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Accessing Videogames for Medieval Studies Course Plans: Four Points of Entry

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Abstract

From Crowther and Wood's 1976 Colossal Cave Adventure to the top games of 2024, the virtual worlds of videogames have been commonly set in worlds based loosely or closely on European history and literature dated 500-1500 CE. Modern subjects have long instrumentalized the symbolic vocabulary of medieval history and romance for representing to themselves the embodied, affective experience of inhabiting virtual, mediated environments, which videogames have also taken up as one of their major subjects. Studying this medievalism in videogames does not only provide instructors and students with a way of accessing medieval history, but also with a way of contextualizing the importance of that history in relation to a major twenty-first century expressive form. This essay identifies four points of entry for instructors, including the narrative concept of adventure, the interrelationship between videogame death and the gothic, and the lore recorded in the rogue archives of videogame fandom.

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"Medievalism" in popular culture is a key sign of the ongoing relevance of medieval history to the politics and culture of the present (e.g. Ashton and Kline 2012; Elliott 2017; Hsy 2022; Matthews 2015; Pugh and Weisl 2012; Young and Finn 2022), and in 2025 the most striking example of this relevance is the "medieval" videogame (e.g. Brylowe and Yeager 2021; Kline 2010, 2016; Moberly 2010; Mochocki 2021; Yeager 2019a; Yeager 2025). Since early modern historians first named the third, *media aeva* mediating between classical *antiquitas* and their own *modernitas*, medieval history has provided modern subjects with a symbolic vocabulary for representing to themselves the embodied, affective experience of inhabiting virtual, mediated environments. In the last fifty years, a major artistic medium used for representing such affective experiences has been the videogame (Anable 2018; Jagoda 2020). In this essay, I will offer a set of pedagogical strategies designed to increase access to medieval texts through this important contemporary artistic medium, and briefly survey some points of entry that might be useful to instructors who wish to grapple with the deep, abiding, and counterintuitive relevance of medieval history and literature to the culture of computing. Videogames can be an engaging, affordable, and otherwise highly accessible starting point for bringing medieval studies into conversation with the major cultural and political questions of the twenty-first century.

The "secondary worlds" (Ryan 2022; Wolf 2014) of adventure video games have borrowed freely from the symbolic vocabulary of medieval romance since Crowther and Wood's formative 1976 game Colossal Cave Adventure first developed its own setting from the medieval role-playing game Dungeons & Dragons or "D&D" (Lessard 2013; Montfort 2003). This game is only one late instance of the phenomenon whereby fantastic re-imaginings of European history between approximately 500 and 1500 CE have thoroughly circumscribed fantastic representations of digital realms since those "realms" were first conceptualized. One useful foundation for introducing students to the medievalism of the videogame medium is the work of the scholar Johan Huizinga, whose 1939 book *Homo Ludens* (1949) remains an important touchstone in videogame studies and whose 1919 book *Autumn of the Middle Ages* (1996) is both an important touchstone in twentieth-century medieval studies and a key antecedent for the modern discipline of anthropology (Arnade 2019). There are clear connections between Huizinga's 1919 thesis that fifteenth-century Europeans were seeking "a more beautiful life" in virtual worlds of chivalric fantasy and his later, more general thesis that the construction of virtual worlds within the collaboratively constructed and ritually defined "magic circles" of games is a basic activity of human culture. In her important and pointed engagement with Huizinga "There Is No Magic Circle," Mia Consalvo proceeds from her work on "cheating" in videogames to interrogate the relative fixity of Huizinga's categories, as in fact the magic circle's boundary between a game and the world beyond it is subject to interrogation and redefinition as a given game unfolds (2009).

It is striking, then, that the "immersive" videogames that push so hard against this boundary from the inside should so commonly participate in the same genre of chivalric fantasy that, in Huizinga's telling, circumscribed the experiences of Europe's cultural and political elite on the cusp of the "modern" period. In my points of entry below, I will show how the persistent medievalism of videogame "allegories of control" (Galloway 2006) provides not only a useful way for accessing the study of this emergent and increasingly dominant cultural form, but also of the ways in which the cultural inheritances of the medieval period operate both at the legible level of imagery and symbolic

content and at the affective level of desire, disgust, and social control. Instead of starting with medieval dialects, political histories, and theological debates and then connecting these to students' social worlds, class engagements with medievalism in videogames begin with students' social worlds (wherein their peers play videogames) and then bring in medieval dialects, political histories, and theological debates to interrogate where these lived experiences came from and what they mean. By framing explorations of medieval history and literature as voyages of self-discovery, we both motivate and facilitate the task of accessing the Middle Ages.

