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Studies in Medievalism

XXI: Corporate Medievalism

Reincorporating the Medieval: Morality, Chivalry, and Honor in Post-Financial-Meltdown Corporate Revisionism

Kevin Moberly and Brent Moberly

Those who follow such things will have undoubtedly noticed that the Capital One "What's in your Wallet" Viking commercials have undergone a dramatic change since they originally aired. Early versions of the commercials cast the Vikings as a collective, agonistic, and decidedly pre-modern other. Garbed in pelts, wearing horned helmets, and wielding all manner of medieval weaponry, they waited in hordes just beyond the horizon, ready to charge screaming into the fray and ruthlessly visit any unfortunate credit-card purchase with requisite and over-determined medieval violence – that is, any credit-card purchase that was not made from beyond the silvered shield-wall of a Capital One credit card. In more recent commercials, however, the Vikings have acquired a decidedly more domestic mien. Though neither their garb nor their weaponry has changed, they have nevertheless forsworn raiding in favor of more mundane and innocuous pursuits such as babysitting, playing in rock bands, and serving as flight attendants, shoe salesmen, and electricians. The Vikings, as such, have become apt spokesmen for the corporation that once thwarted them at every turn and, arguably, for all of the major banks (including Capital One) whose lending policies were responsible for the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008. Heavy-handed brutes who cause chaos and destruction at every turn, they are portrayed as well-intentioned and likeable and, if the scenarios featured in the most recent commercials are any indication, well on their way to becoming productive members of society.

A similar shift can be seen in the medieval-themed massively multi-player

game, *World of Warcraft*.¹ As Scott Rettberg explains in his 2008 article, "Corporate Ideology in *World of Warcraft*," the commercial success of *World of Warcraft* has always, to some degree, been an outgrowth of the extent to which the game "offers a convincing and detailed simulacrum of the process of becoming successful in capitalist societies."² Citing the game's free-market system of auction-houses, the Taylorist, assembly-line-like "grind" that is required to increase reputation, and the hierarchical, quasi-corporate organizational strategies employed by high-end raiding guilds, he argues that "beyond simply portraying capitalism as good, *World of Warcraft* serves as a tool to educate its players in a range of behaviors and skills specific to the situation of conducting business in an economy controlled by corporations."³ While Rettberg is correct in stating that corporate ideology has always been implicit in the behaviors that the game privileges as good or productive play, *World of Warcraft* officially recognized that this ideology was a viable mode of play in the 2010 *Cataclysm* expansion, when players were given the opportunity to play a race that, before that point, had been almost exclusively identified with the worst excesses of *laissez-faire* corporate capitalism: the diminutive, green-skinned, and unapologetically mercantile goblins. Although the goblins are not significantly different from any of the game's other playable races, they do allow players access to innate and explicitly capitalist racial abilities such as "PACK HOBGOBLIN: Goblins can access their bank vault from anywhere with the help of a trusted friend" and "BEST DEALS ANYWHERE: Wheeling and dealing is second nature to goblins, and they always receive a discount from vendors." Yet the fact that Blizzard Entertainment has acknowledged what had always been a latent (though sometimes only thinly disguised) subtext in the game by making the race accessible to players suggests, as does the shift that has occurred in the way that Vikings are portrayed in the most recent Capital One commercials, that the relationship between the corporate and the medieval is not as simple, straightforward, or adversarial as is traditionally assumed.

Elsewhere, we have explored the ways in which neomedievalist works invoke the medieval to obscure the economics, corporate or otherwise, involved in their production.⁴ In this essay, however, we would like to offer an alternative reading. We will examine the resurgence of the medieval as a model for corporate ethics in the wake of the recent financial meltdown and the recession that followed. Accordingly, this essay focuses on how the medieval is invoked and enables the redemption of the corporate in Stieg Larsson's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*.⁵ Using Larsson's novel metonymically, we foreground a discursive strategy that, while not new, is enjoying a revival of sorts in the aftermath of the meltdown: a strategy that employs chivalry, honor, and other values traditionally associated with the medieval to argue that what is needed is not a systematic re-evaluation of the role

that corporations play and their cost to a society, but a return to a corporate model that, with a nostalgia characteristic of the neomedieval, is constructed as more noble and, therefore, more moral, ethical, and socially responsible than its present incarnations. This essay, as such, is intended to complement our earlier works. Recognizing that all of the texts that we discuss in this article (and indeed the journal in which this article appears) are beholden to, if not are, outright productions of the corporate, this essay hopes to better understand the complex and often contradictory representational strategies through which contemporary media productions (neomedievalist or otherwise) encode what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer argue is the central message of all mass culture: "triumph of invested capital, whose title as absolute master is etched deep into the hearts of the dispossessed in the employment line."⁶

