

Medievalisms and Others: Exploring Knights and Vikings at the Movies



(Two knights: Indiana Jones and a protector of the Holy Grail, scene from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, dir. Steven Spielberg, 1989)

Research Master Thesis

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Most of my writing was done in Rijeka and Vienna although it began in Budapest and was continued in Reykjavík. During my time in Croatia I have come to agree with Rebecca West, who said: “I had come to Yugoslavia to see what history meant in flesh and blood.”

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1. Introduction

One of the great problems when dealing with the Middle Ages is the fundamental dilemma: the epistemological problem of conceptualizing and reconstructing the period with the aid of sources.¹ How much can be reconstructed is the eternal gnawing question for all medievalists, not to mention historians in general.² Sir Philip Sidney in his treatise “Defense of Poesy” argues that a “historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal ... the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things”.³ In fact this theoretical question can be juxtaposed with the mimetic question of representation that began with Ancient Greek philosophy and still reverberates today.

This particular problem is quite significant since Rankean positivism within historiography and within the interpretive community subscribes to this theoretical stance.⁴ Depicting history within film is always subjective because the mere act of editing and the choice of subject material create an ideological stance. Indeed, the cinematic topics that deal with the Middle Ages are often analyzed under the rubrics of historical inaccuracies and in this introduction I would like to demarcate how the problematic nature of interpretation among historians can be a crucial issue within medieval studies, by emphasizing this methodological issue to medievalisms within film.⁵ Finally, in subchapter 1.4, the outline of my thesis is then revealed.

¹ My stance is quite skeptical and I may not ascribe entirely to the dictum “there are not facts, only interpretations”, but I still I am convinced that a critical attitude towards all statements of historical orthodoxy is needed.

² Stephen A. Kippur’s biography of Jules Michelet titled *Jules Michelet: A Study of Mind and Sensibility* reveals an interesting (re)construction of the Middle Ages by a famous historian: “My dreams of the Middle Ages ... are ended ... (Kippur, 85). Explaining this diary quote, Kippur mentions how Michelet was in a transitory phase because he was overcoming “previous historical conceptions” (*ibid.*, 85). Thus, Michelet stopped dreaming of a romantic Middle Ages and he became modern and found the Middle Ages to be a “place of hate”, “warlike”, “a world of illusion”. Thus Michelet moved from one medievalism framework to another. (*ibid.*, 85) Kippur, S. A. (1981). *Jules Michelet, a study of mind and sensibility*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press.

³ *The Defense of Poesy. Sir Philip Sidney. 1909-14. English Essays: Sidney to Macaulay. The Harvard Classics.* (n.d.). Retrieved September 12, 2013, from <http://www.bartleby.com/27/1.html>

⁴ Ranke and many others following in his footsteps within historiography follow the ideology that ‘objective truth’ is possible by focusing on the facts.

⁵ Cinematic representations are interpretations as I argue, with very subjective agendas.

1.1 Representational (in)accuracies in history

Within the context of this debate, I wish to use a famous historical figure, Richard III. Throughout the centuries since his death the literary representation of Richard has metamorphosed, along with methodological methods in the humanities, within the historiographical tradition. The best known representation has its genealogies in Shakespeare's play *Richard III*, and Harold Bloom states that "Shakespeare's ironic, self-delighting, witty hero-villain has a troubling relation to actual history". Bloom's sentiments are quite an understatement but his quote helps elucidate the perception and connection of this creation in the interpretive community. Take for example Polydore Vergil's treatment of Richard III in his *Historie of England*, in which he states: "Richard duke of Glocestre, who thowght of nothing but tyranny and crueltie".⁶ Not only does Polydore Vergil assume to know of Richard's cognitive processes, which occurred a generation earlier but he also helped lay the groundwork for Shakespeare's interpretation along with the English chronicler Raphael Holinshed, who describes Richard III in the following manner:

small and litle of stature, so was he of bodie greatlie deformed; the one shoulder higher than the other; his face was small, but his countenance cruell, and such, that at the first aspect a man would iudge it to sauour and smell of malice, fraud, and deceit. When he stood musing, he would bite and chaw busilie his nether lip; as who said, that his fierce nature in his cruell bodie alwaies chafed, stirred, aud was euer vnquiet.⁷

