

SYLLABUS
Fall 2023
History 600: The Middle Ages in Film
Humanities 5245
Thursdays 1:20-3:15 pm

Prof. Elizabeth Lapina
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Office: 4131 Humanities
office hours: Tuesdays 9:15-10:15 and Thursdays 10:00-11:00

In this course we will watch, read about and discuss a series of films on various medieval subjects. Some of these films will be blockbusters, but most will be films that are little known to the general public. Some of them will be recent, but most will date from the middle to late 20th century. Some of them will be American, the rest — European and Asian. With the help of secondary sources, we will gain an awareness of medieval realities and medieval texts on which these films are based. However, we will move beyond simply noting whether each film is offering a faithful or an unfaithful representation of history and will attempt to understand what attracted modern filmmakers to medieval history in the first place and what concerns — be they artistic, political, social, religious, etc. — made them represent it in the ways that they did. Two topics in particular will be at the center of our discussion: violence and gender.

TRIGGER WARNING: The films we will be discussing will be dealing with many violent themes, including rape.

CREDIT POLICY STATEMENT: The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), dedicated online time, reading, writing, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described in the syllabus.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the time you have completed this undergraduate capstone seminar, you will have gained knowledge and skills in the following areas:

- You will have become familiar with certain key themes — particularly those having to do with violence and with gender — of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period between the twelfth and the sixteenth centuries.
- You will become familiar with representations of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period in American, European and Japanese cinema.
- You will have gained a better understanding of how history has been — and is — used to comment upon, justify, criticize, etc. various developments of the present.
- You will have gained experience in developing a research question and will present an argument in a paper between 15 and 20 pages long.

HISTORY / HISTORY:

VIOLENCE: How is violence represented? Positive / negative, necessary / gratuitous; glorious / horrible; defensive / offensive. Who are the perpetrators? The victims? The bystanders? What are the institutions that organize violence? How is violence justified? When is it condemned?

WOMEN:

GRADE:

- Participation: 30%
- Presentation on October 12: 5%
- Research Question (submitted on-time): 5%
- Annotated bibliography: 5%
- Outline (1-2 pages double-spaced; has to contain your research question and our thesis): 5%
- Rough draft (submitted on-time): 5%
- Final presentation (well-organized, engaging, clear): 15%
- Final draft: 30%

LATE ASSIGNMENTS: assignments submitted late will receive a reduction of 5% per workday.

FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT: The students will have to choose a film, a cluster of films, or a topic that runs across a series of films, which they will analyze in their essays and oral presentations.

The grade for the paper assignment will be based on the following:

- An original thesis statement
- Clear structure with one idea per paragraph.
- A close analysis of the film(s) with discussions of specific scenes.
- Length of at least 15 pages (double-spaced).
- Incorporation of basic information about the film (name of director, date and country of production).
- Basic understanding of the historical period represented in the film.
- Basic understanding of the historical period when the film was made.
- Engagement with scholarship (peer-reviewed books and articles)
- An awareness that the reader might not have watched the film.

WEEK 1. September 7: Introduction to the Course

- Syllabus
- Show a few minutes of *Braveheart* to explain how to watch a film.



WEEK 2. September 14: **Braveheart (1995)**

13th century

- HISTORY: Michael Prestwich, "The Scottish Wars, 1296-1307," *Edward I* (New Haven, 1997) 469-516.
- Colin McArthur, "That's Show Business!': The 'What' and 'Why' of Braveheart's Historical Distortions," *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots: distortions of Scotland in Hollywood cinema* (London, 2003) 178-191.
- Colin McArthur, "It Takes One to Know One: Braveheart's Appeal to the Proto-Fascist Psyche," *Brigadoon, Braveheart and the Scots*, 192-208.
- Laurie A. Finkie, and Martin B. Shichtman, "The Hagiography of Politics," *Cinematic Illuminations. The Middle Ages on Film*, 156-194.
- A. E. Christa Canitz, "'Historians ... Will Say I Am a Liar': The Ideology of False Truth Claims in Mel Gibson's Braveheart and Luc Besson's *The Messenger*." In *Postmodern Medievalisms*, edited by Richard Utz and Jesse G. Swan. Studies in Medievalism 13 (Cambridge, 2004) 127-142.
- Elizabeth Ewan, "Braveheart." *The American Historical Review*, 100 (4) (October 1995): 1219-1221.



WEEK 3. September 21: **Lancelot du Lac (1974)**

13th century

- Joseph Cunneen, "The End of Knighthood: Lancelot of the Lake." In Joseph Cunneen, Robert Bresson: A Spiritual Style in Film (New York, 2003) 145-155.
- Rider, Jeff et al., "The Arthurian Legend in French Cinema: Robert Bresson's Lancelot du Lac and Eric Rohmer's Perceval le Gallois." In Kevin J. Harty, ed., Harty,

Cinema Arthuriana: Essays on Arthuriana Film (New York, 2002) 149-162.

- Brian Levy and Lesley Coote, "The Subversion of Medievalism in Lancelot du lac and Monty Python and the Holy Grail." In *Postmodern Medievalisms*, 99-126.
- Kristin Thompson, "The Sheen of Armour, the Whinnies of Horses: Sparse Parametric Style in Lancelot du Lac." In James Quandt, ed., *Robert Bresson* (Toronto, 1998) 339-371.