Published in English almost a year before the financial meltdown that crippled the economy of the United States and many other industrialized countries, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* seems uncannily relevant to the events of the crisis and the anxieties that surfaced in its aftermath. Originally titled *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor*, or "Men Who Hate Women," the novel uses the issues of sexual abuse and violence against women as a vehicle to dramatize contemporary anxieties about the threat of corporate power and the perceived inability of the media and other institutions to police or otherwise limit that power. Yet for all of this, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is not a condemnation of the corporation as an economic, political, and social institution. While *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* acknowledges the dangers that corporate abuse poses to society, it does not represent these abuses as endemic and, perhaps, inevitable to the material role that corporations play in late-capitalist economies. Nor does it recognize the degree to which deregulation and similar neo-liberal economic and political policies that began in the Reagan-Thatcher era have allowed corporations to expand beyond national borders and, as Rita Raley argues, beyond the jurisdiction of the nation-state.⁷ Instead, the novel offers readers an idealist narrative about the corporate that has become all too familiar in the wake of revelations about the lending and accounting practices that led to the financial crisis and culminated in the investment scandals of Bernie Madoff and others – a narrative that holds the institution of the corporation blameless and instead represents its flaws, excesses, and abuses as an expression and consequence of the character flaws and the corruption of the individuals who are not equal to the almost sacred duties entrusted to them.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo might, as such, seem like an odd text with which to begin a discussion about the relationship between the medieval and the corporate. The medievalist impulse, after all, often manifests itself as a reaction against the corporate and the industrial in some of the most canon-

ical works of medievalism. Frodo's last heroic deed, for instance, in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is driving industrialists from the shire. Yet even if one overlooks the degree to which *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is sympathetic to the corporation, it is nevertheless difficult to ignore the fact that the novel is not explicitly a work of fantasy, nor does it contain many of the accoutrements that have come to characterize contemporary medievalism. It does not take place, for instance, in some derivative version of Tolkien's Middle Earth, or even a "long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away." While it emphasizes the difference in climate between the rural north of Sweden and the urban south, neither of these locales is explicitly portrayed as the wilderness, nor do any of the novel's characters embark on a quest to tame them. Similarly, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* does not fetishize the past as simpler or somehow more desirable than the present, but returns again and again to the period immediately following the Second World War and the complex legacy of Sweden's decision to remain neutral during the conflict.

Yet Larsson's novel is nevertheless haunted by the medieval. It is not only peppered with references to Tolkien's trilogy, but explicitly characterizes each of its two protagonists, Lisbeth Salander and Mikael Blomkvist, through allusions to the medieval. This is perhaps most obvious in the case of Salander. A hacker and private investigator, her prominent dragon tattoo is an apt symbol of her Gothic sensibilities and her chaotic and, at times, criminal approach to her work. It is also suggestive of one of the key abilities that makes her so effective at her job: the photographic memory that, Smaug-like, allows her to hoard the treasures she discovers in the course of her investigations. Blomkvist, by contrast, is associated with a very different, though no less recognizable, fixture of the medieval: the knight errant. Embodying the ethics, integrity, and objectivity that many media critics of mainstream media nostalgically associate with the era before twenty-four-hour cable news and the internet, Blomkvist structures almost every aspect of his life, including his work as a financial journalist, in accordance with a strict and unwavering code of behavior. He thus finds himself in a difficult position at the beginning of the novel. Duped into writing an erroneous article about the financial misdealings of investment capitalist Hans-Erik Wennerström, he refuses to reveal the source who fed him the misleading information and is subsequently convicted of libel and sentenced to three months in prison. While this decision might seem strange, especially when readers learn that Blomkvist is aware that he has been set up by Wennerström, it is entirely in keeping with the system of values he outlines in his "controversial" and, appropriately, medieval-titled book, *The Knights Templar: A Cautionary Tale for Financial Reporters*.⁸ An exposé, Blomkvist's work describes the degree to which many prominent Scandinavian financial journalists collude with the corporations that they are tasked with monitoring.⁹ To Blomkvist, then,

these journalists are the contemporary equivalent of the Knights Templar: members of a noble and elite profession who have betrayed their vows to protect the weak and powerless in exchange for the economic and political benefits of financial conspiracy.

