

Introduction

Zelda, Mythopoeia, and the Importance of Developing an “Inside” Perspective on Videogames

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The Legend of Zelda stands as one of the most iconic and recognizable narrative videogames in the world. Nineteen official titles make up the series, with another in production, plus additional spinoffs and the appearance of characters in other game franchises. The original installment sold over six-million copies in its initial run in 1987; 12 million copies for *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, the third installment in 1992, and generally accepted as the burgeoning point of the series’ sophisticated mythology. In total, 108.5 million units of the games have sold worldwide.¹ *Zelda* is one of the major titles exclusively owned by Nintendo, along with iconic properties such as *Mario*, *Pokemon*, and *Metroid*. All of these series, wildly popular in their own right, share with *Zelda* the basic components of avatars that players employ to engage an imagined world. *Zelda*, however, stands apart from these titles in the sobriety with which it approaches its worldbuilding. Even when it takes a more childlike aesthetic, as in *Wind Waker*, the solemnity with which the *Zelda* series regards the integrity of its own imaginary world is seldom matched by *Mario* or *Pokemon*. On the other hand, *Metroid* lacks humor almost entirely; the series follows a typical first-person shooter, isolated-warrior model of worldbuilding in more recent iterations. As a result, however, *Metroid* provides only slender hints of the society Samus Aran, the female protagonist and avatar of the game, inhabits. In *Zelda*, players encounter a civilization, its subcommunities, and the dramas in which they are embroiled, much as in the tales of *The Silmarillion* by J.R.R. Tolkien. This remark is not intended to assert that *Zelda* has no humor in its worldbuilding or even without moments that break the fourth wall, but there is—and I can find no better way to word it—a certain *reverence* with which the *Zelda* narrative approaches its mythmaking.²

For the reason of this earnest worldbuilding, as this introduction to the anthology argues, *The Legend of Zelda* series provides a powerful place to ground the effort to shift videogame scholarship intentionally out of its generally defensive posture. As shall be discussed, Tolkien introduced the term “mythopoeia” to describe what he regarded as a universal human impulse: imaginative creation of fantasy in order to create

coherent meaning out of a painful world.³ As a modern body of myths, I contend, *The Legend of Zelda* parallels at the turn of the 20th into the 21st century Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* during much of the twentieth. If Tolkien was, as Shippey put it, *the* author of the century—at least as far as Mythopoeic narrative is concerned—then *Zelda* is at least the top contender for *the* mythopoeic videogame narrative. Link, whose name is a pun for his avatar function in the *Zelda* games, is modeled after Robin Hood and Peter Pan, putting him in touch with two iconic mythopoeic figures, one quintessentially medieval and the other a cornerstone image of the Victorian-turned-modern conception of childhood.⁴ Moreover, *The Legend of Zelda* dwells within medieval imagery, castles, dragons, knights, dilapidated cathedrals reminiscent of Tintern Abbey's ruins, all of which evoke Tolkien's fantastic medievalism and the medievalism of the fantasy genre that followed in his wake. Just as scholars delve into Tolkien's Middle-earth with profound academic acumen, the 19 and counting titles of *Zelda*, with sprawling narrative timelines and endless opportunity for academic study, are likewise awaiting excavation for those with the will and means to do so. Just as *Tolkien Studies* constitutes a foundational component of the study of fantasy as a genre, a subfield that speaks to the larger discipline but in which one can focus entirely, *Zelda Studies* is a phrase not too indulgent to entertain, as a foundational subfield for the study of mythopoeic videogames.

The question will arise concerning why this study is significant, and I believe the answer cuts to the core of academic life. When we ask our students to write an essay or research paper, we exhort them to ask the "So what" question. Why does your paper matter? What significance does your argument have? This question comes as something of a nuisance, because the answer to that question is, in their minds, painfully obvious: The purpose of writing this paper is to get a grade from us so they can put our courses behind them. I think that part of why telling our students to ask "So what" falls flat because of our institutional failure, in academia, to answer that question on a number of levels: our classes, the institutions students attend for four or more years, the unreasonable amounts of debt that too often come with it, and the gloomy uncertainty about how readily their degree will lead to the jobs they actually want. If we do not answer the "So what" question for them concerning our courses and their general purpose in academia, if we act as though we are above that question, then it is no wonder they have a hard time answering that question for the apparent busywork of papers we put on their calendars, interrupting their lives, which are no less crowded and no less full of the drama of life than ours.

