**Title of Workshop:** “You can’t do that to a[n] (Early) Modern Woman”: Problems and Potentials of Contemporary Representations of 16th– and 17th–Century Women.

**Summary:**
This workshop is designed to explore how modern representations of the 16th and 17th century – through media such as print, stage, film, television, and video games – help shape and reshape our conceptions of early modern women. By examining texts that focus on early modern England, the Americas, and the European continent, we seek to understand the ways in which the early modern period and our current era speak to each other across cultural and temporal lines. We are particularly interested in representations that attempt to reimagine early modern women according to modern conceptions of female agency and desirability. To these ends, the workshop is organized around three primary questions:

- How have early modern women in these representations been reshaped or reimagined by modern popular culture?
- In what ways are such reshapings problematic, or potentially liberating?
- What do these representations reveal about our own society (for example, what anxieties do such representations emphasize)?

To help frame these questions, we have chosen two short texts on Neomedievalism that, while not focused on the early modern period, provide a structure for examining popular modern representations of historical eras.

**Mini-assignment:**
In order to facilitate discussion, we ask that you provide the group (by email) a response to one of the listed texts at least two weeks prior to the seminar. The response should offer 1-2 paragraphs of analysis that take up a question pertaining to the seminar. In these brief responses, we also invite you to draw connections between your chosen text and any additional early modern texts or phenomena that seem germane. In addition, we ask that you read all of the short responses submitted by your fellow workshop participants prior to attending the conference.

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**Readings:**

Featured Texts (Excerpts/Clips below)

**Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End**
Set in the early– to mid–1700s, this fictional film series follows the adventures of Captain Jack Sparrow, William Turner, and Elizabeth Swann as they fight against other pirates, the East India Trading Company, and Davy Jones. In the third film of the series (*At World's End*), the three main characters face the looming extinction of pirates as the world around them is mapped out and brought under the control of various authorities. To meet this challenge, Elizabeth Swann adopts the role of "Pirate King."

**Assassin's Creed: Liberation**
Set in the mid–1700s, this spin-off game from the *Assassin's Creed* series follows Aveline de Grandpré, a fictional African-French Assassin in New Orleans. As the mixed-race daughter of a wealthy aristocrat, Aveline has the ability to take on various "personas" in the game to accomplish different ends. These include not only her
"assassin" persona, but also the "Lady" persona (which she can use to charm those around her and gain access to certain locations) and the "slave" persona (which she can use to gain access to other locations and travel more inconspicuously). *Liberation* is the only game in the series, thus far, that contains this "persona" mechanism.

**The Borgias**

Television series (Showtime) that loosely follows the lives of the Borgia family in early 16th-century Italy. The clip below portrays Lucrezia Borgia's first encounter with a new stable boy.

**Julie Taymor's *The Tempest***

Taymor adapts Shakespeare's play by recasting the powerful main character as a woman (Prospera) instead of a man (Prospero).

**Kate Beaton's *Hark, A Vagrant* Comics**

Beaton uses her comics to irreverently poke fun at history. Included below are her comic strips focusing on Elizabeth I.

**Game of Thrones**

This fictional series, based on the novels by George R.R. Martin follows the exploits of members of the Stark family, who try desperately (and sometimes fail) to survive in the Medieval/Renaissance-esque world of Westeros. The clip included below features a battle between Ser Loras, one of the realm's knights, and Brienne -- a young woman who has actively taken on the role of a knight.

**Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl***

Gregory's novel provides a (fictional) account of that "other" Boleyn girl, Mary Boleyn, and her encounters with the King and the court in the early 1500s.

**Video/Film Clips**

- Julie Taymor's *The Tempest* Official Trailer
- *The Borgias* (Clip from Season 1, episode 5)
- King Elizabeth's Speech (*Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*): "Hoist the Colors"
- *Assassin's Creed: Liberation* Trailer
- *Game of Thrones* (Brienne vs. Ser Loras)
Examples of Kate Beaton’s Comics

BIGGER RUFFS FOR
EVERYONE

THIS WEEK ON
SEXY
TUDORS
HISTORY BLOWS
UNLESS IT’S SEXY!

MAJESTY, LORD
BURGHLEY IS HERE
TO SEE YOU
SEND HIM IN

MACHIAVELLI, I FEAR OUR
SUSPICIONS OF MARY
HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIATED.
WHAT IS THAT
AND WHERE IS
THAT?

