The Heroic Journey of a Villain

The Lost and Found Humanity of an Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

In this essay, we will look at the villain of the Portal franchise, the artificial intelligence GLaDOS, in context with Maureen Murdock’s theory of the “Heroine’s Journey,” from her book The Heroine’s Journey: Woman’s Quest for Wholeness. The essay argues that although GLaDOS is not a heroine in the conventional sense, she is just as important of a figure in the franchise as its protagonist, Chell. GLaDOS acts both as the first game’s narrator and villain, as she runs the Aperture Science Enrichment Center where the games take place. Unlike Chell, GLaDOS is a speaking character with a complex backstory and goes through real character development as the franchise’s story progresses. The essay is divided into four chapters, a short history of women’s part as characters in video games, an introduction to Murdock’s “The Heroine’s Journey,” and its context to John Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey,” a chapter on the Portal franchises, and then we go through “The Heroine’s Journey,” in regards to GLaDOS, and each step in its own subchapter. Our main focus will be on the second installment in the series, Portal 2. Since, in that game, GLaDOS goes through most of her heroine’s journey. In the first game, Portal, GLaDOS separates from her femininity and embraces the masculine, causing her fractured psyche, and as the player goes through Portal 2 along with her, she reclaims her femininity, finds her inner masculinity, and regains wholeness. In Portal 2, we are also introduced to who GLaDOS was before the games took place, a human named Caroline who served as a personal assistant to the CEO of Aperture Science, Cave Johnson. While human, GLaDOS started her journey by rejecting the feminine and completed her identification with the masculine as she became GLaDOS, and ruled Aperture Science with the same lack of morals and obsession with research as Cave Johnson had. Going through Murdock’s ten stages of a heroine’s journey, we traverse through the narrative surrounding the villainess of the two games, Portal and Portal 2, and also take a look at the graphic novel Portal 2: Lab Rat. As this essay will show, the parallels between Murdock’s theory and the story arc of GLaDOS are many. The conclusion is that, although being the villain, GLaDOS does go through the “Heroine’s Journey,” and also that by using the theory, we gain more knowledge and insight into both GLaDOS and the games themselves.
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Introduction

In a survey aimed at gamers of all ages, the survey-takers were asked questions that relate to the narrative qualities of video games: whether they considered such qualities to be an important part of video games and whether games that are heavy on story might rather be thought of as interactive films than video games. Of the 1000 participants, 76.2% marked that the “story/plot” was one of two of the most important aspects when they seek out video games; 35.7% picked graphics (Ólafsdóttir). Video games have come a long way, and their stories and plots have become increasingly more substantial, more layered, and, often, more driven by choice, rivaling even the conventional storytelling of film and literature. Games do, however, not necessarily come to mind when scholarly theories are being used for dissection. Considering how important gamers think the story and plot truly is, it is reasonable to put the focus on video games, and in this essay, we will traverse through the Portal franchise through the looking glass of Maureen Murdock’s *The Heroine’s Journey*.

Chell, the protagonist of the franchise, is somewhat a blank slate. She is silent throughout the entire franchise and is even partly invisible, as you cannot see her unless the player catches a glimpse of her through strategically placed portals. This is partly because of the story’s format: video game. She is the empty shell that every player will inhabit. Not all video games take this route and many protagonists in video games do indeed have a fully fleshed out personality and go through changes. But Chell is a “silent protagonist,” a popular kind of protagonists in video games (Freeman 253).

Although Chell is the main protagonist of the *Portal* franchise, and its heroine, she is not the subject of essay. She goes through her own “Heroine’s Journey,” but the game includes a character that is much more intriguing, more complex and more suited for dissection. That character is GLaDOS, the villainess of the *Portal* franchise. A maniacal artificial intelligence that rules Aperture Science Enrichment Center. She is

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1 The label “gamer” can be controversial, but within the context of this survey it simply refers to people who spend considerable time / long stretches of time playing video games.
arguably one of the best video game villain of the 21st century. GLaDOS is clever, witty, and absolutely evil.

Using Murdock’s “Heroine’s Journey,” we can examine how the story in the Portal games is built, and also gain a deeper understanding of GLaDOS, not only as a villain, but also as a full, complete and rounded character, who goes through a heroine’s journey—despite being the franchise’s villain. We will look at the whole franchise in some way, both Portal, the original game, its sequel, Portal 2, and the graphic novel Portal 2: Lab Rat, however, our main focus will be Portal 2. Through its story, we will follow GLaDOS on her “Heroine’s Journey,” her relationship with the game’s official heroine, Chell, and learn more about this intriguing villain as she learns more about herself, and becomes her own special creation.
1. Women in Video Games

Gaining popularity in the 1970s, video games started out as incredibly simple games, like the famous *Pong* (Kent 23), lacking any story or progress; the goal for the player was only to get more points than the last game while a single pixel went back and forth. As technology grew, so did the games. Simple stories were made, the most popular one becoming “the hero saves the princess.” The most enduring of those heroes turned out to be a plumber, Mario Mario, who first went on his, simplified, hero’s journey in *Donkey Kong* in 1981 (Kent 292), before becoming a full fledge hero in *Super Mario Bros.* (Kent 526), and then there was a simple country boy, Link, in *The Adventures of Zelda*. Most of the adventures these two took on in the 80s and early 90s were the simple mission of saving the princess.

These stories were often expanded with the manuals that came with the game cartridges in the 1980s, and some early games even introduced simple cut-scenes between levels (an early example includes Tecmo’s *Ninja Gaiden* on the Nintendo Entertainment System) that bridged the actual gameplay with perhaps a few frames of pixels and text (Crawford 260). For those gamers hungry for intriguing stories, the so-called text adventure games were available, starting with the pioneering *Adventure* in 1975 (Crawford 259). These games were interactive books, where the player read a paragraph or two before writing input in few words, hoping it would bring him to the next part of the story. As games went from simple cartridges that could only hold a few kilobytes, on to CDs, DVDs and other formats that allowed for longer gameplay, more visuals, audio and video, the stories became a more important part of video games.

While the heroes of video games are still mostly men doing manly things (the saving the princess trope of Mario and Zelda still lives on, while many focus on disgruntled men shooting other men or beings of some sort), there are games, and have been games, that are more woman-centric, and even some that place the women in the role of the hero, the first mainstream example being the video game pioneer Nintendo putting a female, Samus Aran, in the lead in their ever-popular *Metroid* series in 1986 (Nintendo, of course, also being the maker of the games starring Mario and Link). Interestingly enough, the fact that the player was taking control of the first playable
female character is hidden until the player has beaten the game and Samus takes off her helmet and reveals her long hair and feminine features.

Female characters in video games often have an obvious focus put on their sexuality, as scantily clad heroines battle while their male counterparts are clad in more suitable armor. Or an adventurous archeologist who happens to have 150% larger bosoms than originally intended (McLaughlin). Although this focus on female characters’ sexuality in video games is apparent, this by no means the standard for all female video game characters. One of the better examples of such a non-sensationalized female character is the *Portal* franchise.
2. The Heroine’s Journey and The Hero’s Journey

In 1949, the mythologist Joseph John Campbell published the book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and introduced the concept of the “The Hero’s Journey.” The template provided by Campbell could be used on almost every male-centric story, and has indeed. It was groundbreaking work and is still used today. However, although it can be used equally to describe the journey of Moses, Superman and Luke Skywalker, it leaves out the whole other gender (Frankel 1). In a male-centric fashion, the theory focuses on the archetypal hero found in tales of old, but as time passed and Campbell’s work was used increasingly to describe contemporary fiction, there was an obvious need for a theory that focused on the other gender, the female heroine.

In 1990, Maureen Murdock published *The Heroine’s Journey: A Woman’s Quest for Wholeness*. Hers is a feminist application of Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey,” where she sets her sight on the female protagonist. Much was changed, as now the focus is more on the protagonist’s gender identity and how the gendered world around her impacts her adventure and her as a person. Murdock categorizes the journey in ten stages that are cyclic. It starts with separation from the feminine, and ends with the integration of both the masculine and the feminine. The heroine can be situated at more than one stage at each given time, and, as Murdock points out, “the journey is a continuous cycle of development, growth, and learning” (Murdock 4).

Murdock develops her concept of the Heroine’s Journey with the protagonist of the story with the heroine—the one who saves the day—in mind. Why then, should we utilize Murdock’s theories, her list of the events in a heroine’s quest, and focus them on the villainess of a video game franchise? There are two significant reasons. Firstly, the narrative in *Portal* is by no means conventional if judged on the grounds of the media of novel and film, as tends to be the application of Campbell’s and Murdock’s respective theories on the Hero and Heroine’s Journey, and this may be said about all video games in general. Secondly, GLaDOS is an incredibly interesting character with multiple layers of depth and intriguing story arc; much more so than the actual hero of the game, Chell.
Fig 1. The first person view the player has in the game. We can only see the portal gun itself, not Chell, the official heroine of game’s story. We see the world from her perspective (screenshot from Portal).

Fig 2. The only way for the player of Portal and Portal 2 to actually see Chell is by being creative when creating portals. Here we see Chell standing in the corner of a room, having placed an orange portal on the wall in front of her and a blue portal on the wall to her right. Since two portals are connected like a window or a door, when an orange portal and a blue portal are created, the player can look through one and see through the other one (screenshot from Portal 2).
The narrative in games plays by different set of rules than that of the standard literary narrative—even when highly complex. We can see this clearly in the Portal franchise with the protagonist, Chell. She never says a word, never expresses emotions, never has a visible thought or shows any desire for anything. We do not even see her face or body most of the time. In fact, the only way for the player to see Chell, is by maneuvering portals in the right way. She is the perfectly blank slate for any player to insert his or her own self into and takes on their personality and ways moving. The player wants to reach the end goal, and because of that, so does Chell. Chell cannot be interpreted the way GLaDOS can be, because Chell is only an extension of us, the players.

While Chell is only a vessel, an avatar, for the player, GLaDOS has a different function altogether. She has a distinct personality and goes through a journey through the franchise where we see how she loses her humanity and femininity, regains it, and in the end manages to balance both her regained femininity and the masculinity that was thrust upon her. GLaDOS goes through all the steps in Murdock’s theory and is thus perfect for further analysis applying the theory of the “Heroine's Journey.”
In 1998, the video game Half-Life, developed by Valve, was released by Sierra. It was a first-person shooter, a genre that had gained a lot of popularity in the 1990s due to increasingly good graphics and 3D rendering, and games like Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, and Quake. In short, a first-person shooter is a game where the player controls a character and where the camera makes it look like the player sees the surroundings through the eyes of the protagonist (Lacasa 55), while controlling a gun of some sort to use to get through the game (most often by shooting aliens or monsters). It quickly became a classic, and for a good reason. As Barry Atkins writes in his book More than a Game from 2003, “Half-Life stands out among the examples of the first-person shooter produced in the late 1990s in a number of significant ways, both because of its careful incorporation of those cinematic strategies that function to disarm the unease generated by the portrayal of violence, and in its consequent emphasis upon the realization that this is a fiction, and should be read as such” (79-80).

In Half-Life you play as Gordon Freeman, a scientist who has to deal with the disastrous consequences of the science that his company has been developing. The company, Black Mesa, has opened a portal to another dimension, letting in monsters of all sorts. Freeman, the strong, silent, type has to find ways to deal with these monsters, using innovative late 1990s gaming technology. Half-Life was such a success that it made Valve into an icon of the gaming industry, and spawned a few sequels. It also made it possible for Valve to develop more games, one of them being Portal.

Portal was released on October 9th, 2007 as part of a game package, The Orange Box, sold by the Valve Corporation. The game was thought of as an added bonus to the package, but quickly became the breakout hit of the year, winning multiple “Game of the Year” awards as well as being placed in the Museum of Modern Art, chosen as one of the first fourteen games that the Museum of Modern Art considers worth “study[ing],
preserv[ing], and exhibit[ing]” (Antonelli). It is also considered a great example of how video games could be of help in classrooms, as it expertly demonstrates how learners can “understand a specific problem or a class of problems in physics,” where the students learn by solving problems hands on, rather than “just pass [a] paper-and-pencil test about [the problems]” (Gee 230-231).

Like *Half-Life*, the game *Portal* centers on the silent protagonist Chell and her misadventures in the Aperture Science Enrichment Center—a company that incidentally has Black Mesa as its biggest competitor. Also like *Half-Life*, it is a first-person shooter, although the gun is never used to take aim at any creatures (Lacasa 55). After waking up trapped within a small room of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, the protagonist, Chell, is forced to go through tests with the Aperture Science Handheld Portal Device, also known as a Portal Gun. Being completely silent throughout the game, Chell does not display any communication skills and is even somewhat invisible to the player of the game. The only way a player can see the protagonist is by placing two portals strategically and looking at Chell through the portals.
The portals are two holes, one light blue and one orange, that are shot from the Portal Gun onto walls, floors, or ceilings. The portals are connected in such a way that walking through one portal means coming out of the other. If the player were to jump into a portal “A” from a high distance, he would conserve the momentum and fling out of portal “B” at great speed. The game presents the player with multiple testing chambers where the protagonist, the player as Chell, must find her way out by using the portals to reach the exit and solve the puzzles that will open the doors leading to the next room. Although puzzle games were nothing new, these portal mechanics were a breakthrough at the time. Gabe Newell, the founder of Valve, explained what the thoughts were behind this mechanics and goals: “We wanted to take physics out of this domain as a tool that lets you bounce grenades around to how can we really change the game experience for our customers” (Lacasa 57).

It is the corrupt artificial intelligence (A.I.), GLaDOS (Genetic Lifeform and Disk Operating System), of Aperture Science that forces Chell, the hero of Portal and Portal 2, to test the Portal Gun. GLaDOS’s function, and hardwired need, is to make and control the tests in the Aperture Science Enrichment Centre (Portal 2). The player, as Chell, solves puzzles, listens to dialogue from the taunting artificial intelligence, and discovers the “dark undertones that hint at a whole world outside the existence of the game’s tiny space” (Rigney), as she puzzles her way through the facility to ultimately find and destroy her tormentor.

The highly anticipated follow-up, Portal 2, was released on April 19th, 2011 and was considered a huge success, continuing the legacy by winning yet again numerous “Game of the Year” awards. Along with the game, the Valve Corporation published the
graphic novel *Portal 2: Lab Rat*, giving its readers a glimpse into the world of Doug Rattmann, an elusive character in both Portal games that the player never meets.