Evidently, such a historical account is deceitful and its reliability as a 'historical' document or representation of Richard III is limited since it is painfully partial. As a result historians have undertaken the project of reevaluating such texts.⁸ Kewes and her fellow editors argue: "there is a need to study such historical texts in their own right as

⁶ Three books of Polydore Vergil's English history, comprising the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III from an early translation, are preserved among the mss. of the old royal library in the British museum.(n.d.).Retrieved September 23,2013,from,<https://archive.org/stream/threebooksofpoly29verg#page/180/mode/2up/search/richard+III>

⁷ *HOLINSHED'S HISTORY OF KING RICHARD III | Richard III Society – American Branch*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.r3.org/on-line-library-text-essays/holinsheds-history-of-king-richard-iii/>

⁸ This is the case with Holinshed since the recent publication *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed Chronicles* has undertaken the task of reevaluating Holinshed's contributions to the historiographical tradition.

well as the agendas or religious ideologies behind such works”.⁹ This is crucial to delineate since Shakespeare’s play seeks inspiration in Holinshed’s works; thus the textual relation is intertwined. Furthermore, when summarizing the problematic nature of the text, Kewes states that:

Shakespeare's Richard is a physically misshapen, tyrannical usurper whose defeat at Bosworth is portrayed as providential. But scholars today dismiss this as the product of Tudor propaganda. This traditional view comes from accounts of Richard III by earlier writers such as Sir Thomas More, Edward Hall and Richard Grafton which were collected and reproduced in the Chronicles and reinforced with judgmental commentaries and notes in the margins by the Chronicles' editor Abraham Fleming.¹⁰

Nonetheless, for the past centuries cultural representations of Richard III have taken their cue from the basis of these interpretations, including the character Lord Farquand, depicted on the visual still from the film *Shrek* below, who is obviously meant to be a reference to Richard III.



Figure 1: Lord Farquand as a visual trope of Richard III in *Shrek*.



Figure 2: Laurence Oliver as Richard III in the film based on Shakespeare’s *Richard III*.

⁹ Kewes, P., Archer, I. W., & Heal, F. (2013). *The Oxford handbook of Holinshed's Chronicles* (p. 23). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ *Source of Shakespeare's inaccurate Richard III portrayal explored - University of Oxford*. (2013, February 7). Retrieved October 1, 2013, from http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_stories/2013/130712.html

Evidently, Lord Farquaad is a visual trope based on Laurence Olivier's portrayal of Richard III in the film of the same name (compare with Figure II). This allusion was not lost on part of the interpretive community, since Christopher Tookey of the *Daily Mail* wrote that Lord Farquaad was "a dead ringer for Olivier's Richard III".¹¹ Yet, paradoxically if one searches the Internet with the key phrases: "Lord Farquaad Richard III", one can witness the plethora of interpretations among the interpretive community that view the visual reconstruction of Richard III, seen below, recently done by University of Leicester archaeologists as being similar to Lord Farquaad. Indeed, the interpretive community's perception of Richard III is based on popular texts rather than on credible historical sources, and this exemplifies the reception theory of 'authenticity' versus 'accuracy'.¹²



Figure 3: A visual reconstruction of Richard III by a forensic art team at the University of Dundee.

Cumulatively, all of these facts taken together beg the question: why is the aforementioned *Shrek* visual still more of a medievalism than the visual representation next to it, especially considering how they all belong to the same intertextual nexus of perception? This question seems to be lost on the interpretive community, since particular cultural products and notions become embedded within the cultural consciousness. Admittedly, in the *Shrek* world we are treated to various medievalisms or, as Ashton argues in *Medieval Afterlives in Popular Culture*, the films are located in a time we commonly call the "Middle Ages" or, in this case, set around 1409. Furthermore, "the

¹¹ Tookey, C. (2001, June 29). *Shrek (Cert U) | Mail Online*. Retrieved September 3, 2013, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-56877/Shrek-Cert-U.html>

¹² I introduce this theoretical element of reception theory later in the thesis, as well as the term interpretive community.

