Giving Meaning to *Dragon Age: Origins* (Bioware)

A Linguistic Approach

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Abstract

This paper argues that Dragon Age: Origins can be given a meaning over and above the primary goal, i.e. success, through the texts that are regularly offered to the player for contemplation during the game. The game can be said to have a facultative depth. The technology used to achieve this – making a fictional literature accessible for the player as the game progresses – is not exclusive to DAO and can be used by other game designers. Meaning is created when the player perceives a causal and temporal pattern in the game world that bears enough similarity to the patterns through which we have structured our perception of our own history. This process is viewed with the frameworks of schema theory and collective memory. The "real" historical patterns that emerge through the game are fetched from different parts of our western medieval history. Recognizing our own Middle Ages in the game world intensifies the playing experience, possibly the most each time the player has to make an ethically difficult choice. Recognition is precipitated and reinforced when auctor activates the player's capacity to create associations. In this paper I have demonstrated the importance of texts and the stylistically informed use of them to achieve this effect. I have also argued that it is not necessary to have an active knowledge of history nor to be conscious of one's own perception of the Middle Ages to gain access to this deeper meaning. The interpretation comes – sooner or later – to every player who is raised in and lives with our collective memory. The literary technique used in DAO is an example of how a computer game can be given a meaning that is not superficial, and the technology is available for any game designer who wishes to create a meaningful game.

Keywords: stylistics, textual analysis, schema theory, collective memory, Dragon Age: Origins.

A transdisciplinary research project within the humanities concerning computer games is presently being conducted at the Gotland University, Sweden.   One of the objectives is to explore how medieval features in a game affect the player's experience, and the research group has focused on Dragon Age: Origins (DAO) because of its obvious medieval connotations.   My own part in the project aims to explore how the language-based aspects of the game affect the player's reception.

Some definitions: *language* is human communication mediated through speech or writing.   I use the word *text* for a linguistic utterance manifested in speech or writing.   In contradistinction to current usage in an increasing number of academic disciplines, I do not use *text* in the expanded sense – a metaphor for a systematic ordering of meaningful entities of whichever kind.   I use the word *auctor* for the totality of the creative work behind a game.

I am analyzing all dialogues that are triggered by certain characters being in a certain location and can therefore be said to be controlled by the game itself, as opposed to controlled by the player, and all texts that can be appropriated by the player in different parts of the imaginary world. The main subject for this paper is how the latter function in shaping the playing experience. The analysis does, however, also generate some thoughts on the structure of the game.

Within the humanities discussions about the structure of computer games have been initiated by advocates of literary theory, specifically within narratology, where computer games are being called *texts* (Dovey & Kennedy 2006, pp. 84-103). Subsequent debate has sought to nuance conceptualization by underlining their complexity, a complexity that differs from the

structure of what is traditionally called *texts*. The concept *expanded text* has been used

(Tanselle 1989). The term *ergodic text* has been launched to underscore the differences

between a reader of traditional fiction and a game player (Aarseth 1997). Terms like

cybertext and *hypertext* have been used to highlight the fact that a "text" can be expanded by

the use of links (Gunder 2004). The "text" has been called *multisequential, multidiscursive*

and *participatory* in order to define the differences in comparison with "ordinary" literature.

However, the term *text* is still prevalent, as is the case in the recently published volume on

World of war craft (*Digital Culture, Play and Identity,* 2008).

DAO avails itself of three communication channels: visual, linguistic and musical. Calling

the sum total a *text* obfuscates the structure of the game. I will therefore reserve the term *text*

for all language based elements in the game, be they written or oral. These features will prove

to be present to an extent that many players never experience and I intend to demonstrate that

the game has a depth which is facultative; it is accessible to all players who wish to acquaint

themselves with it but not requisite for a complete playing experience. It is possible to

complete the game with success, i.e. by slaying the Archdemon, without reading all texts,

even without being aware of their existence. Conversations between players on the web give

proof of this. Using an analogy one could say that the game has multi-depth.

