1980s influences and captures his desire to *look* rich, even if the illusion is all he truly owns.

Breakdown

From its fashion to its gameplay, *Bayonetta* is saturated with an over-the-top flair that rejects realism in favor of spectacle. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Bayonetta herself, a character whose presence blurs the line between high fashion, fetish aesthetics, and power fantasy. Her impractical, impossibly elegant designs, coupled with catwalk-inspired movement and choreographed combat, make her a walking performance of camp sensibility. Through this lens, we will explore how *Bayonetta* fuses haute couture with gameplay, and how its flamboyant excess is not a distraction, but the point. It's style not in spite of substance, but *as* substance.

Camp

In Susan Sontag's 1964 essay "Notes On 'Camp'", she claims "The essence of Camp is its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration. Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style— but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the "off", of things being what they are not. It is good because it is awful."

Ranging from architecture to fashion to gameplay, everything about *Bayonetta* is extravagant and fully embraces this ethos of excess. The game is relentless, constantly propelling the player from one intense battle or absurd spectacle to the next. Subtlety is not part of its vocabulary. Bayonetta's personality, design, and world all reflect this maximalism. As discussed earlier in her style analysis, Bayonetta's appearance alone is a statement—an impossible blend of haute couture and weaponized glamour. Nothing about Bayonetta's outfit or design is "practical" for fighting angels, but her status as a video game character allows her to transcend the constraints of realism, embodying the freedom to wear the unwearable.

Her camp sensibility is further amplified by her movement and posing, many which are direct nods to high fashion editorials. Every gesture, from her confident strut to her dance-infused combat, exudes theatricality. Director Hideki Kamiya understood that Bayonetta's combat should be as elegant as

it is deadly, and she would, “need a full arsenal of elegant moves as well.” The development team enlisted multiple performers to capture this, most notably dancer Maiko Uchida, whose improvisational style became integral to Bayonetta’s character. Kamiya loved this so much that he added a full dance sequence at the game’s finale—a feature that has since become a series hallmark.

Bayonetta commits entirely to variety and exaggeration. By fusing historical and religious motifs with modern fashion and design, it creates a stylistic collage that has become instantly recognizable and unreplicable. The result is not only one of gaming’s most distinct visual worlds but also one of its campiest creations. Every part from the gameplay mechanics, the flamboyant fighting, the style, the music, the dialogue, the costume, and the settings are completely dedicated to providing something new to the player without ever taking itself too seriously. Through its exaggeration, theatricality, and unapologetic absurdity, *Bayonetta* stands as a true work of camp art.

Environment

Director Hideki Kamiya expressed early on he wanted his protagonist to be an ancient witch revived in modern times. This is evident from the fashion to the environment of the game, which includes a unique mixture of ancient and modern technology and style. Even Jeanne and Bayonetta’s older design have distinctly medieval influence, particularly in the hair, but feature expressly modern taste in the skintight outfits and breakneck heels. This mismatch of styles combine the grandeur of ancient fashion with the sleek sensuality of modern couture. This merging of eras mirrors the game’s larger narrative about ancient beings reawakening in a futuristic world.

From the train stations, to the city of Vigrid, to the celestial realms we visit; each location has a distinctly anciently modern feel about them. The city feels European—particularly Italian—with its spires, stained glass, and Romanesque arches. Italy, with its deep ties to Catholicism, Roman history, and fashion, perfectly encapsulates the triad of influences that define *Bayonetta*’s visual identity. Even the most modern environments, like the train station, echo Gothic sensibilities through wrought ironwork and detailed ornamentation.

Distinct from the rest of Vigrid, the island of Isla De Sol and other structures built by the Ithavoll group are expressly art deco, sharp and modern. The bright lights, polished symmetry and bold geometry serve as a stark contrast to the natural, organic, and humble city of Vigrid. Juxtaposing these two environments so close together is another example of the mesh of ancient and modern, but also that of reality and fantasy. The two cities represent Bayonetta herself, an ancient being forced into a modern world.

