Teaching the Middle Ages on Film: Visual Narrative and the Historical Record

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of some of the contentious issues concerning the role of film in historical studies of the Middle Ages. Is it appropriate to point out inaccuracies of detail in historical film? As a collective commercial enterprise, is a movie inherently limited in its portrayal of the past, and does this matter? How does film convention affect representation? Can movies err on the side of historical truth? What are the uses of purposeful or intentional anachronism? How have perceptions of movies changed with the advent of the paratext on DVD? How might movies with medieval themes be used effectively in the classroom? Responses to these and related questions are drawn from writings on film from 1915 to the present.

Writing in 1915, Hugo Münsterberg proposed the foundation of "a Universal Culture Lyceum" that would produce movies "in science, history, religion, literature, geography, biography, art, architecture, social science, economics and industry . . . for the education of the youth of the land."[1] Despite Münsterberg's visionary prediction, the capacities of film to instruct and inspire are still somewhat subject to question. Developed over the last one hundred years and thus a comparatively new medium, as several proponents have pointed out,[2] film has yet to demonstrate its full potential for teaching and recovering history. Nonetheless, film remains one of the most useful tools for talking about the Middle Ages, for conveying with graphic immediacy some subjects not fully conjured by the written word. This article surveys a number of issues pertaining to pedagogical uses of movies with medieval themes, arguing that films of a variety of genres are documents to be profitably read alongside historical and literary texts. As the historian and film expert Robert A. Rosenstone has suggested, the past created by movies "is not the same as the past provided by traditional history, but it certainly should be called history – if by that word we mean a serious encounter with the lingering meaning of past events."[3]

Criticism of inaccuracies of detail in movies about the Middle Ages has long been the scholar's parlor game. The American writer and critic James Agee, discussing Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*, noted in his review of the film's U.S. release in 1946 that when the film was earlier shown to

a group of Oxford's impassive Shakespeare pundits, there was only one murmur of dissent. A woman specialist insisted that all the war horses which take part in the Battle of Agincourt should have been stallions.[4]

Though Agee is pointing to the pettiness of such criticism (whether the lone woman scholar was in this instance correct or not), there is another point to be made. As the French film critic Marc Ferro has suggested, pointing out errors in the record, whether that record is written or filmed, is part of talking about history. Ferro says:

> there are several ways to look at a historical film. The most common of these, inherited from the tradition of scholarship, consists in verifying if the reconstruction is precise (are the soldiers of 1914 mistakenly wearing the helmets which were introduced only after 1916?), seeing that the décor and the location is faithful and the dialogue is authentic.[5]

This sort of exercise has its place and is frequently found as well in criticism of, for example, historical novels, another type of fictionalizing.[6] And as Rosenstone points out,

> By academic standards, all historical films are, in fact, laced with fiction. Dramatic works depend upon invention to create incident, plot, and character (even documentable "historical" characters become fictional when re-created by an actor on the screen).[7]

There are many films about the Middle Ages that are deeply problematic in their representation of history, perhaps most, but one can learn from bad films almost as much as one can learn from good ones, especially when films are read in conjunction with historical and literary texts.[8] In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," his important 1955 essay, Walter Benjamin pointed out, "It is inherent in the technique of the film as well as that of sports that everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert."[9] As a medium for teaching, film is readily accessible to a range of viewers, providing a good starting point for students and their professors. While the immediate subject of discussion might be the dialogue between medieval source texts and their analogues on film, other topics might include the filmmaker's vision, the screenplay, the interpretation by the actors, the cinematography, film score, and editing.

Writing about film with medieval themes, and about the movies more generally, has attracted scholars from the disciplines of history, art history, and literature, along with musicologists, film critics outside the academy, and sometimes filmmakers themselves. Despite their range of disciplines and training, scholars tend to approach film as text, discussing a movie in terms of the clarity and power of its narrative, its portrayal of character, the strengths and weaknesses of its dialogue, its successful or unsuccessful representation of the past, and its uses in the classroom (while regularly lamenting the fact that the perfect film with a medieval subject has yet to be made). Kevin J. Harty, the Arthurian scholar, filmographer, and bibliographer, whose book *The Reel Middle Ages* is one central text in the

study of films with medieval themes, was trained in English literature; Natalie Zemon Davis and Robert Rosenstone, two scholars who themselves have worked on films and write very cogently on the subject, are both historians.[10] Analysis of film as informed by contemporary politics, or by earlier political contexts, is most finely found in work by Susan Aronstein, also trained in English literature; in the study of Joan of Arc on film by Robin Blaetz, who teaches film studies; in discussion of Robin Hood movies by the medievalist and modern literary critic Stephen Knight, and in the several books and many essays by Jonathan Rosenbaum, film reviewer for the *Chicago Reader*.[11] Remarkably, there is very little discernible difference in basic approach, though opinions and analyses of specific movies certainly may vary.