As strange as it may sound at first, addressing this problem is a driving factor behind my belief that the university must begin to incorporate videogames into the curriculum in a meaningful fashion. Humanities departments bear a major responsibility in this task, because we must

connect the aesthetic and intellectual canons of the past to the organic curriculum of our modern entertainment industry. With 67% of Americans playing videogames, and half of gamers playing on more than one device, videogaming constitutes a normative mode of entertainment rather than a marginal exception.⁵ As educators, we have a choice. We can respond to videogames as a lamentable blight on the intellectual engagement of our students and pit personal interest in Sonic the Hedgehog against academic interest in Shakespeare.⁶ Or we can adapt innovation in media to the traditional modes of inquiry and create a bridge from their popular culture interests to the academic ones we would like them to have.⁷ We can use videogames to help students learn the life of the mind, and better situate ourselves to engage their perspectives. Furthermore, we can better incorporate the perspectives of our students, if we understand them, into the needs of our disciplines.

A belief in the value of serious academic work with videogames motivated the editors to produce this anthology. Of course, this effort is not a new project: scholars have endeavored to analyze videogames intellectually at least since 1997 with the publication of Espen Aarseth's *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*.⁸ After all, careful thinking about any given subject is worthwhile, but that assertion perhaps underscores the value of careful thinking than any particular subject. This volume also demonstrates how videogames model and facilitate thinking. Because videogames require interactivity in ways different from the novel or the soundtrack, they require action from players to *figure the game out*. I may not understand the symbolic value of Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* while reading the books, but I have still read the story. If I do not understand how to interpret a videogame, however, then I do not progress through the narrative or advance the aims the game presents for my actions as the player. Understanding and progression, although required for more discerning interaction with books and films, are inextricably bound together in the player's encounter with a videogame. Although the puzzles of videogames do not always challenge players to a great extent (though in some cases they may), nonetheless they present an opportunity for modeling the process of intellectual work in unique and productive ways.

The phenomenon of the avatar in videogames generates this unique quality of the medium's mirroring of academic effort. Here, we have a protagonist who is both separated from and controlled by the player. The nervous system of the player keys into the artificial events that happen to the avatar.⁹ I remember watching my stepfather play *Spyro the Dragon* on the original PlayStation. As he used the controls to guide Spyro's gliding underneath a digital obstacle, my stepfather ducked his head. My mother commented, "You actually just ducked while doing that." He laughed and said, "Did I?" An almost talismanic or superstitious way of acting can manifest itself in moments like these while

playing videogames: although the controller predated motion-sensitive technology, my stepfather responded as though his ordinary responsive reflexes mapped onto the gaming world.¹⁰

This effect of player identification with the avatar, serving as the conduit between the player and the artificial reality of the game, becomes all the more fascinating when narrative is introduced. When a character such as Boromir dies on screen in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we may feel an acute pain of loss; when Frodo feels the need to flee, we may feel his panicked urgency to find some means to move his plan forward. But Frodo's escape does not depend on the audience's or reader's ability to row a boat: It only depends on our attention to watch (or read about) him undergoing those trials. If my avatar is in danger, and I respond too slowly or ineptly, then the character may receive harm or even die. The weight of the narrative responsibility resides in players in a way it simply does not for readers or viewers. Consequently, those videogames that narrate a story and engage in worldbuilding—of creating an imagined reality in which the player can participate—tend to invest players in the story of the avatar and the very fabric of the world where the avatar exists. With that realization in mind, one can readily understand why videogames inspire such commitment by gamers. Often their interest does not reside only in technical skill required to play, the quality of the story telling, the sophistication of the visual images, the satisfaction of the background music, or the challenge inherent in the tasks. All of these interests intertwine concomitantly between the eyes and the screen, the ears and the speakers, and the hands and the controllers.