Obviously, the player has to carry through certain dialogues in order not to be stymied in

her/his progress through the plot. One example is the conversation with brother Genitivi after

finding him in Haven, which makes it possible to complete the quest for The Urn of Sacred

Ashes, or the conversation with Witherfang in the temple ruins, whereby the assistance of the

elves in the final onslaught is secured. If you choose to have conversations with your

companions, you have to read all your own alternative lines in order to select one of them, and

you have to read or listen to the companions' answers. Taking part of the texts embedded in the game is obligatory only so far. Nobody is forced to read the innumerable books, scrolls, inscriptions and notes that litter the landscape until they are picked up by the player. You can run so fast through the landscape that you never catch the background dialogue which is triggered by the game now and then. You can even choose never to engage your companions in conversation at the camp.

The language-based elements of the game create the imaginary world in which the player lives and acts, using several rhetorical and stylistic strategies. The texts give the game its history and its culture, its spiritual and political conflicts in the story time. In the texts the landscape is populated by diverse humanoid creatures, the known world is filled with cities and villages, different languages are spoken, different religions are practiced and individuals of great import for the background history are presented. A small fraction of all this is communicated verbally by different non player characters without an active choice made by the player. The rest can be studied on an optional basis by reading the texts in the Codex.

How do the texts in DAO affect the playing experience? Let us take a closer look at the functions assigned to the Codex entries. In the first place, it enables auctor to communicate directly with the player, without going by way of the story's fiction. These Codex entries have an extradiegetic function, such as tips on playing technique (battle strategies, suitable weapons, etc.) for greater success. Other Codex entries are extradiegetic and intradiegetic at the same time: they give the player clues on what to do next, but in fictional terms. They only work if the player agrees to regard the fiction as real. Examples of this are short descriptions of different creatures and explanations to their behavior, likewise character portraits and biographies found in the subcategory *Characters*. In these texts, auctor speaks himself to the

player/reader from inside the fiction. One hears auctor's own voice and the text does not assert that it was written by someone else.

On the other hand we have the purely extradiegetic texts which are in majority in the Codex. From a formal point of view they are written by someone other than auctor. One could say that they pretend to be written by different fictitious and named authors. Most of them are fragments of larger texts or literary works in an array of different genres: collections of letters, sermons, lectures, diaries, working notes, histories, inscriptions, proverbs, poetry, etc. Through the total content of these texts, the player is made aware of the historical and cultural background to the present state of affairs among humans, elves and dwarves. The player is informed about what motivates different characters and thereby helped to understand how to succeed.

How does the information stored in the Codex affect the playing experience? The imaginary world that emerges when the player reads the Codex resembles our present, real world so closely that the player can be linked into a greater historical context. A fictitious chronology can be gleaned through dated references and authorial references in the fictitious literature in the Codex. A lost literature ken be recreated in part, just as scholars recreate the lost literature of Antiquity. The information embedded in the Codex has an inner structure that is familiar to the player; it is imparted in bits and pieces and consists of short texts that we read at different occasions in play time, in the same way that modern mass media bring us information in the real world. The playing experience becomes a reading experience in addition, with all that it entails.

The extradiegetic texts can also make the playing experience richer. Examples of this are the descriptions of and explanations to the different kinds of magic spells which the player can

make use of. They situate the spells within a cultural context, thereby deepening the player's understanding and use of magic.

> Humans produce hurlocks, dwarves produce genlocks, elves give birth to shrieks, and from Qunari are born the ogres. (Codex entry *Broodmother*)

After reading this I look upon every attacking darkspawn with new feelings and I no longer combat them mechanically and summarily.

Patterns

After having established the fact that the game has an important textual element and the fact that it can play an important part in the playing experience, we can now ask how this textual element works stylistically and why it has this effect. In my opinion a pattern, recognized by the player consciously or unconsciously, emerges at the textual level. This pattern is created first and foremost by the fictitious literature in the Codex through its content. In addition to this, at the lexical level associations arise which strengthen and confirm the act of recognition. The tools used for this are the naming of people, places and objects of some importance, the presence of several fictitious languages, and the use of different stylistic variables in the texts. Pattern recognition is facilitated by the numerous associations in the player's mind.