Point of Entry #1: Surveying Videogame Studies

There are two major poles in videogame criticism over the last 30 years. The first pole of relatively formalist, humanities-based approaches adapts paradigms from literary and media studies to ask the surprisingly vexed question of what a videogame is and how a critic might best engage with one critically. What precisely might characterize the systematic practice of critiquing a game that differs in some meaningful way from the systematic practice of simply playing it?

Still useful is the so-called "ludology" debate, which provocatively distinguished between this term and "narratology" to distinguish games as starkly as possible from film, literature, and narrative art (Aarseth 2014). Key points of reference include Espen Aarseth's concept of "ergodic" literature (1997), which requires the active participation of the reader relative to more passive forms of consumption, and Ian Bogost's concept of "procedural rhetoric," which is to say the implicit ideological frameworks of game procedures that motivate certain kinds of play, and so certain habits of thought (2007). These concepts provide a starting point for interrogating and critiquing the specific forms of active participation that a given game allows and/or rewards. At the same time, the criticism at this pole tends towards the error Consalvo critiques, of failing to recognize how porous the boundary of a given game's "magic circle" really is (Sicart 2011).

It is useful to focus class discussions of procedural rhetoric on particular game genres; otherwise, the terminology is too abstract. To teach videogame medievalism, I have focused on single-player adventure games, where player "avatars" encounter the interactive elements that populate the game world through the so-called "verbs" available to them, in ways that generate dynamic, "emergent narratives" (Aylett 1999). Both in order to limit costs to the students and to focus discussions of games that can require 50–100 hours to finish a single playthrough, I typically select useful episodes and/or mechanics from the games and then arrange for classes to be held online, so that we can discuss the game as I livestream my own dialogue with a particular NPC or fight with a particular boss or visit to a particular location and so generate a shared emergent narrative can be the starting point for discussion. I solicit student input on my gameplay, I record the session and post it to a class website, and I assign written work that requires students to apply terms and concepts to the events of the recording: the structures of the game, my play style, the unexpected and expected events, the input from other students, our successes and mistakes, our shared and divergent reactions. Though the sessions are admittedly chaotic they are highly engaging, deeply amusing, and produce wonderful, surprising student writing, even—and perhaps especially—when I have been bad at playing the game. If an instructor wished to have students play games themselves but they were concerned about the cost, there are many superb, complex, and culturally relevant games from five, ten, and even twenty years ago that are affordable and available on a wide variety of platforms, including even smartphones.

Of the major vendors at the time of this writing I recommend GOG.com (which grants you full ownership of the game), but there are many options, and it is also worth beginning a conversation with your institution's library if they do not already have a game collection. There are also many games that can be played in a browser for free on the Internet Archive. If you select one of these, I recommend testing them yourself on multiple browsers to make sure that you have identified any bugs before your students encounter them.

Level 1–1 of the medieval fantasy adventure game Super Mario Bros. (Nintendo 1983) is a widely recognizable point of reference for how a game situation can be presented and described.[1] The first screen teaches us Mario's "verbs" immediately: he can walk, run, jump, and move right, with the goal of interacting with game elements that will include power-ups and enemies. Super Mario Bros. also illustrates a common problem for the study of medievalism in videogames: none of these "verbs" relate in any obvious way to the specifically medieval aspects of the game. A game with the same procedural rhetoric could take place in a space station instead of a kingdom; the final enemy could be a robot instead of a dragon; and the objective could be an escape pod instead of a princess. Most of the other points of entry below will return to this question of whether or not a procedural rhetoric can be "medieval," as a productive starting point for classroom discussion. My own view is that the well-known imprecision of the term "medieval" means that it is unreasonable to expect that critics might develop a precise list of specific criteria whereby a game may be called "medieval" before we begin our investigations, though such a list may serve as an interesting goal that classroom discussion could aim towards.

Consalvo's work instantiates the second major pole in game studies, which is the relatively social-science, cultural-studies-based approach to the porous interconnections between professional communities of game developers (who not only work collaboratively in individual game development scenarios but often rely on engines developed and maintained by earlier teams) and the enthusiast communities of game consumers and fans. Scholars who approach games from this perspective commonly explore issues of identity among the communities of developers, fans, and players and in the games themselves (e.g. Gray and Leonard 2018; Phillips 2020; Ruberg 2017; Shaw 2015). There is already a considerable overlap between this avenue of approach and medievalism studies, particularly concerning the representation of fantasy "race" (Galloway 2012; Thomas 2019; Young 2015). "Class" has been less commonly discussed, though of course this term also has identity resonances (Iantorno and Consalvo 2023).