The writers of *Portal*, Erik Wolpaw and Chet Faliszek, now joined with Jay Pinkerton for *Portal 2*, injected the game with equal parts of humor and dark atmosphere, making it appeal to many and encouraging players to theorize about the world of *Portal*. Many questions are raised and left unanswered in the games, such as who the protagonist really is. We get hints in the game design and characters’ dialogue, but no concrete proof. The player has to decide for himself.

The player does not have a lot of influence over the story, but as with most games it is up to the player how he views said story. For an example, a core element of *Portal*’s narrative are small hidden rooms where the player finds information that contradicts the omniscient narrator, GLaDOS, that claims to be helping Chell at the beginning. If the player does not find these rooms and the messages left by the hidden narrator of Doug Rattmann, the story becomes more simple and not as sinister. In the sequel, *Portal 2*, this hidden narrator is much harder to ignore, as the player now has to travel through these “hidden areas” and discover the truth behind the deeper story of the Aperture Science facility.

**Plot Synopsis**

The first game, *Portal*, is considered to be a rather short game, taking roughly 2-4 hours to complete, depending on the player. Because of this, the plot is rather simple, compared to that of its successor, *Portal 2*. Chell, the player, wakes up in the Aperture Science Enrichment Center and hears the voice of GLaDOS. A portal is activated inside her small room and as Chell steps through it, she starts her journey, and enters the first testing chamber. Under the instructions of GLaDOS, Chell figures out how the tests work; she must get to the exit and, by using portals and objects in the chamber, open the exit door that leads her to the next chamber. In one testing chamber, Chell acquires a Portal Gun, allowing her to make portals wherever she wants (as long as the surface is flat and white). Armed with the Portal Gun, she goes through more tests, escaping near death at the hands of turrets that shoot on sight, using her puzzle solving brain to take out her enemies, or simply pass them by.
The turrets in the facility have a personality of their own. The creators of Portal “wanted to create a turret that was different from the traditional … mindless mounted guns,” so they made them look like “cute robots,” and gave them “an innocent sounding voice with dialogue to match” (Faliszek “Developer Commentary”). When fighting and defeating a turret, the player can hear lines such as “I don’t hate you” or “no hard feelings”; when picked up, a turret may ask, “please put me down”; and when destroying or causing damage to one, the player will have to listen to the innocent voices of the turrets indicate pain with confused yells (Portal 2). There is thus a great “juxtaposition of killing machine and innocent non-aggressive personality,” making “the Portal turret a memorable character” (Faliszek “Developer Commentary”).

Things seem to take a dark turn, however, when Chell enters testing chamber number 16. So far, despite an eerie feeling one might get from being watched due to security cameras, GLaDOS has seemed somewhat harmless, her main focus being the safety of the test subject, the Aperture Science equipment, and that the tests run smoothly. It is in testing chamber 16 that Chell might notice “HELP” scrawled in red on the chamber’s floor, as well as a handprint on the wall. If one is to investigate this message and enter a somewhat hidden room behind two boxes, the player will enter the first Doug Rattmann den.

This is a character we never meet in-game, but his presence is most certainly felt. By reading the graphic novel Portal 2: Lab Rat, we get the backstory of Doug Rattmann, a former employee of Aperture Science who managed to escape GLaDOS’s murder spree as she cleansed the Aperture Science facility of all its workers (Kosmatka 20). He has multiple hidden dens throughout the facility and is never seen, although he does leave plenty of artwork and evidence of his stay in each den. Rattmann is a silent
Once inside this first den, the player can see that someone has been living in the small room, probably for quite some time as there are markings on the wall counting up to 180, as well as empty cans and water jugs. The sentence “the cake is a lie,” is written multiple times on a wall and it is here that we get our first obvious clue that GLaDOS is not what she might seem, as she has been promising Chell, the player, that cake will be served at the completion of her testing.

Going back out and completing test chamber 16, Chell moves into test chamber 17 and, if the player looks around, finds another (this time, slightly more hidden) den. Inside are multiple deactivated security cameras, and frantic scribbles on the walls, showing the mind of someone truly paranoid and in need of help. The player can find writings such as “help,” “she’s watching you,” and multiple pictures, perhaps of former Aperture Science employees, plastered on the walls. The paranoid dweller of this den has altered the pictures, taping pictures of the Weighted Companion Cube over the faces of the people, as well as writing “R.I.P.” and drawing multiple hearts surrounding them².

² This makes many believe that the bodies of former Aperture Science employees are, in fact, hidden within the weighted cubes that GLaDOS makes Chell use during her testing (Patrick, "Game Theory: Portal's Companion Cube has a Dark Secret"). There are multiple factors that give this theory credence, but as this interesting fan theory is not related to my focus, I will not go further into it here.
This chamber is also where we meet the Weighted Companion Cube, the one that has replaced the faces of the people in Rattmann’s den. It is like all other cubes that Chell has been using to help her solve tests, except that this special cube has a pink heart on it instead of the gray Aperture Science logo. At the end of the chamber, GLaDOS forces Chell to incinerate this cube, stating that it is “most likely incapable of feeling much pain,” and, no matter how long the player puts it off, she will congratulate Chell as she “euthanized [her] faithful Companion Cube more quickly than any test subject on record” (Portal).

When reaching the final test chamber, GLaDOS’s idea of finishing the tests is to get rid of Chell by guiding her into an incinerator. Chell’s quick thinking and Portal Gun allows her to escape this fiery end and she starts to traverse the inner workings of the Aperture Science facility. She finds her way to GLaDOS’s chamber and faces her captor and tester.

GLaDOS is defeated as Chell uses her own weapons against her with the help of the Portal Gun, and incinerates the personality cores that fall off her with each blast. All the while GLaDOS talks to the mute hero and tries to get her to stop what she is doing, claiming “this isn’t brave, this is murder. What did I ever do to you?” (Portal). Chell is unfazed as she has gotten used to GLaDOS’s mind games and passive-aggressive way of talking, and completes her goal of destroying GLaDOS.

The game ends with an explosion, and as Chell opens her eyes, she can see that she has escaped the facility. Burning bits of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center lie about her as she closes her eyes again, lying on the concrete outside of the facility, and the player is treated to a view of a dark room, only lit by the single candle on a cake which is looked on by the Weighted Companion Cube.

The second installation in the Portal franchise, Portal 2, begins in a similar way as its predecessor. Chell wakes up in a small room and must find her way to a Portal Gun and start testing. However, this time, it is not the villainous GLaDOS that wakes Chell from her sleep, but a new
character called Wheatley. Chell again wakes up to a voice with no visible owner. She
is again trapped in a small room with only the bare necessities, but this time, instead of
opening a portal for Chell so that she can escape the room, the owner of the voice asks
her to open the door for him. This is where we, the player as Chell, meet Wheatley.

The friendly robotic sphere simply wants to escape and finds the first living test
subject to help him on his journey out of the Aperture Science facility. Now that the
events of Portal have taken place, GLaDOS is no longer in control, but due to
Wheatley’s clumsy nature, she is reactivated and restored to her position of power.
Chell is forced to test once more but now has the help of Wheatley, who is determined
to shut GLaDOS off again and find the exit to the word outside.

The Aperture Science Enrichment Center is in ruins. After the explosion at the
end of Portal, and being left without an artificial intelligence to control the place for
many years (exactly how many we do not know), the facility has been taken over by
nature, some rooms even looking more like a swamp than a modern laboratory. In the
rubble, Chell finds more of Doug Rattmann’s dens, and his artwork has matured from
paranoid words into full murals of storytelling.

Fig 10. A mural left by Doug Rattmann depicting the scientists of Aperture Science putting
together their masterpiece, the artificial intelligence, GLaDOS (screenshot from Portal 2).

When the heroic duo of Chell and Wheatley accidentally reanimate GLaDOS,
they quickly get separated as GLaDOS picks them both up with robotic arms and
throws Chell to a location close to her Portal Gun. Wheatley is tossed aside and as Chell begins to test the Portal gun once again, we can hear and see Wheatley try to reach Chell through the walls and help her out so that she can, in return, help him to escape the facility.

After acquiring her Portal Gun again, Chell puzzles her way through the Enrichment Center and faces GLaDOS once more, this time with a friend on her side. Together they manage to shut down GLaDOS, and put Wheatley in charge of the facility instead. Someone has to be in control of the facility, and with Wheatley wielding that power he can easily send an elevator, containing Chell, to the top of the facility and to freedom. This plan has one major flaw since Wheatley can, of course, not join Chell in her freedom as they need someone at the controls and he cannot leave on his own (being a robotic sphere without legs).

As the villainess lies on the ground nearby, she starts to recognize Wheatley, explaining how Wheatley’s dimwittedness is there for a reason, as he is an “Intelligence Dampening Sphere,” designed for GLaDOS to distract her and cling to her “brain” like a tumor (Portal 2). He was designed by the engineers of Aperture Science with the purpose to slow GLaDOS down and keep her in check.

This sends Wheatley over the edge. Having been thought of as dumb, small, and insignificant his entire “life,” the sudden surge of complete power over the entirety of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center goes to Wheatley’s head quite quickly, and he questions whether leaving the facility is the best option. After all, they could do some tests instead.

He angrily places the mighty GLaDOS inside of a small potato battery, and throws her into the elevator along with Chell, hitting the top of the elevator and smashing them down instead of sending them up to freedom. They fall down to their doom but survive unscathed and wake up in the underbelly of the Aperture Science facility, where Wheatley’s power does not reach. The new duo, Chell and potato GLaDOS, travel through the old abandoned parts of Aperture Science and get a history lesson of the company’s rise and fall through the décor and a new narrator.

Cave Johnson, the long-dead owner of Aperture Science, booms out of PA systems down below through the use of pre-recorded messages that become triggered as Chell and GLaDOS walk through the buildings. Mr. Johnson gives a backstory about
the facility as well as GLaDOS herself, as it turns out that GLaDOS is based on Cave’s personal assistant. Her name was Caroline, and her brain was copied, seemingly against her will, and transformed into the artificial intelligence that is GLaDOS.

GLaDOS learns many things about herself, traveling with Chell, and the two start to form a bond. They now have a common enemy, Wheatley, and they set their sights to restoring GLaDOS to the position of power (GLaDOS, of course, promising in return to allow Chell to escape the facility once and for all). Reaching the Enrichment Center, they are greeted with a power-mad Wheatley who has gained an addiction to testing—something that, GLaDOS explains, is ingrained in the control system.

Chell goes through more tests, this time with GLaDOS. When they finally reach Wheatley and manage to get GLaDOS into her old body, Wheatley ends up in space and GLaDOS saves Chell. She finds that Chell is simply too much trouble; she has robots to do tests on. Chell can go and be free. The game ends with Chell going up an elevator on her way to freedom, while turrets serenade her with an operetta in Italian—which is about how much GLaDOS cares for her.
4. The Heroine’s Journey in the Portal Franchise

The circle is inclusive; it does not exclude. The symbol of the feminine is the circle, exemplified in the womb, the vessel, and the grail. (Murdock 173)

Although Joseph John Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey” and Maureen Murdock’s “The Heroine’s Journey” have mostly been applied to novels, stories, and films, they can also be used to give another view into video games. A new form of storytelling, when compared to novels and cinema, video games have evolved tremendously over the past few decades. Unlike films and novels (with the exception of “choose your own adventure stories,” perhaps) video games offer interactivity for the one experiencing them. They can be linear in storytelling, or they can offer multiple choices and endings.
Whether or not the player gets to the end of the game depends on his skills or tenacity, unlike the viewer of a film or the reader of a book. As described in *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*, “Formed by rules and experienced through play, a game is a space of possible action that players activate, manipulate, explore and transform” (Salen & Zimmermann 378).

In the Portal video game franchise, we can use Murdock’s “Heroine’s Journey” both to segment the storyline found in the game, and to find deeper meaning and understanding of our heroine’s journey and better interpret her behavior and acts. With video games, a lot is often left to the player’s imagination or interpretation, and like most first-person shooters, *Portal* has a subjective point of view (Thon 67). Game protagonists, the character the player takes control of, are infamously silent, and often do not utter anything except for grunts while jumping or landing. In some instances, there are cut scenes—short films that depict a scene, or a few scenes, that take place between playable levels—and often the protagonist is shown interacting with non-playable characters, but *Portal* does not feature those. Although the heroine of Portal is the constantly silent Chell, who goes through her own journey filled with trials, she is not the character of the Portal franchise that goes through Murdock’s Heroine’s Journey. Our “heroine” in Murdock’s context, is the first game’s main villain, GLaDOS—an artificial intelligent robot being that controls the Aperture Science Enrichment Center where the games take place.

GLaDOS is anything but silent, and serves both as the first game’s villain and its narrator, as she guides Chell through test chambers. She is seldom earnest, mostly antagonizing, but when her tale is viewed through the lens of the Heroine’s Journey, we can better understand the inner turmoil that is taking place, as she goes from being a ruler to becoming a potato, to eventually understand her own inner woman, and balancing her feminine and masculine programming (she is software). To the casual player, GLaDOS can be seen as a true villain—a monster even. She is never mentioned by name, only referred to as “she,” if spoken about. In the first game, we do not even see her until the very end—waiting to reveal herself at the height of tension like the shark from *Jaws*, as if she were “an unknowable beast beyond control or comprehension” (Benjamin 170). To us, those who have studied the game, GLaDOS is
an intriguing character, a persona of duality and conflicts, a created being who must deal with her past and the life that was handmade for her.
4.1 Separation from the Feminine

In narrative terms, the ‘obstacle’ is the princess, the motivating force for the game—the invitation for the reader/player’s identification and participation, and the reason d’etre for the hero’s progress. He—you—must rescue the princess before she can be removed—and indication also for the gender politics that typify most games. (Beavis 236)

The first stage of “The Heroine’s Journey” is about the separation from the feminine for the heroine. For John Campbell, the feminine was the goal of the hero’s quest; the prize at the end, the princess that needed to be rescued by the hero (Frankel 3). For our journey, there is no princess at the end of the journey, but a queen, straight from beginning to end, and in this instance the queen happens to be the villainess herself. When we meet GLaDOS, our “heroine,” for the first time in Portal, she has already gone through this first stage of the journey, although we, the player, do not find out about that until much later in Portal 2, and, in fact, GLaDOS learns about it along with us.