Which is the pattern in question? In her article *World of War craft as Rich Text* Tanya Krzywinska has argued that embedded myths and intertextual references to the lore of other games enriches both the game and the playing experience (*Digital Culture, Play and Identity 2008*, p. 123-141). In this game too perceiving and understanding the embedded is facultative, i.e. not requisite for any given ending. But unlike World of Warcraft, DAO utilizes not only the stuff of myths but also something se regard as real in the world we live in. The three main categories of humanoids – elves, dwarves and men – have each their own

social system, culture, set of moral values and faith.[1] What distinguishes the culture of men from that of the elves and of the dwarves, is the fact that it is modeled on medieval Europe. Notions of medieval Europe are awakened in the player's mind.

The story unfolds in a period following the glory days of the Tevinter empire. This empire was conspicuous for its imperialism and an economy based on slave trade. It was once "the centre of the world". Its art and architecture were refined and the highways built to connect different parts of the empire are still in use, though somewhat dilapidated. Its past glory is still remembered. Its disintegration started from within but was reinforced by insurrections in subjugated countries. The spark of rebellion was kindled by the female slave Andraste, who spread the words of the Maker to the idolaters. This pleased the Maker to such an extent that he gave her the force to lead the insurrection carrying no other weapon than her sermons. The uprising against the Tevinter empire was successful, but Andraste died a martyr; i.e. she was executed by the empire after having been betrayed by a man. Following these events the empire has been but a decadent shadow of itself. After her death Andraste was elevated to divine status and seated by the Maker's side. She is revered as Our Lady and The Bride of the Maker. The monotheistic religion she taught was called *The Chant of Light.* The pattern that is outlined here easily maps on to the Roman empire, its expansion, the development of its economy and its disintegration. It is also easily mapped on to the life of Jesus, as it is told in the New testament, and to the dogma of his double nature as man and Deity at the same time.

When the player enters this world several centuries have passed after the fall of the empire. Men, dwarves and elves inhabit Thedas, the known part of the world, and Thedas is populated by several nations and peoples. The story takes place in Ferelden, a country with an unstable form of government and a kind of elective monarchy. It was colonized a long time ago by wild barbarians called the Alamarri under their migration to the east and the south. The

Alamarri were divided through inner struggles and two thirds of the people continued traveling in different directions. The remaining Alamarri are The Fereldans of today.

One other country in Thedas is Anderfels, situated to the north and "a land of shocking extremes" with a harsh climate (Codex entry *Anderfels*). It is the poorest nation of Thedas and its warriors are the most feared. The country Antiva is a monarchy in theory but is in reality ruled by merchant princes. It has no standing army – thus only mercenaries – and the whole society is in reality governed by organized assassins. The Free Marches is not a nation but a collection of independent city-states. It has no capital, no central government and no standing popular assembly. Certain medieval European cities can be recognized in this sketch and, most importantly, the development in Europe after the fall of the Roman empire and over a long period of time. If one chooses to, one can recognize the Great Migration with the Germanic Invasions, barren and primitive Scandinavia, Celtic clan society in Scotland, independent cities in Northern Italy (Florence, Venice and Milan are strong candidates), which entered into diverse alliances with each other during the Renaissance, and the strong merchant cities of Northern Europe that became autonomous in relationship to the surrounding country-side during the High Middle ages.