Overall, videogames have tended to attract the scholarship of psychologists, sociologists, and historians of technology. Philosophers, theologians, and literary critics have tried their hands at the effort as well, but there remains a tenacious scholarly resistance to videogame studies within the humanities that has baffled many videogame scholars.¹¹ Videogames became available for households in the 1970s, almost 50 years ago.¹² Surely, after 50 years, intellectuals have noticed that this artifice can be deemed, not only intellectually stimulating, academically worthy of attention, or pedagogically useful (many early videogames were in fact explicitly pedagogical), but also beautiful, edifying, and as engaging as other narratives we encounter. Admittedly, 50 years is not such a long time, and the nascence of videogames does not pose their only obstacle to acceptance in the humanities. They have as well associations with childish indulgence, sexism, excessive violence, and an impractical, entertainment-driven generation. Also, many videogames are badly made, poorly conceived, tedious wastes of time that can leave players feeling guilty if the tasks they make possible do not provide some meaning. As one writer put it, he likes games to have stories because “a small part” of him “is tired of having fun without knowing why.”¹³

The least original response to the list of negative aspects of videogames above is still to me the strongest: Yes, of course, it is all true of many games, but it is also true of many novels, short stories, films, soundtracks, and any other media or content we may seek. “Sermonizing” describes the bad sermon with which we disagree, not the eloquent exhortation to principles we share. We call lengthy texts “wordy” often simply when they do not interest us for whatever reason. Yes, videogames can be perverse in their love for violence and failure to be mindful in the social values they promote, but if that failure is an inherently defeating argument against the videogame industry, then it is also the case that we should close shop on the George R.R. Martins, Quentin Tarentinos, and Lady Gagas of the world. Either we search for legitimate value in the media of the videogame as we do with other forms of entertainment, or we simply stare at it like Ignatius Reilly in *A Confederacy of Dunces* staring at the denizens of a bar at which he himself drinks, saying to his mother, “We must stay to watch the corruption. It’s already beginning to set in.”¹⁴ But we do not wish merely to observe culture as academics; rather, we wish to participate in the game of civilization. And to do that in the contemporary landscape of aesthetic production, we must understand and appreciate the narrative of the videogame.

I say the narrative specifically because one of the most acute sources of fascination with the videogame experience arises where player identification with the avatar intersects with the narrative.¹⁵ Many gamers also participate in Cosplay, where they dress up as characters from videogames, sometimes with incredible accuracy.¹⁶ Without having to participate to this extent (although I cast no dispersions on the practice), we can consider how playing such a videogame facilitates meditation upon one’s identity.¹⁷ When an avatar faces a serious question, such as how meaning is made in the avatar-character’s world or what is the right or wrong thing to do, the player must actually *act* within the gameworld as if that question mattered. We observe when Frodo considers keeping the One Ring and wonder what we might have done; however, a game can make possible choices and see their consequences unfold, as games like *Fable*, *Vampire the Masquerade*, and others have made possible. The problem, as I see it, lies in our tendency still to look *at* the phenomenon of videogames as a culture. As C.S. Lewis puts it in “Meditations in a Toolshed,” “You get one experience of a thing when you look along it and another when you look at it. Which is the ‘true’ or ‘valid’ experience?”¹⁸ We talk about gaming from the outside of the experience of gameplay, even if we ourselves are gamers; perhaps we admit that we play only with embarrassment or when, relieved, someone else mentions that gaming is a favored pastime. We argue *for* the videogame by stacking it up against other forms of media, as I have just been doing.¹⁹ We nod our heads when we admit that objections to some of the deleterious qualities of videogames have some force.

But we should also look “through” the videogame perspective, if we wish to truly understand it. No interpretive model of gaming can be complete without the internal perspective of actually being a player. In “Meditations in a Toolshed” mentioned above, C.S. Lewis makes this point:

The people who look at things have had it all their own way; the people who look along things have simply been brow-beaten. It has even come to be taken for granted that the external account of a thing somehow refutes or ‘debunks’ the account given from inside. ‘All these moral ideals which look so transcendental and beautiful from inside’, says the wiseacre, ‘are really only a mass of biological instincts and inherited taboos.’ And no one plays the game the other way round by replying, ‘If you will only step inside, the things that look to you like instincts and taboos will suddenly reveal their real and transcendental nature.’²⁰

In quite the same way as Lewis argues for a “looking along” posture adjacent to a “looking at” one, we need to position ourselves in the beam of light that falls into the world from the artificial light of the game, to see what vantage point it offers for interrogating our heuristics. Of course, as academics we are properly skeptical of only looking *through* perspectives rather than at them, for that approach can stifle intellectual inquiry. In response to this concern, Lewis goes on to write,