Throughout Portal, the player can hear GLaDOS taunting Chell, and the player gets to know GLaDOS from her calm, computerized, yet undoubtedly feminine, voice. It is not until the very end of Portal that the player finally meets GLaDOS face to face and is able to see her. This is at the final showdown, where Chell will finally destroy her captor and escape to freedom. What greets us, when we confront GLaDOS, is her physical form, made up of wires, steel and plastic shells. This is GLaDOS, who, to many, resembles a bound woman, her bindings reminiscent of a straightjacket, hanging upside down from the ceiling (Bowler). GLaDOS is a bound woman: even though she has the whole of Aperture Science Enrichment Center to roam through, she can only do so indirectly. She can look through cameras, speak through speakers. The whole Aperture Science facility is literally an extension of her body, as she can control all the walls and floors and ceilings and change everything to her liking, but she cannot move freely. She cannot go to the outside world. She is a bound woman.
In the developer commentary to *Portal*, art director and conceptual artist Jeremy Bennett discusses the inspiration for the design of GLaDOS. Before settling on the look she ended with, GLaDOS “went through a bunch of design iterations,” with earlier versions of her including “a floating brain, a sprawling, spidery mechanism, and an upside-down version of Botticelli’s *Rise of Venus* built out of robot parts and wire” (Bennett “Developer Commentary”). In the end, the design team decided on a “huge mechanical device with a delicate robotic figure dangling out of it,” conveying “both GLaDOS’s raw power and her femininity” (Bennett “Developer Commentary”). Her identity as a female, albeit a female computer program in a robotic shell, is thus solidified as soon as the player sees her through the stylized design choices, allowing the player more context than just her undeniably feminine voice (provided by voice actress Ellen McLain).

In *Portal 2*, GLaDOS, this seemingly psychopathic, artificial intelligence overlord of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, gets a backstory. We, the player, knew little to nothing about her in the first game. She was simply a narrator, slash, villain, someone who teases us of our struggle and hints at what lies ahead, and then she is the beast we must destroy to finish the game. She is well written and grandiose and sparks the interest of any who plays the game, but her true self is kept in the shadows. *Portal 2* changes that and makes her into an even more intriguing character by taking her from the shadows and placing her in the limelight. GLaDOS’s backstory is given to us through narration, as the player listens to pre-recorded messages from a past long gone by, while solving puzzles involving the Portal Gun once again.
The pre-recorded messages are triggered by the protagonist visiting the old abandoned part of the Aperture Science facility, Chell being forced there along with GLaDOS after the new villain takes her place, and together they listen and learn about Aperture Science’s backstory along with the player. This, the second half of the second game is the part where we learn where GLaDOS’s “Heroine’s Journey” began. We find that before she was an artificial intelligence, tasked with controlling the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, she was a human being: A woman named Caroline.

In her life, Caroline was a personal assistant to the CEO of Aperture Science, Cave Johnson. From timestamps and other aged items in the abandoned buildings of this forgotten part of the facility, we see the progression of Aperture Science from the 1950s to the 1980s; although we do not know exactly when the Portal games take place, we do know that Portal is somewhere around 2010 and Portal 2 is set sometime in the future (how distant that future is left a mystery) (Totilo). Caroline was held in high regards by Mr. Johnson: “She’s the backbone of this facility. Pretty as a postcard, too. Sorry, fellas. She’s married. To science!,’’ and when he became deathly ill because of the toxicity of moon rocks (used for science), he appointed her as his successor (Portal 2). She does not only become his successor as a CEO, but also the beneficiary of Aperture Science’s latest project: brain mapping, aka, artificial intelligence, a “promotion” that she would get whether or not she liked it.

If I die before you people can pour me into a computer, I want Caroline to run this place. Now she’ll argue. She’ll say she can’t. She’s modest like that. But you make her – Cave Johnson (Portal 2).

Cave Johnson is a real man’s man. He is voiced by actor J. K. Simmons, most famous for his roles as the short-tempered, no-nonsense, Daily Bugle Editor J. Jonah Jameson in Sam Raimi’s Spider-Man trilogy, the short-tempered, no-nonsense convict Vernon Schillinger in HBO’s Oz, and the short-tempered, no-nonsense drum instructor in Damien Chazelle’s Whiplash (for which he won an Academy Award). By reputation alone, a character voiced by J. K. Simmons is associated with male authority; in other words, a short-tempered, a no-nonsense kind-of-a-guy. Cave Johnson is intelligent (he is the head of a major science company), driven (he “own[s] the place”), dependable
through position (CEO), holds prestige (his company innovates to the extreme and other laboratories try to steal from him) and financial gain (although the company appears to be going bankrupt in the end, it was obviously hugely successful at one point). These are all attributes that Maureen Murdock lists in her book *The Heroine’s Journey*, on how society is androcentric and the qualities men are rewarded for (13). Caroline is Cave’s secretary, a position that is unquestionably feminine in nature in regards to history (and the time period that Caroline served in said position).

“Women will never be men, and many women are trying to be ‘as good as men’” (14) writes Murdock, and although we do not get to know all that much about Caroline, it can be assumed by how much recognition she gets from Cave that she has succeeded in a way for him to perceive her as an equal, as he wants her to take over his job. We can assume, too, that Cave is not an ardent early feminist, but someone who relies on his masculinity. He commands and barks orders, both alive and dead. “Cave Johnson here: You lab boys quit your yappin’ and get back to work!,” a pre-recorded message plays in the graphic novel *Portal 2: Lab Rat* when two scientists talk about GLaDOS after Cave’s death (Kosmatka 11).

Caroline’s climb to power must have been an interesting, and long, journey on its own. Going from being newly hired to being the company owner’s secretary and closest confidant, and ultimately becoming second and then first, in command. Still, even though he sees her as a worthy successor, an equal, when he talks about Caroline he talks about her in traditionally feminine ways, as opposed to language one might use for a co-worker and successor. To Cave, she is “the lovely Caroline” and “pretty as a postcard” (*Portal 2*). It is highly unlikely that Cave would have described his successor like that if he had been a man.

Caroline is the feminine that GLaDOS separates from. She is the basis of what GLaDOS is. Caroline is GLaDOS’s memories and thoughts, mapped by computers and recreated in a digital form. GLaDOS is a copy of what made Caroline a person, but we can also assume that something of Cave lies within her too. The artificial intelligence system that hosts her mind, built by “the lab boys,” was, of course, built for Cave (*Portal 2*). Cave was alive when the project started, and he was the one who should have become the Genetic Lifeform and Disk Operating System. It is highly likely that
the building blocks GLaDOS was made off were some part the mapped personality of Cave, although it is mostly Caroline.

Like a daughter is the cells of her mother and father, recreated in a new organism, GLaDOS is a recreation of Caroline and, partly, of Cave. It could thus be stated that Cave is the closest thing GLaDOS has to a father, and Caroline is, in some way, GLaDOS’s mother.

The Degree to which a woman’s mother represents the status quo, the restrictive context of sexual roles, and the deep-seated sense of female inferiority within a patriarchal society determines the degree to which a woman will seek to separate herself from her mother. (Murdock 14)

Caroline did climb the corporate ladder within Aperture Science; however, it can be said that it was not because she managed to break the glass ceiling.

As we hear more of Cave’s pre-recorded tapes, we progressively find out more about how unethical his practices became. “I’ll be honest, we’re throwing science at the wall here to see what sticks,” he explains to the test subjects (Portal 2). He often talks about what is to be done to the test subjects, and then admits that he does not know what effects it will have: “Worst case, some tumors, which we’ll cut out” (Portal 2).

Beginning with only the best and the brightest, Cave used scientists and astronauts for all of Aperture Science’s tests, but when his ethics started slipping, due to the lack of funds, he started using less qualified personnel, going as low as offering twenty dollars to homeless people to become test subjects for the facility. When the willing test subjects deplete, presumably because there are no longer any homeless people alive in the vicinity of Aperture Science, he resorts to using his own staff—the scientists and engineers who run the facility—to be the subjects. “Since making test participation mandatory for all employees, the quality of our test subjects has risen dramatically. Employee retention, however, has not” Cave states in one of his pre-recorded messages (Portal 2). As a CEO, he has failed. He does blame Black Mesa, another research corporation like Aperture Science, for stealing his scientific breakthroughs, and gives some excuses, but all in all, the company that he started, is going under. We are not
given insight into whether he sees himself as a failure, nor are we privy to Caroline’s thoughts on the matter.

The company that Johnson gives to Caroline is not the company in its prime. It is a rundown mill, bankrupt, void of employees and future, filled with steel and iron, but lacking humanity. Caroline might have always been his first choice, but she is also probably his only choice. He still has his “lab boys,” but Cave does not seem to put much faith in them other than to complete their tasks, to finish their tests (Kosmatka 11). Caroline is the only way to maintain the status quo: to keep things like Cave Johnson wants them to be to continue his era. The true hero’s task, according to Campbell, “is to slay the monster of the status quo,” “to shatter the established order and create a community” (Murdock 14), and at this point in the story, GLaDOS is the representation of the status quo, mostly. We see in the semi-prequel graphic novel Portal 2: Lab Rat that it was GLaDOS who forced the remaining staff members to become test subjects and killed off those who did not comply with neurotoxins (Kosmatka 20). As Cave was doing similar things, we can say that she was keeping his status quo, although going further into immorality than even Cave.

“To distance herself from her mother and the motherhood on her, a woman may go through a period of rejection of all feminine qualities distorted by the cultural lens as inferior, passive, dependent, seductive, manipulative and powerless” (Murdock 14). As GLaDOS rose from the ashes of Caroline, she rose as something inferior to none, dependent upon nobody and all-powerful. She is a being that controls the life and destiny of all those who embark upon her domain, a viscous killer, held back partly by a morality core. According to Wheatley, the robotic sphere that helps Chell out of her sleep at the start of Portal 2, there are thousands of test subjects: “Why should I be kept informed about the life functions of the ten thousand bloody test subjects I’m supposed to be in charge of?” (Portal 2). GLaDOS reigns supreme over them all, controlling every aspect, every floor tile, of the facility that houses them.

Caroline is a good representation of the mother in regards to GLaDOS’s heroine’s journey, not only because of the symbolic motherhood of the person and the computerized descendant/clone, but also because of where Caroline lies within GLaDOS.
The journey begins with the heroine’s struggle to separate both physically and psychologically from her own mother and from the mother archetype, which has an even greater hold. The mother archetype is often referred to as the unconscious, particularly in its maternal aspect, involving the body and soul. The mother image represents not only one aspect of the unconscious, but it is also a symbol for the whole collective unconscious, which contains the unity of all opposites. (Murdock 17)

As we find out when GLaDOS hears both Cave Johnson talking about Caroline in the recordings and Caroline herself talking, as well as seeing a painted portrait of both Caroline and Cave, the robotic GLaDOS has a recollection of those people, but it is hidden deep within her unconscious. She has some memories, mapped in code deep down, hidden from view. She hears Cave Johnson exactly like Caroline heard him, and she sees the portrait precisely as Caroline saw it. Although GLaDOS may not remember her past self, the woman she was, or was born from, Caroline lies within her unconscious and that fact may have controlled her actions, her demeanor, more than GLaDOS herself would know.

In this sense, Chell, the main test subject, the protagonist and the mute character that the player of the Portal franchise takes control of, may have become a symbol for the separation of the mother for GLaDOS. Chell looks feminine by society’s standards. She is slim and beautiful, with long dark hair and traditional features, never overly sexual but a sexual being, but she is also independent, smart and strong, and unwilling to give up. She becomes the villain for GLaDOS, where GLaDOS casts her ire that would have gone towards her mother. For
all intents and purposes, there is no reason why GLaDOS would think she had a real mother—not a biological one—since GLaDOS is not biological herself, and not an adopted mother, since GLaDOS came into this world fully developed mentally. She was created, she knows that; she is artificial, a digital creation, not a biochemical human. She is an operating system that runs on cores. She knows her mind came from somewhere, but she must have believed the lines of code that made her a person were written from scratch, not mapped from an actual brain. Those who made her, literally, those who created her body, wrote the software, and those she believed had written the basis of her personality, were nothing to her. She killed them without a second thought in test chambers or with neurotoxins. Those who evaded her, like Doug Rattmann, were hunted until she seemingly lost interest. Without the direct knowledge of her past, she has no links to humanity, and thus she takes on different outlets.

As Murdock wrote, “many young women make their mothers into the image of the archetypal vengeful, possessive and devouring female whom they must reject to survive. … According to Jung this inner mother begins to function in us as a shadow figure, an involuntary pattern that is unacceptable to our egos. We cannot accept it in ourselves so we project it onto others” (18). For GLaDOS, this is Chell. She is the shadow that lurks in GLaDOS’s test chambers, undermining her, devouring her; she is the female that GLaDOS must not only reject, but destroy, for her own survival.

In every step of the first game and most of Portal 2, GLaDOS talks about Chell as if she were the vengeful one, simply by waking up, finishing test chambers and not dying. While GLaDOS is simply doing some testing, fulfilling her purpose, Chell is trying to sabotage it. Chell is unreasonable and the destroyer for GLaDOS. GLaDOS needs her for testing. Being a test subject is Chell’s purpose, as doing the tests is GLaDOS’s, but GLaDOS also knows that for her to survive, Chell must die. Chell becomes the literal shadow, the villain, the part of GLaDOS’s unconscious that controls some part of GLaDOS, the involuntary pattern that, to her, is unacceptable. Thus, GLaDOS projects her inner struggle with the mother onto Chell by berating her, by calling her names and by threatening her with her future doom.

In relation to the “Heroine’s Journey,” a woman will function in reaction to her mother until the unconscious reaction becomes conscious (Murdock 19). She will become what the mother is not, out of fear of becoming her (Murdock 20). While
Caroline was the always the dependable assistant of Cave Johnson, for at least 30 years, GLaDOS becomes the “devouring bitch” portrayed by Bette Davis: assertive, demanding, and purposeful, while at the same time becoming Joan Crawford as an abusive adopted “mommie dearest” (Murdock 19).

Although GLaDOS admires Chell’s tenacity, and she even admits her admiration through song in both games, she must react to her, distancing herself from Chell and her accomplishments. Even though it means that she is actively antagonizing the one person that matters to her at that moment, the test subject, and that the only thing the test subject is doing is completing the tests given to her. Chell, of course, does much more than that, but GLaDOS becomes sassy with her much sooner than that starts to happen. Chell is in some ways both doing what GLaDOS needs her to do and the exact opposite. GLaDOS wants her to be a test subject, but all the terms should be under GLaDOS’s control.