MAJESTY, I’M
NOT VERY
GOOD AT
BEING SEXY

DO NOT
TEST
ME

ELEANOR, YOU
CAN DO
BETTER
THAN THAT

NEXT WEEK
ON
SEXY
TUDORS

ELIZABETH’S
FUTURE WILL
BE MINE!
ELIZABETH I COMICS

WHAT IS THAT RACKET?!?

OUCH! I CAN'T STAND HIM!

Your Majesty! Would be wise to consider such an alliance.

ELIZABETH: Huh... like you care or you know? Cakes?

GUARDS ON YOUR ALLEGIANCE!

I'LL GO TELL HIM I HAVE SOMEONE ELSE.

NAKA. MAKE IT LIKE ANY OTHER.

LATER, ELIZABETH GETS TRICKED INTO APPEARING ON A DATING PROGRAM!

- THE BACHELLETTE!

Piss off!

QUEEN ELIZABETH COMICS

YOU ARE LOOKING VERY MAGNIFICENT!

AND SO - YES THIS IS JUST THE TICKET A MAGNIFICENT!

LET US AWAY TO FIGHT THE RAVENNA!

Huh?

AND THE HANKERING?

CAPTAIN! WHAT ARE THE ENGLISH DOING?

I AM NOT SURE.

DO YOU THINK THEY CAN SEE US?

YEAH, WE ARE VERY FAR AWAY, MAJESTY.

GOOD, I AM EXCITED TO SEE THE SUPPOSED BITCHES OF YOURS!

LATER, ELIZABETH GETS A NEW WHALEBONE HOOPSKIRT

YES, THIS IS JUST THE TICKET. IT'S REALLY NICE!

GET THE QUAKE ON THE ISLAND! QUAKE ON THE QUEEN!
QUEEN BESS
AT TILBURY

MY BELOVED PEOPLE
I KNOW I HAVE THE BODY OF A WEAK AND FEEBLE WOMAN.

AND THE WINGSSPAN OF AN ALBATROSS

BUT I HAVE THE HEART AND STOMACH OF A KING

WELL THIS MAY NOT BE A GREAT THING FOR SPAIN

ELIZABETH WHAT DO YOU LOOK LIKE UNDER ALL THAT MAKEUP?

I’LL SHOW YOU SCUB SCUB SCUB

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOOD ON UNCLE THOMAS DRESS RIGHT NOW?

FIRST PERFORMANCE IS FLAWLESS, THAT IS MY MASTERPIECE

NOT ENOUGH PART JUNES IN THIS ONE

THERE’S A TIGER AND A MERMAID MORE TANTS!
The arrival of the master of the revels to teach us our steps for the dance was the signal for a savage battle fought with smiles and the sweetest words as to who would play which role in the masque. In the end the queen herself intervened and gave us our parts without allowing any discussion. She gave me the role of Kindness, the king’s sister Queen Mary got the plum part of Beauty, Jane Parker was Constancy—“Well she does cling on so,” Anne whispered to me. Anne herself was Perseverance. “Shows what she thinks of you,” I whispered back. Anne had the grace to giggle.

We were to be attacked by Indian women—in reality the choristers of the royal chapel—before being rescued by the king and his chosen friends. We were warned that the king would be disguised and we should take great care not to penetrate the transparent ruse of a golden mask strapped on a golden head, taller than anyone else in the room.

It was a great romp in the end, far more fun than I had expected, much more of a play-fight than a dance. George flung rose petals at me and I drenched him with a shower of rosewater. The choristers were just little boys and they got overexcited and attacked the knights and were swung off their feet and spun around and dumped, dizzy and giggly, on the ground. When we ladies came out from the castle and danced with the mystery knights it was the tallest knight who came to dance with me, the king himself, and I, still breathless from my battle with George, and with rose petals in my headdress and my hair, and sugared fruit tumbling out of the folds of my gown, found that I was laughing and giving my hand to him, and dancing with him as if he were an ordinary man and I little more than a kitchen maid at a country romp.

When the signal for the unmasking should have come the king cried out: “Play on! Let’s dance some more!” and instead
of turning and taking another partner he led me out again, a
country dance when we went hand to hand and I could see his
eyes gleaming at me through the slits in his golden mask. Reck-
less and laughing, I smiled back up at him and let that sunny
approbation sink into my skin.

