

EUH 2021 Fall 2010
Medieval to Modern Europe: European History through Film

Professor: Dr. Felice Lifshitz (lifshitz@fiu.edu; www.fiu.edu/~lifshitz)

MMC Office Hours: Monday 11 AM – 12 PM and by appointment; 305-348-3557 direct office line; 305-348-2328 History Department; Office Location: DM 389

BBC Office Hours: Wednesday 9 AM – 10 AM and by appointment; Office Location: AC1 386A

The Course: This course provides an introduction to some major themes in European history, using as source material thirteen (13) twentieth-century films set in the European Middle Ages.

On the basis of these films, the course covers:

- (1) some key moments in medieval European history;
- (2) some key moments in modern European and American history;
- (3) some key aspects of film studies, with a focus on historical films;
- (4) some key aspects of medievalism.

The Films:

1. **“The Vikings”** (USA, 1958; director Richard Fleischer)

Based on the 1951 novel *The Viking* by Edison Marshall (1894 – 1967)

Main medieval source = 12c (?) Old Norse “Ragnar’s Saga” (trans. Ben Waggoner, Ben, *The Sagas of Ragnar Lodbrok*; The Troth, 2009)

2. **“Becket”** (UK, 1962; director Peter Glenville)

Based on the 1959 play *Becket, or the Honor of God* (*Becket ou l'honneur de Dieu*) by Jean Anouilh (1910 – 1987), as translated by Lucienne Hill and adapted for the Broadway stage in 1960 by producer David Merrick.

No main medieval source; Anouilh did research by reading the works of professional historians and various biographies (medieval and modern) of St. Thomas Becket.

3. **“The Lion in Winter”** (USA, 1968; director Anthony Harvey)

Based on the 1966 Broadway play *The Lion in Winter (A Comedy in Two Acts)* by James Goldman (1927 – 1998), adapted for the screen by Goldman.

No main medieval source; Goldman did research by reading the works of professional historians.

4. **“The Adventures of Robin Hood”** (USA, 1938; directors Michael Curtiz [castle sequences] and William Keighley [forest sequences])

Original screenplay by Norman Reilly Raine and Seton I. Miller “based upon ancient Robin Hood legends”

Plot elements taken from 17c “garlands” and ballads including “*Robin Hood and Maid Marian*,” *Robin Hood and Little John* (1624), *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar* (mid 17c), and Martin Parker, *True Tale of Robin Hood* (1632)

No medieval sources were used directly, but the 17c depictions drew upon a series of 15c plays and ballads including *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, *Robin Hood and the Monk*, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, *Robin Hood's Death* and *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*

5. **“Sorceress”** (“Le moine et la sorcière”) (France, 1987; director Suzanne Schiffman)
Screenplay by Suzanne Schiffman and Pamela Berger, based on a 13c document analyzed in a well-known study by a professional medieval historian: Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound. Guinefort, healer of children since the thirteenth century* (1983, Cambridge University Press; translated from the 1979 French original, *Le saint lévrier*).

6. **“The Messenger”** (France, 1999; director Luc Besson)
Retells a well-known and frequently-filmed story, on the basis of a new script – co-authored with Andrew Birkin - that grew out of Besson’s research at the Museum of Joan of Arc in Orleans.

7. **“The Adventures of Marco Polo”** (USA, 1938; director Archie Mayo)
Screenplay by Robert E. Sherwood, based on the Prologue and Chapter Three of *Le Devisement dou monde (Description of the World)*, known in English translation as the *Travels of Marco Polo*, “ghost-written” in 1298/1299 for the Venetian merchant Marco Polo by Rustichello of Pisa.

8. **“The Seventh Seal”** (Sweden, 1957; director Ingmar Bergman)
From the director’s original script, inspired by the visual arts of the period during and after the Black Death of 1348/1349.

9. **“Kriemhild’s Revenge”** (Germany, 1924; director Fritz Lang)
Based on the anonymous romance of c. 1200, *Die Nibelungenlied*. The film is part two of a larger whole. Part one is entitled “Siegfried.”