After the fall of the Tevinter imperium, Orlais expanded and conquered Ferelden. The conquest was overturned seventy years later and Ferelden has been autonomous since then, but there is still much friction in political and cultural contacts between the two nations. Life at the court in Val Royaux is brilliant, elegant, gaudy and complicated. Make-up is much in use, artful masks are often worn in diverse situations, and everyone spies on everyone in order to gain influence at court. Auctor has not been stingy with clues as to Orlais' counterpart in reality. The name of the country and all its geographical names, for instance Remmes and Montsimmard, are congruent with French phonology – though not necessarily with its

morphology (Val Royaux, which is perfectly possible with respect to its phonology but not its morphology, is an instance of this). All Characters in the game that stem from Orlais speak English with a clear French accent. The player is obviously meant to form associations with France, and these can lead to several periods in French history. The imperialistic period can be seen as referring to the Carolingian period or the Norman invasion of England; the constant friction between Ferelden and Orlais can be seen as the Hundred Years' War and the depiction of life at court could allude to the court of Louis XIV.[2]

I do not contend that every detail in the depiction of Thedas has its counterpart in European historiography, nor that each fictitious geographical or political entity has one and only one counterpart in reality. The force at work here is the fact that there are enough fictitious details that taken together create a cognitive pattern which is easily mapped on to reality as we experience it, shaped by our own historiography. The text does not exhort us to accept it as a depiction of reality and is therefore not mimetic. Rather, it leads our thoughts to what we experience as reality. Fictitious historical facts in the game relate to each other with regard to temporality and causality. They thereby create temporal and causal connections which, joining together in a pattern, can be transferred to real historical facts. The text might perhaps be called pseudo-mimetic.

The stylistic technique at work here may be said to fall under the heading of *schema theory*. We humans strive to give meaning to every linguistic utterance that we perceive. If we are unable to decode the utterance , we search for a context that might lead to a meaningful interpretation of the utterance in question. As Stockwell put it in "Schema poetics and speculative cosmology":

[e]ssentially, the context that someone needs to make sense of individual experiences, events, parts of situations or elements of language is stored in background memory as an associative network of knowledge. In the course of experiencing an event or making sense of a new situation, a schema is dynamically produced, which can be modeled as a sort of script based on similar situations encountered previously (as cited in Gregoriou 2009, p. 86-88).

Gregoriou (2009, p. 87) has pointed out that

Since schemata are abstract cognitive structures which incorporate generalized knowledge about objects and events, containing slots which are filled with specific information bits as a text or message is processed, these are bound to vary depending on the culture and overall personal background and experience that each on of us has had.

The cognitive pattern mentioned above can be regarded as a schema, a schema that is shared by most people in our culture. I do not contend that it is necessary to consciously have knowledge of the historical reality of which the memory is being brought to the fore. A player/reader with relevant knowledge will find a meaning in her/his own memory. A player who lacks this knowledge will give the utterance meaning by searching in the collective memory of society (Halbwachs 1992; The Collective Memory Reader, pp. 139-149). That process is probably not conscious, but the result will be same and give the same satisfaction: a meaning has been elicited.

The church and faith

My hypothesis is borne out by the depiction of *The Chantry* – its origins, its organization and its goals. [3]

After having been spread to a greater part of Thedas the monotheistic religion went under the name of *Andraste's Chantry.* When southern Thedas had been liberated from the Tevinter empire the new ruler in the Orlais, Drakon, took an initiative to regulate religious practice. He institutionalized The Chantry in the city of Val Royaux, let build a vast cathedral and appointed a female leader. The holder of the holy office received the title *divina.* He declared Andraste's chantry established religion in the whole Orlesian Empire, Andraste herself was declared its ruler, and Drakon declared himself emperor.

In course of time dissension in doctrinary matters arose between The Chantry in Orlais and The Chantry of Tevinter. The Orlesian emperor initiated several crusades against the dissidents, but in vain. In the end the Tevinter chantry declared its independence from the mother institution in Orlais and appointed a leader of its own, a male one. Since then there have always been two religious leaders with each her/his own holy office, a female "divine" in Orlais and a male one in Tevinter. They do not acknowledge each other and both regard themselves as the only real representative of the true faith.

In time The Chantry becomes an institution around which society is organized. Each city has its own local Chantry, physically manifested through a building reminiscent of Christian churches. This is where the local religious leader (The Grand Cleric) resides with other clerics, professed monks and nuns and lay brothers and sisters. They share the responsibility for religious services and for charity towards the poor and needy. The local chantries also serve as libraries and archives and are vital to society in producing and storing knowledge.