There has, however, been some scholarly and critical debate about whether or not historical representation on film is necessarily limited by the commercial nature of the medium. Speaking at Princeton University in 1934, the art historian Erwin Panofsky famously compared the making of movies to the building of the medieval cathedral, noting that both enterprises were the product of group effort and further that both were inherently commercial, made for patrons of one sort or another:

> It might be said that a film, called into being by a cooperative effort in which all contributions have the same degree of permanence, is the nearest modern equivalent of a medieval cathedral; the role of the producer corresponding, more or less, to that of the bishop or archbishop; that of the director to that of the architect in chief; that of the scenario writers to that of the scholastic advisers establishing the iconographical program; and that of the actors, cameramen, cutters, sound men, makeup men and the divers technicians to that of those whose work provided the physical entity of the finished product.[12]

Historically most art has been commercial, according to Panofsky:

> if commercial art be defined as all art not primarily produced in order to gratify the creative urge of its maker but primarily intended to meet the requirements of a patron or a buying public, it must be said that noncommercial art is the exception rather than the rule.[13]

While historical errors in feature and other forms of film are certainly sometimes due to the nature of such films as collective enterprises that must be financed, there are also issues of their truth claims, which sometimes seem either ignorant or meretricious. Jerry Bruckheimer's recent film *King Arthur* (2004), for example, described in its publicity as "The True Untold Story that Inspired the Legend," has been criticized not only for its ahistoricity but for its theft of story elements from other movies. One review by Harty describes the lifting of various familiar elements – Henry V's St. Crispin's Day speech, the battle on ice from Sergei Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), and battle tactics from *Braveheart* (1995): "Even the Saxon teeth and hairstyles seem borrowed, in this case from those of the aliens in *Battlefield Earth*."[14] The argument might be made that these elements make the story more familiar, or authentic, to moviegoing audiences, though it is doubtful

that most viewers would have seen *Nevsky* or even *Battlefield Earth* (2000). *King Arthur* seems to have struck a nerve with medievalists and has been analyzed and discussed by Alan Lupack, Virginia Blanton, Tom Shippey, and Caroline Jewers, among others.[15]

In an interview published in *Arthuriana*, David Franzoni, the screenwriter of *King Arthur*, seems rather vague about the Arthur legends, relating them vividly, if anachronistically, to the present day. Commenting on the basis of the movie, a probably specious notion developed in 1925 by Kemp Malone that the men associated with an historical Arthur may have been Sarmatians, Franzoni says:

> these gallant, polished knights, who were cruising around Britain solving inscrutable mysteries and rescuing bored Beverly Hills housewives from themselves, were actually descended from the Hell's Angels! After that [the story] became for me the American GI experience – strangers in a strange land, killing to stay alive and hating doing it.[16]

Fortunately, the film itself is rather more coherent than this statement and provides a useful starting point for a discussion of the Arthur legends in the classroom. Most of my students had already seen the film outside of class, and some had believed the false claims of its publicity. Watching clips in the classroom after having read excerpts from the *Annals of Wales*, the *History of the Britons*, the *Life of St. Carannog*, Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Perceval and Lancelot stories of Chrétien de Troyes, and a good deal of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, students were able to analyze "what's wrong with this picture" both thoughtfully and playfully.

Another film that students turned out to see was *Tristan & Isolde* (2006), directed by Kevin Reynolds (who also directed *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* [1991] with Kevin Costner).[17] The advertising – "Before Romeo and Juliet there was Tristan & Isolde" – was also problematic, though perhaps more apt to give an English professor pause. Like *King Arthur*, *Tristan & Isolde* was clearly aimed at an audience about the same age as the young actors,[18] and all the magical aspects that inform the many *Tristan* narratives were removed, perhaps misguidedly, from this visual rendering presumably in an attempt to make the narrative relevant to its perceived audience. In this movie, Isolde is shown as literate. Anachronistically, she reads to Tristan from a volume of poetry the last stanza of John Donne's "The Good-Morrow," the lines of which are then repeated to reiterate the film's theme of true love. Moved by this use of Donne's seventeenth-century poem in the film, my students looked it up on the Internet and were quick to notice and point out its displacement from the era of the setting.