Having been so often deceived by looking along, are we not well advised to trust only to looking at? In fact to discount all these inside experiences? Well, no. There are two fatal objections to discounting them all. And the first is this. You discount them in order to think more accurately. But you can’t think at all - and therefore, of course, can’t think accurately - if you have nothing to think about. A physiologist, for example, can study pain and find out that it “is” (whatever is means) such and such neural events. But the word pain would have no meaning for him unless he had “been inside” by actually suffering. If he had never looked along pain he simply wouldn’t know what he was looking at. The very subject for his inquiries from outside exists for him only because he has, at least once, been inside.²¹

On what grounds do we ask from the outside of the gamer experience, “What is the worth of playing videogames?” but not from within that experience, “Why should videogames, an important and gripping platform for experiencing narrative and so for making meaning, be excluded from the conversation of what constitutes the life of the mind?” The sense continues that the burden of proof rests on advocates who value

videogames and must demonstrate their preferred medium is not particularly more pernicious than others. But it does not, and it is not. The world is convinced—people play videogames, find meaning in them, and build relationships and lives around them. Gamers participate in a meaningful culture. If we concern ourselves with edifying participation in culture as academics, in sharing what Matthew Arnold calls sweetness and light, then we should want that participation to be as sweetened and as illuminated as it can be. If we pit intellectualism against videogames, videogames will win. And that is because a great deal of human intellect has already been absorbed into the world of videogames, which has generated products of immense human creativity of a sort that is hard to fathom even for gamers and game designers. By recruiting the videogame to the life of the mind, we consequently gain an ally rather than an opponent, one that brings unique qualities for profound contemplation.

For these reasons, we have not taken the approach in this volume of studying videogames primarily as games, although that aspect receives treatment when necessary; nor have we treated them primarily as technology, although that, too, is a reality integrated into the perspective. The essays also do not approach videogames as a medium that must be justified as part of the entertainment industry. The market of human interest and engagement has already settled that question. Instead, this volume provides what Lewis called that “looking through” approach, where we can enter into the dialogic world of meaning made possible by videogames. Indeed, precisely because videogames employ both external artifice in terms of computer technology as well as the internal artifices of music, visuals, and narrative conveyed by that technology, we have chosen Tolkien’s concept of “mythopoeia” as the organizing principle for the volume. Indeed, as a major voice behind Lewis’s development of his insights in “Meditations in a Toolshed,” Tolkien believed that stories should be looked “through” as well as “at.”²² That shift was the powerful contribution Tolkien made to *Beowulf* scholarship with his essay “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics.” He writes,

I would express the whole industry in yet another allegory. A man inherited a field in which was an accumulation of old stone, part of an older hall. Of the old stone some had already been used in building the house in which he actually lived, not far from the old house of his fathers. Of the rest he took some and built a tower. But his friends coming perceived at once (without troubling to climb the steps) that these stones had formerly belonged to a more ancient building. So they pushed the tower over, with no little labour, in order to look for hidden carvings and inscriptions, or to discover whence the man’s distant forefathers had obtained their building material. Some suspecting a deposit of coal under the soil began to dig for it, and forgot even the stones. They all said: ‘This tower is

most interesting.’ But they also said (after pushing it over): ‘What a muddle it is in!’ And even the man’s own descendants, who might have been expected to consider what he had been about, were heard to murmur: ‘He is such an odd fellow! Imagine his using these old stones just to build a nonsensical tower! Why did not he restore the old house? He had no sense of proportion.’ But from the top of that tower the man had been able to look out upon the sea.²³

Scholars fail to understand the edifice of the poem when they only take it apart for information; the poem is understood when it is put back together by the reader and *experienced* as the poem it was intended to be. The mythopoeic videogame stands vulnerable to similar critical treatment at the hands of critics, if we are not careful first to ascertain the value of these productions from a mythopoeic standpoint, which generations of scholars failed to do when assessing *Beowulf* prior to Tolkien’s seminal recovery of the poem’s aesthetic worth.