“I envy your husband when your dress comes off tonight, you
will shower him with sweets,” he said in an undertone when the
dance brought us side by side as we watched another couple in
the center of the ring.

I could not think of a witty reply, these were not the formal
compliments of courtly love. The image of a husband being
showered with sweets was too domestic, and too erotic.

“Surely you should envy nothing,” I said. “Surely everything
is all yours.”

“Why would that be?” he asked.

“Because you are king,” I started, forgetting that he was sup-
posed to be in impenetrable disguise. “King of Chateau Vert,” I
recovered. “King for a day. It should be King Henry who envies
you, for you have won a great siege in one afternoon.”

“And what d’you think of King Henry?”

I looked up at him, my innocent look. “He is the greatest
king that this country has ever known. It is an honor to be at
his court and a privilege to be near him.”

“Could you love him as a man?”

I looked down and blushed. “I would not dare to think of it.
He has never so much as glanced toward me.”

“Oh he has glanced,” the king said firmly. “You can be sure of
that. And if he glanced more than once, Miss Kindness, would
you be true to your name and be kind to him?”

“Your . . .” I bit my lip and stopped myself saying: “Your
Majesty.” I looked around for Anne; more than anything, I
wanted her by my side and her wits at my service.

“You are named Kindness,” he reminded me.

I smiled at him, peeping up through my golden mask. “I
am,” I said. “And I suppose I should have to be kind.”

The musicians finished the dance and waited, poised for
the king’s orders. “Unmask!” he said and tore his own mask off his face. I saw the king of England, gave a wonderful little gasp and staggered.

“She’s fainting!” George cried out, it was beautifully done. I fell into the king’s arms as Anne, fast as a snake, unpinned my mask, and—brilliantly—pulled off my headdress so that my golden hair tumbled down like a stream over the king’s arm.

I opened my eyes, his face was very close. I could smell the perfume on his hair, his breath was on my cheek, I watched his lips, he was close enough to kiss me.

“You have to be kind to me,” he reminded me.
“You are the king . . .” I said incredulously.
“And you have promised to be kind to me.”
“I didn’t know it was you, Your Majesty.”

He lifted me gently and carried me over to the window. He opened it himself and the cold air blew in. I tossed my head and let my hair ripple in the draught.

“Did you faint for fright?” he asked, his voice very low.
I looked down at my hands. “For delight,” I whispered, as sweet as a virgin in confession.

He bent his head and kissed my hands and then rose to his feet. “And now we dine!” he called out.

I looked over to Anne. She was untying her mask and watching me with a long calculating look, the Boleyn look, the Howard look that says: what has happened here, and how may I turn it to my advantage? It was as if under her golden mask was another beautiful mask of skin, and only beneath that was the real woman. As I looked back at her she gave me a small secret smile.

The king gave his arm to the queen, she rose from her chair as gay as if she had been enjoying watching her husband flirt with me; but as he turned to lead her away she paused and her blue eyes looked long and hard at me, as if she were saying goodbye to a friend.

“I hope you will soon recover from your faintness, Mistress Carey,” she said gently. “Perhaps you should go to your room.”
"I think she is light-headed from lack of food," George interposed quickly. "May I bring her in to dine?"

Anne stepped forward. "The king frightened her when he unmasked. No one guessed for a moment that it was you, Your Majesty!"

The king laughed in delight, and the court laughed with him. Only the queen heard how the three of us had turned her order so that despite her declared wishes, I would be brought in to dine. She measured the strength of the three of us. I was no Bessie Blount, who was next to nobody; I was a Boleyn, and the Boleyns worked together.

"Come and dine with us then, Mary," she said. The words were inviting but there was no warmth in them at all.
Another Excerpt from Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*

“You lost him,” Uncle Howard said accusingly. He looked down the long wooden dining table in the great hall at Eltham Palace. Our retainers stood on guard at the doors behind us, there was no one in the hall but a couple of wolfhounds and a boy asleep in the ashes of the fire. Our men in Howard livery stood at the doors at the far end. The palace, the king's own palace, had been made secure for the Howards so that we could plot in private.

“You had him in your hand and you lost him. What did you do wrong?”

I shook my head. It was too secret to spill on the unyielding surface of the high table, to offer up to flint-faced Uncle Howard.