Although less explicitly, Larsson also associates the ailing Vanger group with the medieval. A familial concern with roots in nineteenth-century Swedish industrialism and even older, perhaps "twelfth-century" origins, the corporation's management is so convoluted, dysfunctional, and internecine that Blomkvist tells the aging patriarch of the family, Henrik Vanger, that it "sounds medieval in some ways."¹⁰ Yet Blomkvist nevertheless pledges fealty to Henrik Vanger and the Vanger Corporation. Hoping to obtain information about Wennerström's financial misdeeds, he reluctantly agrees to investigate, under the pretense of "help[ing] [...] with the family chronicle," the nearly thirty-year-old mystery surrounding the disappearance of Vanger's favorite niece, Harriet Vanger.¹¹ In doing so, Blomkvist sets into motion a narrative that might seem more appropriate to a contemporary neomedievalist work than to the sort of island-bound, drawing-room mystery that Vanger and others regard as the normative state of their familial and corporate relations. Indeed, with Blomkvist playing the role of knight, Salander the role of dragon, and both working to understand the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a young woman who is fetishized as representing the fertile potential of both family and company, Larsson's novel reads almost like a contemporary Scandinavian retelling of the 1996 feature film *Dragonheart*: a film in which an exiled knight joins forces with the last surviving dragon and – through the pretense of rescuing a politically savvy, though otherwise perpetually imperiled maiden – puts an end to a hereditary and corrupt regime.¹²

In *Dragonheart* this corruption is personified by a craven prince who, despite his vows to uphold an ancient, Arthurian "one-code" of honor, inherits and soon exceeds his father's penchant for cruelty and brutality towards the peasantry. In *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, it takes a more financial, though no less brutal, form. On one hand, it is manifested in the character of Martin Vanger, who, as CEO of the Vanger Corporation, not only inherits his father's poor business sense, but also, as Blomkvist and Salander discover, his father's grotesque, criminal pastime: religiously and sexually inspired serial murders of young women. On the other hand, this corruption is manifested in Wennerström whose multi-national economic holdings are composed almost entirely of shell companies for a variety of international criminal enterprises. Using Martin Vanger and Wennerström as representatives, Larsson thus constructs corporate corruption as a quasi-religious, fascist, and blasphemous practice that emerged in the era of post-war industrial capitalism and culminates in the types of corporation that

have become synonymous with late-capitalism: corporations that profit from buying and selling other corporations, rather than the production of manufactured goods. Yet although the most pernicious effects of this corruption are social rather than individual, the responsibility for alleviating or addressing them does not lie with the state, which is invariably portrayed as powerless or unwilling to intercede. Instead this responsibility is borne by private individuals who, despite their differences, are nevertheless bound together by their belief and adherence to a neo-chivalric code of honor and who, as a result, can only succeed in purging the corruption by challenging and vanquishing the individuals who embody it on the field of battle.

Thus, just as the death of the corrupt prince and his retinue sets the stage for political reform in *Dragonheart*, the key to restoring the Vanger Corporation to its rightful place at the head of Swedish industry lies not in revising its corporate structure to divest it of its antiquated system of familial governance, but in reforming the Vanger family itself: removing its corrupt members so that its more virtuous members can take their rightful places at the head of the Vanger Corporate board. Although this strategy makes for tidy, proportional endings, it is important to point out that it does not produce justice or systematic reform in either *Dragonheart* or *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Indeed, although the peasants play a pivotal role in overthrowing the tyrannical government in *Dragonheart*, they are not rewarded with more political power or a more equitable system of political representation, but with what is, arguably, more of the same: a "better" version of the feudal system that demanded their suffering and sacrifice in the first place. Much the same can be said for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. While Martin Vanger's death and the subsequent revelations about Wennerström's financial misdeeds in the media function to effectively end their respective reigns of terror, these events do not benefit the people who have suffered most: the dozens and dozens of women that Vanger murdered or the countless invisible victims of Wennerström's criminal schemes. Instead, these crimes and the suffering that resulted from them are deliberately covered up, not only by Blomkvist and Salander, who are aware of, but decide not to reveal, the full extent of Vanger's murders, but by the journalistic community as a whole, who invariably use the news about Wennerström's crimes and downfall as an occasion to celebrate the personal triumph of crusading journalists such as Blomkvist. As with the murder of the half-dozen or so peasants who are slaughtered roughly every twenty minutes in *Dragonheart*, everything else is portrayed, quite literally, as the price of doing business: the cost in human lives that must be paid in order to restore the status quo and the people who benefit from it to their former positions of prominence.