The Chantry is responsible for controlling mages, i.e. practitioners of magic. Magic is not dangerous as long as it is controlled by men and elves and is practiced by them for good purposes. It is well known, though, that individual mages can go too far by mobilizing

supernatural forces that are potentially dangerous. In order to keep all mages in Thedas under control, The Chantry has developed a designated police force, The Order of the Templars. The templars are raised in The Chantry where they develop the spiritual and the physical strength that will enable them to trace, hunt down and neutralize dangerous mages.

This pattern is so clearly chiseled that no ambiguity arises. The Chantry is obviously modeled on the Christian church during Antiquity and the Middle Ages. One recognizes the emperor (Constantine the Great) who declares Christianity established religion in the Roman empire. One also recognizes the subsequent schism between the western (Roman Catholic) and the eastern (Greek Orthodox) church, caused by disagreements in questions of doctrine. One similarly recognizes the development of the Roman Catholic Church into a political force and cultural institution in western Europe. Here we have the foreign crusades and the home mission as well as monasticism and the inquisition.

The pattern is reinforced by the occurrence of words and concepts associated with the catholic church, especially in the Middle ages. These are technical terms and concepts fetched from theology in general and church history in particular. I give some examples here, and words specifically mentioned are printed in italics, while concepts rendered through circumlocutions are printed in normal characters: *commandment, temptation, sin, repentance, penitence* and *grace; blessing* (benediction)*, sermon* and Eucharist; *Creation, the Creator*, fallen angels, the Devil, Christ and Mary; *vision, demonic possession,* heresy, *apostate,* inquisition, crusade and *home mission*; *piety* and *orthodox*; *cathedral,* church, *cloister* and *reliquary*; *initiate* [monks and nuns], *lay* [brothers and] *sisters*; diocese, bishop, synod, *cleric* and *rectory*; miracle, invocation of the Devil and exorcism.

Especially striking are the five commandments which the Maker has ordained all men to observe. In analogy to the ten commandments presented by Yahweh to Moses on Mount Sinai, five commandments have been articulated for mankind by the prophetess Andraste in The Chant of Light. They can be paraphrased as follows: Do not believe in any other God than me, Do not misuse magic, Do not kill, Do not bear false witness, and Do not steal. The second commandment can be interpreted as an injunction not to misuse superhuman forces (i.e., take God's name in vain) and these five commandments are obviously copied from the Christian ones. Another striking detail is the mention of five sins which are personified by five demons: "desire", "hunger", "rage", "pride" and "sloth". They can be compared to the deadly sins of the medieval church, seven in number and of which five correspond to the ones in DAO: *luxuria* (fornication), *gula* (gluttony), *ira* (ire), *superbia* (pride) and *acedia* (accidie).[4]

Associations

The process is expedited by words and expressions that create associations, and of course this goes for the visual and musical elements as well. The game's dependence on Peter Jackson's cinematic interpretation of The Lord of the Rings is more than obvious, and this choice is probably the main tool for leading the player's thoughts to the Middle Ages. I would intuitively say that associations are awakened by the visual, musical and textual elements in equal measure. The extent to which the player forms associations with the film and the extent to which the film has medieval connotations for the player will be the extent to which medieval connotations are transferred to the game. The game borrows, so to speak, the film's inherent capacity for creating associations with the Middle Ages.

But, in addition, the texts contain a conspicuous amount of words and expressions whose main purpose is to create associations. Certain types of proper nouns can be given as examples. The most commonly occurring category consists of personal and geographical names that have Celtic or Anglo-Saxon origin *or* remind you of Celtic/Anglo-Saxon names through their phonology:

for instance the personal names Morrigan, Teagan, Alistair, Connor, Duncan, Eamon, Flemeth, Rendon, Loghain, Gwynlian, Heather, Aeducan, Theirin, Cauthrien, Guerrin, Berwick, Sinclair, Calenhad,

or the geographical names Ayesleigh, Cumberland, Denerim, Yonoch, Rainesfere.