“I want an answer,” he said. “You lost him. He hasn’t looked at you for a week. What have you done wrong?”

“Nothing,” I whispered.

“You must have done something. At the jousting he had your kerchief under his breastplate. You must have done something to upset him after that.”

I shot a reproachful look at my brother George: the only person who could have told Uncle Howard about my scarf. He shrugged and made an apologetic face.

“The king dropped it and his page gave my scarf to Queen Mary,” I said, my throat tight with nervousness and distress.

“So?” my father said sharply.

“She gave it to the queen. The queen returned it to me.” I looked from one stern face to another. “They all knew what it meant,” I said despairingly. “When we rode home I told him that I was unhappy at him letting my favor be found.”

Uncle Howard exhaled, my father slapped the table. My mother turned her head away as if she could hardly bear to look at me.

“For God’s sake,” Uncle Howard glared at my mother. “You assured me that she had been properly brought up. Half her life spent in the French court and she whines at him as if she were a shepherd girl behind a haystack?”

“How could you?” my mother asked simply.
I flushed and dropped my head until I could see the reflection of my own unhappy face in the polished surface of the table. “I didn’t mean to say the wrong thing,” I whispered. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s not that bad,” George interceded. “You’re taking too dark a view. He won’t stay angry for long.”

“He sulks like a bear,” my uncle snapped. “Don’t you think there are Seymour girls dancing for him at this very moment?”

“None as pretty as Mary,” my brother maintained. “He’ll forget that she ever said a word out of place. He might even like her for it. It shows she’s not overly groomed. It shows there’s a bit of passion there.”

My father nodded, a little consoled, but my uncle drummed the table with his long fingers. “What should we do?”

“Take her away.” Anne spoke suddenly. She drew attention at once in the way that a late speaker always does, but the confidence in her voice was riveting.

“Away?” he asked.

“Yes. Send her down to Hever. Tell him she’s ill. Let him imagine her dying of grief.”

“And then?”

“And then he’ll want her back. She’ll be able to command what she likes. All she has to do—” Anne gleamed her spiteful little smile “—All she has to do when she returns is to behave so well that she enchants the most educated, the most witty, the most handsome prince in Christendom. D’you think she can do it?”

There was a cold silence while my mother and my father and my Uncle Howard and even George all inspected me in silence.

“Neither do I,” Anne said smugly. “But I can coach her well enough to get her into his bed, and whatever happens to her after that is in the hands of God.”

Uncle Howard looked intently at Anne. “Can you coach her in how to keep him?” he asked.

She raised her head and smiled at him, the very picture of
confidence. “Of course, for a while,” she said. “He’s only a man after all.”

Uncle Howard laughed shortly at the casual dismissal of his sex. “You have a care,” he urged. “We men are not where we are today because of some sort of accident. We chose to get into the great places of power, despite the desires of women; and we chose to use those places to make laws which will hold us there forever.”

“True enough,” Anne granted. “But we’re not talking of high policy. We’re talking of catching the king’s desire. She just has to catch him and hold him for long enough for him to make a son on her, a royal Howard bastard. What more could we ask?”

“And she can do that?”

“She can learn,” Anne said. “She’s halfway there. She is his choice, after all.” The little shrug she gave indicated that she did not think much of the king’s choice.

There was a silence. Uncle Howard’s attention had moved from me and my future as the brood mare for the family. Instead he was looking at Anne as if he had seen her for the first time. “Not many maids of your age think as clearly as you.”

She smiled at him. “I’m a Howard like you.”

“I’m surprised you don’t try for him yourself.”

“I thought of it,” she said honestly. “Any woman in England today would be bound to think of it.”

“But?” he prompted her.

“I’m a Howard,” she repeated. “What matters is that one of us catches the king. It hardly matters which one. If his taste is for Mary and she has his acknowledged son then my family becomes the first in the kingdom. Without rival. And we can do it. We can manage the king.”

Uncle Howard nodded. He knew that the king’s conscience was a domesticated beast, given to easy herding but prone to sudden stubborn stops. “It seems we have to thank you,” he said. “You have planned our strategy.”

She acknowledged his thanks, not with a bow, which would have been graceful. Instead, she turned her head like a flower on
the stem, a typically arrogant gesture. “Of course I long to see my sister as the king’s favorite. These things are my business quite as much as yours.”