10. **“El Cid”** (US, 1961; director Anthony Mann)
Based on the play *Las Mocedades del Cid* by Guillen de Castro (1569-1631), an adaptation of the anonymous *Las Mocedades de Rodrigo (The Youthful Deeds of Rodrigo)* of c. 1300, and filmed under the guidance of the historian and philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal (1869 – 1968), author of *La España del Cid* (1929).

11. **“Alexander Nevsky”** (USSR, 1938; director Sergei Eisenstein and Dmitri Vasilev)
From a script co-written by Eisenstein and the KGB official Pyotr Pavlenko, based on historical works and popular legends concerning the Russian national hero and saint of the orthodox church, Alexander Nevsky.

12. **“Krzyzacy” aka “Order of Teutonic Knights”** (Poland, 1960; director Aleksander Ford)
Based on the novel *Krzyzacy* (in English translation called *The Teutonic Knights*) by Henryk Sienkiewicz, serialized 1897 – 1900, then published in book form in 1900.

13. “**Excalibur**” (USA, 1981; director John Boorman)

Adapted for the screen by Rospo Pallenberg from Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (written 1470, printed 1485).

Lectures: Monday and Wednesday, 10:00 – 10:50 AM in DM 100 (or a room in the new garage) on MMC and in HM 260 on BBC. Please check your schedules for the definitive room assignment for MMC. The lectures will be available soon after their live delivery via the course website on Moodle and on iTunesU. Please bear with us the first week of the semester as we work out the technological kinks on this process. Substantive film-related lectures begin September 1. We will have everything running smoothly by then.

The twice-weekly lectures cover the basic information required to understand course themes (1) and (2). It is impossible to survey both the moments of creation of the films (which range from 1924 through 1999) and the periods depicted in the films (which range from the ninth through the fourteenth centuries) in correct chronological order. Instead, the course is divided into thematic units. Each lecture is accompanied by an “Information File,” containing precise dates, correct spellings of names and places, and the like. This information does not constitute the lectures; rather, it makes it easier to follow the lectures. The relevant “Information File” will be uploaded weekly onto the Moodle site. These lectures (on which the professor works very hard!) represent the fruit of hours of research, thought, and writing. They provide all the information necessary for you to be oriented concerning crucial aspects of the films. There is no need to have recourse to any additional sources of information. It is an unnecessary expenditure of time to do any additional independent research, something which also easily turns into a temptation for plagiarism. The wisest strategy is to focus your efforts on writing the papers (for which see below) based on the course materials provided for you.

The main challenge of the class is to grasp the medieval history depicted in the film, the modern context that generated the film, and the complex relationship between the two points in time. The study of that relationship is the study of “medievalism,” that is, course theme (4), which will also be highlighted in at least one of the lectures associated with each film.

Required readings: Articles from *The History on Film Reader* (edited by Marnie Hughes-Warrington and available for purchase at both FIU bookstores) are devoted to course theme (3). Key points from the readings are highlighted in the lectures, along with additional interpretations by specialists on medieval film, such as the observation by Anke Bernau and Bettina Bildhauer that “a playful confusion of temporalities is a fundamental characteristic...of medieval film” (in their *Medieval Film* of 2009). The aim of the readings is to give students a vocabulary and analytical tools for the academic discussion of (historical) film. The readings are concentrated in the first half of the semester, so that students can benefit from these tools as early as possible. They should be helpful to you throughout the course.

Film Screenings: Every Monday from 8 – 10:30 PM. I will screen the first film on August 23 in DM 100. FIU Space and Scheduling cannot assign a permanent room to special events until after the second week of the semester. I am hopeful that we will be given DM 100 for the remainder

of the screenings, which run through November 22 (with no screening on Labor Day). If the room changes, I will post a note to that effect on the Moodle website; otherwise, continue to come to DM 100. These screenings run one week ahead of the course schedule, for the benefit of the Section leaders and of those students who wish to have seen the film before the Monday morning lecture. Students who do not attend the screenings can watch the films in the library (always on MMC and sometimes on BBC as well), or arrange for their own viewings. All of the films are available for purchase through Amazon.com or for rental through various outlets such as Netflix. The FIU bookstore may have ordered a few copies as well. All are classics that would enhance any personal or family film collection. You are required to have seen the films and to have completed the assigned reading by the time you attend your discussion section.