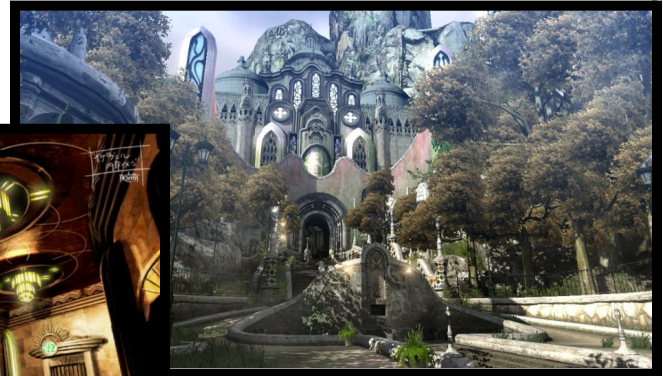
On the other end of the spectrum exists Rodin’s bar, The Gates of Hell, which is far more contained in its style but no less influenced. Dark and mellow, the embellishments on the walls may miss

your notice the first time you visit. Inspired by the Swiss artist H.R. Giger, best known for designing the Xenomorphs from *Alien*, the architecture features ribbed and organic motifs that incorporate imagery of bones, spines, and embedded human forms. This unique blend of sensuality and the grotesque give the interior an eerie intimacy. Combined with its smoky jazz soundtrack, the bar's aesthetic feels both alien and familiar, yet perfectly at home in *Bayonetta's* lush, stylistic, and surreal visual collage.

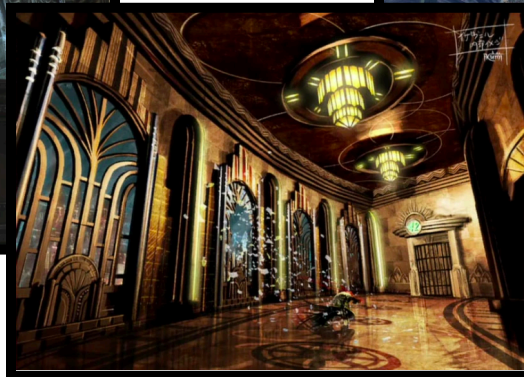


The Gates of Hell

Isla Del Sol



Vigrid



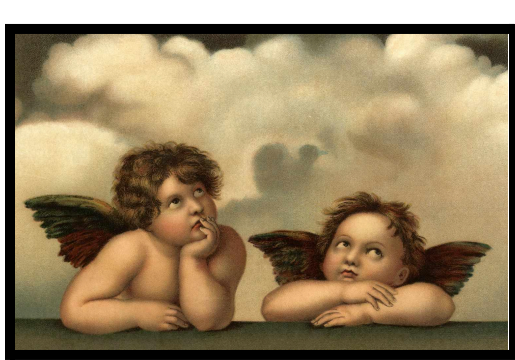
Religious Iconography & Influence

Much of *Bayonetta's* appeal lies in its use of “reverse-Orientalism”: a Japanese reinterpretation of Western religious and mythological imagery. This creative lens has long been present in Japanese popular culture, transforming familiar Western imagery into something new and exciting. *Fullmetal Alchemist* and *Turn A Gundam* were inspired by a blend of European countries and the Industrial Revolution. *Metal Gear Solid* has a fascination with American film, and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* is heavily inspired by classic American rock.

A lot of Japanese pop culture also has an interest in organized religion, present in influential works such as *Ultraman*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and *Shin Megami Tensei* to name a few. *Bayonetta* participates in this trend, by imaging angelology through a distinctly foreign perspective. These creatures, with their statuesque forms and multiple faces, echo biblical descriptions more faithfully than the sanitized angels of popular Western art. Their trumpets, halos, and wings evoke divinity, yet their uncanny beauty reminds us of the incomprehensible nature of the divine. This interpretation is particularly impactful for Western audiences, many of whom may be encountering these unsettling depictions for the first time, and aren't used to the idea of angels and heavenly bodies appearing frightening and destructive. While popular culture has sanitized angelic imagery, the Bible describes angels as overwhelming,

incomprehensible and even terrifying entities, a vision that *Bayonetta* adopts with remarkable and flamboyant fidelity.

