

SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

Bednorz, Magdalena. *Courtly Love in Digital Games: The Rhetoric of Emotional Labor in Selected Interactive Narratives*

The present dissertation undertakes the analysis of three romantic subplots from three BioWare role-playing games—*Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*, *Dragon Age: Origins*, and *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. It discusses how the selected game romances employ courtly themes in the representation and romanticization of love as emotional labor. In doing so, it explores the potential of games to present love fictions and craft specific representations of romantic love through both medium-specific tools of expression and references to broader themes and notions associated with love and romantic affection. It also investigates how by representing existing, contemporary patterns of romantic behaviors and dynamics, such in-game renditions participate in the negotiation and understanding of love and romance, as well as in legitimizing specific behaviors and relationship dynamics as appropriate expressions of love.

To achieve this aim, the dissertation assumes the following structure: chapter one, “Love Fictions in Digital Games: An Overview of the State of the Art,” is devoted to an overview of the existing state of academic research on love, the storytelling potential of games, and in-game love fictions. It both emphasized the relevance of critical research on game love, as well as point out the blank spots in the current knowledge. Chapter two, “Playing with the Cultural Ideal of Love: Rhetoric(s) of Courtly Love in Digital Games,” introduces a theoretical perspective that serves as a starting point for further analysis. Combining the perspectives of studies on courtly love themes and rhetorical potential of digital media in relation to love, it outlines a proposal for a close reading of in-game courtly romances, with attention paid to both their rules and their fictional alignment, in order to trace

how they facilitate specific ideas of love and romantic relationships. The following chapters present such analysis of the selected titles.

Chapter three, “Emotional Labor of a Courtly Lady: Anomen’s Romance in *Baldur’s Gate II*,” opens the analytical part of the dissertation. It presents an analysis of Anomen’s romance in *Shadows of Amn*, focusing primarily on the basic references to courtly love theme in Anomen’s characterization and in the romance-specific dialogue structures. Chapter four, “Emotion Management in Quests: Alistair’s Romance in *Dragon Age: Origins*,” discusses the use of quest structures and player agency in Alistair’s romance in the first game of the *Dragon Age* series. The analysis is oriented at showcasing the use of quests in the romantic subplot, as they participate in both the depiction of relationship dynamics and in drawing references to chivalric romances and courtly love. Chapter five, “Emotional Effort in Navigating Courtly Spaces: Cullen’s Romance in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*,” serves as a study of the role of spatial rhetoric and the expressive power of movement in a digital environment in the romantic context. It investigates the influence of spatial positioning of the characters on the specific rendition of courtly love in Cullen’s romance in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*. Each of the analytical chapters, then, is devoted to a particular category of game-specific means of expression.

As a whole, the analytical chapters explore both the various means through which courtly love theme is adjusted to the realities of the digital and ludic medium, and the relationship between a particular take on courtly love and the resulting association of love as reliant on unevenly divided emotional labor performed by the involved female PC. Together, these examples of BioWare romances lead me to conclude that they not only engage the cultural themes of courtly love and adapt them to fit the mediality of digital games, but also employ them in the recirculation of an ideologically-grounded concept of how romantic love functions. As such, the dissertation presents a medium-sensitive, fiction-oriented, and

critically-leaning approach, and applies it in a thorough investigation of the rhetoric of emotional labor in the selected interactive narratives of courtly love.