Required Discussion Sections: Attendance at and participation in your assigned Discussion Section are required. Your Section Leaders will also grade your written assignments for the course. All are graduate students in the Department of History who are taking a Reading Seminar with the professor that is designed to improve their knowledge of all four course themes. Each will draw individually and independently on the work s/he does in the seminar to enhance your learning experience in the Sections.

Attendance at and informed participation in the sections is worth one point for each meeting (for a total of 13 points); two additional points for outstanding performance may be awarded by your Section Leader at her or his discretion. Regular, excellent contributions to the discussions are also the main way to earn extra credit in the course, up to a total of 10 additional points (awarded by your Section Leader). You may also access some or all of those 10 additional points through a steady pattern of improvement in your writing assignments. Rewrites are not permitted; instead, focus on applying what you have learned and doing better the next time, and try thereby to earn extra credit points.

Writing Assignments: This class satisfies the “Humanities with Writing” requirement for FIU’s lower division. There are five writing assignments, of varying length and complexity, each based on anywhere from one to four films along with the readings for the course. Topics and due dates for the five essays appear below. Essays are always due by 11:59 PM on the due date and must be submitted (by the student) to the appropriate section leader via Turnitin.com. The class ID is 3395154.

Section Leaders: The contact information for the MMC section leaders, all of whom will hold office hours in DM 392, follows here. When you attend your sections, your TA will inform you of his or her office hours and any other important information relevant only to your section. Your section leader may also open a discussion board for his or her group on Turnitin.com. The list below also includes the password required to register for your individual section on Turnitin.com. Please register at your earliest convenience to avoid last-minute difficulties when the first paper is due. The section numbers listed below are unrelated to those used by FIU on panthersoft; they are internal to the course and were established for Turnitin.

Daleth Amorim (ddiaz036@fiu.edu): Ragnar (Section 1)
Paul Burkart (pburk002@fiu.edu): Becket (Section 2)
Jacqueline Nusz (jnusz001@fiu.edu): Eleanor (Section 3)
Sarah Otero (sotero@fiu.edu): Robin (Section 4)
Marquita Reed (mreed003@fiu.edu): Joan (Section 5)
Angelo Santa Lucia (asant021@fiu.edu): Hagen (Section 6)
Gracia Solis (gsoli002@fiu.edu): Rodrigo (Section 7)

The Section Leader for the BBC is:

Tiffany West (twest007@fiu.edu): Alexander (Section 8). Her office location is also AC1 386A.

Paper Topics and Due Dates: Please do not feel obligated to use the “assignment names” on the syllabus and on Turnitin as the title for your papers. It is preferable that you devise an original title that reflects the particular argument in your paper. In a pinch, however, use these titles rather than have no title at all.

Paper #1: Use the films “The Vikings,” “Becket,” “Lion in Winter,” and “The Adventures of Robin Hood” along with the readings from *The History on Film Reader* and the relevant lectures to discuss the topic below (due 11:59 PM, Sunday October 3). This paper is worth a maximum of 20 points. Maximum length is 7 pages. Minimum length is “sufficient to say something significant and illustrate/demonstrate it with evidence.” Grades will be posted on October 13.
Topic: On the whole, the portraits of the ruling kings of medieval England (Aella, Henry II, and John) in these four English-language (and mostly American) films are more negative than positive, sometimes dramatically so. Rather than heroize holders of institutional, administrative, power, these films tend to celebrate adventurers, outlaws, and opponents of central government authority. Do you agree with that assessment of the films? If so, why? If not, why not? Whichever answer you select, explain what you think the portraits of English rulers in these films might tell us about attitudes towards government among some sectors of mid twentieth-century American and English society?

Paper #2: Use “Sorceress” and “The Messenger” along with readings from *The History on Film Reader* and the relevant lectures to discuss the topic below (due 11:59 PM, Sunday October 17). This paper is worth a maximum of 15 points. Maximum length is 5 pages. Minimum length is “sufficient to say something significant and illustrate/demonstrate it with evidence.” Grades will be posted on October 25.