He shook his head as my mother made a shushing noise at her overly confident eldest daughter. “No, let her speak,” he said. “She’s as sharp as any of us. And I think she’s right. Mary must go to Hever and wait for the king to send for her.”

“He’ll send,” Anne said knowledgeably. “He’ll send.”

I felt like a parcel, like the curtains for a bed, or the plates for the top table, or the pewter for the lower tables in the hall. I was to be packed up and sent to Hever as bait for the king. I was not to see him before I left, I was not to speak to anyone about my going. My mother told the queen that I was overtired and asked for me to be excused from her service for a few days so that I might go home and rest. The queen, poor lady, thought that she had triumphed. She thought that the Boleyns were in retreat.
Baphomet Incorporated:
A Case Study in Neomediaevalism

Harry Brown

Recently Studies in Medievalism (SiM) has dedicated itself not only to reassessing the meaning of medievalism but also to defining the emergent field of neomediaevalism. In their effort to distinguish neomediaevalism as a new mode of expression qualitatively distinct from previous medievalisms, Carol Robinson and Pamela Clements, along with several of the contributors to SiM 19, have identified what they find to be the most salient features of neomediaevalism. Most significantly, they argue, neomediaevalism severs itself from history, often with conscious irony and anachronism, producing works refracted through the lenses of previous medievalisms rather than rooted in a real sense of the Middle Ages. These works foster the commodification and mass consumption of the past rather than the earnest attempt to recover and understand it. Moreover, while neomediaevalism gestures to multicultural awareness, it sometimes presents a narrow and culturally homogeneous interpretation of the medieval. Finally, while digital technology does not by itself define neomediaevalism, it provides an ideal environment to nurture works that are frequently intertextual, fluid, and collaborative.1

On one level, the attempt to distinguish neomediaevalism from its “parent,” as Robinson and Clements say, is a semantic exercise that betrays an anxiety of influence:2 We misconstrue nothing by admitting simply that neomediaevalism is medievalism adapted to the postmodern moment. As Amy S. Kaufman sensibly concludes, “While medievalism can exist perfectly independently at any point in time, neomediaevalism despite its seeming ahistoricity, is historically contingent upon both medievalism itself and the postmodern condition. [...] Despite its desire to erase time, neomediaevalism is situated in time: it just happens to be our time.”3 We do not need to disown medievalism in order to legitimate neomediaevalism.

Nevertheless, the vigor of discussion in the pages of SiM and on the
panels of professional conferences suggests that we do need a new theoretical
template, and perhaps a new term, to account for the new ways that con-
temporary culture has appropriated the medieval without quite comprehending
(or wanting to comprehend) the Middle Ages, particularly in films and
games. The appropriation of the medieval by Antoine Fuqua’s film *King
Arthur* (2004) or by the online video game *World of Warcraft*, with its nearly
twelve-million subscribers, signals a cultural phenomenon more complex
than pure “anarchy” or the mere “dumbing down” of the high medievalism
practiced by J. R. R. Tolkien and T. H. White.4
(Re)producing (Neo)medievalism

KellyAnn Fitzpatrick

If medievalism remains, as Gwendolyn A. Morgan says, “somewhat slippery,” then neomedievalism is outright ephemeral. If a survey of recent scholarship on the topic is any indication, neomedievalism manages all at once to create a “hyperreality” more real than reality itself and to carve out its living in the lucrative and ravenous consumption of mass-produced commodities, yet also floats disembodied above a sea of already constituted academic disciplines waiting to be formed into something solid and publishable/enpublishable.

This ephemerality is perhaps most evident in the contradicting conclusions that recent scholarship has forwarded in regards to the relationship of neomedievalism to medievalism proper. In “Living with Neomedievalism” Carol L. Robinson and Pamela Clements locate their concept of neomedievalism among contrasting tropes such as postmodernism and fantasy, and inevitably produce part of their definition in relation to medievalism. They write:

Unlike in postmodernism, however, neomedievalism does not look to the Middle Ages to use, to study, to copy, or even to learn; the perception of the Middle Ages is more filtered, perceptions of perceptions (and of distortions), done without a concern for facts of reality, such as the fact that The Knights Who Say "Ni" never existed. This lack of concern for historical accuracy, however, is not the same as that held in more traditional fantasy works: the difference is a degree of self-awareness and self-reflexivity. Nor is it the same as what we conceive to be medievalism.