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo, then, hinges upon two potent and inter-related mediaeval fantasies: that the corporate ideal necessarily recalls

older feudal ideals, especially in the areas of corporate governance and continuance, and that there exist in such ideals imperatives derived from mediaeval mores that transcend questions of just profit, loss, and unfettered competition. Though newly dramatized in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, these twin fantasies are not recent developments; rather, they echo, perhaps unconsciously, attempts by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformers and economists to rationalize, if not constrain, the industrial and economic developments of the period by recourse to what they promoted as more traditional systems of feudal ethics. This strategy is particularly evident in the writings of A. J. Penty and G. D. H. Cole, who rose to prominence in the first quarter of the twentieth century as advocates for the nascent Guild Socialism movement, and those of Alfred Marshall, who was arguably the leading English economist of the time. Though Marshall did concede a cautious sympathy for socialism in general, he was openly skeptical of "ill-considered measures of reform by Utopian schemers" – a category that might well have included Penty and Cole.¹³ Nevertheless Marshall advocated, like Penty and Cole, a moral economy regulated by the ideals of the mediaeval past.

The Guild Socialists located their immediate origins in the Arts and Crafts movement, and they shared that movement's fascination with the mediaeval as well as its ambivalence towards industrialization, particularly automated means of production.¹⁴ They faulted the Arts and Crafts, however, both for what they considered to be the movement's run-away individualism and as having been co-opted as a "feeder" of luxury. Instead they advocated collective action on behalf of all laborers against, as Penty writes, "that industrial progress 'whose motive is money and whose method is machinery.'"¹⁵ They regarded the contemporary state as complicit in the capitalist alienation of labor, and they proposed as a corrective the establishment of distinct, self-governing "industrial guilds" that would restore workers' control over state and industry.¹⁶ Such industrial guilds were to be, in Penty's words, of the "Mediaeval or Regulative type," meaning that their concerns would transcend questions of material production to include "the maintenance of Just and Fixed prices and rates and wages, the regulation of machinery and apprenticeship, the upholding of a standard of quality in production [...], and other matters appertaining to the conduct of industry and the personal welfare of its members."¹⁷

Although Penty's works contain the occasional, strident call for the revival of "our social and industrial past, when there was peasantry on the soil and craftsmen in the workshop, when things produced were beautiful, and when, organized in Guilds, men lived a corporate life, when, in short, England was a true Merrie England," his mediaevalism was, in practice, nowhere near so absolute, nor was that of his collaborators.¹⁸ While the Guild Socialists

condemned industry for its shoddy mass-production and its role in the continued exploitation of its workers, they nevertheless conceded the reality, if not the necessity, of contemporary means of production and instead turned to the medieval for "moral standards" with which to police modern industry.¹⁹ To this extent, the "Guild movement," as Anthony Wright notes, "was never medievalist. It did claim some affinity of spirit with the medieval guild [...] but the theorists of Guild Socialism were concerned to transform the industrial world, not to abolish it."²⁰ Cole perhaps voices this sentiment most directly in *Guild Socialism Restated* (1920):

Clearly, we cannot seek to restore the mediæval – that is the communal – spirit in industry by restoring the material conditions of the Middle Ages [...]. If the mediæval system has lessons for us, they are not parrot-lessons of slavish imitation, but lessons of the spirit, by which we may learn how to build up, on the basis of large-scale production and the world-market, a system of industrial organization that appeals to the finest human motives and is capable of developing the tradition of free communal service.²¹

Penty likewise acknowledges that "modern industry differs from Medieval industry," but he insists that such differences "are technical, and no technical difference can involve a difference of moral principles."²² Industrialism, Penty writes, "grew up in a spiritual vacuum, when all the great traditions were dead."²³ Consequently, its salvation lay in a return to the clear "moral principles" that were understood by the medievals but lost to their more modern counterparts. According to Penty:

The Medievalists understood what we are only beginning to understand – that there is no such thing as a purely economic solution to the problems of society, since economics are not to be understood as a separate and detached science considered apart from morals. On the contrary, economic issues are primarily moral issues with economic equivalents.²⁴

Cole writes:

In the Middle Ages there were industrial sinners, but they were conscious of sin; for commercial morality and communal morality were the same. Today, commercial morality has made a code of its own, and most of its clauses are flat denials of the principles of communal morality. In the Middle Ages, the motives to which the industrial system made its appeal were motives of free communal service; today, they are motives of greed and fear.²⁵

The appeal of the medieval to both Penty and Cole, then, lay in its potential to connect "moral issues with economic equivalents" and thus recast contemporary debates over economic inequality as essentially moral questions. The concept of the "industrial sinner" is compelling to Penty and Cole because it allows them to imagine, as a corrective to what they considered to be the abuses of capitalism, economic actors "conscious of sin," which is to say economic actors empowered by more transcendent moral and ethical concerns.