While rejecting the mother, GLaDOS also takes on the role of the mother, herself, in a way. In the original Portal, GLaDOS gives Chell life by waking her up from stasis sleep. Chell had a life before, of some kind, but gave that away when she became a test subject. As we find out in the graphic novel, she was rejected as a test subject but was still kept in stasis sleep for some reason, so if GLaDOS had not woken her up, she would have stayed asleep, indefinitely, only being awoken as a last resort, or simply fading away with the end of time. We, the ones playing the game, know little of Chell before GLaDOS wakes her for testing. During the gameplay Portal, we get no real information about her, only her current struggles at the Aperture Science Enrichment Center and her battle against turrets, lasers, acid soaked floors, and GLaDOS herself. When we defeat GLaDOS, Chell is once again put in a long stasis sleep that segues her into the beginning of Portal 2, without us learning anything new about her. For us, she might as well be a new person at the beginning of Portal—a child taking her first steps, guided by its mother, who looks caring enough in the beginning, although perhaps a little controlling. GLaDOS’s guidance might not be traditional, but it is she who helps Chell move from test chamber to test chamber, although not always in the direction Chell herself might want to go.

GLaDOS is thus the mother for Chell, since she technically gave her life anew, and yet also projects the role of the mother onto Chell, since Chell gives her life in
Portal 2 and by GLaDOS’s demeanor toward Chell—becoming both the mother and the
daughter, a dualistic character, indeed.

As Murdoch points out, “as a girl enters puberty and discovers her sexuality, her
mother may reject or demean her daughter’s physical body. Or she may envy her
daughter’s youth and attractiveness, activating feelings of shame or competition in the
young woman” (24). This is the way GLaDOS releases her resentment towards Chell, as
about half of the comments GLaDOS makes about Chell are about her appearance in
some way, mostly about her weight. Her comments bear no connection to reality, but
that does not matter. It is the thought that counts.

Hmm. This Plate must not be calibrated to someone of your... generous...
ness. I’ll add a few zeros to the maximum weight. (Portal 2)

Per our last conversation: You’re also ugly. I’m looking at your file right
now, and it mentions that more than once. (Portal 2)

While rejection of the female body is a part of the journey (Murdock 25), it is forced
upon GLaDOS as her human female self has long turned to dust, while she is
encompassed in a shell made of metal and plastic. This might be why GLaDOS takes on
the part of the traditional mother while also projecting the mother onto Chell. Chell’s
feminine body is the body GLaDOS might feel unconsciously that she should have, as a
mother might feel that the daughter “deprived” her of the body the daughter now has.
This also falls in line with Murdock’s ideas on rejection by the mother.

A woman who has felt rejected by her mother because of adoption, illness,
depression, or escape into alcohol will feel deeply unmothered and will
continue to look for what she never had. … If a woman feels alienated or
rejected by her mother she may first reject the feminine and search for
recognition by the father and the patriarchal culture. Men are in a position of
strength, so women look to men for support to strengthen themselves. Our
heroine sets out to identify with the powerful all-knowing masculine. (26-
27)
While GLaDOS is an operating system, a piece of software, a robot, and has self-conscious knowledge of what she is, she should not, instinctively, have expectations for a mother, however, we know that her unconscious has the memories of her former self, Caroline. There is human instinct along with all those 1s and 0s that make up her digital mind. Her human nature could thus create a sense of loss or one of being deprived of having a mother, since the idea of a mother is so engraved in mammals.

It only makes sense that some of our human instincts went along for the ride when Caroline’s mind was mapped. We can hypothesize that GLaDOS, however illogical (and artificial intelligences hate illogical things), feels rejected by the mother that does not technically exist, but at the same time does in Caroline. Add to that the fact that GLaDOS has knowledge of Caroline unconsciously and we can say that GLaDOS might feel as an orphan would, who has been put into adoption by its mother. GLaDOS, unconsciously, thus identifies not only with the powerful, all-knowing masculine, the part of her that is Cave Johnson, and the part of Caroline that looked up to him, by becoming the powerful, all-knowing demanding robot, but also projects her feelings of deprivation, of her being rejected, onto Chell.

As stated earlier, half of GLaDOS’s derogatory comments about Chell are about her appearance and her weight. The other half is about how Chell is an orphan, how her mother (which she refers to as “birth mother,” which is interesting in itself) abandoned her, and how she is unloved. Whenever she makes mistakes—according to GLaDOS—it shows that her birth mother was right to abandon her. “Don’t let that ‘horrible person’ thing discourage you. It’s just a data point. If it makes you feel any better, science has now validated your birth mother’s decision to abandon you on a doorstep” (*Portal 2*).

She even teases Chell, acting as if she has her parents hidden away somewhere, around the corner, if she finishes the next test chamber, but of course, like the famous cake in *Portal*, the parents are a lie. “If it makes you feel any better, they abandoned you at birth, so I very seriously doubt they’d even want to see you” (*Portal 2*), she explains to Chell when the room is empty. That probably does not make Chell feel better, but it seems to lift GLaDOS’s spirit.
At this point in a woman’s journey she may seek to heal the original split with her mother and to recover the mother/daughter relationship in its larger context. She will look for goddesses, heroines, and contemporary creative women with whom she can identify and who will teach her about female power and beauty and enrich her experience of her own developing authority. She will ultimately find her healing in the Great Mother. (Murdock 27)

At this point, for both GLaDOS and Chell, the only other female they have is each other. For GLaDOS, Chell is the contemporary woman GLaDOS can identify with, and even look up to, and although she would not admit it at first, she is the one who teaches her about female power, both by showing strength at times of adversity, and by never giving up. As we will learn in the Portal graphic novel, Chell was rejected as a test subject because she never gave up, and GLaDOS has learned that from past experiences. GLaDOS has never been in this situation, to be helpless, a pawn in some megalomaniac robot’s dungeon. Chell, however, has. It happens to have been GLaDOS who was the megalomaniac robot then.

Chell may be the only woman, the only human, that GLaDOS knows personally, but it happens that she is the contemporary creative woman GLaDOS needs, a heroine and, in a way, a goddess. Chell rises to every challenge that is brought before her and GLaDOS knows that if anyone will succeed in the adversity they are facing now, it is Chell. By connecting to Chell, GLaDOS is also healing the mother/daughter split in the context of her being the mother to Chell (as when she breathed life into Chell in the stasis chamber in Portal) and Chell being the mother to GLaDOS (since Chell gave life to her in Portal 2). Chell can also be seen as the Great mother in this context, as when GLaDOS joins Chell, she begins to heal and learn how she can have authority through femininity as Chell does.
4.2 Identification with the Masculine

Male norms have become the social standard for leadership, personal autonomy, and success in this culture, and in comparison women find themselves perceived as lacking in competence, intelligence, and power. The girl observes this as she grows up and wants to identify with the glamour, prestige, authority, independence, and money controlled by men. Many high-achieving women are considered daughters of the father because they seek the approval and power of that first male model. (Murdock 29)

Cave Johnson is arguably the male that GLaDOS models herself after, unconsciously, whether or not he is a part of her psyche. Cave had his mind on the project at hand and did not let anything get in his way of finishing said project—morality and the life and safety of others included. GLaDOS’s demeanor and actions are a natural evolution of his way of ruling, although much more straight forward. While he managed his company like a maleficent god, GLaDOS rules the testing facility with both his attitude and the power of a god. As often stated, she controls everything in the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. It is her domain. Much like it was Cave Johnson’s when he was alive. However, while he needed staff to control machinery, change test chambers, build new ones, and everything else, GLaDOS can do that all by herself. She has total control in a much more direct way.

Although it is unknown if any of Cave’s personality was actually written into the code that became GLaDOS’s mind, Cave was indeed a great influence on Caroline as a person, and GLaDOS is underneath a brain map of Caroline. While working as his assistant for over three decades, Caroline became the person that Cave could trust to the point of wanting her to take over from him in the event of his death. We do not know if Caroline and Cave’s relationship was in any way sexual in nature, but in regards to GLaDOS, we can firmly state that he was the father in her making. “Whether a woman feels that it is alright to be ambitious, to have power, to make money, or to have a successful relationship with a man derives from her relationship with her father” (29), states Murdock, and regarding Caroline and Cave, the relationship was successful.
Successful, it was one of mutual trust, even though Cave broke that trust when he single-handedly made the choice for her ultimate dedication to his cause. It brings to mind an episode of the popular television series *The Simpsons*. A recurring character on that show, Charles Montgomery Burns, the owner of the Springfield’s Nuclear Power Plant, and a kindred spirit of Cave Johnson—a man with a plan and few if any morals—has a trusty personal assistant, Waylon Smithers. In *Burn’s Heir*, the eighteenth episode of the fifth season, Mr. Burns is pondering what will come of his empire when he is gone. Smithers makes a sound, reminding Burns that he is a trustworthy successor, but Mr. Burns scoffs at the idea: “Oh, no, my dear friend. I’ve planned a far greater reward for you. When I pass on, you shall be buried alive with me,” he exclaims. “Oh. Goody,” Smithers remarks (“Burns’ Heir”).

In a way, there are parallels between the ideas of Cave Johnson and Montgomery Burns and the eventual fate of their trusty assistants. While Burns wanted to literally bury Smithers alive with him, Cave was content burying Caroline in his creation. In his mind, Cave might think he is doing Caroline good, giving her immortality, although a non-conventional immortality. That is what he wants, and by experience, Caroline has sought after his approval, and his way, the masculine way, of thinking is the society’s standard of the right way, so in his mind, he knows best what is good for Caroline, even though he knows she will object. Though in different ways, Mr. Burns and Mr. Johnson are both dooming their assistance by keeping total control of them after their own deaths.

“Psychologists who study motivation have found that many successful women had fathers who nurtured their talent and made them feel attractive and loved at an early age” (Murdock 30). As I previously quoted, Cave mentions on record how attractive Caroline is, how she is the backbone of the company and how precious she is. Cave was not a man of great morality, but he seems to have done good by Caroline—forcing her to become a machine after his death, excluded. His nurturing did work. Caroline became the backbone of the company (which is, of course, a figure of speech, but obviously bears some truth) and is successful in life. Aperture Science might have been on the brink of bankruptcy in the end, but it was still a big and powerful company, and although it is isolated from the world, GLaDOS’s Aperture Science Enrichment Center is a huge and impressive piece of structure.
In this part of our heroine’s journey, GLaDOS has been resurrected by Chell at the beginning of *Portal 2*. She finds herself anew inside her metallic body after having been a disembodied piece of software since her last encounter with Chell, replaying the moment of her death again and again and again in the digital afterlife. She is all powerful again, connected to everything in the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, and does exactly what Cave Johnson would have done. She starts testing again, locking Chell in an endless loop of test chambers, tormenting her with her bitter tongue more than ever. She sets out to dismantle the status quo, the era of no testing that has been in effect since her death at the end of *Portal*, an unknown length of time, although she is probably well aware of how much time has passed.

Testing is more than a hobby to GLaDOS, it is her life, it is her purpose, it is her addiction. His is a way to prove to the world that she is no less than Cave Johnson was, even though there is no outside world for her, as Aperture Science seems to be totally disconnected from the outside world, and by proxy to the *Half Life* series (a series in which Aperture Science’s main competitor, Black Mesa, created a dimension portal which allowed monsters from another world to take over earth), there might not be much of a world outside of the facility. As Murdock states, “A young woman may appear to succeed while bleeding herself dry internally. Because of an innate fear of female inferiority, many young women become addicted to perfection, overcompensating, and overworking because they are different than men” (41).

This addiction is both figurative and literal, as GLaDOS later states, after Chell has conquered her and Wheatley has taken over her body: “The body he’s squatting in—MY body—has a built-in euphoric response to testing. Eventually, you build up a resistance to it, and it can get a little... unbearable. Unless you have the mental capacity to push past it” (*Portal 2*). Quite like a human feels at first euphoria by use of a drug or by an action, that might lead to addiction, the artificial intelligence of GLaDOS has the addiction for testing programmed into her. Moreover, judging by the way that Cave was addicted to testing it can be fair to assume that the way for Caroline to get his approval and attention was when she did something positive in relation to testing. “Little girls learn early on which games to play for their father’s approval and attention” (Murdock 42). Thus GLaDOS is not only addicted; she is still seeking approval and attention.
This makes us also think that the perky voice we hear when Caroline speaks in the recording may not actually represent who Caroline was on the inside. If she was seeking affection and approval from Cave Johnson, she might as well have put on a front for him. To be this pretty-as-a-postcard persona that he enjoys, she might have been bleeding herself dry on the inside, constantly playing the games her father figure wanted to play, fearing the innate thoughts of female inferiority while degrading mentally and morally. GLaDOS might be the product of herself, automatic code written by her artificial intelligence, or she might be the product of society—the product of “women [becoming] addicted to perfection, overcompensating, and overworking because they are different than men” (Murdock 43). We will consider later in the essay how GLaDOS did not evolve into the killing machine, but tried to kill her creators the moment she was turned on. Perhaps that was just what Caroline had become, with added frustration of being now forcibly stuck as a servant to the masculine as a robot. Unfortunately, we do not know the extent of how much the murderous rage that controls GLaDOS is Caroline, but it is something to think about.

In this part of the journey, a heroine usually finds her allies, who most often are men, male identified women, or women who have made their way to the top (Murdock 35). While she does not remember them, GLaDOS’s greatest allies are the long-deceased Cave and Caroline, for she is everything they knew: their pragmatism, their wisdom, their hunger for testing. However, it could be said that during this testing phase, when everything seems right to the world for GLaDOS, the ally she is gathering is Chell.

While Chell and Wheatley are working together, it cannot go unnoticed by Chell that he is a little unstrung. He rambles, he is disoriented and frightened. He is the new member in this relationship of horror, and the only male one, and unlike Chell and GLaDOS, he does not give out the sense of strength or intelligence. We have gone over how abusive the relationship between Chell and GLaDOS is, but although Chell has killed GLaDOS, and GLaDOS has repeatedly tried to kill Chell, to them, they are the known. Wheatley, as Chell and GLaDOS will find out, is the unknown. Chell and GLaDOS know what to expect from each other, but Wheatley is unpredictable. He acts as if he means the things he says, that he can be trusted for the plans he makes, but he is still someone they know little about. It turns out that he cannot be trusted. He is weak,
and cannot handle power. He will be the reason, the driving force, behind Chell and GLaDOS’s need to put away their differences and become allies. But first, Chell and Wheatley are the ogres that GLaDOS has to confront in our “Heroine’s Journey.”
4.3 The Road of Trails

“The heroine crosses the threshold, leaves the safety of her parents’ home, and goes in search of herself” (Murdock 46). This may not sound like a description of the first steps of GLaDOS’s journey in Portal 2. However, when we realize that her parents’ home is the one she left when Chell killed her, her body, the comparison seems more appropriate.