For Tolkien, mythopoeia, or myth-making, transcends a cerebral process, constituting a means by which we discover our interior disposition to search for meaning in the world:

The heart of man is not compound of lies,
But draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
and still recalls him....
Whence came the wish, and whence the power to dream,
or some things fair and others ugly deem?
....All wishes are not idle, nor in vain
fulfilment we devise—for pain is pain....²⁴

We do not have a choice about whether life will impose experiences upon us that exhibit meaning. But the meaning we can find can be nasty, brutish, and short. Fairy tales and myths, genres on the same spectrum for Tolkien, express through narrative the process of imagination by which he believes humans find the comfort of a life informed by value deeply felt as well as conceptually understood. This notion of comfort resulting from the comingling of emotion and understanding is what Tolkien terms Joy:

The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending.... This joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well.... Giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.²⁵

For Tolkien, “Fantasy is a natural human activity,”²⁶ and the fairy-tale, the effort of mythopoeia, is fantasy employed for the sake of that Joy.

It is therefore those videogames that engage in mythopoeia, which Tolkien might have argued touches on the central role of story itself: to produce in those who engage it a genuine sense that existence is worth the trouble.

The 12 pieces in this volume thus endeavor to make the overall argument: *The Legend of Zelda* series facilitates our assessment of the intellectual and academic merits of the videogame from the inside; and we can adopt the inside posture best through a mythopoeic interpretive stance, even when that stance is subverted, critiqued, or strained to its limits, as some of the essays show. A single volume or even a very many number of volumes cannot provide a concluding word on the dignity of the mythopoeic reach for meaning and the potential of videogames to refine the grasp of that reach; however, the essays in this anthology are included with the hope that soon we will stop asking whether videogames are art and begin focusing on how the artistry of videogames can yield valuable returns when approached with the tools at the heart of humanism and its scholastic endeavors. This volume consequently includes a breadth of the humanities: art history, literary criticism, theology, philosophy, musicology, as well as a number of subspecialties in this investigation into the *legendarum Zeldae*.

The first section of the anthology, “Foundations: Myth-Makers and Myth-Players,” sets the tone by investigating the mythopoeic methods and practices of those involved with *Zelda* from both the sides of production and consumption. Alicia Fox-Lenz insightfully inquires into surprising resonance between the progenitor of *The Legend of Zelda*, Shigeru Miyamoto, and Tolkien, two classic examples of myth-makers in spite of the difference in their preferred media. Thomas Rowland provides an essential foundation in videogame scholarship per se, explaining the way in which the intromersive capacity of videogames provides a particular access into aesthetic experience. Ethan Smilie investigates how some players, called speedrunners, upend the mythopoeic aspect of games like *Zelda* by trying to complete them as quickly as possible; however, in so doing they assimilate to themselves a heroic status in the spectacle of the gaming community.

The second section of the anthology, “*The Legend of Zelda*: Entrance into Mythopoeic Structure,” builds upon the foundational discussion of makers, medium, and players by developing a posture of “looking along” the mythic structure of *Zelda* to perceive the conceptual posture its interactive narrative enables. I argue for a synthetic understanding of the Campbellian Hero’s Journey and Tolkien’s *On Fairy-Stories* as it unfolds in *The Ocarina of Time*, putting the videogame’s interactive component by means of the avatar into conversation with the grammar of worldbuilding and its capacity to illuminate identity, thereby communicating the satisfaction of meaning found in the phenomena of

our primary world. Vincent E. Rone investigates how music of *Zelda* functions inside and outside the games, particularly within *Twilight Princess*, as signifiers of nostalgia essential to the Tolkienesque aesthetic, defending thereby the noetic value of nostalgia for its mythopoeic power to help make meaning. Michael Elam concludes the section with a close reading of the Hero's Journey in *Wind Waker*, examining how its resonances with other sea-faring epics including *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid* lend dignity to the domestic spaces in the game. Elam thus qualifies, through *The Wind Waker's* mythopoeic domesticity, the Campbellian emphasis on the journey at the expense of return and homecoming.