Though by no means reactionary, Alfred Marshall's medievalism was nevertheless rooted in his ambivalence towards the potential of collectivist causes to address the apparent inequalities of the time while allowing for what he considered to be sufficient freedom of creative, intellectual, and economic expression. As much is evident in his 1907 essay, "The Social Possibilities of Economic Chivalry," which dedicates as much, if not more, attention to the apparent deficiencies of collectivism as it does to its professed subject. Although Marshall opens the essay by expressing concern with, in the words of Hans E. Jenson, "the manner in which real income was used in the economic society of his time" and eventually concedes a "reasonable dissatisfaction, with which every person must regard the existing distribution of wealth," he maintains that these two issues are, at best, only secondary threats to England's overall economic well-being.²⁶ The true danger, he argues, lies in the "ill-considered measures of Utopian schemers" that would "pervert" justified economic concerns in the promotion of "schemes that claim to be practical, and yet are based on no thorough study of economic realities."²⁷ Marshall's strident denunciation of "Utopian schemers," however, belies a deeper ambivalence towards collectivist causes, with Marshall himself admitting to a much-qualified socialism later in the essay and even expressing a degree of admiration for the "strenuous and unselfish devotion to social well-being" of those dedicated to collectivist causes.²⁸ Marshall nevertheless worries, though, that the rise of collectivism and its associated bureaucracy ultimately threatens both the tangible and intangible sources of economic and social progress:

I am convinced that as soon as collectivist control has spread so far as to considerably narrow the field left for free enterprise, the pressure of bureaucratic methods would impair not only the springs of material wealth, but also many of those higher qualities of human nature, the strengthening of which should be the chief aim of human endeavor.²⁹

Here and for the remainder of the essay, Marshall's "higher qualities of human nature" indicates the creative drive that he feels lies at the heart of capitalist enterprise and distinguishes it from a government that "creates

scarcely anything."³⁰ Marshall's concern for humanity's "higher qualities," however, acquires a metaphysical urgency, as Simon Cook observes, in Marshall's other writings:

At the deepest level, Marshall's argument with socialism was a metaphysical argument concerning the doctrines appropriate to a modern, secular and progressive faith [...]. The value of economic competition thus acquired a metaphysical justification for Marshall; it was both the most recent institutional manifestation of moral freedom, and the key economic institution which fostered that creative action which drove further progress [...]. The collectivist plans of the socialists, however, which sought to replace competition by government planning, led not only to inefficiency, but ultimately to 'spiritual death.'³¹

Marshall's ambivalence with collectivism, then, might be said to lie in his sympathy for its motivations, inasmuch as he identified its motivations as arising from a creative and commendable altruism, and his concern for the long-term efficacy of its proposals, both in terms of tangible economic development and more abstract spiritual effects. For Marshall, writes Cook, "collectivist doctrines were the product of freedom and spiritual creativity. Yet in practice such doctrines were likely at present to lead only to 'the tyranny and the spiritual death of an ironbound socialism.'³²

As the title of his essay suggests, Marshall derived his answer to not only the social and economic disparities of his time, but also (and consequently) the threat of impending collectivism, from discourses of chivalry reconstituted in the popular medievalism of the late-Victorian and early-Edwardian eras, formulating a call for collective, ethical business practice according to the individualistic, martial standards of an imagined bygone feudal elite. Thus Marshall writes (in what may perhaps be the earliest mash-up of fantasy, science fiction, and misplaced classicism):

If in the Elysian fields a mediæval warrior be now discussing with late inhabitants of worlds many billions of miles away from our own experiences of his old world, he may hold up his head as he speaks of the chivalry of war, the thing that occupied people's imagination most in that age [...].