It's not a coincidence that the enemies Courage, Temperance, Prudence and Justice are based on the four cardinal values of the Christian faith. Drawing further inspiration from the Bible for their angelology, the enemies in *Bayonetta* are separated by a hierarchy, with the shape of the halo indicating the enemies rank. The angels also speak in Enochian, the angelic language constructed by 16th century mathematician and occultist John Dee, and all of Bayonetta's demonic summons are triggered by Enochian phrases. Overall, each angel in the game is an unforgettable enemy and these layers of symbolism rooted in both Christian mythology and the occult creates an incredibly divine yet disturbing aesthetic and gives the world of *Bayonetta* and its foes an otherworldly authenticity.



Angels portrayed by popular media
(The Two Cherubs, Raphael)



Angels portrayed in the Bible
(The Book of Ezekiel, Matthaeus Merian the elder)



Angels portrayed in Bayonetta
(Fortitudo)

In contrast to these Biblical elements, *Bayonetta* is very open about indulging in the worldly temptations and sins that are taboo by the standards of these religions. This may also be one of the contributing factors as to why Western audiences were initially uncomfortable with aspects of the game, deeming them sacrilegious, but over time found it liberating and inspiring. Using this same logic, we can assume that Japanese audiences were amused by these rules and standards, and found *Bayonetta's* attitude empowering and entertaining. Whilst other similar titles like *Devil May Cry* are heavily inspired by Christian mythology and literature, *Bayonetta* dives far deeper into these complex concepts and uses it as a tool of subversion. *Bayonetta* delivers a bold and incisive critique of organized religion, dismantling the very structures that have arguably restrained human potential for centuries. *Bayonetta* personifies a sharp, mocking defiance of the hypocrisy, contradictions, and outdated ideals upheld by institutions that claim to be the guardians of spiritual enlightenment.

Bayonetta imagines what might lie beyond the portals depicted in the ornate ceiling frescos of Italian cathedrals. Over-the-top in scale, proportion, and style, blending divine inspiration with irreverent

blasphemy. At its center is a character who turns spiritual femininity into a weapon, using nudity and sensuality to challenge the double standards found in both religious iconography and modern pop culture. All of this is delivered through a distinctly outsider lens that navigates potential controversy with humor and maturity.

Sensuality & Reclamation

Bayonetta's cultural and critical reception has evolved significantly since her debut, and the public perception of her has transformed from sex object made for men by men (director: Hideki Kamiya), to the embodiment of empowered female sexuality made by a woman (designer: Mari Shimikazi). This development is due to a variety of factors, but primarily the shift reflecting changing conversations around agency, sexuality, and feminist interpretation.

Like its camp sensibility, *Bayonetta's* use of sexuality is self-aware and deliberate. Bayonetta knows exactly how she's perceived and uses that perception as a weapon. Her body and beauty are under her control, never exploited for the player's gaze. Despite Bayonetta's amnesia, she is not naive. She is aware of her desirability and uses it to her advantage; she is entirely in control of her sexuality and how others react to it as well. This is most evident in her hair, which comprises her bodysuit and is her main conduit for demonic summons while fighting. Bayonetta can use the contract she has with the demon Madama Butterfly and summon large fists or heels out of her hair to crush enemies. Bayonetta appears partially naked when this happens, reflecting that Bayonetta's sexiness is being used as a way to empower and protect her. She doesn't lose health, become more vulnerable to enemy attacks, or take damage when doing this; she is not punished for using her sexuality as she pleases. While these transformations momentarily expose her body, instead of being made vulnerable, these acts make her stronger. Her sexuality is synonymous with her power.