Another group of personal names expands the reader's horizon to encompass the Norse sphere:

for instance Kolgrim, Haftir, Sten, Eirik, Thorval, Havard.

Another category creates associations with the Middle ages because they are perceived as Latin or Latinate or because they are Latinized forms of a name with some other origin:

Maleus, Genitivi, Greagoir, Leliana, Valendrian, Celene, Benedictus, Amara, Rica, Dane, Petrine, Florian, David of Quarinus, Josephus, Mareno, Renata, Justinia, Wensilius, Tyrenus, Rhonus, Gravid.

One category leads the reader's thoughts in direction of the French and German language areas, especially to characters in vernacular literature:

for instance the personal names Isolde, Anora, Henric, Wilhelm Sulzbacher, Uccam, François Maigny, Aveline, Gaston Gerrault, Herren, Bader, Ramos of Guilherme, Halden, Vheren, Remi Vascal, Serain,

or the geographical names Hossberg and Tantervale.

Some names of places and peoples play on phonological resemblance to real names, known from European history:

for instance Alamarri [Alamanni], Nevarra [Navarra], Orlais [Orléans].

Some common nouns activate the player's latent vocabulary, for instance:

archon (title of the ruler in Tevinter), a Latinized form of the Greek word for 'ruler',

magister, the Latin word for 'teacher',

divina, feminine form of the Latin adjective *divinus*, 'divine'.

An especially learned instance of this form of play on words is the way auctor has used the title of one of the most well-known medieval books, "Malleus maleficarum". This is the title of a treatise on the art of detecting and interrogating witches, written by two Dominican officers of the inquisition in the fifteenth century, [Jacob Sprenger](#) and [Heinrich Kramer](#). *Malleus maleficarum* means 'witch hammer'. The first word, *malleus* 'hammer', has obviously served as inspiration for the name of the banished senior enchanter Maleus as well as being almost homophonous with the Latin word for evil, *malus. Maleficarum* is genitive plural of *malefica* 'witch' and through a conscious or unconscious, incorrect segmentation of this word *maleficar* has become the term for a malevolent mage, a so-called blood-mage in DAO (with the plural form *maleficarum*).

This technique accelerates and reinforces the mapping of causal and temporal patterns from the story world on to our medieval history. The stylistic device is used frequently in Codex, above all in the dispersed fragments of a lost literature.

Religion and magic

Magic is the term used by auctor to denote a phenomenon which is a prominent factor in both the plot and the playing. According to the Oxford English Reference Dictionary (1996) *magic* is "a) the supposed art of influencing the course of events by the occult control of nature or of the spirits; b) witchcraft." The first definition applies to that which is called *magic* in DAO, with the exception of the requisite "supposed", since the art is presented as real in the fictional world. Several humans and elves possess this power. It gives the power to harm and kill as well as to invigorate and heal. This personal quality is optional for the player character and inherent in two of the companions. If used properly, magic is a powerful tool in the hands of the player and the part it plays in the fictitious world of Thedas is worth a comment.

This type of magic is recurrent in computer games with plots situated in an environment that is perceived or reported as medieval. It has been argued, that the "medieval" magic in these games is a counterpart to modern technology (e.g. Stern 2002). The implication might be, that medieval technology was so primitive that, represented realistically, it would not satisfy the modern player. Therefore, magic is introduced. The presence of magic would thus have extradiegetic causes.

Nevertheless, in DAO magic can be seen as diegetic and as an integrated part of the pattern we give meaning to by mapping it on to the medieval church. From the fourteenth century on the church was more or less possessed by its problem with heresy and heretics. In my opinion the game contains a depiction of this and it is possible to interpret the occurrence of magic within this story frame. I do not mean that the magic can be equated with heresy; rather, the magic represents something which the church often labeled as heresy, that is, the result of the mental power residing in some people.