Middle Ages into which we are invited is also a mix, made up of ‘temporal reckonings’.¹³ While the *Shrek* universe, that is to say the first film and its sequels, employs a general medievalized aesthetic, the films also draw on later historical periods for inspiration. Overall, all four films offer an idealized preindustrial setting: as such, the films are medieval-like, medieval enough, or, as Pugh and Ramey put it, ‘medievalish’.¹⁴ However, as I have demonstrated above, the cinematic representation of Richard III in Laurence Oliver’s version is only a cinematic representation based on a literary representation that siphons its inspiration from a Tudor-era propaganda work, which is filled with multiple voices and agendas and ideologies, just as cinema is in its essence. The mere cinematic representation of Richard III is a medievalism, since it is an imagining of an imagining – or, simply put, an interpretation.

1.2 “History means interpretation”

The historian E.H. Carr accounts for this theoretical problem when he argues that: “history means interpretation”.¹⁵ Nonetheless, before this paradigm shift of subjectivity within historiography, Ranke influenced the historiographical tradition immensely. After him there was emphasis on a perceived analytical historiography steeped in the empirical and positivist tradition. Later, the *Annales* school of thought incorporated a social history focused on *histoire des mentalities*.¹⁶ By doing so they created a paradigm shift by focusing on mentalities rather than on great historical events or important historical figures, or monumental history as Nietzsche had defined it.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, the monumental tradition of historiography was dominant in early cinematic representations; and classical Hollywood depictions of the Middle Ages were often hagiographical in nature or hortatory films. In some cases, like Laurence Oliver’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, these representations helped define not only “a historical individual” but a historical era. Undoubtedly, this ‘reel’ version of Richard III helped create and foster the interpretive communities’ understanding of the character; he is

¹³ Ashton, G., & Kline, D. T. (2012). *Medieval afterlives in popular culture* (p. 204). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁴ Ashton, G., & Kline, D. T. (2012). *Medieval afterlives in popular culture* (p. 204). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁵ Carr, E. H. (1961). *What is history?* (p. 24). New York: Vintage.

¹⁶ Le, G. J. (1982). *Time, work, & culture in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁷ In my chapter on medievalism I discuss his theories of historiography in more detail.

revealed to be Machiavellian and a humpback who, through murderous machinations, came to the throne of England.¹⁸ Fortunately, with the advent of technological breakthroughs the reconstruction of the Middle Ages has gone even further, as is evidenced with the recent discovery of Richard III's corpse. The violent tendencies associated with the Middle Ages seem to be verified when the interpretive community reads in what manner Richard III died, since a detailed three-dimensional reconstruction of his pelvis reveals that Richard received an injury by a thrust through his right buttock, close to the midline of his body.¹⁹ This gruesome albeit formal description helps constitute the popular conceptions of the Middle Ages as violent. In this case an 'auxiliary' science such as archaeology only helps mutate and further add to the interpretation of Richard III as an historical figure.²⁰ Without a doubt, one can imagine how richer the line "The day is ours, the bloody dog is *dead*,"²¹ is now, because within the interpretive community the Middle Ages have been reimagined and reconstructed to be violent and savage; and new archaeological proof seems to back this confirmation bias.²² *New Yorker* columnist Amy Davidson²² reiterates this viewpoint when she writes "[i]f Richard was sodomized with a sword it may have been preferable that the act followed, rather than caused, his death".²³ Interestingly enough, this paragraph invokes the famous line "I'm going to get medieval on your ass." from *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994).²⁴ Due to the saturation of sociocultural conditioning in the form of mass media and memes, it is difficult to see how Richard III's death does not add to the violent aesthetic attributed to the Middle Ages. Haydock summarizes this aesthetic and

¹⁸ This is Shakespeare's literary representation that has influenced later interpretations.

¹⁹ Evidence from bone analysis – University of Leicester. (n.d) Retrieved January 1, 2014, from www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/for-journalists/richard-iii/press-conference-4-february/key-scientific-information/evidence-from-bone-analysis

²⁰ Indeed we are presented with certain material culture facts that explain that Richard was indeed deformed at least in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, e.g. descriptions from Shakespeare and Holinshed that I quote above.