The fictionalized love story between Balian of Ibelin and Sybilla, sister of Baldwin IV, the leper king of Jerusalem, at the center of Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005), was also concocted, one would assume, to appeal to a young audience, though this is a movie that is much more interesting for the many details it gets right. Sybilla is shown as multilingual and

exotically attired, exemplifying the accommodations and alliances with the predominantly Muslim community made by the Christian crusaders and their families who lived in Jerusalem after the First Crusade. Her brother Baldwin IV is depicted affectingly as a young, sophisticated, and well-intentioned ruler struck with a terrible disease. In history, Sybilla was happily wed to Guy de Lusignan, who was seen as an upstart, one of the renegade knights in Jerusalem, the very worst of whom was Reynald of Châtillon, lord of Transjordan. In the film, the story of these men is also told, as is their famous slaughter by Muslim armies at the Horns of Hittin, where Saladin further captured the Christians' relic of the True Cross. Particularly in its final moments, the film accurately details the story of Balian of Ibelin, the historical hero who held Jerusalem for nearly a week against Saladin and his army. While this episode is well described in history books, particularly by Amin Maalouf in *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, for example, seeing the action onscreen brings it immediately and vividly to life.[19] In the final battle scenes in *Kingdom of Heaven*, Saladin employs siege towers, or mounted platforms on wheels with catapults, which viewers may have last seen in Peter Jackson's *Two Towers* (2002), to attack the battlements of the city. Not being a military historian, I was surprised to learn that these were not the invention of J. R. R. Tolkien but were replicas of actual weapons used by Saladin in the historical siege of Jerusalem, as was Greek fire, a weapon rather like napalm, which also featured in this film.[20] Reviewing *Kingdom of Heaven* in *TLS*, Robert Irwin commented that the film's

> visual mix of the chivalric and heraldic with the Oriental and exotic has proved to be a gift to the designers of sets and costumes, as well as to the cameraman. It is as if a continuous diorama of Orientalist canvases by Jean-Léon Gérôme were being unscrolled.[21]

Visually sumptuous, this movie accurately recreates several important historical moments. Though certain plot details have been adjusted to suit the tastes of younger audiences, *Kingdom of Heaven* also instructs the medievalist, along with students, about the past.

What can film teach further about history? While some films willfully manipulate historical fact to simplify it or to create a romantic story line, others might be said to err on the side of truth, to provide a fictional reality that is almost too much to bear. Though Jane Grey might be a bit outside the scope of medieval history, having been executed in 1554, her death scene as shown in the film *Lady Jane* (1986) remains one of the best examples of this sort of recreation of an historical event. Shown as dignified, somber, and articulate in her last moments, Jane Grey (played by Helena Bonham Carter) forgives the executioner, then, blindfolded and kneeling, cannot find the block and wildly gropes around for it, a powerful and disturbing scene guaranteed to make viewers uncomfortable. The action as staged in the film seems so tasteless that it might have been fabricated by the filmmakers. But the episode, in fact, is drawn from a Tudor eyewitness account:

Groping in the dark she cried out "Where is it? What shall I do?" Someone came forward to guide her and she laid her head down upon the block and stretched forth her body and said: "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit!" And so she ended.[22]

The pathos of the last moments of Lady Jane Grey as shown onscreen (as if the modern audience too were an eyewitness to the event) is particularly painful to observe.

Perhaps filmgoers, like other kinds of audience, do not always want entirely factual history, as the playwright and screenwriter Tom Stoppard playfully points out in *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*. When Guildenstern complains about "The mechanics of cheap melodrama!" in theatrical representations of death, the Player explains that he was once able to incorporate the real death of an actor, condemned for a crime, into a play:

and you wouldn't believe it, he just wasn't convincing! It was impossible to suspend one's disbelief – and what with the audience jeering and throwing peanuts, the whole thing was a disaster! – he did nothing but cry all the time – right out of character . . . Audiences know what to expect, and that is all that they are prepared to believe in.[23]

As film historians have noticed, conventions are observed in all forms, whether in the writing of history or the making of movies. Rosenstone, in particular, has stressed that "written history is not a solid and unproblematic object but a mode of thought, [and] so is the historical film."[24]

Representations of true-to-life suffering may reach their apex in films about Joan of Arc. Writing in 1928 about Carl Theodor Dreyer's silent film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) for *Close Up*, the American poet H.D. records her distaste for Dreyer's technique (and her simultaneous fascination with it):

Do we have to have the last twenty four hours' agony of Jeanne stressed and stressed and stressed, in just this way, not only by the camera but by every conceivable method of dramatic and scenic technique? Bare walls, the four scenes of the trial, the torture room, the cell and the outdoors about the pyre, are all calculated to drive in the pitiable truth like the very nails on the spread hands of Christ.[25]

Dreyer's film draws upon the expert knowledge of Pierre Champion, the editor of the original trial records, who served as the film's historical consultant. As painful as the movie is to watch, it remains the best film about Joan and is still a very powerful experience in the classroom.