Cory Lowell Grewe, in responding to Robinson and Clements, credits them with hitting upon some useful approaches in defining neomedievalism but disagrees with them “when they assert that neomedievalism is something

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other than medievalism." While M. J. Toswell differentiates the two by means of their object of study,29 Amy S. Kaufman calls neomedievalism a "functional subset" of medievalism and sees medievalism as a necessary precondition of neomedievalism. She writes, "Neomedievalism is one way of doing medievalism, one that requires certain philosophical and technological shifts in order to exist at all. Yet while medievalism can exist perfectly independently at any point in time, neomedievalism despite its seeming ahistoricity, is historically contingent upon both medievalism itself and the postmodern condition."30 In the very same collection of essays where Kaufman firmly anchors neomedievalism to medievalism, Lesley Coote makes the ontological claim that "new-medievalism, by its nature, cannot be fully contained within 'medievalism,' or any other, similar, terminology."

Within the parameters of delineating a relationship between neomedievalism and medievalism, neomedievalism cannot logically hold all of these positions and yet, somehow, it does. Robinson and Clements argue that neomedievalism "lacks nostalgia" and "denies history."31 This is done, however, with a "degree of self-awareness and self-reflexivity," which positions both consumer and producer of the neomedia in the necessary position of knowing enough history and/or historiography to knowingly deny it. To do otherwise would defeat the point, but we are then faced with a concept of neomedievalism that relies on one moment on that very thing it negates in the next. Indeed, in addition to working, as Coote asserts, "always to escape from the parameters that 'ism' impose,"32 neomedievalism invokes a constant state of producing, alternating, and reproducing; it is less a thing than an action. It can position and reposition itself toward away from medievalism proper as the occasion requires. As Lauryn S. Mayer points out, such a perspective on neomedievalism tasks us with reevaluating our entire battle plan when it comes to conceptual development:

If there is one aspect of neomedievalism that critics can agree upon, it is that it resists any easy definition, and the problem may lie in the questions we are asking. To ask "what is neomedievalism?" or even "what are neomedievalisms?" is to treat a continuously unfolding and changing phenomenon as if it were a finished and static entity; any answer given will by default be "a slight fabrication."33

To borrow from the title of an aptly named Medieval Electronic Media Organization anthology, the neomedia is always "in motion":34 by the time we look at where and what it is, it has already moved on to something and somewhere new. To my mind, the wisest course of action in responding to this tangential nature of neomedievalism is to take Mayer's advice and
“(Re)producing (Neo)medievalism”

"worry less about what, precisely, it is and to spend more time thinking about what it does and why it does it." The remainder of this essay demonstrates some of the ways neomedievalism is contingent on and participatory in a constant production and reproducing, assembly and reassembling; it then takes Mayer's advice as a starting point for an articulation of neomedieval praxis.\(^\text{15}\)

As a number of scholars have noted, recent media forms taken by neomedieval texts have contributed to the "dissolution" of individual authorship in favor of the creation of narratives and narrative experiences through collaborative participation.\(^\text{14}\) This results in a multiplicity of authors as well as narrative forms that are far more fragile and fleeting than the hard-copy objects of the pre-digital age.\(^\text{15}\) At the same time the texts that take these forms necessitate that their participants shift into positions of production even while they are active consumers, which potentially entails a false sense of empowerment. As Robinson and Clements note:

It suggests a movement from identity of narrative creator(s) through characterization (such as one seeks through the *Getoutin*, *Pearl*, and *Cleanliness* poems) to identities of creators imposed upon the reader/player. The illusion of control seems to be on the end of the player as she develops her character and moves through the narrative structure of the game; however, just as is the case with most Hollywood studio films, the actual control is that of the corporation (the programmers, designers, marketers, ...) that produces the film.\(^\text{16}\)