In my own teaching, I have found it both efficacious and efficient to cover the full range of approaches through a "character creation" assignment, where students apply to themselves the descriptions of the six core attributes from a given edition of the D&D Player's Handbook (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma), assign themselves scores in all six categories, and explain both their decisions and the attributes of their self-understanding that the schema leaves out. I suggest they start by trying to remember moments from their lives where it seems that they rolled a successful "check." Did they avoid the cold that afflicted all of their roommates

[1] This reading draws from the analysis by anna anthropy "Level Design Lesson: To the Right, Hold on Tight" from her defunct website, paraphrased by Maklin and Sharp 2016, 91.

because of their high Constitution? Has their high Charisma ever helped them to sell something at work?

In the second section of the assignment, students apply this self-analysis in a brief history of their personal relationship to videogames, focused again on concrete examples that require them to adapt the procedural rhetoric of D&D as a ludic starting point for an autoethnography identifying the forms of procedural rhetoric that resonate with them and why. I have found the self-reflections produced by this prompt to be not only illuminating and delightful windows into the lives of my students, but also useful for helping them identify themes to deploy in their later written assignments. A critic writing about "ergodic literature" must be particularly prepared to recognize the patterns in their own choices and so control for them in their analyses, and the character creation provides students with a good starting point for this task.

Point of Entry #2: Are Adventures Always Medieval?

One adventure role-playing game (RPG) that my students love and so that I would encourage colleagues to consider assigning is Disco Elysium (ZA/UM 2019). (At the time of this writing the game is still at a higher price point, but if you put it on your Wishlist in your chosen game store you will receive notifications when it goes on sale, at discounts that can sometimes be more than 75% off.) A detective game set in a fantastic reimagining of 1970s Eastern Europe, there is not much on the level of symbolic content that marks it as medieval. At the same time, the game's engine is modelled on the Infinity engine used for the D&D games of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the game itself owes an explicitly acknowledged debt to the (similarly acclaimed) D&D game Planescape: Torment (Black Isle Studios 1999; Nelson 2019). A useful way in, then, is to discuss whether or not the medieval qualities of Planescape: Torment carries over into the procedural rhetoric of Disco Elysium through its structural and procedural inheritances.

Progress through both Disco Elysium and Planescape: Torment is mediated by checks on abilities, like those from D&D mentioned in my description of the "character creation" assignment above. The overall likelihood that a player's avatar can accomplish a given feat—of intuition, of memory, of strength, and so on—is predetermined by the game's designer. A player may have a 4 in 5 chance of doing something relatively easy, but a 1 in 20 chance of doing something hard. Hence, while player ability scores make certain checks easier, spending them on certain abilities and not others means that other sorts of checks will remain difficult or become even harder still.

These mechanics decentralize and distribute story-telling authority. Both scenario designers and players can influence the outcome of events, but ultimately those outcomes are determined by chance. This manner of story-telling rather precisely fits the original definition of "adventure" as a "chance occurrence or event, an accident" (OED def. 1.a), and so this coinage from the future passive participle of the Latin verb *advenire*—meaning "to come about," "to occur" (DMLBS def. 2)—is at its root a synonym for the game criticism term "emergent narrative" cited above. Given that the term "adventure" is a medieval coinage whose current meaning originates in a medieval literary genre whose texts have circulated widely and continuously for all of modern history, might emergent narratives in games always be implicitly coded as "medieval," in a manner explaining why the chance-based adventure-storytelling system D&D has never evolved beyond its original "sword and sorcery" setting nor been supplanted by its many non-medieval competitors (Peterson 2012)?