Having read excerpts from "The Poem of Joan of Arc" composed by Christine de Pizan in 1429 and from Joan's published trial records of 1431, students in my women's history class then also studied George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* (1923) and chapters from Marina Warner's 1981 biography, along with critical commentary and reviews. Students further viewed clips from Dreyer's film, and from the films about Joan of Arc made by Victor

Fleming and Otto Preminger; Dreyer's film made the keenest impact with its portrayal of the immediacy of suffering, and students cited it as a powerful and transformative visual text in their final examinations and elsewhere. As H.D. notes, and the students also could not help but notice, the film is claustrophobic and relentless, using close-ups to convey the intensity of emotion as well as "the yawning gap between fifteenth-century doctors of theology and law and an unlettered village woman with strong religious and political affiliations."[26] Dreyer was not interested, however, in staging Joan's trial, recantation, and execution as historical costume drama or even in placing it specifically in time. "The year of the event seemed as inessential to me as its distance from the present," he wrote.[27] Instead, taking away the actors' makeup and minimizing props and sets, Dreyer used close-ups to "express the character of the person they show and the spirit of that time." Though the film is silent, it is not dated; though the "means [of its making] were multifarious and new," it effectively achieves its director's purpose, which is "getting the spectator absorbed in the past."[28]

Movies, in other words, do not need the trappings of costume drama to teach the lessons of the past. Many of the most instructive and enduring films about the Middle Ages do not try literally to replicate the precise details of historical events. Ingmar Bergman's iconic *Seventh Seal* (1957) employs images of medieval allegory to create a timeless morality tale that also includes modern existentialist themes. In the print program produced for the film's premiere, Bergman explained that "It is a modern poem, presented with medieval material that has been very freely handled."[29] The use of purposeful or intentional anachronism has been effective, for example, in the history films of Derek Jarman, in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), and in the *Black Knight* (2001), among others, as several scholars have noted.[30]

Among the several successful makers of movies with medieval themes is the director Eric Rohmer who "is categorically uninterested in any accurate reconstruction of historical reality."[31] Rohmer's *Perceval le Gallois* (1978) is meticulously researched, based on the twelfth-century romance by Chrétien de Troyes. The action is highly stylized, the actors' gestures and the settings drawn directly from medieval manuscript illuminations. Shot indoors on a soundstage, the film is purposely artificial, as polished and lustrous a representation of reality as a medieval enamel.[32] Like Chrétien's masterpiece, the narrative is rambling and episodic, and Rohmer's fidelity to Chrétien's text gives the film its integrity. C. G. Crisp has noted that:

> all Rohmer's films are subordinate to some pre-existing textual original, whether of his own authorship or that of others; and fidelity to that external textual authority . . . becomes as much the validation of reality and of one's own life as it does of any representation of these.[33]

Rohmer's *Perceval* plays well in the classroom, because clips of specific episodes so accurately represent scenes from Chrétien's romance. In a 1978 interview, Rohmer explained that he was "searching to rediscover the vision

of the Medieval period as it saw itself. This, it seems to me, one can attempt to accomplish, while we will never know the Middle Ages as they really were."[34] Through close study of visual and historical texts, Rohmer provides a glimpse into the past that seems artless, intentionally artificial, yet true.

The argument has been put forward that because of the emphasis on a comparatively simple story line, film narrative is less accurate than written history; further, it has no footnotes and no scholarly apparatus. This is, for example, one of the reasons given by Natalie Zemon Davis as to why she followed her work as historical consultant on the film *Le retour de Martin Guerre* (1982) with a book on the subject.[35]

This may have been truer before the advent of the DVD. The recent Criterion reissue of the Scandinavian film *Häxan* (1922) is case in point. In a 1922 essay, Carl Theodor Dreyer described the director Benjamin Christensen as "the pioneer who has the courage to bring a subject of cultural history to film *for the sake of the subject*."[36] Christensen was an early proponent of the historical film; in *Häxan*, multiple narratives effectively explore ideas about witchcraft held from the fifteenth century. The DVD includes among its selections the *Bibliothèque Diabolique*, a photographic exploration of Christensen's historical sources. This segment shows fifteenth- through seventeenth-century woodcuts and paintings representing witches and magical practices, with their provenance and texts carefully labeled, and could be used to begin a scholarly or pedagogical lecture on the subject. The selection, in fact, forms a kind of footnote to the actual film. The DVD further includes bibliographies of works consulted by those creating the movie, along with two different versions, each commenting on the other, in effect. There is the silent film of 1922 with music from the original Danish premiere, and there is also *Witchcraft through the Ages*, a shorter version of the original film that appeared in 1968, narrated by William S. Burroughs and resubtitled, with a jazz sound track featuring Jean-Luc Ponty. In this case, the DVD is replete with information, but paratexts on DVD are usually more uneven, as recently explored by Richard Burt writing on "Movie Medievalism" in *Exemplaria*, for example.[37]