Part of what a digital game sells is the illusion of control over the game itself, even as one becomes acutely aware of the narrative limitations that even virtual worlds must constitute by virtue of the component of their makeup that is hardline nuts-and-bolts code. Massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as *World of Warcraft* expand these possibilities in two important ways: first, by means of the component of social networking, which, in addition to positioning the player (however deceptively) as author of her own fate, necessitates variations on the gaming experience according to the other players with which she comes into contact; and second, through the commodification of a plethora of virtual objects and potential virtual objects that for some players drive the momentum of the game in more exciting ways than narrative creation or social networking. The intersections of social networking and virtual goods result in the establishment of entire economic systems designed to accommodate these phenomena, which in turn necessitates the creation of virtual currencies, markets, and on-the-job training.
World of Warcraft, like many other virtual worlds such as SecondLife or the social networking game Farmville, maintains its own virtual currency; in the case of World of Warcraft this is gold. While the accumulation of gold is in itself an attraction for some players, for the most part gold is useful in terms of what it can buy. In World of Warcraft this can range from traditional fantasy-action-game fare such as armor and weapons to virtual items that have no foreseeable use or other value in the game but that nevertheless become desirable commodities. The latter may include fashionable clothing, flashy jewelry, or exotic pets, and while Non-Player Character (NPC) vendors sell some trendy items, players also have the choice of visiting an auction house where they can either bid for items they want or sell items they have acquired through questing, production, or other means.

Players have the option of producing some of these virtual commodities, as each player may learn up to two “professions” such as Mining, Tailoring, Blacksmithing, or Jewelcrafting. Just as a traditional action game allows one to “level up” one’s combat abilities, a player can level up her character’s professional ability by extensive and often repetitive practice. As a player becomes more skilled in a profession, she can then craft higher-level goods that in turn can be traded or sold in order to buy other goods, including the raw materials required for further professional crafting. The services of the highest-level craftspeople are often sought out by other players who have not built up such abilities; while such services are often exchanged for gold, many will offer their services for free if a client provides the necessary materials, as this allows the craftsman to build up their professional skill level without having to shell out the gold for raw materials.

The system of professions, then, serves as yet another way that a text such as World of Warcraft allows its players to participate in the process of production. Although these processes result in virtual goods that become the object of interest for some players,17 the participatory nature of these types of production suggests that the virtual act of producing is somehow just as valuable as the resultant products. Indeed, players often have the option of migrating outside of a game in order to purchase auxiliary funds for use within the game. This is made possible by a practice known as “gold-farming” in which the currency within the virtual world of a Massively Multiplayer Online Game is accumulated and then exchanged for “real” currency.18 This practice also extends to the buying and selling of high-level virtual goods, and players can even hire someone in the “real” world to “power-level” their characters, which allows them to outsource and thus skip the often tedious processes by which the game intends them to build up their characters’ abilities. Gold-farming, trading virtual objects, and power-leveling are, however, greatly discouraged by most MMORPG companies. For example, part of World of Warcraft’s Terms of Use agreement expressly forbids these practices:
Blizzard owns, has licensed, or otherwise has rights to all of the content that appears in the Game. You agree that you have no right or title in or to any such content, including without limitation the virtual goods or currency appearing or originating in the Game, or any other attributes associated with the Account or stored on the Service. Blizzard does not recognize any purported transfers of virtual property executed outside of the Game, or the purported sale, gift or trade in the "real world" of anything that appears or originates in the Game. Accordingly, you may not sell in-game items or currency for "real" money, or exchange those items or currency for value outside of the Game.29

Despite these warnings, many players do engage in these activities, and some make a living from them; however, the majority of players are interested not only in the goods themselves but in the process that goes into producing them. Indeed, one could argue that although this is a virtual process in which virtual commodities are produced, it is the virtual production itself that is commodified and then consumed by those who engage with these types of neomedieval texts. The neomedieval, then, may at times produce commodities but is equally capable of commodifying production as well.

This intertwined process of producing and consuming, commodifying and creating, results in a certain romanticizing of the labor process itself. Neomedievalist scholarship may endeavor to be cognizant of the processes of commodification and consumption in which it participates, but at times even we participate in processes of mystification. For example, in speaking of digital-game designers and programmers, Kaufman proposes a link between "programmers, whose own encoded language seems mysterious and inaccessible, and who act as the invisible yet omnipotent force behind a game" and the "magic-wielding characters in the games they create."30 Robinson and Clements have, in response to Kaufman, argued that "it is clear that a strong bond exists between the culture of computers and the culture of medieval fantasy and that culture is conducive to juxtapositions of tropes between both worlds."31

Because the production of MMORPGs relies on skill sets and labor practice that we ourselves are not equipped to perform, it is not surprising that academics in the Humanities would be fascinated by them. With Tolkien as a model of the novelist-scholar, there was always the suspicion that one could, if one wanted, turn one's expertise into a self-aware product that "gets it right" either in its adherence to or laughing departure from some sort of cultural medieval accuracy. Very few of us, however, are comfortable with programming code in any systematic way, and I have come across no indication that the creation of digital worlds will become part of our job