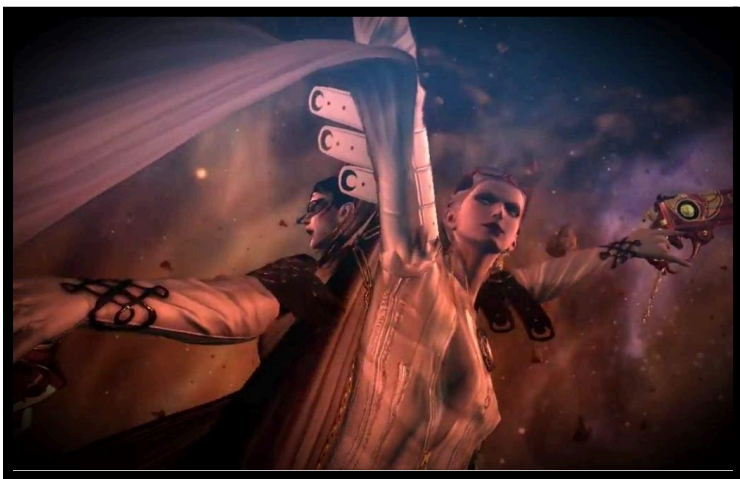
This philosophy is further reinforced through Bayonetta's interactions and relationships with other characters, and how they enforce her autonomy. One of the first characters we meet is Rodin, who although is immensely powerful himself, never attempts to dominate or overshadow Bayonetta. He explicitly tells her he isn't interested in getting involved with her affairs, and while he does play a significant supporting role, he never steals the spotlight. He respects her as a woman, a witch, a customer and a fighter.

Luka by contrast embodies the more problematic form of masculinity, and represents the *wrong* ways to treat Bayonetta— and all women by extension. The first time we see him he is attempting to woo a citizen of Vigrid, handing her a rose, before falling over a cart on the street, which inverts the typical video game archetype of smooth and suave male leads and romantic interests. Initially hostile towards Bayonetta, he later becomes romantically infatuated with her when he discovers she is not responsible for

his father's death. Rather than respecting her independence like Rodin, Luka begins to view her as a prize to be won. Bayonetta toys around with him and ridicules his efforts while trying to teach him a lesson in respect, positioning Bayonetta as his unflappable teacher in confidence and self-respect. His repeated failure, both romantic and heroic, are played for comedy, and the narrative never awards his entitlement. Through Luka, the game critiques male insecurity and entitlement while positioning Bayonetta as a figure of confidence and self-possession.

The second most important character in the game, Jeanne, also of course has a complex and interesting relationship with Bayonetta that further reinforces this theme. As we see their relationship develop over the course of the game as Bayonetta regains her memories and Jeanne works to break Balder's brainwashing respectively, we see the witches fight against one another with an elite skillset. The game establishes quickly that the most powerful fighters in this universe are women. After Jeanne breaks Balder's control and "sacrifices" herself to save Bayonetta, Bayonetta goes on to confront Balder. Both Jeanne and Bayonetta have overpowered this man who had been manipulating them for his own gain.

The climax of the game also subverts the "damsel in distress" trope so common in video games. When Bayonetta is trapped in space after awakening the left eye, she is paralyzed and all hope seems lost. Suddenly out of nowhere, Jeanne races in on her motorcycle, intent now to save her Umbran sister. Jeanne's words of encouragement awaken Bayonetta, and two witches then combine their power to summon the demon Queen Sheba who defeats Jubelius. While Bayonetta becomes a "damsel in distress" in this moment, it is her fellow witch who saves her and the events serve as a crucial part of rebuilding their trust and relationship, and reaffirms the narrative that female solidarity and not male heroism, will bring victory. This final scene would be nowhere near as impactful if Luka or Rodin were to save Bayonetta, both narratively and culturally.



Jeanne comes to Bayonetta's rescue and the Umbran sisters reunite

Strongest Element

While I've already waxed lyrical about Bayonetta's iconic style, it's worth emphasizing that one of the game's greatest strengths lies in how deeply intertwined her personal aesthetic is with the gameplay itself. Bayonetta's relationship to her fashion isn't just cosmetic, but is fundamental to both her identity and the combat mechanics of the game. Her long, flowing hair isn't simply a symbol of femininity or glamour, it serves as the primary medium for her demonic powers. Because her clothing is composed entirely of her hair, her fashion quite literally is her weapon. When she unleashes her most powerful attacks, her clothing unravels as part of the summoning ritual—visually signaling that when she is most exposed, she is also at her most formidable. This inversion of vulnerability turns what might be dismissed as “fan service” into something far more radical: a celebration of feminine sexuality as power without penalty.