Topic: These two late twentieth-century French films rely upon modern psychological theories concerning the effects of trauma to explain the actions of real figures from French medieval history. Does the psychological perspective contribute to increasing the historical understanding of the audience, or does it distort the historical reality by introducing

anachronistic dynamics into the French Middle Ages? Is the answer the same for both films, or does one do a better job of preserving historical “accuracy” than does the other?

Paper #3: Use “The Adventures of Marco Polo” and “The Seventh Seal” along with readings from *The History on Film Reader* and the relevant lectures to discuss the topic below (due 11:59 PM, Sunday October 31). This paper is worth a maximum of 15 points. Maximum length is 5 pages. Minimum length is “sufficient to say something significant and illustrate/demonstrate it with evidence.” Grades will be posted on November 10.

Topic: What did you learn about late medieval social and economic history from this unit of the course? What did you learn about twentieth-century views of medieval social and economic history? Can you suggest some explanations for the stark contrast between the optimistic merchant hero of the 1938 American film and the pessimistic knightly hero of the 1957 European film?

Paper #4: Use “Kriemhild’s Revenge” (1924), “El Cid” (1961), “Alexander Nevsky”(1938) and “Krzyzacy” (1960) along with readings from *The History on Film Reader* and the relevant lectures to discuss the topic below (due 11:59 PM, Sunday November 28). This paper is worth a maximum of 25 points. Maximum length is 10 pages. Minimum length is “sufficient to say something significant and illustrate/demonstrate it with evidence.” Grades will be posted on December 4.

Topic: The films span several decades, and come from all across Europe, from Spain through Germany and Poland to Russia. All are epic films drawing on medieval materials, men, or moments central to the political and cultural identities of the nation-states (if the USSR can be labeled as such) in which the films were made. How do female figures function in these dramas of national identity? Do they represent the nation as much as, or in the same ways, that male figures do? Is the treatment of female figures similar through all four films, or does it vary dramatically from film to film? Can you detect any patterns in the treatment of female characters, or draw any connections between the places and times when the films were made and the roles played by women in them?

Paper #5: Use “Excalibur” along with the readings from *The History on Film Reader* and the relevant lectures to discuss the topic below (due 11:59 PM, Sunday December 5). This paper is worth a maximum of 10 points. Maximum length is 3 pages. Minimum length is “sufficient to say something significant and illustrate/demonstrate it with evidence.” Grades will be posted on December 11.

Topic: Did you find Reading 15 (Aronstein, “Revisiting the Round Table”) useful for deepening your understanding of Arthurian films in general and of “Excalibur” in particular? If so, why; if not, why not. Please use this first portion of the answer as a jumping-off point to assess the

general value of the scholarly field of film studies (as represented by *The History on Film Reader*) for helping you understand historical films.

Late papers will only be accepted in extraordinary and exceptional circumstances. Contact your Section leader directly with requests concerning late papers. Students are expected to adhere to a code of academic honesty, to avoid plagiarism, and submit only their own original work.

Cumulative Point Totals for Final Grades:

Total points	Final Grade
95+	A
90+	A-
85+	B+
80+	B
75+	B-
70+	C+
65+	C (minimum grade to fulfill the Lower Division requirement)
60+	C-
55+	D+
50+	D
45+	D-
44 or below	F

Components of an Extremely Successful Essay

- 1) The essay is founded upon and built around specific scene(s) in the films assigned for the course.
- 2) The essay presents a strong central theme or argument which is clear, logical, and comprehensible, and is in fact supported by the evidence of the film(s) in question.
- 3) The essay addresses the topic proposed by the instructor.
- 4) The argument of the essay is actually plausible given what is believed by professional historians about the period and place under discussion, and is flawed neither by major confusions nor by popular prejudices and misconceptions concerning medieval Europe.
- 5) The essay represents the student's own individual work, and gives credit for every idea, fact, or opinion which the student has drawn from another author. It is not plagiarism to report an interpretation of a text, film or historical event advanced by another author; it is plagiarism to do so without citation. It is not plagiarism to utilize factual information (even something as minor as a date) garnered from the works of others; it is plagiarism to do so without citation. It is not plagiarism to utilize particularly apt turns of phrases from the works of other authors; it is plagiarism to do so without citation, and without the use of quotation marks.