²¹ MIT: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (1993). *SCENE V. Another part of the field*. Retrieved October 12, 2013, from <http://shakespeare.mit.edu/richardiii/richardiii.5.5.htm>

²² This psychological term refers to the tendency individuals have to reaffirm their beliefs irregardless of their veracity.

²³ Davidson, A. (2013, February 4). *The Skeleton of Richard III Identified : The New Yorker*. Retrieved October 3, 2013, from <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/closerread/2013/02/the-humiliation-of-richard-iii.html>

²⁴ Tarantino, Q. (Director). (1995). *Pulp Fiction* [Motion picture]. America: Miramax. *Pulp Fiction* is one of the more popular films of the past twenty years in popular culture and is widely referenced, thus its cultural dissemination helps sustain the violent aesthetic medievalism category.

the film quote thusly: “[t]his medieval represents a species of violence that even in a hyper-violent film cannot be shown or clearly be described”.²⁵

The ignominy of Richard III’s death echoes recent sentiments made by Israel’s interior minister who wanted to send Gaza back to the Middle Ages.²⁶ Fittingly,, as Haydock rightly points out in *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Ages*, “the term ‘medieval’ in popular culture often refers to that which abjectly or shockingly lies outside the legal and customary constraints of post-Enlightenment civilization”.²⁷ Obviously, sending Gaza back to this time period elucidates what idea most of the interpretive community has of it. The Middle Ages seem, indeed, by default ripe and fertile for cultural productions that wish to depict hyper-violence or give it a proper referent. The medieval period is most certainly considered violent within our Western society.²⁸ Certainly, the interpretive community shares sentiments such as these made by the Israeli interior minister, and this reinforces the idea of the Middle Ages as a barbaric period.²⁹ While on the opposite side of the spectrum there are numerous medievalisms, which depict the period in more romantic terms such as *First Knight* or *A Knight’s Tale*. Amusingly enough, somewhere in between are the medievalisms of such fantasy films as *Legend*, *Dragonslayer*, *Black Cauldron*, *Your Highness* and *Lord of The Rings*.

1.3 Between Scylla and Charybdis

As I have tried to point out, despite the inherent problematic nature of interpreting the medieval period there is still the romantic attitude and tendency to painfully adhere to the fidelity and a certain understanding of the era,³⁰ which in itself is always on trial due to

²⁵ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 22). Lonson, UK: McFarland.

²⁶ *Israel's medievalism - Opinion - Al Jazeera English*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 13, 2013, from <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/11/2012111912538816887.html>

²⁷ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 34). Lonson, UK: McFarland.

²⁸ For the sake of clarity, I will discuss this term in my chapter on medievalism and distinguish between collective and social memory as opposed to individual memory in order to better clarify my use of the term interpretive community as well.

²⁹ For example, in Huizinga, J. (1996). *The autumn of the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³⁰ This theoretical position is taken most notably in Windschuttle, K. (1997). *The killing of history: How literary critics and social theorists are murdering our past*. New York ; Toronto: Free Press.

Lindley is also guilty of this when he argues that there is an attitude, on display for example in the film *The Fisher King*, that is “turning them [the Middle Ages] into children’s literature” *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (1998, May 29). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

constant revisions and interpretations within academia and the interpretive communities. H.L. Carr points this dichotomy out when he states that we are:

... navigating delicately between the Scylla of an untenable theory of history as an objective compilation of facts, of the unqualified primacy of fact over interpretation, and the Charybdis of an equally untenable theory of history as subjective product of the mind of the historian who establishes the facts of history and masters them through the process of interpretation.³¹

Interesting enough, the theoretical position of strict accuracy is somewhat parodied in the film *Cable Guy* when the wench (Janeane Garofalo), who is a waitress at the famous restaurant-chain Medieval Times,³² says to Steven (Ben Stiller): “There were no utensils in medieval times, hence there are no utensils at Medieval Times. Would you like refill on that Pepsi?” to which Steven replies: “There were no utensils but there was Pepsi?”.³³ Obviously, this joke exhibits the inherent and slippery nature of historical accuracy,³⁴ as I have tried to point out above in this introduction. Most of the interpretive community, hopefully, agrees that Pepsi was not a part of the material culture of the time. Nonetheless, the medieval period and its visual and literary representations are hindered by even further confusion, because not only is the sociocultural reality often (re)imagined, but there also happens to be another controversial issue among scholars. Quite simply, there is a fundamental dilemma in the demarcation of what the Middle Ages are and what is their temporal delineation; furthermore the question must be raised

Unfortunately, the reader is left to speculate also what the definition of ‘children’s literature’ is and if this generalization does not because somewhat convoluted in general.