One of the clergy's raisons d'être during the Middle Ages was the fact that they, thanks to their education, possessed the knowledge that enabled them to correctly interpret the key to all true knowledge, i.e., Holy Scripture. As a consequence, the church took the view that lay interpretations were potentially dangerous and more than often actually heterodox. By insisting on interpretations that went against the experts', i.e. the clergy's, some individuals exposed themselves to accusations of heresy and this was tantamount to putting your life in danger. Nonetheless, there were many people in medieval Europe who took the liberty to independently formulate knowledge of God and divine matters. Some of these people gained their knowledge in the form that is known as revelations or visions.

To receive a revelation meant to receive knowledge that was not communicated through language. It meant to communicate directly with God, to receive knowledge which was not structured in words at the moment of revelation. Many visionaries made attempts to describe the experience without finding adequate words. It is evident that both visual and auditive sensations could be part of it, but also that sensory impressions could be totally absent. On gets the impression that describing a revelation was just as difficult as expressing a dream. Once received though, it was the visionary's task to recode the message so that it became comprehensible for others. Putting revelations into writing meant to put into words what really could not be expressed verbally.

Revelations were often noted down or dictated to a scribe in the vernacular for later translation into Latin. They were rapidly copied and disseminated, preferably in the vernacular versions, in order to be read by laymen and clergy as edifying literature. Excerpts and abbreviated versions were often incorporated into sermons and historical literature. (Dinzelbacher 1981; Genicot & Dinzelbacher1991).

The last decades have seen a growing scholarly interest in revelations. Theology has taken an interest in the phenomemological and psychological dimensions. Dogmatic matters and ecclesiastical history have also been investigated. Visionaries who received a divinely inspired understanding of God, Christ och Creation and who disseminated this understanding, be it in speech or in writing, quickly came to the attention of ecclesiastical authorities. Their texts and/or sermons were examined with regard to dogmatic content and their compatibility with official church dogmata. If the result was negative the texts and the visionary were pronounced heretic. The penalty was often death.

Medieval visionaries were seen as in possession of extraordinary mental powers. Miracles were ascribed to many of them, as well as being the objects of inexplicable physiological phenomena. The could be stigmatized, fall into lengthy unconsciousness or be unnaturally lean and ascetic[5]. They were usually assumed to be born with this power, which is reflected in their biographies. With practically no exception the visionary was reported to have had revelations and supernatural experiences in early childhood.

Visionaries who were deemed orthodox served as inspiration concerning piety and faith for both lay people and clergy; in such cases the extraordinary mental power was regarded as positive and constructive. However, if the visionary transgressed the limits of dogmatic orthodoxy, she/he was suspected of being inspired by the Devil and therefore had to be checked, possibly even executed, in order to prevent the mental power from becoming destructive to the environment.

In DAO The Chantry as a social institution is tasked with detecting children with innate magical capacity and raising them under near monastic conditions. It is also obliged to control all adult mages. Approved mages live in closed communities called *circles,* where

they are under the supervision of the templars. Mages who evade supervision are called *apostates* and are regarded as potentially dangerous. Mages who mobilize too strong a power and use it in a way deemed as dangerous for society are called *blood-mages* and are regarded as even more dangerous. Apostates and blood-mages alike can be hunted down and neutralized by The Chantry's own police force, the templars. Being "neutralized" means to be executed or robbed of all magic power through a special ritual which also robs the individual of all emotions. It is therefore obvious that magic power is a part of the individual's psyche.

If *magic* in DAO were interpreted as symbolic of *technology*, it would entail viewing religion and magic as quite distinct in the game world. It would also mean that The Chantry (i.e. the church) fears technology and fights it. Several texts in the Codex show that this is not so. In the Codex, two peoples are said to have an advanced technology: the dwarves and the Qunari, as opposed to humans and elves. Both the dwarves and the Qunari lack religion and all magic power. Religion *and* magic is something which humans and elves possess.

Concerning warfare between humans and the Qunari, a Codex entry says:

> The greatest advantage of the Chantry-led forces was the Circle of Magi. For all their technology, the Qunari appeared to harbor great hatred for magic. (Codex entry *Par Vollen: The Occupied North*)

Concerning the dwarves we are informed that 1) they have no gods; 2) they are never born with magic powers; and 3) they have an advanced technology. Thus, we see that the two concepts *magic* and *technology* occur in the same context in the game world and are therefore not interchangeable with each other.