- 6) The essay seeks to understand rather than to pass judgment; argument is to be distinguished from the mere assertion of opinion.
- 7) The essay is written in formal academic (rather than colloquial) English, without errors of grammar, syntax, orthography, punctuation, or usage.
- 8) The essay suggests original interpretations of the films or innovative ways to understand the past.

Grades on the papers will be determined by starting with the maximum point total and deducting points for every component on the above list that is missing from the essay.

Schedule of Lecture Topics and Reading Assignments:

Monday August 23 Course Overview

Wednesday August 25 Film Studies I

- Reading 23: Rosenzweig & Thelen, "The Presence of the Past"
- Reading 3: Rosenstone, "History in Images"
- Reading 2: Davis, "Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead"
- Reading 16: Cyrino, "Gladiator (2000)"

Monday August 30 Film Studies II

- Readings 27: Maltby, "On the Prospect of Writing Cinema History"
- Reading 5: White, "Historiography and Historiophoty"
- Reading 4: Landy, "The Historical Film"

Wednesday September 1 "The Vikings" part I

- Reading 20: Pierson, "A Production Designer's Cinema"

Monday September 6 Labor Day Holiday

Wednesday September 8 "The Vikings" part II

- Reading 13: Desser & Studlar, "Never Having to Say You're Sorry"

Monday September 13 "Becket" part I

- Reading 8: Turim, "Flashbacks in Film"

Wednesday September 15 "Becket" part II/"Lion in Winter" part I

- Reading 6: Comolli, "Historical Fiction"

Monday September 20 "Lion in Winter" part II

- Reading 17: Baudrillard, "History"

Wednesday September 22 "The Adventures of Robin Hood" part I

- Reading 18: Rosen, "Detail and Historicity"

- Reading 26: Smith, "Selling My Heart"

Monday September 27 No Class

Wednesday September 29 "The Adventures of Robin Hood" part II

SUNDAY OCTOBER 3: PAPER #1 DUE

Monday October 4 "Sorceress" part I

- Reading 12: Burgoyne, "Prosthetic Memory"

Wednesday October 6 "Sorceress" part II

Monday October 11 "The Messenger" part I

- Reading 24: Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Post-Modern"

Wednesday October 13 "The Messenger" part II

- Reading 14: Young, "In the Combat Zone"

SUNDAY OCTOBER 17: PAPER #2 DUE

Monday October 18 "The Adventures of Marco Polo" part I

- Reading 25: Eckert, "The Carole Lombard in Macy's Window"
- Reading 22: Giroux, "Memory and Pedagogy"

Wednesday October 20 "The Adventures of Marco Polo" part II

Monday October 25 "The Seventh Seal" part I

- Reading 19: Barthes, "The Romans in Films"

Wednesday October 27 "The Seventh Seal" part II

SUNDAY OCTOBER 31: PAPER #3 DUE

Monday November 1 "Kriemhild's Revenge" part I

- Reading 7: Doane, "The Representability of Time"

Wednesday November 3 "Kriemhild's Revenge" part II

- Reading 9: Deleuze, "Cinema 2"

Monday November 8 "El Cid" part I

Wednesday November 10 "El Cid" part II

Monday November 15 "Alexander Nevsky" part I

Wednesday November 17 “Alexander Nevsky” part II

Monday November 22: “Kryzacy” aka “Order of Teutonic Knights” part I

Wednesday November 24: “Kryzacy” part II

Wednesday November 24/Thursday November 25/Friday November 26: no section meetings
(Thanksgiving break)

SUNDAY NOVEMBER 28: PAPER #4 DUE

Monday November 29 “Excalibur” part I

- Reading 15: Aronstein, “Revisiting the Round Table”

Wednesday December 1 “Excalibur” part II

SUNDAY DECEMBER 5: PAPER #5 DUE