The section "There's Something Mything Here: Problems of Counter-Structure or Contra-Structure in *Zelda's* Mythopoeic Methods" contains essays, which, in different ways, contend for possibly subversive or alternative approaches to *Zelda* mythopoeia while retaining the perspective that the presence of the myth yields productive insight into assumptions that bear interrogation. Nathan Schmidt interrogates the often-assumed binary between human agency and nature as revealed by evil's disruptive influence, identifying an anthropocentric impulse in myth, which is manifested in *Zelda* even as it is undermined by the very myths that posit it. Matthew Sautman investigates a different yet no less salient component of hermeneutic unrest within *Zelda*: the perennial and convoluted issue of *Zelda's* timelines and how they queer our relation to time's apparent stability. Tying these themes together, Damian Asling analyzes how *Majora's Mask* uses horror to invite players to question their own memories.

The final section, "The Legend of Pedagogy: Theory and Practice", initiates a conversation about the *Zelda* series from pedagogical perspectives, as a body of texts we can teach and a body of texts we can use to teach other subjects. Chamutel Noimann codifies the value of understanding *The Legend of Zelda* as children's literature and the engagement it provides for children to begin conceptualizing narrative at an early age. David Boffa provides an account of an Art History class he designed around *The Legend of Zelda*, documenting both his methods in teaching *Zelda* games as texts worthy of artistic examination, as well as how he used study of the games to teach methods in the field of art history. The final essay, collaboratively authored by Farca, Lehner, and Navarro-Remesal, demonstrates the inherently pedagogical nature of the most recent installment of the series, *Breath of the Wild*, and provides a fitting conclusion for the volume as a whole.

We offer this volume in the hope it will inspire new forays into *Zelda Studies* and its adjoining field of the mythopoeic videogame, with the belief that looking along the experience of players of such worldbuilding, narrative games harbors great potency for the concerns of all who believe in the work of the humanities.

Notes

- 1 See Video Game Sales Wiki: The Legend of Zelda. https://vgsales.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda.
- 2 Explicit homages to other games, especially Mario, can be found in the games which gently undermine the otherwise careful worldbuilding.
- 3 For Tolkien, the only distinction between the great myths and the nursery fairy tale is stature, status, and stakes, where gods are grander than pixies, kings better known than accountants, and saving the cosmos more impressive than saving one's dog. But the desire to treat these all with the fantastic power of imagination all have potential for the dignity of mythopoeia, in Tolkien's view. Myth as narrative-driven meaning making, rather than as historical bodies of myths from world religions, is the emphasized connotation of the term invoked in the volume, though the overlap in usage is vital.
- 4 Of course, players can opt to choose names other than Link, but this is his official appellation. His connection to Peter Pan in particular becomes more explicit in games such as *Ocarina of Time* and *Majora's Mask* where he acquires Tinkerbellesque fairy companions. Link is also technically a rebel fighting against prevailing powers, however unjust (as when Ganondorf takes over Hyrule), and so his virtuous outlawry puts him in touch with the Robin Hood mythos. Aside from rupees in pots, however, thievery is not typically something with which Link is associated. See Chamutal Noimann's contribution to the volume for further discussion.
- 5 The Entertainment Software Association. "Industry Facts," accessed 17 August 2019, www.theesa.com/about-esa/industry-facts/.
- 6 A reaction noted by James Newman in "Everybody Hates Videogames," *Playing with Video Games* (London, UK: Routledge), 1:

Videogames have not enjoyed an easy ride in the popular press which has long concerned itself with the negative influences of their representations and the consequences of play. For many commentators, if videogames are worth considering at all, they can be easily and readily dismissed as little more than inconsequential trivialities. Indeed, so pervasive is this discourse of videogaming as worthless diversion that many gamers recount the experience to which they devote many hours of puzzling, dedication and creative effort as shameful, guilty pleasures ... two types of story have come to dominate. The first centres on the apparently universally violent nature of videogames ... the second type of story ... treats these experientially, technologically and structurally identical 'videogames' as both symptomatic of and the partial or even sole cause of social, cultural, and educational decline. From standards of child literacy through sociality to imagination and creativity, videogames are seen to exert a singularly deleterious effect

(1–2)

It is worth noting, however, that eight years have passed since *Playing with Videogames* was published; scholarship has advanced and the entrenched negative opinion toward videogames is perhaps not as pervasive as Newman noted nearly a decade ago.

- 7 Fundamentally, this position operates on the paradigm provided by Gerald Graff in his book, *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*. Graff contends that popular culture can be leveraged to refine students' capacity for understanding the intellectual moves necessary in academic writing; I go further and argue that certain subsets of popular

culture can be adopted as academic interests on their own merits. Videogames hold our attention here, although this argument can be productively applied elsewhere too.