As a literary counterpoint to these two games, an instructor could assign Chretien de Troyes' adventure romance *The Story of the Grail* (1991) and Dashiell Hammett's 1930 detective novel *The Maltese Falcon* (1992), as generic counterpoints to Planescape: Torment and Disco Elysium respectively. The famous "grail quest" of the former text starts when Percival arrives at the castle of the Fisher King and witnesses a bizarre ritual involving a "grail" (most likely a plate of some kind). An elder knight had advised Percival that he ought not to talk very much, and so Percival refrains from asking anything about the display. He learns shortly thereafter that his silence was an error—if he had asked about the grail he could have lifted the curse on the Fisher King. These events may be reframed as a videogame emergent narrative as follows: after a lucky ability check, Percival happened to stumble across the Fisher King early in his journey, who stood before Percival with a question mark, speech bubble, or equivalent indicator floating over his head; Percival did not know that he should initiate a dialogue with him, and after he recognizes his mistake, he cannot repeat his lucky roll and find the Fisher King again. In other words, Percival cannot *finish* his grail quest because he cannot *begin* it: only after speaking to the Fisher King would he know what he is supposed to do. This deferral of the beginning of "the story of the grail" is the precondition for the episodic storytelling in the romance that follows, as it is for the adventure videogames where completionist players may defer the end or even beginning of the main quest to focus on side quests.

SF author Michael Moorcock once advised aspiring genre fiction authors that if they want to write a novel quickly, they should begin with the plot of *The Maltese Falcon* (1992; Hammett 1992). This novel's plot is in turn a parody of the grail quest appearing in proto-novelist Thomas Mallory's *Morte d'Artur*, which may be a medieval work, but which found its main success in commercial print (Wade 2022). The Nameless One in Planescape: Torment and Harry DuBois in Disco Elysium are not only Percival figures—whose adventures precede the "true" quests for redemption that cannot begin until they have their memories back—but also Sam Spade figures, pounding the pavement to converse with shady characters in a theoretically endless series of formulaic adventures. The grail, the Maltese falcon, and the lost memories of DuBois and the Nameless One are not just MacGuffins that motivate the characters, then, but metafictional allegories for the endless deferral of resolution that motivates the consumption of episodic stories that sell themselves as emergent narratives—in the words of Sam Spade from the 1941 film of *The Maltese Falcon*, "the stuff that dreams are made of." Studying these two games and these two fictions in conversation with each other illuminates all four texts and their genres, and there are any number of ways for an instructor to design assessments that read across their examples to interrogate adventure narratives medieval and modern.

Point of Entry #3: Death, Failure, and the Gothic

In her analysis of videogame genres as "affective assemblages," Andrea Andiloro describes the "Soulsborne" genre of games developed by FromSoftware (2023; Kunzelman 2020), which provide another useful case study for thinking about a medieval procedural rhetoric. In his meditation on difficulty in videogames *The Art of Failure* (2016), Jesper Juul identifies three kinds of "fairness," which is to say conditions of success and failure that contribute to player "flow" rather than disrupting it: skill, chance, and labor (74–76). The satisfying formula of the Soulsborne game is to push the needle on all three forms of fairness to a degree that allows the games to be more punishing. The level design in these games is surprising, so that one's ability to progress on the first run through depends largely

on luck. After a player knows the area, it becomes a test of skill: in timing the enemy's attacks, in rolling, blocking, and attacking oneself at the opportune moment. But when a player hits the limit on skill, they can always grind their way through the easier levels to collect the Souls, Runes, or other game currencies that can be spent on improving one's abilities to make the later challenges more manageable.

This rigorously fair structure—which, like many of the most critically celebrated videogames, encourages the cultivation of "patience" in its medieval, spiritual sense of endurance and detachment—is nonetheless coded as impossible by the stories of the games, as part of their participation in the meta-genre of the "rogue-like." In the original Rogue (A.I. Design 1980), the magic artifact one attempts to collect and remove from the dungeon has cursed the player so that every time they die, they are reborn in a reconfigured version of the dungeon, which they cannot escape unless they bring the artifact with them. Thus, the game situation of death and rebirth occurs diagetically within the game's story, in what has since become a common metafictional gesture within and beyond the rogue-like genre.

A useful example of how this works is provided by Dark Souls (From Software 2011), the "Souls" of the portmanteau "Soulsborne." Game events and dialogue emphasize how the game models precisely this traumatic repetition. The game has been remastered and rereleased several times, with the later versions being more expensive, but the older versions can be tracked down and the newer versions also go on sale periodically. The game begins with the player in a location called The Undead Asylum. After escaping, the player sees a cutscene explaining the "Fate of the Undead," that "one day an undead shall be chosen to leave the undead asylum in a pilgrimage to the land of the ancient Lords." Then the first non-player character (NPC) one encounters, named "the crestfallen warrior," says to the player: "Let me guess. Fate of the Undead, right? Well, you're not the first. But there's no salvation here. You'd have done better to rot in the Undead Asylum… But, too late now." Thus, Dark Souls suggests to its players from the outset that its difficulties cannot be surmounted and the character is stuck in a meaningless cycle of suffering and violence with no promise of redemption or release. The success of the game, then, is that this hopelessness only makes progress more satisfying and gameplay more immersive.