³¹ Carr, E. H. (1961). *What is history?* (p. 29). New York: Vintage.

As Carr himself points out “the use of language” prevents the historian from being neutral (ibidem, p. 25). This is elegantly displayed by his use of Greek mythology, which privileges an Eurocentric terminology.

³²Medieval Times Dinner & Tournament. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2013, from <http://www.medievaltimes.com>

If one examines their homepage one can witness a myriad of medievalisms and inaccuracies. Perhaps it is convenient to just point the culinary options on offer as ‘material culture medievalism’.

³³ Stiller, B. (Director). (1996). *The Cable Guy* [DVD]. USA: Columbia Pictures.

³⁴ Of course I am not comparing genuine historians or specialists to purveyors or owners of restaurant chain. My point is that a certain cognitive and theoretical stance is taken when constructing the Middle Ages, and both scholar and layman are equally ‘guilty’. Quite simply because there is no uniform Middle Ages.

whether or not the term Middle Ages itself might not be problematic since during this period there was no such thing as a stable monolithic Western European culture.³⁵

1.4 The endless dreaming of the Middle Ages

Despite my skeptical stance I would like to analyze cinematic representations that deal with the Western European Middle Ages, thus ignoring other cultures but employing recent theoretical positions, which incorporate postcolonial theories into medieval studies as well as other postmodern theoretical positions. Furthermore, I will compare and juxtapose the texts in question, that is to say films or cinematic medieval representations, to their primary and secondary sources when applicable. I will argue that medievalisms are not simply historical inaccuracies, illusions or fantasies, a theoretical stance that is sometimes taken by academic scholars. Medievalisms make medieval cinematic representations unique since they can function on many levels. In fact, medievalisms can function as codes that reveal ideological agendas hidden beneath the veneer of Hollywood escapism and inaccuracy.³⁶ Therefore, my main question is: how do medievalisms within film deal with notions of race and nationality, especially in regards to nation building? Are there ideological underpinnings behind the use of medievalisms or are they postmodern pastiche? I will try to answer these questions by examining numerous medieval cinematic representations as well as medieval themed ones by utilizing a thematic approach.

In my first chapter I will examine the term ‘medievalism’ and contextualise the concept by examining it within the historiographical tradition; that is to say by elucidating how ‘reel history’ is dealt with or how historical films are understood, and how they are read ‘historically’ when they are attempting such historicizing attempts.

³⁵ Within academia, debates about when to date Late Antiquity and whether or not the Middle Ages commence with the fall of the Roman Western Empire still rage on. For sake of convenience, I am referring to the period from the fall of Rome to what is considered to be the beginning of the Renaissance era.

³⁶ I am using Hollywood film as an umbrella terminology, nonetheless numerous nations have been guilty of such agendas. Examples from World cinema include *Egri csillagok e. Stars of Eger* (Zoltán Várkonyi, 1968) and *Krzyżacy e. Teutonic Knights* (Aleksander Ford, 1960). These films all deal with significant national events and their narrative strategies focus on nation building; especially by juxtaposing nationhood and external threats. Marek Haltof quotes a reviewer who states that the *Teutonic Knights* was a crowning achievement in the development of Polish cinema and that it was national remedy in all colors. Haltof, M. (2002). *Polish national cinema*.(p.27) New York: Berghahn Books. It is perhaps no coincidence that both of the films mentioned above are based on novels that are literary representations of monumental historical events vital to the national identity of both countries.

