DEAR ESTHER

Game Critique

Gui Thomas Pereira
BACKGROUND

• First Person
• Developed by Chinese Room for PC, Mac, Linux.
• Originally a mod for the Source engine in 2008, then full game in 2012.
• Released for PS4 and XO1 in 2016.
SYNOPSIS

• Island in the Hebrides.

• Narrator tells a story as you walk around the island.

• Find out about Esther, who is presumed to be the narrator’s wife/girlfriend/SO, and about her accident.
GAMEPLAY
GAME?

• No conflict
• Virtually no decision making
• Virtually no interaction
GAME’S PURPOSE

• Initially done as a research project at the University of Portsmouth.

• Professor Dan Pinchbeck wrote the story and script, was “really interested in moving towards a quite *image-heavy, symbolic, poetic use of language* rather than the normal descriptive tone we find in games.”

• Basically an “interactive” story.
NARRATIVE

• Narration is the main mechanism in the game.
• Cohesive game, with environment and music matching the mysterious, if sometimes morbid and creepy narration.
MESSAGE

• Unclear message. Many possible interpretations.

• Narrative is not ineffective, muddiness is intentional.
POTENTIAL SPOILERS
MY INTERPRETATION

• The character controlled by the player is Esther, in some sort of dream/hallucination.

• She is in the hospital following her car accident.

• Her husband is talking to her by her bedside.
ENDING

• Inconclusive ending
• Different from any game I have played
• Allows the player time to think about the experience