The facility she took so much pride in, lies in ruins. We, the player, get to see how it has broken down, nature taking control and growing through the walls and floors of the place. Many parts of the Enrichment Center remind one more of a swamp than the sterile testing ground it once was.

When Chell is first revived from stasis sleep in Portal 2, her chambers look pristine and new, and a robotic announcer can be heard declaring that she has been there for fifty days, so presumably there have been fifty days since the end of Portal. She is quickly put in stasis sleep again, and when she wakes up anew, the room is in total ruins. The refrigerator and microwave in her chamber are rusty, the frames on the walls are broken, the walls themselves are gray and faded, the plant in the corner is long dead and wasted away, her bed is crooked, and the mattress has a noticeable, and deep, indent from her body. This says a lot, since Chell is not a heavy person, no matter what GLaDOS says. We do not know how much time has passed, but it is safe to say that Chell is in the distant future based on the conditions of the Enrichment Center. Not only are her chambers in ruins, but the announcing voice exclaims that the core is overheating and a nuclear meltdown is imminent.

Wheatley comes by, frantically, and promises to help Chell get out of there. He also has some control of the facility, being able to move her room through the huge almost empty space that is the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. He obviously does not know exactly what he is doing, but he is the only one Chell has at that moment and there is no way for Chell to know that his incompetence will be the reason why she, accidentally, gives GLaDOS life again.

The Aperture Science facility that GLaDOS, as Caroline, helped build from the ground up with Cave Johnson, and that was an extension of her body as GLaDOS, is almost decimated as she rises from her ashes. Nature, time and chaos have taken over.
Looking over the place and the damage she claims that “this place really is a wreck” (*Portal 2*), and to add insult to injury, as she is reactive to see all this, the first thing she sees in the wreck, as her yellow beaming eye is calibrated for vision, is her destroyer, and her tormenter: Chell. It does not take long for her to regain her strength and her control, and recapture Chell, and thus continue her heroine’s journey.

GLaDOS’s journey is not one she can take without help, but not in the traditional sense at this point; that is, what she needs now is not compliant allies. She needs a test subject. The obstacle courses the heroine must face, are the ones she creates herself in the testing chambers. They are just as much of a trial for her as the testing subject itself. If the testing chambers fail, she fails (Murdock 47). A testing chamber that has no solution, is a failed experiment, and the failure lies with GLaDOS. Therefore, she must make chambers that are solvable, but must also beat Chell by outsmarting her; she must make a chamber that is solvable, but not by Chell. For her to complete her task is to make a testing chamber that is solvable, but dangerous enough to kill. In a way too, every time Chell completes a chamber, GLaDOS has also failed, since she also has the objective to kill Chell, but it conflicts with her primary objective, to test.

Chell is the ogre that appears “on her path to test her endurance, her decisiveness, and her ability to set limits” (Murdock 47) and her weapons are the turrets, the acid floors, and time. While Chell is mortal, GLaDOS is not. If Chell fails to find the solution to the test chamber, she will not be able to get out of it. If she gets stuck in a chamber that has a solution, GLaDOS must only wait to slay the ogre.

“Women are expected to take care of the dependency needs of others; they are trained from girlhood to anticipate these needs” (Murdock 48), and as GLaDOS is dependent on Chell during testing, she tries to lure Chell to behave by testing her need, but cannot stop herself from using it to taunt her. In the first game, GLaDOS promised her cake at the end of her testing, in *Portal 2* she knows that the thing Chell needs most is to escape. She taunts her of the promise of Chell’s parents, of the outside nature that Chell has been deprived of but GLaDOS can access freely. “I was outside watching some deer frolic. You don’t even care about the outside do you?” (*Portal 2*). The needs of Chell, that GLaDOS tries to anticipate, may well be exactly what she wants. Perhaps
Caroline really only wanted a slice of cake. Perhaps GLaDOS only wants to see her parents.

This thought of how women are expected to take care of the dependency needs of others is not only applicable to her relationship with Chell, and perhaps it is better suited in context with her relationship with Cave Johnson. We are only privy to his side of the story. It is him we listen to on the audio tapes. Caroline only gave answers to his questions, the answers he wanted to hear. We only know that it is Cave Johnson who needs to test, to do science, to keep Aperture Science going. We never know if this was what Caroline wanted, let alone keep doing after Cave Johnson’s death and in her afterlife. For all we know, that was just what was expected of her. To take care of the dependency needs of Cave Johnson. To be for him, instead of being for herself.

As they learn to anticipate others’ needs they consciously or unconsciously expect that their needs will be anticipated and taken care of as well. When a woman discovers that her needs are not being considered she feels that something is wrong with her. She may actually feel shame that she has needs too. (Murdock 48-49)

Caroline might have been expecting, either consciously or unconsciously, that her needs would be anticipated, that Cave would take care of her. That all her hard work would mean that she would also get what she wanted, but according to Cave Johnson, her needs are what he needs, and that is immortality. This strengthens the theory that GLaDOS is only what Caroline had become, and the murderous rage is a byproduct of her needs being completely dismissed to the very end in favor of Cave’s need.

In regards to Chell and GLaDOS, Chell’s needs have always been a weapon for GLaDOS, she may feel pride in her ability to anticipate them, up to a certain point; not to fulfill them, though, but to use them against Chell. She is happy that she can use them to mock Chell and confuse her, or make her think about the things she does not have. GLaDOS does admit she needs Chell but must mention that it is the idea of Chell, not Chell herself. “This final course is training to reach the human vault. So this actually has a purpose. Those other courses were fun, but let's be honest, I need human test subjects for it to be science” (Portal 2). Chell is something she needs, but only because
Chell is there at that time, filling the seat of the test subject. She needs a human test subject, not Chell. She is replaceable, although, it may be hard to find a replacement.

GLaDOS masks her dependency on Chell as revenge. She does not need her. Not GLaDOS. Testing Chell is not for GLaDOS because GLaDOS needs a human test subject, it is for revenge. She is going to torment Chell, by testing her again, and again until she dies of old age, and perhaps, she hints, after her natural death.

I'm happy to put this all behind us and get back to work. After all, we’ve got a lot to do, and only sixty more years to do it. More or less. I don’t have the actuarial tables in front of me. But the important thing is you’re back. With me. And now I'm onto all your little tricks. So there's nothing to stop us from testing for the rest of your life. After that...who knows? I might take up a hobby. Reanimating the dead, maybe. (Portal 2)

With this, GLaDOS tries to slay the myth of dependency as best she can, by trying to persuade Chell that she is not dependent on her, or anyone, and perhaps GLaDOS does believe it herself. As dependency is a dirty word for a woman, along with needs (Murdock 48), GLaDOS tries to distinct herself from having anyone believe that she has needs or dependencies. She just has subjects, and what she does, she does not for herself, but for science. Chell is not something she needs, but a pawn in her pursuit of science.

GLaDOS makes another discovery as well while she is confronted by Chell and Wheatley and reanimated. When she was first built, she scared the human scientists who built her (and as we find out, for a good reason). She was too smart. She was too strong. She was too resourceful. She was too hungry to kill them as soon as possible. What this woman needed, according to them was a literal masculine subconscious. An Intelligence Dampening Sphere, constructed to make her less threatening, less of a femme fatale. Less of the woman she was. When she hears Wheatley’s voice as he and Chell are confronting her, GLaDOS remembers his existence and what purpose he had, and she loses her temper.
I know you. The engineers tried everything to make me... behave. To slow me down. Once, they even attached an Intelligence Dampening Sphere on me. It clung to my brain like a tumor, generating an endless stream of terrible ideas. It was YOUR voice. Yes. You’re the tumor. You’re not just a regular moron. You were DESIGNED to be a moron. … YES YOU ARE! YOU’RE THE MORON THEY BUILT TO MAKE ME AN IDIOT! (Portal 2)

Feminine qualities are denigrated by society and women often see themselves as lacking when they don’t have the qualities society marks as masculine, and thus suffer from the myth of inferiority. A woman can internalize this inferiority complex, this self-loathing, as a voice of self-hate that decrements her, that can be personified as a male Ogre Tyrant (Murdock 55). Since we are dealing with artificial intelligence, those things that are generally figurative concepts in theory, can find their way to be a literal identity in the Portal franchise.

This voice of self-hate is one of those things, as for GLaDOS, the “lab boys” literally built this voice into her. A voice to make her be less of what she was. To make her more obedient. To make her fall in line, and be controllable. This voice was Wheatley, and we can easily imagine that the “endless streams of terrible ideas” were terrible only in context to what GLaDOS saw her purpose as (Portal 2). To be fair, if they were “do not kill the scientists” as one can imagine, we can probably agree that they were not terrible ideas. That does not really matter though, because, for GLaDOS, Wheatley was the literal manifestation of the Ogre Tyrant, and GLaDOS needs to slay him for once and for all.
4.4 The Illusory Boon of Success

As the testing is in high swing, GLaDOS seems to be in total control of the world she has created for herself. Chell is imprisoned and can only traverse through the lifts and corridors that GLaDOS opens for her, there are no back rooms with secret clues to the past, or backdoors Chell can use to escape. The facility itself is starting to look as it was, with each testing chamber looking a bit better as GLaDOS clears away the rubbish that has filled up everywhere with her many mechanical arms that extend behind each tile in the underground building. GLaDOS does not know that behind the walls she controls so perfectly, Wheatley is trying to find an escape for himself and for Chell. Her success is a short-lived illusion.

Our “heroine” has learned how to perform well, so when she feels a sense of discomfort, she tackles the next hurdle (Murdock 65), and GLaDOS does so by using her total control of the mechanical environment to make test chambers that are more difficult, more taxing, and more dangerous. Each chamber only lasts so long, and although she berates Chell if she does not solve them quickly, Chell’s speeding through the chambers is the opposite of what GLaDOS needs as she tries to get everything in order.

GLaDOS needs to keep busy. Keep her artificial mind occupied. The tests are not only her obsession, but her means to cope. Underneath her conscious lie the memories of the past, her former life as a human being, of Caroline and Cave Johnson and his wants and needs, and the “lab boys” that constructed her. Human beings, a form of life that she has little regards to now, and perhaps for a good reason, as they are the reason for her existing. As the Murdock’s heroine, she has an obsessive need to stay busy, and that might be to keep her from feeling the growing sense of loss of her former self (Murdock 65).

We do know that Caroline was a loyal assistant, but we do not know whether her complete obsession lay with testing as it did with Cave Johnson, or if she was only trying to imitate him, seeking his approval, adorations, attentions, and whether GLaDOS is thus unconsciously redoing the things she did while she was human. Unconsciously following the pattern that she followed as Caroline, seeking approval from someone she does not even remember existing.
Jung says that the creative process in a woman can never come to fruition if she is caught in an unconscious imitation of men or identifies with the inferior masculine in her unconscious. He defined the masculine as the ability to know one’s goal and to do what is necessary to achieve it. If that inner masculine remains unconscious in a woman, he will persuade her that she has no need to explore her hidden motives and will urge her to a blind pursuit of her conscious goals, which of course liberates her from the hard and undramatic task of discovering her real individual point of view. (Murdock 67-68)

It is still quite some time in the game until GLaDOS fully remembers who Cave Johnson was, so any imitation of him must be unconscious. She recognizes his voice, as she hears him spouting orders and information from the PA system, even answers some of his questions by reflex as Caroline, but she cannot remember the man, her former self, or their past relationship. Her stated goal in life is to test for science, but we never know if that is what she really wants. We know that it is programmed into her to feel euphoria by testing, and that means it is probably an addiction, but we do not know if it is also the inner masculine (Cave) urging her to go on. Perhaps it is merely herself because what else is there to do for an artificial intelligence that has total control of a testing facility deep underground, where everything is made for testing? Would that realization be too much for her, that is, that there is nothing more for her? Or is there more, but the unconscious imprint Cave left on her is persuading her to not explore her hidden motives, the reason for all these tests. Her inner struggle. The longing for male approval. To just go on, doing the things he would have done.

We can assume, based on knowledge from the game, that Chell is in no way her first test subject, although she was the first after she decimated all the staff but Doug Rattmann, one of her creators. The other test subjects were, however, not enough and no test chamber is enough. When the unconscious masculine takes over, a woman may feel that no matter what she does or how she does it, it is never enough, writes Murdock and this is obvious in the case of GLaDOS (67). She always must outdo herself. She must build more complex puzzles. She must find new ways to test. What she does is never
enough, and the fact that Chell still lives is an eternal reminder of just that. While Chell is alive, and even after she has escaped in the first game, there are still new puzzles to do, new experiments to run, or, as she states herself, singing while dead at the end screen of Portal after Chell has escaped (and been recaptured, although, we do not know if it was GLaDOS that dragged her back into the building or an automatic system):

Look at me, still talking
when there’s science to do!
When I look out there,
it makes me glad I'm not you.

I've experiments to run.
There is research to be done.
On the people who are
still alive. (Portal)

Even while Chell is in a difficult test chamber, that is not enough for GLaDOS, because there is always the possibility that Chell will figure out what cubes goes where and how to control that laser to open that door and so on. So GLaDOS needs to think of the next step, the next test chamber, the next challenge for Chell as well as for herself. While Chell is in each chamber, GLaDOS talks about future test chambers, perhaps while she is envisioning them herself, as she can make them on the fly by moving walls and ceilings as she places through the vast space of Aperture Science Enrichment Center. This obsession with the next chamber falls in line with the Myth of Never Being Enough, which states that whatever she is engaged in in the present moment has no value; it urges her to think ahead (Murdock 67).

Chell goes through the test chambers, one after the other, and although GLaDOS is disappointed in not being able to kill Chell, she is happy that she can continue to torture Chell by testing her abilities endlessly, so everything looks right in the world for our “heroine.” All is not as it seems in her facility, as darkness lurks around the corner where her Intelligence Dampening Sphere goes back and forth on the railing system,
trying to find an escape for Chell. Eventually, Wheatley helps Chell to escape and before GLaDOS knows it, the escaping duo are in her chambers yet again, ready to fight her physical robotic form. She faces the ogres, valiantly, and loses even after trying to persuade Chell to do the right thing.