The next question is: can *magic* and *religion* be seen as antitheses of each other? Can we equate the practice of magic with paganism within a medieval context? Some texts in the Codex indicate that the answer is no.

> Such was the power of the Maker's word that the young King Drakon [in Orlais] undertook a series of exalted Marches meant to unite the city-states and create an empire solely dedicated to the Maker's will. The Orlesian Empire became the seat of the Chantry's power, the Grand Cathedral in Val Royeaux the source of the movement that birthed the organized Chantry as we know it today. Drakon, by then Emperor Drakon I, created the Circle of Magi, the Order of Templars and the holy office of the Divine. (Codex entry *The History of the Chantry: Chapter 4*)

Here we see that emperor Drakon, who is credited with organizing religious worship in the new, monotheistic religion, drew up a plan which in one sweep regulated activities within The Chantry, the mages' circle and the templars, i.e. all socially sanctioned religious activities. It was an overall solution. One of the five commandments, which is repeated by different characters now and then, is:

> Magic exists to serve man and never to rule over him. (Codex entry *The Commandments of the Maker*)

Magic is perceived as an asset when practiced correctly and is not necessarily something evil. This is borne about, among other things, by the fact that mages in each local chantry are entrusted with lighting and kindling the eternal flame that burns in each brazier there – with their magic. (Codex entry *History of the Circle*)

The Chantry opposes the undesired use of the magic power which is innate in some individuals and an integrated part of that individual's psyche. The conflict between the

Chantry and certain mages creates a pattern that can be mapped on to the conflict between the medieval church and heretic visionaries. The visionaries were embodied in the church and religious worship until they were declared heretic by religious authorities and consequently expelled, and mages in DAO are embodied in religious worship until they are labeled as apostates or blood-mages by religious authorities in Ferelden. In the medieval church orthodox revelations were a gift to the faithful and were not opposed to the dogmata of organized religion. In DAO a moderate and controlled use of magic is a gift to humans and elves and is not opposed to organized religion. The game's use of the conflict between The Chantry and certain mages on one hand, and our picture of the conflict between the medieval church and certain visionaries on the other, can be interpreted as two different ways of dealing with the same subject: man's desire for supernatural mental powers and her/his fear of them.

Conclusions

I have argued that DAO can be given a meaning over and above the goal, i.e. success, through the texts that are regularly offered to the player for contemplation during the game. The game can be said to have a facultative depth. The technology used to achieve this – making a fictional literature accessible for the player as the game progresses – is not exclusive to DAO and can be used by other game designers.

Meaning is created when the player perceives a causal and temporal pattern in the game world that bears enough similarity to the patterns through which we have structured our perception of our own history. The "real" historical patterns that emerge through the game are fetched from different parts of our western medieval history. Recognizing our own Middle Ages in the game world intensifies the playing experience, possibly the most each time the player has to make an ethically difficult choice. Recognition is precipitated and reinforced when auctor

activates the player's capacity to create associations. In this paper I have demonstrated the importance of language to achieve this effect.

Viewing these patterns through the framework of *schema* theory and *collective* memory, I have also argued that it is not necessary to have an active knowledge of history nor to be conscious of one's own perception of the Middle Ages to gain access to this deeper meaning. The interpretation comes – sooner or later – to every player who is raised in and lives with our collective memory.

The literary technique used in DAO is an example of how a computer game can be given a meaning that is not superficial, and the technology for it is available to any designer who wishes to create a meaningful game.

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Endnotes

[1] According to the Codex, the dwarves have no religion, i.e. their faith is non-faith.

[2] There is a tale from Orlais about the female warrior Aveline, who concealed her true sex by wearing armor, which can be interpreted as a reference to Joan of Arc.

[3] This has no counterpart in Peter Jackson's film, which contributes to establishing the game's independence towards it.

[4] The two remaining mortal sins are *invidia* (envy) and *avaritia* (greed).

[5] For examples, see Bell 1985.