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description on a widespread basis anytime soon. It may be useful, however, to add to our understanding of the collaborative nature of neomedia
texts a more specialized understanding of the process that gives us the initial iteration of text, the raw materials that allow many authors to simultaneously create and consume neomedia narrative.22

As is, our fascination with programmers and our willing conflation of programming code with the magical and mystical reveals our own susceptibility to the neomedia
texts that we study, as well as a willingness to overlook the bottom-line circumstances in which neomedia is continually produced. Rather than feel ashamed of this, I suggest that we take this as a sign that we should investigate not only what neomedia does, but what we could do with it. For example, in addition to examining the history of our inherited disciplinary practices, neomedia as a set of scholarly practices could benefit from more careful self-examination of the width and breadth of practices that constitute not only our field, but those of a wider intellectual community. Indeed, the productive practices that determine the majority of our own labor conditions have been for some time in various states of crisis. For example, the expectation of monograph production has been deemed untenable by those who engage with it strictly as a commodity.23 At the same time, our tenure-and-promotion committees rely on the acceptance of intellectual work as a commodity to make their decisions, and so our livelihoods become based not on the quality of our scholarship but on our ability to successfully engage in commodity production. Perhaps we could, as we boldly barge into virtual worlds and discover new ways of producing texts, consider alternate ways of making them accessible and assessable. As the book itself, and not just the academic monograph, is in crisis, we may wish to reconsider the digital technologies, such as e-book readers, that are displacing it.24 If we can consider the importance of producing virtual loot in virtual worlds, we may also want to consider the effects that virtual books may have on our "real"-life production practices. This includes deciding whether it is the scholarly value of the monograph we value or the commodity, the intellectual labor or the paper and cloth that constitute it.

The constant processes that make up neomedia, then, not only invite us to produce meanings and commodities and narratives but also to critically re-examine our own assumptions about where we belong in this process. When we read a novel, play a digital game, or compose an essay, we produce our texts through ever more complicated patterns of consumption, play, authorship, and scholarship. Some participants catalogue their experience through relatively traditional approaches, such as Bonnie A. Nardi in her anthropological account of her time as a Night Elf Hunter in World of Warcraft.25 Others have used the technologies of neomedia texts to forge
new scholarly communities that operate cooperatively and collaboratively within the virtual worlds they study.26 Still others choose to subvert the authority of the texts they study/produce/consume in an attempt to wrest control back from the corporations that produce them.27 And then there are those who attempt to be as self-reflexive and self-aware as possible when endeavoring to produce scholarship on neomediievalism.

To that end, I must confess that I am fully aware of the irony of producing a definition that claims its own definition is impossible, that pushes to articulate the uses of less-permanent media through the means of a traditional one, and that urges a self-reflexive stance on intellectual production even as it serves as a potential part of the academic hire–tenure–promotion process. I have high hopes, however, that the ephemerality of neomediievalism will somehow let this work. Just as neomediievalism must acknowledge history as a precondition to denying history, I suspect that we can reverse the process; perhaps deny history, and then acknowledge it once more as yet another process of which we can make use. Indeed, the history of mediievalism lends insight into issues of disciplinarity and historicity, and provides us with the example of “menacing mediievalism” and tropes misused to displace the production of something new/neo with nostalgia for the processes of production that, while they have armed us with the insight in the first place, are long outdated. This becomes possible if we realize that neomediievalism must always be more about the denying than the unbroken integrity of the denial, just as its value lies less in the definition than in the act of defining.

NOTES


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5. Toswell, "The Simulacrum of Neomedievalism," 44. Toswell argues there that "The difference between the two terms as they are used in the English-speaking world is that medievalism implies a genuine link — sometimes direct, sometimes somewhat indirect — to the Middle Ages, whereas neomedievalism invokes a simulacrum of the medieval."


12. Mayer, "Dark Matters.", 75.

13. As Lesley Coote notes in "A Short Essay about Neo-Medievalism," "Deconstructing the text is postmodern, but cutting and pasting it to make something new is neo-medieval — and it brings the cut-and-paste surprisingly, dangerously, close to medieval reading practices" (30).