But if the talk should turn in the Elysian fields on the elevation of life which we have won by the new methods of business, we should not hold up our heads as bravely as would the mediæval knight. I want to suggest that there is much latent chivalry in business life, and that there would be a great deal more of it if we sought it out and honoured it—as men honoured the mediæval chivalry of war.³³

As Thomas D. Birch notes, Marshall's call for "economic chivalry" was a call for "improving the quality of all human life both in the 'production of wealth and its use.'³⁴ It presupposed that humanity was, though misguided by the allure of material status, inherently altruistic, and it called for workers from all levels of industry to labor unstintingly and cooperatively and to take "delight in doing noble and difficult things because they are noble and difficult."³⁵ The well-to-do were also to refrain from conspicuous consumption and instead divert those funds to the less fortunate.³⁶ Likewise, those who were so wealthy as not to have to work were to undertake "solid work for the public weal."³⁷ Compensation for these efforts would come not as wealth, but in terms that were more symbolic than material, in the form of the "honor" gained through the relative merits of one's endeavors. The rewarding as well as the recognition of honor would be policed not by national or collectivist institutions, but by "public opinion" enlisted by "businessmen" and "economists" to serve as an "informal Court of Honour" charged with judging the relative nobility of various endeavors:

To distinguish that which is chivalrous and noble from that which is not, is a task that needs care and thought and labor; and to perform this task is a first duty of economists sitting at the feet of business men and learning from them. An endeavor should be made so to guide public opinion that it becomes an informal Court of Honour: that wealth, however large, should be no passport to success if got by chicanery, by manufactured news, by fraudulent dealing, or by malignant destruction of rivals; and that business enterprise which is noble in its aims and in its methods, even if it does not bring with it a large fortune, may receive its due of public admiration and gratitude [...].³⁸

Marshall's economic chivalry was, in short, a call for collective action on the individual level without recourse to what he considered to be overreaching and soul-destroying bureaucratic institutions espoused by collectivist causes. If "true socialism," as Marshall puts it, were to be achieved on national and international levels, it would not be through the "iron bounds of mechanical symmetry, which Marx postulated as necessary for his 'International' projects," but through "economic chivalry on the part of the individual," which would, in turn, "stimulate and be stimulated by a similar chivalry by the community as a whole," and so on.³⁹

It is difficult to know whether Marshall had Guild Socialism in mind when he wrote "The Social Possibilities of Economic Chivalry." He never identifies any collectivist scheme in particular in the essay, and Guild Socialism only came into its own as a coherent movement in 1915, though much of the movement's immediate inspiration came from Penty's 1906 *The Resto-*

ration of the Guild System.⁴⁰ Still, a certain irony emerges when Marshall's "Economic Chivalry" is juxtaposed with the works of the Guild Socialists; whereas the Guild Socialists turn to the medieval to fill a spiritual vacuum left by industrial capitalism, Marshall invokes the medieval as an antidote for a spiritual threat that he felt was inherent in collectivist practice, if not ideology. Although Marshall emphasizes the virtues of "chivalric emulation" rather than the transgressions of Penty and Cole's "industrial sinners," he nevertheless promotes, as do Penty and Cole, medieval precedents of moral and ethical behavior as central to modern reforms, industrial or otherwise.

Neither Guild Socialism nor Marshall's vision of economic chivalry or, for that matter, the optimistic medievalism of late-Victorian and Edwardian England, were to survive past the 1930s. The Guild Socialist movement collapsed after failure of the General Strike of 1926 and is now regarded as little more, as Wright puts it, than "a brief early-century interlude, a current isolated from the mainstream of British socialist development, to be recalled patronizingly or with derision according to taste."⁴¹ As Birch notes, Maynard Keynes would question a key foundation of Marshall's call for economic chivalry in a lecture delivered the same year as Marshall's death – Marshall's enthusiasm for the positive role played by the entrepreneur in *laissez-faire* economics.⁴² "The analytical intricacies of [Marshall's] extraordinary engine of analysis" still command, in the words of Theodore Levitt, "the undeviating [...] attachment of economists," but his "persistent moralizing" has been "consistently [...] ignored" – "his long policy sermon on 'The Social Possibilities of Economic Chivalry' [...] quickly and resolutely forgotten."⁴³ For its part, the heady medievalism of the period, already inherently nationalistic, would soon be conscripted by the National Socialists to justify the atrocities of the Second World War. It would be replaced by the literary neomedievalism of Tolkien and his followers, which imagined mediaeval realms isolated from the complications of history by their own fantastic and intricate systems of lore, and by the political and economic neomedievalism deployed during the second Bush presidency by neoconservative think tanks and corporate lawyers to justify everything from the torture of terror suspects to the banking chicanery that brought us the Enron and WorldCom scandals, culminating finally in the global financial crisis of 2007 and 2008.⁴⁴