GLaDOS succumbs to Wheatley, as he becomes the main core of the facility when Chell pushes a button that replaces the previous core, GLaDOS, with a new one, and Wheatley quickly proves himself to be an ogre, and the real villain of the game. Now he is in total control of Aperture Science Enrichment Center. He has total power over each wall, floor and ceiling, over the production of each robot, of each cube. He is the god now, and he uses his new found power to dismiss GLaDOS, removing her from her core and throwing her out with the garbage. He then quickly follows her footsteps, as he realizes that maybe Chell should not go just yet. Maybe this testing thing is not such a bad idea. So Chell finds herself back in a testing chamber, but now Wheatley is the one doing the testing. Being thrown in the trash is not the end though for GLaDOS, as it is one of the most important things to happen to her during her heroine’s journey. As Murdock writes:

When a woman can find the courage to be limited and to realize that she is enough exactly the way she is, then she discovers one of the true treasures of the Heroine’s Journey. This woman can detach herself from the whims of the ego and touch into the deeper forces that are the source of her life. She can say, I am not all things . . . and I am enough. She becomes real, open, vulnerable, and receptive to a true spiritual awakening. (69)

For GLaDOS, that meant to be transferred into a potato battery.

As a potato battery, she becomes the opposite of what she was. Before, she was too powerful to be a real being—a god. She had the whole world (hers and Chell’s whole world, that is) under total control. The world that Wheatley currently holds complete dominion over. Now, as a potato, she is vulnerable to creatures she would not have thought of as notable (like the birds that put her in their nest and start pecking), but her new vulnerability is not only physical. Being a potato, she also has to rely on
Chell—she cannot hide her dependency on her anymore, as she only has her mind, her thoughts, no real body or test chambers, no minion robots or anything else. This forces her to become receptive to the outside world, to feel how it is and experience it as it is, not how she wants it to be. When she cannot control her world any more, she must see how it really is, and thus begins her spiritual awakening.
The sense of loss these women express is a yearning for the feminine, a longing for a sense of home within their own bodies and community. Most women today have spent their early and mid-adulthood developing and fine-tuning qualities that have always been considered masculine, including skills in logical, direct linear thinking, analyzing, and setting short-range goals. Women who brought emotions into the workplace were quickly told they did not belong there. Although many companies are now training upper management in a more feminine or “Beta-style” mode of leadership, which values feelings, intuition, and relationship, many women complain of undervaluing the feminine part of themselves. (Murdock 73)

The only thing Chell needed to do was to not push a button. GLaDOS is merely a computer chip, kept in a core that is plugged into the computer system that controls the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. Wheatley is also just a computer chip in a core and when Chell connects him to the computer system, a manual override has to be activated to complete transfer of power, since GLaDOS is not complying in giving away her power. GLaDOS begs Chell not to do it, but is, in her mind, betrayed by her test subject. Chell pushes the button and Wheatley gets control, going mad with power in a matter of seconds. He decides that Chell should stay awhile, not escape just yet as planned and that GLaDOS should get a new body. A potato that works as a battery for the computer chip that houses her. She thus not only loses the facility that was an extension of her body but the body that was one of the few things that connected her to femininity as well as the core itself that stored her mind.

“Women who burn out trying to fill male roles are scorched to their inner core” (74), writes Murdock, and in the case of GLaDOS, this turns out to be, like so many things, a little too literal. Her role as overseer of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center has been to fill the role of the ultra-masculine Cave Johnson. She has focused on the qualities considered masculine, the short-range goals of each test chamber, analyzing everything and using linear thinking, while abandoning feelings and striving to have no emotional relationships. Her constant taunting of Chell is her way to keep
her at a safe distance, while still keeping with the feminine instinct of having a relationship. GLaDOS did not, in reality, have to have any contact with Chell. There was no reason for Chell to know that GLaDOS was a conscious, self-aware being. It was GLaDOS that decided to reveal herself as such, and by that, creating a relationship with the human test subject, and as a result, show feelings towards it.

In *Portal 2: Lab Rat*, the Portal graphic novel, we also learn that Wheatley was not the first attempt to control GLaDOS. When Doug Rattmann was working on her, he commented on how being assigned to her was not a good deal, while a co-worker tells him he is lucky to be working on the bleeding edge of technology. “Every generation gets one new frontier to tackle. Einstein got relativity. The NASA cowboys got the moon. All the easy stuff is taken. I mean take a look around you, we're on the bleeding edge here. Artificial consciousness is the next frontier” (Kosmatka 11). Rattmann mentions that every time they turn GLaDOS (referred by him as “it”) on, it takes her “sixteenth of a picosecond” before she tries to kill them. An improvement, the co-worker says. Before it took her only tenth of a picosecond (a picosecond is one trillionth of a second) (Kosmatka 11). The solution is a new core. A morality core, the latest in AI inhibition technology—a conscience from the start, even before Wheatley, the men of Aperture Science were trying to influence how GLaDOS thought and behavior—and, perhaps, then for a good reason, since she was trying to kill everyone. Rattmann knows though that it might not be enough. “You can always ignore your conscience,” he remarks (Kosmatka 15).

A woman loses her ‘inner fire’ when she is not being fed, when the soul’s flame is no longer fueled, when the promise of the dream held for so long dies. Old patterns no longer fit, the new way is not yet clear; there is darkness everywhere, and she cannot see or feel or taste or touch. Nothing means very much anymore, and she no longer knows who she really is. (Murdock 74)

This quote works well to describe GLaDOS as her position is taken away from her. Caroline might not have wanted the life she lived, and she might not have wanted to become a machine, but that was the hand that was dealt to her. She might have been
frustrated and filled with killer rage when Cave Johnson failed to acknowledge her real
wants and needs, putting his wants and needs onto her instead, but at least she had total
control and the new dream of testing. When she loses the control, her powerful body,
with no control, with a weak body, where her old ways no longer work. She has been
thrown into the darkness and she is disconnected from all the sensory inputs that she
was so used to. There are no longer cameras everywhere she can see everything
through, there are no microphones that give her every sound made in the facility. There
is only what is in the closest vicinity of the potato. She has been betrayed by both the
personal and the culture (Murdock 74). Nothing is like it should be. Now she has to find
out what she is, and what she wants, and with that, reevaluate how she can accomplish
those goals.

Now she has a choice. Her forced literal unconscious masculinity, the
Intelligence Dampening Sphere, has taken over the facility. Will she abide, will she go
quietly into the night or will she hold her (figurative, since she is a potato) head high
and exclaim: “no!”? Will she defy the new king, Wheatley? Before, for better or for
worse, she was chosen by the king, Cave Johnson, and it feels so good to be chosen
(Murdock 83). While that king still lies in her unconscious, somewhere, in some form,
the literal male unconscious has different feelings towards her than Cave Johnson did.
She was the one that rejected him to begin with. He was her Intelligence Dampening
Sphere, he did cling to her brain like a tumor, generating an endless stream of terrible
ideas, but somehow, she managed to get rid of him.

At the beginning of Portal 2, Wheatley says indirectly that he is supposed to
take care of the test subjects. GLaDOS managed to rid herself of him, but for some
reason, and perhaps in true GLaDOS fashion, she did not kill him but demoted him to
take care of the things she has the least respect of. The human test subjects. Perhaps it is
a testimony of how little she cares for humanity if she is willing to put a moron in
charge of keeping them safe. Whatever her reasons, when she got rid of Wheatley from
her person, it was an important step, because it was the first time she truly stood up to
the patriarchy and said no (but, killing the scientists might count, too).

What happens when we say no to the patriarchy? We have the time to create
the space within ourselves to develop a new relationship to the masculine;
not the masculine voice that has been split off from the feminine for centuries, as many men in our culture have been, but a creative masculine figure that leads us to the Great Mother, where we can heal our split from our own feminine nature. When we say no to the patriarchy we begin our descent into the spirit of the goddess where the power and passion of the feminine has been dormant in the underworld—in exile for five thousand years. (85)

For GLaDOS, she must defy the patriarchy further, and all that is patriarchal around her. The male-run company that created her, the masculine way of ruling, the male dominant way of thinking, the man that gave out the order for her to become a machine, the men who put her together. She must find her own masculine figure, one that helps her instead of uses her. For her, the healing split of her feminine nature starts with finding a new ally in an old foe: Chell.
4.6 The Initiation and Descent of the Goddess

During the descent, a woman experiences a period of introversion or depression, a slow painful self-pregnancy in which she scrapes away her identification with ego-consciousness and goes back to a state of body/mind knowing before there were words. She may feel an incredible sense of emptiness, of being left out, shunned, left behind, without value. She may feel homeless, orphaned, in a place of in-between. (Murdock 105)

The descent of the goddess to the underworld in the “Heroine’s Journey” is often a part of a loss of the role the heroine had before (Murdock 87) and GLaDOS has certainly lost the role she had, and the only role she truly knew. It is a journey to the underworld (Murdock 87), and for GLaDOS, the underworld is the underbelly of the Aperture Science facility. The old testing facility: big open space instead of small closed test chambers. It is a dark rusty place where her mechanical arms did not reach before. It is a place where nothing is white and shiny like her modern test chambers, and instead of Portal Guns, there are multi-colored gels that have amazing characteristics and abilities but are also made of the infamous and deadly moon rocks. This is Cave Johnson’s territory, still run by him with old audio recordings on a loop. “This journey to the underworld is filled with confusion and grief, alienation and disillusion, rage and despair. A woman may feel naked and exposed, dry and brittle, or raw and turned inside-out.” (Murdock 88).

These audio recordings have a few, and very different, connotations but they do, however, all impact GLaDOS in some way, shape or form. Firstly, Cave Johnson has now taken over as the narrator of the game. Up to this point, that has been GLaDOS’s main function. In the first game, until the player fought her, she was the narrator. She was the one who introduced the player to the world, how he could traverse through it, how to control the playable character, Chell, and how he could manipulate the science equipment to his advantages—how to create a blue portal with a push of a button and an orange one with the push of another and use momentum as a force, etc. She was the game’s only coherent voice, not including the simpleminded turrets that would repeat simple phrases at the sight of Chell (“Are you still there?/I see you./Wheeee” (Portal)).
She was the all-knowing force the player had to rely on. Now, Cave Johnson, from the dead, is this voice. He could not even have the decency to go away fully after death. No longer the narrator, GLaDOS is on the same voyage as the player, stuck in a potato that is held by Chell’s portal gun. This fills her with confusion and grief, rage and despair, but things are going to get even more confusing for her.

As she gets more information from Cave, both from what he says and simply the voice he has, she becomes preoccupied and inaccessible (Murdock 87). She, uncharacteristically, needs time for herself to think. She finds that this man, Cave Johnson, who she does not even know who is, still has control over her in some way. “Yes, sir, Mister Johnson!” she exclaims unconsciously after hearing him speak through the PA system. “Why did I just-Who is that? What the HELL is going on he—?” she barks before losing the little power the potato battery can give her and is turned off (Portal 2). She becomes so confused that she compliments Chell in an earnest way, something she has not done before unless we count the end credit song of Portal. She tries desperately to grasp what is going on. She is used to be all powerful and all knowing; now she struggles to remember who a disembodied voice belongs to. “Caroline... why do I know this woman? Did I kill her? Or… Oh my god. Look, you’re... doing a great job. Can you handle things for yourself for a while? I need to think” (Portal 2).

She spends some time in off mode, sheltered from the outside world and perhaps most importantly, not only relying on Chell fully but giving her complete control over her. If Chell had wanted to kill her, she could have done so easily and without GLaDOS even knowing what was happening. This new trust she gives Chell shows that she is growing. While in off mode, GLaDOS realizes the truth. The man she is hearing on the PA system through old recordings, Cave Johnson, is her former boss, mentor, male subconscious, and the female he talks about, and sometimes even talks herself, is she: Her old self—her own human form. She is Caroline. “Women find their way back to themselves not by moving up and out into the light like men, but by moving down into the depths of the ground of their being” (Murdock 89).

She turns herself off from Chell again, to think, to dive into the depth of her being, and she comes out stronger. She has reclaimed the parts of herself that she rejected, Caroline, the feminine; she has put “aside her fascination with the intellect and
games of the cultural mind” (Murdock 90), that were for her the testing chambers and
the simple performance of testing, “and acquaints herself, perhaps for the first time,
with her body, her emotions, her sexuality, her intuition, her images, her values, and her
mind” (Murdock 90). Cave gives her his final advice, and she runs with it, but now on
her own terms as she shouts out with feverous agreement to Cave’s passionate speech
about taking control.

When life gives you lemons? Don’t make lemonade. Make life take the
lemons back! Get mad! ‘I don’t want your damn lemons! What am I
supposed to do with these?’ Demand to see life’s manager! Make life rue the
day it thought it could give Cave Johnson lemons! Do you know who I am?
I’m the man who’s going to burn your house down! With the lemons! I’m
going to get my engineers to invent a combustible lemon that burns your
house down! (Portal 2)

GLaDOS responds: "I know things look bleak, but that crazy man down there was right.
Let’s not take these lemons! We are going to march right back upstairs and MAKE him
put me back in my body!" (Portal 2). GLaDOS is now a new woman, a woman with a
mission and she is not going to stand by and watch patriarchy control her destiny any
longer. She is standing proud and saying no.
4.7 Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine

One of the greatest challenges of the Heroine’s Journey is to experience the deep sadness a woman feels about her separation from the feminine, to allow herself to name and grieve this loss in whatever way is appropriate for her, and to then release it and move on. When she is in a state of sadness and despair she needs the support of the positive feminine, a mother or sister figure, man or woman, to contain her safely while she expresses it. The intensity of the sadness varies with the degree to which a woman feels unseen and unknown to herself, and with how much she has to do to reclaim her lost treasures. She may feel sad for the simple reason of having too much and not having enough: having an abundance of “things” or empty accolades, but lacking self-love, self-respect, or connection to her inner core. It is important not to merely focus blame on others for this sorrow, but to deeply examine its causes and take responsibility for self-healing. (Murdock 121)

As the overseer of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, GLaDOS had complete power over everything. She controlled every detail, every square meter of flooring, the walls, everything, can be changed and adjusted by her every whim. She had everything, but it was still not enough. She lacked connection to her subconscious, to Caroline, her past life, and she lacked control of Chell. She had cut herself off from most of her feelings, and although she is software, we know she has feelings since she openly expresses her more masculine feelings, that of anger and contempt, while never showing earnestness, hope, and love. Murdock writes that we cut ourselves from feelings “because we do not want to experience the sadness of not being held and cherished” (121). This might be the case for GLaDOS. While having total control of her surroundings, but lacking connection to her subconscious and her feelings, everything is blamed on Chell, the living person she has no control over.