WEEK 4. September 28: **Valley of the Bees (1968)**

13th century

- Alice Lovejoy, *Army Film and the Avant Garde. Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military*
- Hames, Peter and Istvan Szabo, *The Cinema of Central Europe*
- Jonathan L. Owen, *Avant-Garde to New Wave. Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties*
- Ewa Mazierska, Matilda Mroz and Ezbietta Ostrowska, eds., *The Cinematic Bodies of Eastern Europe and Russia. Between Pain and Pleasure.*
- Sean Martin, *New Waves in Cinema*
- Mira Liehm and Antonin J. Liehm, *The Most Important Art. Soviet and Eastern European Film After 1945.*



WEEK 5. October 5: **The Last Duel (2021)**

14th century

Read a few reviews of the film:

- <https://screenzealots.com/2021/11/01/the-last-duel/>
- <https://loudandclearreviews.com/the-last-duel-film-review-jodie-comer/>
- <https://scroll.in/reel/1008092/the-last-duel-movie-review-then-is-now-in-period-me-too-drama>

WEEK 6. October 12:

Short presentations in class. Watch a “medieval” film of your choice. Come prepared to talk about the film for about 10-12 minutes.

- Identify the director, the country (countries) and the date of production.
- Identify the historical period portrayed in the film.
- Discuss what *contemporary* (20th / 21st century) themes the film is reflecting / commenting upon.
- Prepare a Powerpoint with some stills.



WEEK 7. October 19: **The Seventh Seal (1957)**

14th century

Annotated bibliography of 7-10 scholarly items due in class.

READ:

- Wicks, R. L. (2020). *Introduction to Existentialism: From Kierkegaard to The Seventh Seal*. Bloomsbury Publishing.



WEEK 8. October 26: **Kenau (2014)**

The film is also known under a different title: *1572: The Battle for Haarlem*

16th century

Research question due in class.

READ:

- HISTORY: Anton Van Der Lem, *Revolt in the Netherland*, chapter “Loyalty Tested,” 69-94.
- Truax, Jean A. “Anglo-Norman Women at War: Valiant Soldiers, Prudent Strategists or Charismatic Leaders?” In *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Military and Naval History*, edited by Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Andrew Villalon, 111–25. Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999



December 2: **Seven Samurai (1954)**

Detailed outline due in class.

16th century

- Randy P. Schiff, “Samurai on Shifting Ground: Negotiating the Medieval and the Modern in Seven Samurai and Yojimbo.”
- Desser, David. *The Samurai Films of Akira Kurosawa* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983).
- David A. Conrad, *Akira Kurosawa and Modern Japan*
- Dolores Martinez, “Seven samurai and six women: Kurosawa's Shichinin samurai.” Alistair Phillips and Julian Stringer, *Japanese Cinema Texts and Contexts* (London, 2007)
- Lukasz Boron, “Ideology of the Agrarian Myth: Kurosawa’s Seven Samurai and Sturges’ The Magnificent Seven,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 36 (2019).
- Galbraith, Stuart *The Emperor and the Wolf: The Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune* (London, 2001).
- James Goodwin, *Akira Kurosawa and Intertextual Cinema* (Baltimore, 1994).
- Stephen Prince, *The Warrior’s Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa* (Princeton 1991)
- Donald Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* (Berkeley, 1996)
- Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC, 2000).
- Akira Kurosawa, *Something Like an Autobiography* (New York, 1983).
- Darrell William Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film* (New York, 1996).
- Peter Wild, *Akira Kurosawa*

WEEK 10. November 9: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTOR

WEEK 11. November 16: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTOR

November 22nd: rough drafts due (I will return your rough drafts on November 30th). (1) Place one copy in your instructor's mailbox. (2) E-mail a copy to your partner.

WEEK 12: November 23rd: THANKSGIVING!!!

WEEK 13: November 30: PRESENTATIONS

E-mail a one-page copy with your construction criticism to your partner and to your instructor by 11:59 pm.

WEEK 14: December 7: PRESENTATIONS

LIST OF 'MEDIEVAL' FILMS

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/medfilms.html>

BOOKS ON RESERVE AT THE COLLEGE LIBRARY:

- (1) Aberth, John, *A Knight in the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (2003).
- (2) Barnau, Anke and Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Film* (2009).
- (3) Driver, Martha W., and Sid Ray, eds., *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (2004).
- (4) Finkie, Laurie A. and Martin B. Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations. The Middle Ages on Film* (2010).
- (5) Haydock, Nickolas, *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Ages* (2007).
- (6) Ramey, Lynn T. and Tison Pugh, *Race, Class, and Gender in 'Medieval' Cinema* (2007).
- (7) Harty, Kevin J. *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern, and Asian films about Medieval Europe* (Jefferson, NC, 1999).
- (8) Aronstein, Susan, *Hollywood Knights* (2005)
- (9) Bildhauer, Bettina, *Filming the Middle Ages* (2011).
- (10) Elliott, Andrew B. R., *Remaking the Middle Ages* (2011)

(11) Haines, John, *Music in Films on the Middle Ages* (2014)

(12) Kellym Kathleen Coyne, and Tison Pugh, *Queer Movie Medievalisms* (2009)

(13) Sigler, Lora Ann, *Medieval Art and the Look of Silent Film* (2019)

(14) William F. Woods, *The Medieval Filmscape* (2014)

Bartlett, Robert. *The Middle Ages and the Movies, Eight Key Films*. London: Reaktion Books, 2022. Pp. 288. £16.00. (Subsequently released in the United States by the University of Chicago Press, \$22.50.) ISBN: 978-1-78914-552-6.

Medieval Women on Film

<https://mcfarlandbooks.com/product/medieval-women-on-film/>

Imagining Heloise as Abbess of the Paraclete

[Constant J. Mews](#)