And yet, the popularity of Stieg Larsson's fantasy of a corporate world derived from and ultimately governed by a distinctly mediaeval and neo-chivalric morality suggests that the ethical medievalism espoused by Penty, Cole, and Marshall might be enjoying a wider resurgence. Marshall's faith in such "informal Court[s] of Honour" may sound naïve to us, but it is worth noting that Marshall's charge that "wealth, however large, should be no passport to success if got by chicanery, by manufactured news, by fraudulent dealing, or by malignant destruction of rivals," etc. nevertheless suggests

itself as a fitting coda for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* novel, despite having been written almost a century before Larsson's novel.⁴⁵

In closing, we want to suggest two reasons for this nascent revival of the medieval as an imaginative precedent for the contemporary corporate ideal. The first is historicist, namely that the United States now finds itself in a very similar position to Edwardian England: at, if not slightly past, the apex of its economic potential, with corporations enjoying unprecedented prosperity but with the nation experiencing the widest disparities in income and wealth since the 1920s. In short, current conditions are arguably as fertile for neo-feudal moralists as they were in the time of Marshall and Penty and Cole. The second reason is more cynical (and thus probably more correct): that the mediaeval ethics recently revived by Larsson and espoused by Penty, Cole, and Marshall with their eventual emphasis on individual morality are not (despite the best efforts of Penty and Cole to deploy them as such) calls for collective responsibility, but exactly the opposite. In emphasizing individual "honor" (or lack thereof) as fundamental to corporate ethics, these discourses implicitly discredit historical materialist approaches to corporate malfeasance and instead enable the "bad-actor" fantasy, whereby one or two individuals can be persecuted in lieu of more substantial and collective action against the corporate whole. After all, this is the idealist fantasy that Larsson convinces his readers to accept. He not only represents the troubles of the Vanger Corporation as ultimately stemming from the anti-Semitic and murderous sociopathy passed down from Gottfried to Martin Vanger, but also involves readers in what is perhaps the great subterfuge perpetuated in the novel: Blomkvist and Salander's revision of the history of the Vanger family to conceal the systematic murders of an untold number of innocents for the good of its namesake company.

NOTES

1. *World of Warcraft: Cataclysm Expansion* (PC Version), Blizzard Entertainment, 2010.
2. Scott Rettberg, "Corporate Ideology in *World of Warcraft*," in *Digital Culture, Play, and Identity: A World of Warcraft Reader*, ed. Hilde G. Corneliussen and Jill Walker Rettberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 20.
3. Rettberg, "Corporate Ideology," 20.
4. See our "Revising the Future: The Medieval Self and the Sovereign Ethics of Empire in *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*," in *Studies in Medievalism XVI: Medievalism in Technology Old and New*, ed. Karl Fugelso with Carol L. Robinson (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), 159–83.
5. Stieg Larsson, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, trans. Reg Keeland (New York:

Alfred A. Knopf, 2010). All citations from the novel come from this edition. Citations from the original Swedish come from Larsson's *Män Som Hatar Kvinnor* (Stockholm: Månepocket, 2005).

6. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1944, 1972), 124.

7. Rita Raley, "eEmpires," *Cultural Critique* 57 (2004): 122–23.

8. Larsson, *Dragon Tattoo*, 43, 82.

9. Larsson, *Dragon Tattoo*, 82–84.

10. Larsson, *Dragon Tattoo*, 136. The original Swedish is, "Det låter medeltida på något sätt" (171). Of the Vanger family's origins, Larsson writes, "The family tree could be traced back to the early sixteenth century, when the name was Vangeersad. According to Vanger the name may have originated from the Dutch van Geerstat; if that was the case, the lineage could be traced as far back as the twelfth century" (135) [Familjeträdet kunde med säkerhet spåras tillbaka tidigt 1500-tal, då familjenamnet hade varit Vangeersad. Enligt Henrik Vanger var det möjligt att namnet härstammade från holländska van Geerstad; om så var fallet kunde släkten spåras ända tillbaka till 1100-talet] (170).

11. Larsson, *Dragon Tattoo*, 124. The original Swedish reads, "[...] hjäpa [...] med familjekrönikan" (157).

12. *Dragonheart*, dir. Rob Cohen (Universal Studios, 1996).