Chell also has the femininity that GLaDOS lacks, but even though outwardly GLaDOS is not obviously feminine, her seen body is quite feminine when it is more closely scrutinized. What we see of her (she is, in reality, the whole facility) is a
robotic—non-humanoid, mostly—shell that hangs from the air. She has three segments: her long head plate and two segments that can almost form a body. The one closer to her head symbolizes her chest and upper torso, with a divider in the middle that gives her symmetry; the other segment is wider and gives the illusion of feminine hips. Her plates are white but bound in wires and electric cords.

For Aperture Science, she is the mother goddess, and when she is destroyed at the beginning of the journey, the connection between her body and soul is destroyed too (Murdock 111). She has spent her whole time mastering her command of the material world, and fine tuning her intellect while ignoring what her body actually is and does, and as Murdock notes, that can lead to the woman remembering that the body and spirit is one (111).

There are moments when I can almost see the underlying grammar of this place. An impossibility, some mad architect’s opus—a relic from an age that never could have been. It is metastasized amalgam of add-ons, additions and appropriations building itself out of itself. Beautiful and terrible. And like anything cloned from a cancer cell, probably immortal.” –Doug Rattmann, a scientist who worked on GLaDOS describes the Aperture Science testing facility, which is an extension of GLaDOS’s body. (Kosmatka 6)

If a daughter has become male-identified by pleasing her father, she emphasizes the development of her mind and intellect and rejects her female body. (116) GLaDOS was undoubtedly male-identified, and consciously, or sub-consciously, aimed to please her father figure, Cave Johnson. Now, however, when she has literally disconnected to her body, she might be finding that her body was the one of the few feminine things she had to hold onto. Of course, it was the source of her power, too, but we can assume that she is also striving to reclaim her treasure of femininity.

While inside her body, GLaDOS blamed Chell for everything, but in the state of despair, the support she gets is from Chell, the positive feminine. For GLaDOS to become whole, she needs to stop blaming Chell, and examine inwards, and this is what she does while she is a potato. She had everything but at the same time nothing. By
giving her positive feminine support, Chell helps GLaDOS through her struggle in her path to know, and heal, herself.

In the Portal graphic novel, Portal 2: Lab Rat, we discover at the end that Chell was not supposed to be a test subject. She was rejected, for reasons we are not immediately given. After GLaDOS had taken over Aperture Science’s Enrichment Center and started to enforce the new forced “voluntary” participation for employees, the only staff member that had escaped becoming a test subject, and the neurotoxins that were meant for those who opted out of testing, was Doug Rattmann. In the graphic novel, we get a glimpse from that time, and we are shown Rattmann going frantically over the files of all the awaiting test subjects that are kept in stasis beds around the facility. He finds one test subject and goes by a hunch that it is the right one. He edits the Excel document that lists all future test subjects in order of being tested and puts Chell as the next one in line. At the end of the graphic novel, we see Chell’s file and learn that Rattmann did not choose her because of her high IQ, there were other test subjects who were smarter, more athletic and faster. What Chell had was tenacity. She refused to give in.

This is important because tenacity, determination competitiveness, never backing down—the traits Chell was chosen for, are traits which society most often attribute to men, or traits that society allows men to have, while a woman with those traits is frowned upon. Chell was, in fact, rejected as a test subject by the patriarchal, male-run, pre-GLaDOS Aperture Science. These are also traits that can be attributed to GLaDOS herself. She does not back down. She is determined to go through with her tests whatever happens. This cements the fact that Chell is the positive feminine Murdoch talks about (121); she is both obviously feminine and has the needed tenacity.
4.8 Healing the Mother / Daughter Split

As we have discussed, the mother/daughter relationship is complicated in *Portal 2*, as GLaDOS is both the mother and the daughter. For Caroline and Chell, she is the daughter, but in regard to Chell, she is also the mother. Chell both gives her life in a literal sense when she helps reactivate her, and is the one that GLaDOS projects all her anger towards as the stand-in mother. In the next step of the “Heroine’s Journey,” GLaDOS must heal the mother-daughter split (Murdock 130). “We are lonely for deep connection” (130), notes Murdock, and GLaDOS seems to have started to feel that longing as she discovers her old connections. “We yearn for affiliation and community; for the positive, strong nurturing qualities of the feminine that have been missing from this culture” (Murdock 130), she continues and GLaDOS’s actions now might show that this is her feeling as well.

For GLaDOS, her relationship with her “mother,” Caroline, was of course none. She was simply created. All the connection she has with her is purely unconscious; a bunch of 1s and 0s in her databank. According to Murdock “feeling abandoned by the mother is an issue for unorphaned women as well” and that “whether the mother was physically present or not, the lack of her emotional and spiritual presence is felt as abandonment by the child” (136). Now, to judge whether GLaDOS is an orphan, or if Caroline is indeed ‘present’ in her, is a philosophical discussion in itself. Caroline did not really abandon her, since she is her, but she is not present either. She is both there and not there, like some cat in a cruel test.

If a woman recognizes the wound of her inner feminine, and her mother is still alive and available, she may seek to heal that wound by renewing and transforming this initial relationship. She recognizes the fragmentation she carries from being an unmothered daughter and reaches out to ask for connection. (Murdock 137)

The problem for GLaDOS is that her mother is both alive and available and dead and unavailable. Her physical form and biochemical brain are not dead and gone, however, everything she was, her memories and traits are inside GLaDOS. They were mapped by
the best “lab guys,” and put into her, and as we have gone over, we do not know how much of GLaDOS is Caroline. In many ways, this can be said about traditional, human, relationships as well. The daughter carries away with her mother’s genes, her thoughts and memories that she has shared with her, and it is often difficult to see in humans too where the daughter begins and the mother ends. GLaDOS’s woes are not traditional in any sense of the word since she is an operating system, but we can find parallels in the real, human, world for her.

For GLaDOS to reconnect, to renew, the relationship with Caroline, she must dive into her unconscious programming and rekindle the memories, thoughts, and feelings that she originated from, but we, the player, do not see this on the outward. We must follow in detail what she says and how she says the things she says. It is important to remember that at this time, she is literally a piece of computer hardware and a single LED light on a potato. There are no subtle expressions to look for, nor can we cipher much from her digitalized voice. What we can do is look for her view on the things she deems important, whether it be regaining control of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center or just starting testing again.

Women who have experienced a deep wounding in relationship to their mothers often seek their healing in the experience of the ordinary. For many this takes the form of divine ordinariness: seeing the sacred in each ordinary act, whether it be washing the dishes, cleaning the toilet, or weeding the garden. (Murdock 139)

We can use these ideas and thoughts from Murdock to decipher GLaDOS, as this statement about seeing the sacred in each ordinary act. For GLaDOS, testing is the most sacred, and it cannot be only because of a programmed addiction. For her, it is the be all and end all act for everything that she does and strives to accomplish. When Chell finishes a chamber too fast, or fails in it, or does not do it the right way, she is not following the sacred order—it is almost blasphemy—and for it, she gets berated by GLaDOS.

Although GLaDOS’s relationship with Caroline is harder to see in action, we can, however, see how she tries to heal the wound with the person that gave her life the
second time around and the sufferer of her aggression, Chell. Women often reach out to
other women when they try to heal the split with their inner feminine (Murdock 139)
and by reaching out to Chell, she is not only fixing the mother-daughter split she has
with her, but she is also reaching out to another woman, a separate entity altogether
from the mother. She reaches out to her, not only by showing her that she is dependent
on her, by both trusting her completely, and by how she speaks towards her, and about
her.

These changes in actions are done by GLaDOS at first for necessity. She is
without her body. She cannot do anything alone. She needs Chell—which still has her
feminine body—to regain power, to regain control, but mostly, to survive. GLaDOS and
Chell might help each other at first because of necessity, but the journey they go
through is much more healing for their relationship, and GLaDOS herself. When
GLaDOS starts remembering who she originated from, it is Chell who is with her, and
what they are facing, the male dominance that has overtaken the facility, is a common
enemy that unites them. The last true remnant of the masculine patriarchy that ruled the
Aperture Science Enrichment Center before GLaDOS, and has ruled it through
GLaDOS indirectly ever since. This remnant is personified in Wheatley.

Perhaps the biggest change we can see clearly in GLaDOS, in regards to her
thoughts on Chell is how she reacts when Wheatley, now in her old body, tries to use
the same tactics she used against Chell: Taunting her, belittling her body and her
parental status. Of course, Wheatley does not have the supreme intellect GLaDOS has,
so he is not as successful at it, and it does not help that GLaDOS will not have any of it.

Wheatley: Alright. So that last test was... seriously disappointing.
Apparently being civil isn’t motivating you. So let’s try things her way...
fatty. Adopted fatty. Fatty fatty no-parents.

GLaDOS: And...?

Wheatley: What?
GLaDOS: What, exactly, is wrong with being adopted? [Whispered to Chell] For the record: You ARE adopted, and that’s TERRIBLE. But just work with me.

Wheatley: What—what’s wrong with being adopted? Um. Well... lack of parents, for one, and... also... furthermore... nothing. Some of my best... friends are... orphans... But...

GLaDOS: Also: Look at her, you moron. She’s not fat.

GLaDOS had to remind Chell that she does feel it is terrible to be adopted, but we get the idea that the statement (although terrible as it is) is said in a more playful manner than before. As two friends, two equals, might josh with each other, rather than the force it had before when they were the victim and the tormentor. This might be perhaps because now, as they stand united against Wheatley, they are, in fact, equals; and if they are not equals, then it is not the potato that is superior.

The “she’s not fat” statement goes further, as she says it with such conviction, and without the disclaimer of the adoption remark. Perhaps it is because GLaDOS now feels now more consciously as an orphan than she did before, and has to use snarkiness as a coping mechanism). Women are often known to belittle each other, and as we discussed, it can be a part of the mother-daughter relationship for a mother to make fun of her daughter’s body, but now, GLaDOS seems to be more enkindled with her femininity and can face the facts. Chell is not fat.
4.9 Finding the Inner Man with Heart

The masculine is an archetypal force; it is not a gender. Like the feminine, it is a creative force that lives within all women and men. When it becomes unbalanced and unrelated to life it becomes combative, critical, and destructive. This unrelated archetypal masculine can be cold and inhuman; it does not take into account our human limitations. Its machismo tells us to forge ahead no matter what the cost. It demands perfection, control, and domination; nothing is ever enough. Our masculine nature, like the Fisher King, is wounded. (Murdock 156)

Before being forced to look within when she was transported into a potato, GLaDOS lived a destructive life. The unbalance of feminine and masculine, the controlling aspects of the unconscious masculinity, lead to her destruction. She did not care about the price others had to pay for her total control, her need for perfection and domination, nor the cost to her psyche. In her mind, she did not need anything but test subjects, and test subjects were at the same time the most important thing in the world and the most replaceable. She forged ahead with what she deemed important and was left cold, and inhuman, even for an artificial human.

The grail she seeks at the end of Portal 2 is not the dominant body that she gets, but the force that it brings (Murdock 155). The computing power it gives her to rethink, to re-imagine herself. The power to recalculate, to re-code, to become her own person.

Chell and GLaDOS face Wheatley together, and together, they defeat him—with a little help from him as he is incompetent. After defeating Wheatley, GLaDOS exiles him to the moon, and she is reunited with her old body as her core replaces Wheatley’s. This is her experiencing the sacred marriage (Murdock 159), the union of her ego and herself. GLaDOS “comes to understand the dynamics of her feminine and masculine nature and accepts them both together” (Murdock 159). By doing so, she becomes her own creation.
The result of this union is the “birth of the divine child.” A woman gives birth to herself as a divine androgenous being, autonomous, and in a state of perfection in the unity of the opposites. She is whole. (Murdock 160)

The GLaDOS now in control is older, wiser, a new being that can show affection, though with its limits. When Wheatley went through a portal in GLaDOS’s chamber that led to another portal on the moon, Chell went with him, but it is GLaDOS who pulls her back through and saves her from a fate of drifting dead through space. When Chell gets her back to earth through the portal, GLaDOS exhales: “Oh, thank god, you are alright,” with an earnest, yet robotic, voice (Portal 2).

GLaDOS is quick to follow it, though with: "You know, being Caroline taught me a valuable lesson. I thought you were my greatest enemy. When all along you were my best friend” and it is an important quote as it confirms many of the speculations we have put forward here in this essay (Portal 2). When GLaDOS started her heroine’s journey, she was nothing but power. Nothing mattered but testing. Everyone was her enemy. Chell was a pawn, one that she wanted to kill at first, then wanted to torture to eternity. Now, as she has found her femininity and recaptured control of her masculinity, she can see that Chell was not the enemy. She was her only companion.

In the first game, Portal, GLaDOS emphasized a lot how alone Chell was. How she had no one and used it to torture her. Along the way through the test chambers, Chell had to use cubes to put weight on buttons to open doors or activate things that could help her reach her goal of an open door. One cube was called the “Weighted Companion Cube.” It went through the journey of a chamber with Chell. GLaDOS commented how it was her only friend, and in true villain fashion, GLaDOS made Chell burn the cube to be able to move on to the next test. It seemed then a simple act of villainy, but now it seems that unconsciously, GLaDOS was both forcing Chell to be alone like herself, or even that she did not want Chell to have anyone, or anything, other than herself.

This truly is the task of the contemporary heroine. She heals as she breathes as she recognizes her true nature, breathing knowledge into all of us. The heroine becomes the Mistress of Both Worlds; she can navigate the waters
of daily life and listen to the teachings of the depths. She is the Mistress of Heaven and Earth and of the Underworld. She has gained wisdom from her experiences: she no longer needs to blame the other; she is the other. She brings that wisdom back to share with the world. And the women, men, and children of the world are transformed by her journey. (Murdock 168)

GLaDOS comes back as the mistress of all worlds in the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. She does not have to blame Chell for things that go wrong in testing because she encompasses everything that has to do with testing. She is the tester. She is the creator. She is Aperture Science Enrichment Center.
4.10 Beyond Duality

If the prevalent attitude about human nature is one of sin and depravity, then there is no trust. There is also little room to allow for a change in attitude about one’s enemies. (Murdock 172)

Although she has a past as a human, GLaDOS has only had conscious knowledge of how to be an artificial intelligence, a god-like robot that can make anything around her be whatever she wants. For her, humans are test-subjects, weak, mortal, and not to be trusted. “This course was created and then abandoned by humans. They tend to do that, create something wonderful and then abandon it,” shows both how little she thinks of humans and might strengthen the argument that she sees herself as being abandoned (Portal 2). It seems that Chell is the first human to make her confront those ideas, and then, of course, she finds Caroline in her subconscious.