Her look masterfully blends classic witch motifs with high-fashion aesthetics. The silhouette of her hairstyle nods to the pointed shape of a traditional witch's hat, yet it's sleek, sculptural, and unmistakably modern. Even her infamous heel-guns, which defy logic and practicality, feel right at home in Bayonetta's exaggerated, camp-infused world. They offer creative gameplay mechanics and variety, all while drawing attention to her commanding posture and graceful, elongated legs. Her combat, infused with rhythmic, dance-like motion, further blurs the line between performance and violence, and beauty and brutality. In this way, Bayonetta's sensual, unapologetically feminine style isn't just visual, it's embedded in every kick, strut, and spell. Her body becomes the stage, the weapon, and the spectacle all at once, making her look not just a feature of the game, but its very foundation.

Unsuccessful Element

Whilst the plot and characters may seem digestible and comprehensible in the format of this paper, they are not presented as such in the game. Many key story elements aren't fully fleshed out or explained well enough and can leave the player confused if they haven't played the other games or don't have a guidebook or the game Wiki nearby. The Witch Hunts, Rosa and Balder's relationship, The Eyes of the World, Bayonetta's past, Luka's father, and other aspects are only partially explained or buried within cryptic dialogue and fleeting cutscenes. Some of these plot points are addressed in subsequent games, but not with the most clarity. For players without this knowledge, the narrative can feel disjointed and confusing.

The game's relentless pace further exacerbates this issue. It often falls over itself rushing to the next fight, making it difficult to fully soak up the environment and subtler themes and messages and leaves little time for reflection or worldbuilding. This can result in narrative whiplash, where moments of emotional or thematic weight are overshadowed by the game's obsession with momentum and spectacle. As a result, *Bayonetta's* storytelling can sometimes feel secondary to the style, requiring players to piece together meaning from fragments rather than being guided through a clearly articulated narrative.

Highlight

One of the game's most distinctive and thematically rich mechanics is the torture attack system. These powerful offensive moves are conjured through Enochian chants that Bayonetta can activate under specific conditions and with the right moveset. This ability allows her to summon ancient infernal devices once used to torture other witches during the Witch Hunts; reclaiming those devices of suffering as a weapon against her foes. While the mechanics shift throughout the subsequent games, the core function of delivering high-damage blows to a target remains. What also remains is the flamboyant and over-the-top performance Bayonetta gives while delivering these attacks, utilizing her sexuality and domineering personality to annihilate her enemies. These torture attacks therefore serve as a unique and rewarding gameplay mechanic while providing a narrative link to the Umbra Witches and their persecution.



Wooden Horse



The Vice



The Guillotine

Critical Reception

Eurogamer - 90/100, Simon Parkin (November 18, 2009)

Perhaps a bit brunt when referring to the protagonists looks and sex appeal Simon Parkin's 2009 review for Eurogamer praises *Bayonetta* for, "Rather than attempting to merely recreate *Devil May Cry's* successes in *Bayonetta*, Kamiya's bravely stripped away all of the dead weight from his initial template, ruthlessly streamlining the form and function to deliver something at once fresh and familiar. It's also, unquestionably, the greatest game yet to spill from this niche." The review praises *Bayonetta* for being both technically polished and strategically deep, highlighting the combat systems' uniquely fast, fluid and imaginative combos and techniques. Parkin notes a few caveats such as long loading times or frame rate dips, but emphasises that these don't significantly detract from the experience.

Game Informer - 90/100, Joe Juba (December 22, 2009)

Another timely review that praises *Bayonetta* for its excessive style and intense action. Juba describes the concept of the game as simply as, "Take *Devil May Cry*, make the combat even better, and replace Dante with every fetish you can think of." Juba acknowledges that the character detail and even enemy designs are remarkably intricate and well-researched. The gameplay never gets boring and only continues to escalate with the narrative and stakes. Juba does point out however that while these combat controls work perfectly fine during normal sequences, the one-off gimmick levels get sloppy (i.e. controlling Jeanne's motorbike or surfing with *Bayonetta*). While the story is described as bizarre and over-the-top, filled with sexual innuendo and spectacle, the review asserts that the gameplay more than compensates.