Rosenstone has pointed to the problem cited earlier, the oversimplification of history that film narrative seems to call for: "Film offers us history as the story of a closed, completed, and simple past," which may be true, but not when one considers the larger context of modern renderings of older texts, whether historical or literary.[38] The Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*, for example, may be read through *The 13th Warrior* (1999), in which the *Risala* of Ibn Fadlan has been competently wedded to the Beowulf story (the description of the Northmen by tenth-century medieval Arab chronicler Ibn Fadlan, though duly footnoted, seems to have composed more than half of Michael Crichton's novel, *Eaters of the Dead*, on which this film was based).[39] Though the low-budget rock musical of *Beowulf* seen last fall at the Irish Repertory Theatre in New York City was constricted by cheap production values, the

puppet monsters were effective, and the small cast did well with their multiple roles as both Danes and Geats. Julie Taymor's production of the opera *Grendel*, drawn from John Gardner's 1971 novel, was best at creating spectacle, at which Taymor excels.[40] The book in these latter works was weak, unfortunately, and script seems also the least important aspect in the recent film *Beowulf & Grendel* (2005) which curiously introduces the character of Selma, a witch–prostitute and lover of both Grendel and Beowulf. This film is, however, beautifully shot. The splendid recital of Benjamin Bagby of the Anglo-Saxon poem remains the best of the modern *Beowulf* texts (because it is the *Beowulf* text), but audiences are also already anticipating the animated *Beowulf* film that is due out in fall 2007.[41] In other words, there are many readings of the text, and the multiplicity of modern interpretations and performances of *Beowulf* attests more generally to the vitality of older stories and histories and to the value that continues to be given them, both within and outside the classroom.

Nearly a century after Münsterberg first conceived the notion of his "Universal Culture Lyceum," contemporary historians and film critics have begun to discuss in earnest "the new sorts of history that are made possible by the medium of film." Rosenstone in particular has commented that:

> in principle there is no reason why one cannot make a dramatic feature set in the past about all sorts of historical topics – individual lives, community conflicts, social movements, the rise of a king to power, revolutions, or warfare – that will stay within the bounds of historical accuracy.[42]

Film is powerful. Even as a comparatively recent medium, movies, like drama, have had a profound impact on the historical memory, functioning, like the actors described by Hamlet, as "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time" (*Hamlet* II.2.520). The past as represented on film invites lively discussion, which might range from correction of glaring historical errors to the ways in which historical narrative is perceived, edited and retold. Film is also universal and immediate, providing a common language and context of reference for audiences not only in the classroom but around the world. Writing in 1936, Panofsky described movies as "the only visual art entirely alive," saying further,

> Whether we like it or not, it is the movies that mold, more than any other single force, the opinions, the taste, the language, the dress, the behavior, and even the physical appearance of a public comprising more than 60 percent of the population of the earth.[43]

Like historical fiction – or works of art more generally, for that matter – movies with historical themes are most productively studied in their broader contexts, alongside, and in conjunction with, written sources. In teaching and writing about the Middle Ages, scholars and critics have found film to be a powerful shaper of perceptions of the past, which has become increasingly a source to be reckoned with.

Short Biography

Martha Driver is Distinguished Professor of English and Women's and Gender Studies at Pace University in New York City. A co-founder of the Early Book Society for the study of manuscripts and printing history, she writes about illustration from manuscript to print, book production, and the early history of publishing. In addition to publishing some forty articles in these areas, she has edited twelve journals in nine years, including *Film & History: Medieval Period in Film*, the *Journal of the Early Book Society*, and, with Deborah McGrady, a special issue of *Literary & Linguistic Computing*, "Teaching the Middle Ages with Technology" (1999). Her books about pictures (from woodcuts to film) include *The Image in Print: Book Illustration in Late Medieval England* (British Library Publications and University of Toronto) and *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*, edited with Sid Ray (McFarland). Forthcoming books include Fascicle Four in the *Images in English Manuscripts* series, with Michael Orr (Brepols), *Shakespeare's Medievalism in Performance*, edited with Sid Ray (McFarland), and *Midwives to Warriors: Women and Work in the Middle Ages* in the Praeger Series on the Middle Ages.

Notes

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[1] Hugo Münsterberg, "The Photoplay: A Psychological Study" (1915), in Phillip Lopate (ed.), *American Movie Critics: An Anthology from the Silents until Now* (New York: Library Classics of America, 2006), 13–14.

[2] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Slaves on Screen: Film and Historical Vision* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 5, explains that film is only a hundred years old while history has been "written over the millennia for many kinds of patrons, sponsors, and political figures, some of whom insisted on sycophantic loyalty, while others encouraged independence. Film is only beginning to find its way as a medium for history." Lopate comments further: "Movies may be only a hundred years old, but already they have generated in this country a body of extraordinary critical writing that honors the best belletristic traditions of our nonfiction prose" (xiii).