Like many roguelikes Soulsborne games are "gothic" in design and mood (Kirkland 2022). The term "gothic" originates as a name for several groups who moved into western Europe in the fifth century as part of the population displacements popularly remembered today as "the fall of Rome." In the early-modern period the word "gothic" acquired its art-historical, paleographic, and architectural sense of "medieval," as a way of contrasting medieval art, writing, and architecture with the art, writing, and architecture of classical Roman antiquity. The first novel to call itself "gothic," Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), did so in conversation with this antiquarian terminology (Yeager 2019b), but the term "gothic" quickly moved beyond this original context to name the aesthetic we know today, connecting the beautiful to the abject, artifice to nature, and desire to revulsion (Brylowe and Yeager 2021, 7–9).

The "rogue-like" genre and the Soulsborne games specifically are perfect texts to adopt to a course investigating the gothic side of popular medievalism. Student writing on the subject could articulate their experiences with the game(s) in ways that build on the self-reflection done in a Character Creation writing assignment: what are their own personal answers to Juul's question about

the pleasure we take in failure? How do they feel when their game character dies, or when the instructor's character died in the class live stream? Which kind of "fairness" do they experience in games like Dark Souls, and what lessons do they take from these experiences about both the games and themselves? I have borrowed one format for written assessment from the "Game Diary" features posted to the website Kotaku, wherein staff writers reflect conversationally on what they have been playing lately to introduce critical reflections on the game in question, games in general, and themselves as players. Among other advantages, these assignment formats give students a chance to explore what writing about games professionally might be like, and to begin building a portfolio of work.

Point of Entry #4: Lost Empires and Lore

If there is one essential element of a "medieval" world, it is the ruined infrastructure of a lost empire. There could be no "middle" ages without two other ages for them to exist between, and in European history the bottom half of the epochal sandwich was the "classical" period of the Roman Empire. From *Beowulf* through The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom (Nintendo 2023) medieval landscapes have been dotted with ruins, caves, and "dungeons" waiting to be scavenged for the forgotten relics of a more technologically advanced age, and the obvious antecedents to these spaces are the Roman ruins that did indeed dot the landscape of early medieval Britain.

One place where the "lore" of lost empires is particularly important for critics is in the vast online corpora of "rogue archives" (DeKosnik 2016) that surround even moderately successful videogames. The bread-and-butter output of publications like Kotaku are their tips, strategies, and even comprehensive "walkthroughs" of games, providing a sort of *glossa ordinaria* that documents the best strategies for navigating difficult moments and even for completing games from start to finish. Outside these fiefdoms of editorial control are vast expanses of recordings and livestreams on platforms like Twitch that have become a major expressive genre in its own right, with internationally famous stars who occupy an important place in the media ecosystem (Hilvert-Bruce et al. 2018), and of the fan-created wikis that exhaustively document game lore, narrative, and so also items (and where to find them) and monsters (and how to beat them).

Given that these corpora exist precisely in order to make videogames accessible, they are particularly useful to instructors bringing videogames into their classes. Certainly, it is easy enough to find a detailed playthrough of a relevant scene or quest from a popular game if one does not wish to play the game oneself or force the students to play it. More to the point, I have discovered through character creation assignments that many students who do not play videogames nonetheless consume them through "Let's Play" videos on YouTube; and in my class livestreams, I have sometimes fielded comments and followed suggestions that came from my students' roommates and siblings, who joined in just because they like watching other people play videogames. When so many consumers of digital emergent narratives do so, not as participants but as observers, the archives of game recordings and livestreams also merit their own critical reflections.

There is also much to be said for how the negotiations of quasi-hermetic authority about distinctions between "canon" and "apocrypha" among the creators and moderators of these resources resemble the frameworks for negotiating and recording doctrine and learning in the medieval period, as some fascinating studies have already attested (Busse 2017; Jansen 2021). The contrast between the procedural rhetoric of the "game" when these wider networks are included and the procedural rhetoric

of the computer program designed by the developers can provide a useful starting point for critical conversations. And as the "game diary" example illustrates, these quasi-scholarly multimedia forms make useful starting points for class assignment formats, not least because mastery of them can grant students access to the communities of practice that would shape their own professional and cultural identities if they became game critics or developers.