Lessons

1 . Style as substance

Bayonetta offers several lessons in narrative design, aesthetics and representation that continue to influence and push modern game development and design. Notably this is through how the game expresses the power of style as substance. Rather than treating the fashion, choreographed fighting, or general exaggeration as superficial flair, the game integrates these qualities directly into its storytelling and gameplay. Every design choice from *Bayonetta's* hair-based outfit to her dancelike combat, serves the dual purpose of character expression and mechanical innovation. The game shows that fashion, movement

and visual flair can serve as powerful narrative tools and not just icing. Turning aesthetics into a form of expression and gameplay innovation rather than simple spectacle.

2. Elevation through excess

Second, *Bayonetta* reveals how camp and excess can elevate rather than bury a narrative. By embracing its theatricality, humor and spectacle, the game transforms what could have been parody into purposeful empowerment. No longer a shameful pleasure, but a gratifying escapism. *Bayonetta* has helped transform the way audiences, developers and critics understand femininity and spectacle in gaming, and proving that a camp-y presentation can still carry serious thematic weight. The lesson here is that excess can be a pathway to meaning rather than a distraction from it, and embracing this boldness can elevate art and deepen emotional resonance in a way that is both entertaining and meaningful.

3. Reclamation and agency

Finally, *Bayonetta* teaches an important lesson about reclamation and agency. It reframes female sexuality as a source of control and power rather than vulnerability, showing that sensuality and strength are not mutually exclusive. Through subversion of religious iconography and patriarchal tropes, the game illustrates how narrative and design can critique social systems while celebrating autonomy and identity. The game teaches us that strength and sensuality can do more than just coexist, but thrive off one another, and that reclaiming one's image and narrative is the strongest act of liberation.

Summation

Ultimately, *Bayonetta* stands as a landmark title not only for its kinetic gameplay and cinematic flair, but also for its unapologetic and sophisticated engagement with femininity, camp aesthetics, and self-aware sensuality. It fuses mythology, fashion and philosophy into a cohesive narrative that both entertains and challenges conventional representation of women in video games. Despite the occasional narrative incoherence, its thematic clarity remains undeniable: empowerment through performance, confidence and defiance.

The game's willingness to blur boundaries, whether it's between the sacred and the blasphemous, beautiful and grotesque, masculine or feminine, cements its place as both a thrilling action experience and a provocative piece of art. By making fashion, flair and personality central to its storytelling, *Bayonetta* teaches that narrative meaning in games need not come from dialogue or exposition alone, but it can also emerge from movement, style and presence. Ultimately, *Bayonetta* reminds players that power and

identity are performances of our own making, and that there is strength in embracing both the absurd and divine within us.



Works Cited:

Shimizaki, M. (2009, April 17). *Designing bayonetta - platinumgames official blog*platinumgames official blog. PlatinumGames Official Blog.

<https://www.platinumgames.com/official-blog/article/1278>

Bayonetta Wiki. (n.d.). https://bayonetta.fandom.com/wiki/Bayonetta_Wiki

YouTube. (n.d.). Bayonetta - Dance Motion Capture. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVvk8XXWo4Q>

Wikimedia Foundation. (2025, August 13). *Ophanim*. Wikipedia.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ophanim#/media/File:Ezekiel's_vision.jpg

Wikimedia Foundation. (2025a, August 12). *Sistine Madonna*. Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistine_Madonna#/media/File:RAFAEL_-_Madonna_Sixtina_\(Gem%C3%A4ldegalerie_Alter_Meister,_Dresden,_1513-14._%C3%93leo_sobre_lienzo,_265_x_196_cm\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sistine_Madonna#/media/File:RAFAEL_-_Madonna_Sixtina_(Gem%C3%A4ldegalerie_Alter_Meister,_Dresden,_1513-14._%C3%93leo_sobre_lienzo,_265_x_196_cm).jpg)

Sontag, S. (1964). Notes on “Camp.”

https://monoskop.org/File:Sontag_Susan_1964_Notes_on_Camp.pdf

Juba, J. (2009, December 22). Bayonetta Review - Bayonetta pushes action to absurdity. Game Informer.

<https://gameinformer.com/games/bayonetta/b/ps3/archive/2009/12/22/review.aspx>

Parkin, S. (2009, November 18). Bayonetta Review: Angel May Cry. Eurogamer.net.

<https://www.eurogamer.net/bayonetta-import-review>