8 See Thomas Rowland's contribution to this piece for a fuller investigation into the history of videogame scholarship.

9 Although what one ought to think of this is a matter of much debate, that it happens is undisputed. See Tung-Chen Lin, "Effects of Gender and Game Type on Autonomic Nervous System Physiological Parameters in Long-Hour Online Game Players," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 16, no. 11 (2013) for an example. This particular study finds some gender differences in the phenomenon:

Long-hour online game playing resulted in the gradual dominance of the parasympathetic nervous system due to physical exhaustion. Gaming workload was found to modulate the gender effects, with males registering significantly higher sympathetic activity and females significantly higher parasympathetic activity in the higher gaming workload group
(1)

10 If this was an effect then, one wonders how much more powerfully motion-sensitive and virtual reality-based games impact the nervous system.

11 An example of this critical disdain can be seen in Joshua Gibbs, "Should Classical Students Play Video Games?" *The Cedar Room*, 2019, www.circeinstitute.org/blog/should-classical-students-play-video-games Negative views are not always so explicitly articulated as that presented by Gibbs (a high school educator), but I have encountered reservations among my co-workers, and many of my colleagues involved in gaming scholarship have reported similar bias against the pursuit within a classical model of education. I make no scientific claim as to how pervasive the attitude is: but that the potential for videogames as a tool of initiating students into the life of the mind generates resistance in some quarters appears true. The hope is that this volume can help us move past that debate and into practical questions of how to use videogames to do serious, life-of-the-mind work.

12 See Rusel Demaria and Johnny Lee Wilson, *High Score! The Illustrated History of Electronic Videogames* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Osborne, 2002), for more on the subject of the history of videogame ownership and play.

13 Mike Buckler, "A History of the Videogame Narrative," *Arts & Living in The Amherst Student* (31 October 2012): 142–148, <https://amherststudent.amherst.edu/article/2012/10/31/history-videogame-narrative.html>.

14 John Kennedy Toole, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (New York, NY: Grover Press, 1980), 17.

15 See James Newman, "Videogames and/as Stories," *Playing with Videogames* (London, UK: Routledge, 2008), 46–68.

16 See James Newman, "Things To Make and Do: Fanart, Music and Cosplay," *Playing with Videogames* (London, UK: Routledge, 2008), 69–88. Newman writes,

A contraction of 'costume' and 'roleplay,' cosplay describes the act of dressing up as characters from popular animation, film, and videogames... cosplay's playful fusing, synthesis or even juxtaposition of the real and the virtual present a rich site within which the extraordinary characters of videogames may be lived and seen in the most ordinary of places and situations

(83–88)

- 17 The goal here is not to suppress what videogame scholars term the *ludic* element of games, that is, task-oriented play which requires development of gameplaying, but to connect that development of player skill with the storytelling impulse in videogames. See Graham H. Jensen, "Making Sense of Play in Video Games: *Ludus*, *Paidia*, and Possibility Spaces," *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture* 7, no. 1 (2013): 69–80 for a discussion of this facet of gameplaying.
- 18 C.S. Lewis, "Meditations in a Toolshed," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), 213. Lewis's own thought, as he reiterates in numerous places, was profoundly shaped by Tolkien's view of myth, both in *On Fairy-Stories* and *Mythopoeia* and the conversation which led to their composition. These remarks thus aptly set the tone for the present volume.
- 19 I make no claim that this move is exclusive to defense of videogames or the study of them, only note the problematic nature of the move.
- 20 Lewis, "Meditations in a Toolshed," 213.
- 21 Lewis, "Meditations in a Toolshed," 214.
- 22 Famously, when C.S. Lewis referred to myths as "lies breathed through silver," Tolkien retorted with the view that myths were a lens for apprehending certain truths that could be discovered no other way, an argument that was instrumental to Lewis's reconversion to Christianity. Tolkien wrote "Mythopoeia" to enlarge upon his insights from that discussion.
- 23 J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Chicago, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 54–55.
- 24 J.R.R. Tolkien, "Mythopoeia," in *Tree and Leaf*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 87–88.
- 25 J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 68–69.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 55.