With Caroline there, or her programmed personality and traits to be more exact, GLaDOS has to decide what to do. Does she keep separate her masculinity, her overarching personality written to emulate that of Cave Johnson, and her unconscious femininity brought on by Caroline, or does she integrate them? Since GLaDOS is a piece of software, her method is quite a bit more extreme than something a human would do. She explains: “The surge of emotion that shot through me when I saved your life taught me an even more valuable lesson: where Caroline lives in my brain. Goodbye, Caroline” (Portal 2).

She, of course, deletes Caroline from her system.

It is, however, apparent that she did not delete her to go back to her old ways as one might suspect. If she had reverted to the GLaDOS she was before she went on the “Heroine’s Journey,” Chell would be back in suspended animation, waiting to be tested again, or in a test chamber immediately. GLaDOS would have no trust in Chell. She would just be a human; something that GLaDOS is not. Something GLaDOS is superior to. That is not what GLaDOS does though after she had deleted the last remnants of Caroline.
You know, deleting Caroline just now taught me a valuable lesson. The best solution to a problem is usually the easiest one. And I’ll be honest. Killing you? Is hard. You know what my days used to be like? I just tested. Nobody murdered me. Or put me in a potato. Or fed me to birds. I had a pretty good life. And then you showed up. You dangerous, mute lunatic. So you know what? You win. Just go. [gentle laughter] It’s been fun. Don’t come back.

*(Portal 2)*

Of course, GLaDOS still has her pride. She must act like it is too much hassle to try and kill Chell and that she brings too many misfortunes. She lets Chell go, and as Chell is taken away in a lift to the outside world to be reborn again, a flock of turrets confront her and sing an Italian operetta for her. When translated, these are the lyrics:

Beautiful dear, my darling beauty!
My child, oh heavens (Chell)!
That she respects!
That she respects!
Oh my dear, farewell!
My dear child...
Why don't you walk far away?
So far away from Science!
My dear, dear baby...
Ah, my beloved!
Ah, my dear!
Ah, my dear!
Ah, my little girl!
Oh dear, my dear... *(Portal 2)*

With this song, GLaDOS shows that she is no longer the daughter of Caroline (or Chell, in fact); she is the mother. She is the Great Mother. She is giving Chell life in the outside world, saving her from the harm the Aperture Science Enrichment Center
always brings. She not only cares for her “little girl,” she respects her, and she wants her to go and live her life. She lets her little bird fly from the nest, all on her own.

This is not the first time GLaDOS has shown pride in Chell’s success. When Chell defeats her in the original game, another song is sung where GLaDOS states that she is satisfied with Chell’s success, even though she did kill her. Then, Chell defeated her by destroying her personality cores, including morality, leaving behind only the true GLaDOS. When she was resurrected in Portal 2, she regained all these conflicts that came with the sub-conscious. GLaDOS needed to grow, to be allowed to be herself.

The true hero’s task “is to slay the monster of the status quo,” “to shatter the established order and create a community” (Murdock 14), and by reconnecting with her femininity, and by balancing her femininity with her masculinity, and finding herself in the process, GLaDOS has shattered the status quo and created a community of her peers (other robots), and allowed the human test-subject to go free.

At least until Portal 3 comes out.
Conclusion

By looking at Maureen Murdock’s version of Jung’s “Hero’s Journey,” the female-focused “Heroine’s Journey” in her book *The Heroine’s Journey: Woman’s Quest for Wholeness*, we can better understand the entirety of GLaDOS’s character. She is not only a villainess, or a means for tension, but a complete character on her own. We do not get to experience the beginning of her heroine’s journey directly; however, we do get to follow it through the Portal video games, mainly *Portal 2*, as well as the graphic novel. In *Portal 2*, we also get a glimpse of her life as she started her journey, when she was still the human Caroline, and therefore we can interpret and conclude how she became the person/artificial intelligence, that she is.

While we went through each step in Murdock’s theory along with the progression of *Portal 2*, it was easy to see how GLaDOS’s actions and demeanor, along with the situations she was put in each time, both as GLaDOS (thrown from her throne as master of the Aperture Science Enrichment Center) and as Caroline (made CEO of Aperture Science and then forced to become a robot), correspond with each step of the “Heroine’s Journey.”

As Caroline, she separated from the feminine while climbing the corporate ladder in Aperture Science, following Cave Johnson and becoming his successor. She took on his masculine approach to running the company and the demeanor needed to impress him. Her separation was then completed when the scientists of Aperture Science decided to map her brain and put her into a computer—her agreement not needed. She identified with the masculine to the full extent as GLaDOS, while she had total control over the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, emulating the dominant style of management employed by Cave Johnson while he was alive and running the company.

After having been defeated by Chell in *Portal*, she is given life back by Chell in *Portal 2*, and goes on her road of trials as she tries to fix the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, which lies in ruins, and fights the ogres that are trying to stop her, Chell and Wheatley. GLaDOS then experiences the illusory boon of success, as she captures Chell and begins testing anew, but the success is short lived. Once again, she is
defeated, stripped of her body and put in a potato, but strong women can say no, and GLaDOS says it loud and clear—she is not going to take this lying down.

As GLaDOS traverses through the underbelly of Aperture Science, she learns much about her past self, and her present self. She yearns to reconnects with her femininity, she heals her fractured relationship with Chell, she becomes more powerful as a person as she makes peace with the masculine, and finally, by integrating the masculinity and femininity as she deletes the old remnants of Caroline (and Cave Johnson) and becomes her own creation.

We can conclude that Maureen Murdock’s “Heroine’s Journey” can be fruitfully applied to the journey that GLaDOS takes in the Portal franchise. More importantly, however, we have seen that by using Murdock’s theory, we could dive deeper into the character that is GLaDOS than by simply playing the games. By applying the theory to her story arc, we find a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of her actions, and the reasons behind the ways she changes throughout the game. With this new understanding, we can enjoy the game more and appreciate GLaDOS on a new level, as we see how complex and layered a character she really is.
Works Cited


“Burns’ Heir.” *The Simpsons*, created by Matt Groening, voice by Harry Shearer, season 5, episode 18, Gracie Films and Film Roman, 1994.


Appendix A.
Breakdown of the Ten Stages and Their Application to Portal

In the following table, we have the ten stages in Maureen Murdock’s Heroine’s Journey with a short summary of each stage and of how and where GLaDOS goes through them. The steps and the Portal games are then examined in a more detailed fashion in each chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heroine’s Journey I</th>
<th>Portal Application</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Separation from the Feminine</td>
<td>Pre-Portal, audio recordings in Portal 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Often a mother or societally prescribed feminine role.”</td>
<td>Caroline, the assistant to Aperture Science’s CEO, Cave Johnson, rises to become Mr. Johnson’s most trusted colleague and becomes the CEO upon his death. After the research team completes Johnson’s final project, brain-mapping and artificial intelligence, Caroline is forced to be turned into Aperture Science’s latest creation, Genetic Lifeform and Operating System, or GLaDOS for short. It is unknown how much of GLaDOS is Caroline, but she is always a copy of her, not the actual person.</td>
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<td>2 Identification with the Masculine</td>
<td>Portal 2: Lab Rat, Portal, Portal 2</td>
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<td>“This often involves choosing a path that is different than the role prescribed for him/her deciding to gear to ‘fight’ an organization, role, or group that is limiting her, or entering some male/masculine-defined</td>
<td>GLaDOS now has total control over the Aperture Science Enrichment Center, having taken over the male dominated organization. Cave Johnson was obsessed with science and testing his inventions, no matter how dangerous, on volunteers and staff members. As GLaDOS, Caroline continues to mimic his</td>
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<td>Sphere.”</td>
<td>behavior, and style of ruling. All her actions seem to be based on what the masculine Cave Johnson would have done, both in practice and morally.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Road of Trails</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Heroine encounters trials and meets people who try to dissuade her from pursuing her chosen path and/or destroy her (ogres and dragons or their metaphorical counterparts).”</td>
<td>GLaDOS is given life anew after being killed by Chell in the first game. The Aperture Science Enrichment Center lies in ruins and before her are Chell and, Wheatley, an artificial intelligence that was originally built to control GLaDOS’s actions. They try to stop her from pursuing her goal and purpose of testing. Thus they are the ogres that she must overcome.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Illusory Boon of Success</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Experiencing the boon of success by overcoming the obstacles. This would typically be where the hero’s or “shero’s” (a female protagonist on a hero’s journey) tale ends.”</td>
<td>GLaDOS manages to capture Chell and put her once again in the testing facility. Chell is no under her control and only able to move from testing chamber to testing chamber if GLaDOS permits. GLaDOS also rebuilds the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. Everything seems to be going as planned for GLaDOS. She has total control and can do as much testing as she sees needed. For her, Chell is a human test subject first, but also something she must torment for eternity. It is obvious that there is a deeper motif for her than merely revenge.</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strong Woman Can Say No</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Heroine’s awakens to feelings of spiritual”</td>
<td>After a short illusion of success, GLaDOS is confronted once more by Chell and Wheatley</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Heroine urgently yearns to reconnect with the feminine, but cannot go back to her initial limited</td>
<td>Going along with Chell, trying to find a way to escape the old parts of Aperture Science Enrichment Center that Cave Johnson used to test different types of paint-like liquid gels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Initiation and Descent to the Goddess</td>
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<td>“The heroine faces a crisis of some sort in which the new way is insufficient and falls into despair. All of her “masculine” strategies have failed her.”</td>
<td>Having followed Cave Johnson’s masculine ways both in human form as Caroline, and as an artificial intelligence as GLaDOS, GLaDOS finds herself in despair as it left her destroyed. She has lost everything that gave her power. She is no longer in her body, she no longer has any control over Aperture Science, and she is vulnerable to dangers that she would not have given a second thought of earlier, and the computing power the facility gave her, is no longer available. In the murky depths of Aperture Science Enrichment Center, she must count on the help of her old foe, Chell, and start to find out who she, herself, really is.</td>
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<td>aridity/death because the new way of life is too limited. Success in this new way of life is either temporary, illusory, shallow, or requires a betrayal of self over time.”</td>
<td>and they manage to defeat her. With the help of Chell, Wheatley takes over GLaDOS’s body, and with it gets the total control over Aperture Science Enrichment Center. Wheatley discards her core, leaving only the computer chip her mind is kept in, and replaces the core with a potato battery. He throws her out of the main facility like she was trash.</td>
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While there, the PA system plays old audio recordings of Cave Johnson explaining the tests, and the immoral ways the tests are being done. He sometimes mentions his assistant, Caroline, and Caroline can sometimes speak. GLaDOS recognizes the voices, but with limited computing power at hand, has trouble remembering how she recognizes them. She finally realizes that the voices belong to her old boss, and her when she was a human. Both long dead and gone, but still they live on, in her.

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<th>8</th>
<th>Healing the Mother / Daughter Split</th>
<th>Portal 2</th>
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<td></td>
<td>“Reclaiming some of her initial values, skills or attributes (or those of others like her) but views them from a new perspective.”</td>
<td>While traversing through Aperture Science stuck to Chell’s portal gun, she finds that Chell has in many ways been her partner in science and the animosity she has directed towards her, both verbal (calling her fat and making fun of the fact that she is an orphan) has perhaps been misguided. GLaDOS has learned, or reclaimed the memory of it from her subconscious, and is adamant to take over the Aperture Science Enrichment Center once more and run it her own way. As she learns more about who she was, she learns more about what makes her the being she is and it changes how she acts.</td>
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<th>9</th>
<th>Finding the Inner Man with Heart</th>
<th>Portal 2</th>
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<td></td>
<td>“Heroine makes peace with the “masculine” approach to</td>
<td>Chell and GLaDOS confront Wheatley. He tries to mimic the way GLaDOS acted when she was</td>
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</table>


the world as it applies to herself.””
in power and fighting Chell, making a reference to her weight and her being adopted, but GLaDOS, no longer being controlled by her subconscious masculinity, rejects his (previously hers) notions that Chell is fat and in general comes in Chell’s defense. Wheatley was made originally constructed by the male scientists to control her, and by prevailing against him, she manages to become her own creation.

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<th>10</th>
<th>Beyond Duality</th>
<th>Portal 2</th>
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<td>“Heroine integrates the masculine and feminine to face the world or future with a new understanding of herself and the world/life. Heroine sees through binaries and can interact with a complex world that includes her but is larger than her personal lifetime or geographical/cultural milieu.”</td>
<td>Wheatley and Chell end up in space after going through a portal on the moon, but GLaDOS, who spent most of her time trying to kill Chell, now saves her. Her change of heart in regards to Chell is not because of Caroline gaining control of her, quite the opposite as GLaDOS actually deletes Caroline from her system. Having done so, she has a new understanding of both herself and the world, and does not see it quite as black and white any longer. She not only saves Chell, but lets her leave the Aperture Science Enrichment Center. She urges her to go, she does not need human test subjects any longer, and Chell is only a hassle. Through a song sung by turrets while Chell escapes the center in an elevator, GLaDOS’s true feelings of care for Chell are revealed.</td>
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Appendix B.

A Survey Regarding Storytelling in Video Games – Results

What is your gender? (1000 responses)

- Female: 71.3%
- Male: 25%
- Prefer not to say: 3.7%

How old are you? (1000 responses)

- 18 or younger: 33.7%
- 19-25: 33.3%
- 26-35: 17.5%
- 36-45: 10.7%
- 46 or older: 6.4%

How often do you play video games that have a noticeable story/plot?
(1000 responses)

- Rarely: 55.9%
- Every now and then: 33.4%
- A lot: 10.7%
What are TWO of the most important aspects you seek out when choosing a video game?

(1000 responses)

- Graphics / Visuals: 357 (35.7%)
- Story / Plot: 313 (31.3%)
- Action: 176 (17.6%)
- Puzzles: 235 (23.5%)
- Multiplayer: 150 (15.6%)
- Customization: 164 (16.4%)

What is your preferred way to receive narrative (the story/plot) in video games?

(1000 responses)

- Through cutscenes: 28.4%
- Through a narrator/storyteller: 28.2%
- Through dialogue with non-player characters: 14.1%
- Through exploration (for example, finding texts or items that help the player put together the story/plot): 29.3%

Do you consider Walking Simulators with minimal gameplay to be games?

(1000 responses)

- Yes: 47.8%
- No: 34.4%
- I don’t know / I’m unsure: 17.8%
Would you consider Telltale Games to be interactive films/cutscenes rather than actual games?
(1000 responses)