13. Alfred Marshall, "The Social Possibilities of Economic Chivalry," *The Economic Journal* 17/65 (1907): 18. As John Maynard Keynes wrote in Marshall's 1924 obituary, Marshall "sympathised with the Labour Movement and with Socialism [...] in every way, except intellectually." See "Alfred Marshall, 1842–1924," *The Economic Journal* 34/135 (1924): 358.

14. For an overview of the origins of the Guild Socialist movement and the chief personalities behind it, see Frances Hutchinson and Brian Burkitt, "The Douglas/New Age Texts in Historical Context," in *The Political Economy of Social Credit and Guild Socialism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 7–29. On the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement on Penty's architectural practice and its implications for his advocacy of Guild Socialism, see David Thistlewood, "A. J. Penty (1875–1937) and the Legacy of 19th-Century English Domestic Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 46/4 (1987): 327–41.

15. Arthur J. Penty, *Post-Industrialism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1922), 143. For Penty's critique of the Arts and Crafts movement, see 146–51.

16. For a summary of the Guild Socialist critique of capitalism and the state, see Anthony W. Wright, "Guild Socialism Revisited," *Journal of Contemporary History* 9/1 (1974): 169–70. For an overview of the movement's proposed "industrial guild" system, see 173–74.

17. Arthur J. Penty, *Towards a Christian Sociology* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1923), 134–35.

18. Penty, *Post-Industrialism*, "Return to the Past," 143.

19. Penty, *Towards a Christian Sociology*, 135.

20. Wright, "Guild Socialism Revisited," 168. Thistlewood likewise writes that, as an architect, Penty was "prompted by the desire to restore conditions that had given rise to medieval buildings, though not by a desire to revert to medieval built forms" (333). Arguably, this approach seems informed by Penty's writings on Guild Socialism as well.

21. G. D. H. Cole, *Guild Socialism Restated* (1920; reprint, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, Inc., 1980), 45–46.

22. Penty, *Towards a Christian Sociology*, 135.

23. Penty, "Means and Ends from *Means and Ends*," in *The Gauntlet: A Challenge to the Myth of Progress* (Norfolk, VA: IHS Press, 2003), 41.

24. Penty, *Towards a Christian Sociology*, 101.

25. Cole, *Guild Socialism Restated*, 45.

26. Hans E. Jenson, "Marshall Revisited: A Reply," *Journal of Economic Issues* 19/4 (1985): 971.

27. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 12–13. "I do not doubt," writes Marshall about the efforts of the collectivists, "that the paths on which they lead us might probably be strewn with roses for some distance" (12).

28. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 17.

29. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 17–18.

30. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 21.

31. Simon Cook, "Poetry, Faith and Chivalry: Alfred Marshall's Response to Modern Socialism," *History of Economics Review* 47 (Winter 2008): 29.

32. Cook, "Poetry, Faith and Chivalry," 29. Here, Cook quotes from Marshall's 1890 Presidential Address to the Economic Science and Statistics Section of the British Association. See "Some Aspects of Competition (1890)," in *Memorials of Alfred Marshall*, ed. A. C. Pigou (1925; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1966), 291.

33. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 13–14.

34. Thomas D. Birch, "Marshall and Keynes Revisited," *Journal of Economic Issues* 19/1 (1985): 196. Here, Birch quotes Marshall's "Economic Chivalry," 14. Marshall goes on to compare working for the difficulty of the work's sake to the call of "knightly chivalry" on its aspirants to begin "by making [their] own armor" (14).

35. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 14.

36. Birch, "Marshall and Keynes," 196.

37. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 26–27; Birch, "Marshall and Keynes," 196.

38. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 25–26.

39. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 27–28.

40. Hutchinson and Burkitt, "Historical Context," 8.

41. Wright, "Guild Socialism Revisited," 166.

42. Birch, "Marshall and Keynes," 198.

43. Theodore Levitt, "Alfred Marshall: Victorian Relevance for Modern Economics," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 90/3 (1976): 441.

44. For accounts of literary neomedievalism, see our "Neomedievalism, Hyperrealism, and Simulation" (12–24), as well as the other essays on the subject in *Studies in Medievalism XIX: Defining Neomedievalism(s)*, ed. Karl Fugelso (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010). For an account of the political and economic neomedievalism of the second Bush presidency, see Bruce Holsinger's *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007).

45. Marshall, "Economic Chivalry," 29.