[3] Robert A. Rosenstone (ed.), *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 5.

[4] James Agee, *Agee on Film: Criticism and Comment on the Movies*, ed. Martin Scorsese, intro David Denby (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 347.

[5] Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 159.

[6] A recent review of *The Ruby in Her Navel*, a novel about twelfth-century Sicily by Barry Unsworth (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006), is case in point. Reviewer Nicholas Vincent (*Times Literary Supplement*, September 15, 2006: 22) characterizes Unsworth's novel as "a story of great emotional and intellectual depth" and predicts the book will "become the best-selling historical novel of the year." However, "The basic chronology is less than perfectly contrived . . . The poetry of Bernard de Ventadour had probably still to be written when Thurstan is said to have sung it in Palermo, and King Roger's royal title had been recognized by the popes for at least a decade by the time it is said still to have been in dispute. Gorze not 'Groze' was the great monastery on the Moselle," and so forth.

[7] Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, 6–7.

[8] In "Bad Movies," J. Hoberman, film critic for *The Village Voice*, comments "A supremely bad movie – an anti-masterpiece – projects a stupidity that's fully as awesome as genius" (Lopate,

American Movie Critics, 520). The essay "Trash, Art, and the Movies" apparently reflects the bad time Pauline Kael, longtime film critic for *The New Yorker*, had in school. She comments: "Perhaps the single most intense pleasure of moviegoing is this non-aesthetic one of escaping from the responsibilities of having the proper responses required of us in our official (school) culture. And yet this is probably the best and most common basis for developing an aesthetic sense because responsibility to pay attention and to appreciate is anti-art" (Lopate, *American Movie Critics*, 349). But that is where Kael is wrong, because most, if not all, forms of art, whether high or low, studied in school or not, begin, at least partially, as entertainment, from *The Iliad* to *Beowulf* to Shakespeare's plays to Shaw, as well as works that inspire great deeds, inspire the imagination, evoke pity and fear, or simply create awe and all the rest of it.

[9] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, reprint edn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1978 [1955, 1968]), 231. See also John Ganim, "The Hero in the Classroom," in Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (ed.), *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 239, who describes his students as "highly sophisticated" in their understanding of "the complex relation between screen and script and between script and [medieval] source."

[10] Kevin J. Harty, *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films About Medieval Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999).

[11] Susan Aronstein, *Hollywood Knights: Arthurian Cinema and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Aronstein and Nancy Coiner, "Twice Knightly: Democratizing the Middle Ages," *Studies in Medievalism*, 6 (1994): 185–211; Aronstein, "The Return of the King: Medievalism and the Politics of Nostalgia in the Mythopoetic Men's Movement," *Prose Studies*, 23/2 (August 2000): 144–159; Aronstein, " 'Not Exactly a Knight': Arthurian Narrative and Recuperative Politics in the Indiana Jones Trilogy," *Cinema Journal*, 34/4 (1995): 3–30. Robin Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid: Joan of Arc in American Film and Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984). Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Knight, "*Robin Hood: Men in Tights*: Fitting the Tradition Snugly," in Deborah Cartmell et al. (eds.), *Pulping Fictions: Consuming Culture across the Literature/Media Divide* (London: Pluto, 1996), 125–33; Knight, "A Garland of Robin Hood Films," *Film & History*, 29 (1999): 34–44. Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Rosenbaum, *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and the Media Limit What Movies We Can See* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 2000); J. Hoberman and Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983). In much of this criticism, there is very little discussion of camera work or the technical aspects of film which, according to many writers, most vocally Pauline Kael, "usually isn't very interesting." (Lopate, *American Movie Critics*, 342).

[12] Erwin Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," in Irving Lavin (ed.), *Three Essays on Style* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 119–20. Called by its editor "perhaps the most popular essay in modern art history," this was first presented as a talk in 1934 to a Princeton University audience interested in founding a film archive at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (10).

[13] Ibid., 120. As examples of potent commercial art, Panofsky cites Dürer's prints and Shakespeare's plays. Further, Panofsky saw the challenge posed by the movies as this: "The problem is to manipulate and shoot unstylized reality in such a way that the result has style. This is a proposition no less legitimate and no less difficult than any proposition in the older arts" (123).

[14] Kevin J. Harty, "The Round Table: *King Arthur*," *Arthuriana*, 14/3 (Fall 2004): 121–223.