Jensen's example of the Imperial Library of "lore" for Bethesda's Elder Scrolls series provides a useful entry point into a larger issue. Given that we live in a "gamified" world where most public discourse takes place through social media platforms that are, essentially, videogames, can we still meaningfully distinguish between the professional design of videogames, the fan consumption of videogames, the quasi-scholarly management of videogame lore, and the many other negotiations of power between citizens in a gamified public commons? In practice these activities are all tightly integrated, in what Henry Jenkins has formatively called "convergence culture" (2006). Reardon and Wright have summarized how the consumers and fans of the Elder Scrolls games and several other major medieval fantasy and SF series have worked their way into development processes, using social media to pressure developers into creative decisions as the developers meanwhile actively seek player engagement (2021). Some players have gone a step farther to program their own "mods" to the games, introducing their own character appearances, armor sets, locations, quests, and—in "total conversion mods" like Enderal: Forgotten Stories (SureAI 2016)'s mod of Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim (Bethesda 2011)—their own entire game (Hirvonen 2017; Periera and Silva Bernardes 2021; Resinho et al. 2024; Sotamaa 2010). Convergence culture is one reason that scholars of videogames, like the recent scholars of medieval manuscripts, have abandoned critical paradigms that presume to study the origins and uses of a text-as-*product* to rather develop paradigms that study a more heterogeneous text-as-*process* (Consalvo 2008; Johnston and Van Dussen 2015), cultivating a broader range of interdisciplinary methodologies as a consequence.

The text-as-process paradigm informs the final assessment I will describe in this essay, which is a creative project where students work in groups to produce game design documentation (adapted from Macklin and Sharp 2016, 131–48) for a game that must be titled "*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 2." An instructor may choose to tie the design plan to an accessible design platform with a large support community like Twine (which is free) or RPGMaker (which in its earlier versions costs less than $10 CAD), but as a general rule I would recommend that instructors use such limitations only to impose specific guardrails on provisional design documents—unless, that is, they have the resources to offer students the time and technical support necessary to create prototypes.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 2 begins with the Green Knight coming to Camelot on Christmas the year after the events of the first poem to challenge Gawain to a second head-chopping-off contest. This beginning may or may not precipitate a second voyage to Bertilak's castle and a second trading game between Gawain and Bertilak, which may or may not involve Bertilak hunting while Gawain flirts with Bertilak's wife, and may or may not end with a second climactic meeting with the Green Knight in the Green Chapel; and the game may begin at any moment along this timeline and unfold in any direction.

I require that the game be one player; that the action be choice-driven; and that in lieu of dialogue options that specify what a character says, the player will choose the characters' emotional

responses, based on the emotions displayed by the characters in the original poem. For example, Gawain's choices in a given dialogue would be as follows:

- You feel fear.
- You feel anger.
- You feel shame.
- You feel love for the Virgin Mary.
- You feel loyalty to Arthur.

The words or actions that Gawain makes would then express these emotions in a manner chosen by the student designer. I mandate "emotional response" as a "verb" to encourage my students to explore the working hypothesis stated above, that medieval romances have provided digital culture with a useful symbolic vocabulary for accessing the critical distance that can help students articulate in their own words what life in a convergence culture feels like, and how they think that culture came to be.

Above, I have named four points of entry for accessing medieval videogames: first, a survey of the interdisciplinary criticism of videogames between its two implicit disciplinary poles, as a starting point for critical (and ludic) autoethnography; second, a relatively formal engagement with episodic adventure narrative in games and popular fiction, through the longstanding association between adventure and the medieval romance genre; third, a relatively psychoanalytic engagement with the medieval "gothic" aesthetic as it relates to the formal emphasis in adventure games on experiences of failure and death; fourth and finally, a relatively archival study of negotiations of authority between fans, designers, and other creators around the term and concept of "lore," which follows from the other examples to view the actual computer program of a videogame as only a starting point for what that game text actually is. These are just a few prompts for working with students and other collaborators to access the virtual worlds of medieval videogames and interrogate their deployments of medieval symbolic vocabulary, which can help us not only to understand cultural production in the twenty-first century, but also the ways in which medieval works of literature may also be productively read as medieval games. If the readers of this article have other ideas for pursuing these exciting directions for medieval studies, or if they would like to collaborate on developing new approaches and making them more accessible, I am eager to hear from them.

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