[15] See the film review by Alan Lupack, in "The Round Table," *Arthuriana*, 14/3 (Fall 2004): 123–5; Virginia Blanton, " 'Don't Worry, I Won't Let Them Rape You': Guinevere's Agency in Jerry Bruckheimer's *King Arthur*," *Arthuriana*, 15/3 (2005): 91–111; Tom Shippey, "Fuqua's *King Arthur*: More Myth-Making in America," *Exemplaria*, 18/2 (2006): 1–14. I look forward to reading Caroline Jewers, "Mission Historical, or '[T]here Were a Hell of a Lot of Knights': Ethnicity and Alterity in Jerry Bruckheimer's *King Arthur*," in Tison Pugh and Lynn Tarte Ramey (eds.), *Filming the Other Middle Ages: Race, Class and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema* (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).

[16] Kemp Malone, "Artorius," *Modern Philology*, 22 (1925): 367–74; John Matthews, "An Interview with David Franzoni," *Arthuriana*, 14/3 (Fall 2004): 116.

[17] For more on the Costner *Robin Hood* (and the appropriation of Henry V's St. Crispin speech), see Martha W. Driver, " 'We Band of Brothers': Rousing Speeches from *Robin Hood* to *Black*

Knight," in Ruth Evans, Helen Fulton and David Matthews (eds.), *Medieval Cultural Studies: Essays in Honour of Stephen Knight* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 91–106.

[18] An informal classroom survey revealed that several of the young women had seen *Tristan & Isolde* more than once primarily for the dishy young male star, James Franco. The film did make interesting use of the boat motif that occurs in written texts of the Tristan legend, combining it with notions of historical Anglo-Saxon ship burial, thus making sense of how Tristan comes to Ireland and is discovered by Isolde. Shot in the Czech Republic, the film has spectacular cinematography. I had prepared to see *Tristan & Isolde* by watching *Lovespell* (1979), a late film on the Richard Burton roster with Kate Mulgrew, in which the excellence of the leads could not conceal or divert the viewer from the cheap production values and costumes. The male characters wore vinyl jerkins, and the same static ship interior (with a curiously immobilized hanging lamp) was used for several scenes. See also Meradith T. McMunn, "Filming the Tristan Myth," in Kevin J. Harty (ed.), *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty Essays*, rev. edn. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), 211–19.

[19] Amin Malouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 176–200. For classic historical writing about the Crusades, see Steven Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–1955); see also Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: A New History of the Crusades* (Boston: Belknap Press, 2006). John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 68–91, provides some historical background for his discussion of other films about the Crusades, including *Saladin* (1963), Youssef Chahine's epic crusade film produced by the Egyptian film industry, starring Arab matinee idol Ahmed Mazhar as Saladin, with a screenplay written by Naguib Mahfouz and the poet Abderrahman Cherkaoui. For *Saladin*, see also Harty, *Reel Middle Ages*, 242, item 462.

[20] The *Kingdom of Heaven* DVD (20th Century Fox, 2005) includes "History vs. Hollywood: *Kingdom of Heaven*," made by the History Channel, and "Movie Real: *Kingdom of Heaven*," first seen on the A&E Network. The History Channel program includes discussion with several favorite medieval historians, Kelly DeVries, Candace Gregory, and Lorraine Stock among them, along with interviews with the actors and director, and asserts rather generally that the movie is a "mostly accurate portrayal of siege warfare in medieval times." The A&E program, with interviews with other medieval historians and again with the actors and director Ridley Scott, is more specific in its discussions of the history underlying the film and describes the siege weapons used by Saladin as large catapults, including the mangonet, and moveable siege towers weighing up to 17 tons when reproduced for the film recreation of the battle.

[21] Robert Irwin, "It's God Guignol," *Times Literary Supplement* (May 27, 2005): 17.

[22] *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sep 2004; online edn., Jan 2006, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8154, accessed on Sep 22, 2006.

[23] Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 83–84.

[24] Rosenstone, *Revisioning History*, 4, further argues that the history film may be considered as "a way of constructing the past with a legitimacy of its own" (3).

[25] H.D., in Lopate, *American Movie Critics*, 41–2. For more on Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, see Carina Yervasi, "The Faces of Joan: Cinematic Representations of Joan of Arc," *Film & History*, 29/3–4 (1999): 8–19; Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 85–8; Edward Benson, "Oh, What a Lovely War! Joan of Arc on Screen," in Martha W. Driver and Sid Ray (eds.), *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2004), 217–36. For a discussion of the varieties of paratexts available on the Criterion DVD release, see Richard Burt, "Getting Schmedieval: Of Manuscript and Film Prologues, Paratexts, and Parodies," *Exemplaria*, 18/2 (2006): 15.

[26] Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, 13.

[27] Donald Skoller (ed.), *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, trans. of Carl Th. Dreyer's *About the Film* (*Om Filmen*) (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 50.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Cited in Aberth, *Knight at the Movies*, 217. For Aberth's further analysis of this film, see 216–43.

[30] Jarman's *Edward II* (1991) is discussed by Sid Ray, "Hunks, History, and Homophobia: Masculinity Politics in *Braveheart* and *Edward II*," *Film & History*, 29/3–4 (1999): 22–31. See also Roy Grundermann, "History and the Gay Viewfinder," *Cinéaste*, 18 (December 1991): 24–27. For *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, see Donald L. Hoffman, "Not Dead Yet: *Monty Python and*

the Holy Grail in the Twenty-First Century," in Harty, *Cinema Arthuriana*, 136–48; Martha W. Driver, "'Stond and Delyver': Teaching the Medieval Movie," in Driver and Ray, *Medieval Hero on Screen*, 211–16. For discussion of *Black Knight*, see Caroline Jewers, "Hard Day's Knights: *First Knight*, *A Knight's Tale*, and *Black Knight*," in Driver and Ray, *Medieval Hero on Screen*, 192–210; Driver, "'We Band of Brothers,'" 97–102.

[31] C. G. Crisp, *Eric Rohmer, Realist and Moralist* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 83.

[32] The paradoxical impression of historicity achieved through the use of clearly artificial sets and locations was effectively used later in Rohmer's *L'Anglaise et le duc* (*The Lady and the Duke*, 2002), a film set during the French Revolution. While integrity to the text was again maintained, in this case a memoir written by a young Scotswoman, Mrs. Grace Elliott, the onetime mistress of Phillipe Égalité, the Duke of Orléans, which describes her experience during the Terror, the film uses painted sets and digital technology. Viewers are given the impression they are directly observing historical action as it happens, whether in public or behind the scenes. For other visual techniques used by Rohmer, see Angela Dalle Vacche, *Cinema and Painting: How Art Is Used in Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 81–106.

[33] Crisp, *Eric Rohmer*, 83. In *Cinématographe*, 44 (February 1979): 15, Fabrice Lucchini, the star of *Perceval*, described the film as "a scholarly project, touched with insanity" (qtd. in Crisp, *Eric Rohmer*, 86).

[34] Nadja Tesich-Savage, "Rehearsing the Middle Ages," *Film Comment*, 14 (1978): 51. See also Leslie Abend Callahan, "*Perceval le Gallois*: Eric Rohmer's Vision of the Middle Ages," *Film & History*, 29/3–4 (1999): 46–53.

[35] Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, xi. Davis says she subsequently wrote *The Return of Martin Guerre* because the film made "a few important departures from the historical record" and there were "complexities in the evidence that the film, rich and nuanced though it was, could not accommodate." See also Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 27, cites the philosopher Ian Jarvie as saying that film does not allow for critical apparatus and further, "you cannot evaluate sources, make logical arguments, or systematically weigh evidence"; but one can, in fact, do this outside the film through reviews, discussion, and writing. Film is the starting point.

[36] Dreyer, "New Ideas about the Film: Benjamin Christensen and His Ideas," in Skoller, *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, 32.

[37] See Burt, "Getting Schmedieval"; Burt, "Re-embroidering the Bayeux Tapestry in Film and Media: The Flip Side of History in Opening and End Title Sequences," in *Exemplaria*, 18/2 (2006), http://www.english.ufl.edu/exemplaria/movie/, accessed on Aug 13, 2006.

[38] Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 57.

[39] For text and commentary on the *Risala*, see James E. Montgomery, "Ibn Fadlān and the Rusiyyah," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies*, 3 (2000): 1–25. Michael Crichton's novel, *Eaters of the Dead: The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan Relating His Experiences with the Northmen in A.D. 922* (New York: Knopf, 1976), was later translated into Arabic and published in 1994.

[40] Billed as a "21st-Century Ritualistic Rock Opera," *Beowulf* was directed by Charlotte Moore and played at the Irish Repertory Theatre (132 West 22nd Street, New York) from October to November, 2005. The text was adapted by Lenny Pickett and Lindsey Turner. Taymor's *Grendel: Transcendence of the Great Big Bad*, composed by Elliot Goldenthal, with book by Taymor and the poet J. D. McClatchy, was staged at the New York State Theater, Lincoln Center on July 11, 13, 15, and 16, 2006. As spectacle, *Grendel* worked brilliantly (the opera might be renamed the "Cirque du Soleil *Beowulf*").

[41] *Beowulf: Voice and Medieval Harp* by Benjamin Bagby was seen on July 18, 19, 21, and 22 at the LaGuardia Drama Theater as part of the Lincoln Center Festival. *Beowulf*, directed by Robert Zemeckis with screenplay by fantasy author Neil Gaiman, a $70 million animated feature, is scheduled for a November 2007 release.

[42] Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 30, 231. Davis, *Slaves on Screen*, also suggests that the best historical films are yet to come: "Films can do much more to pose questions to their viewers about history-making and history-knowing" (136).

[43] Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures," 94.

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