Furthermore, I will discuss medievalisms and some of the more salient and influential theorists and how they conceptualize the terminology. In my second chapter I focus on the Arthurian legend and how it has been dealt with especially in regards to nation building and nationalism and I will argue for a postmodern Arthurian turn, while also dealing with alterity and race. In the third chapter I will focus on representations of Vikings in medieval themed films. It is my theoretical belief that medievalisms or inaccuracies are not inherently bad or good. To avoid any misunderstanding, I wish to argue in my chapter regarding medievalism that medievalisms and historical inaccuracies are often equated as being the same thing, but medievalism is more than being simply inaccuracy as I argue in this thesis; medievalisms can be driven by agendas, ideologies and literary and historical topoi. If anything, medievalisms are enlightening glimpses into how individual directors or film studios and society as a whole view the medieval 'heritage'. Or as Nietzsche says in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History For Life*: "the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture".³⁷ And thus with Nietzsche's maxim as my guide into the inferno I will attempt to argue that Stuart Airlie's "*lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*" tongue in cheek warning that "[m]ovies can be dangerous for medievalists"³⁸ is entirely unnecessary rhetoric, since medievalisms can only enrich Medieval Studies as a discipline.

2. Chapter I: "The records of ancient and medieval history are starred with lacunae" or facts versus the imaginary medieval.

It has been a tendency among scholars and others that have written about historical films to be mainly concerned with historical inaccuracies and anachronisms present in these texts, thus insisting on a certain kind of historical truth in the vein of Ranke. Certain medieval cinematic representations have been heavily scrutinized and criticized;

³⁷ Nietzsche, F. W. (1980). *On the advantage and disadvantage of history for life* (p. 23). Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

³⁸ Nelson, J. L., & Linehan, P. (2001). *The medieval world* (p. 163). London: Routledge.

including cinematic representations such as *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (Ridley Scott, 2005). The films in question, along with countless others, are often mocked according to historical (in)-accuracy rubrics.³⁹ Rosenstone points out rightly that “judgments are made historical value on wildly divergent grounds – accuracy of detail, the use of original documents, appropriateness of music, the looks of apparent suitability of an actor to play some whose body language, voice, and gestures we can never know from historical record”.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, historical inaccuracies and cinematic medievalisms are not synonyms.⁴¹ Medievalisms are not simply merely purely fictive representations or illusions as opposed to historical facts or inaccuracies, since that is a simplistic binary. Medievalisms are in fact important contributions to medieval studies because they illuminate how the Middle Ages are reinterpreted, appropriated, seen and imagined by the interpretive communities, be they scholarly or those of the general public. Because as Landy argues: “[r]ather than reflecting history through verisimilitude, films reflect our received notions of the past and offer, either reflexively or obliquely, an understanding of how cinematic history is constituted in monumental, antiquarian, and critical fashion as well as in ways that counter the excesses of these modes”.⁴² Conversely, it is vital to contextualize and define what is meant by the term ‘historical

³⁹ This is often the case despite the fact that “[h]istorical films are often marketed on the basis of their accuracy and their ability to show the past “as it really was”. Stubbs, J. (2013). *Historical film: A critical introduction* (p. 12). New York: Bloomsbury Academic. This argument echos the development of film history given by Bordwell and Elsaesser that point out the film developed from actualities and the “cinema of attractions” into respectable entertainment, especially with the advent of historical epic films such as *Birth of The Nation* and various other films, both in North America and Europe.

⁴⁰ Rosenstone, R. (1995). *FILMHISTORIA Online*. Retrieved October 10, 2013, from <http://www.pcb.ub.edu/filmhistoria/>

⁴¹ Andrew Elliot, Robert Rosenstone and Nicholas Haydock all rightly point out that it is important to distinguish whether or not one is criticizing the film itself or the historical representation. See Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history* in portraying the medieval world. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, Rosenstone, R. (1995). *FILMHISTORIA Online*. Retrieved October 10, 2013, from <http://www.pcb.ub.edu/filmhistoria/> and Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Ages*. London, UK: McFarland. However, Rosenstone goes even further by arguing that we must bring historical film into the debate seriously as historians: “Do we learn anything worth learning by approaching the past through the conventions of the mainstream film (conventions that are, through global Hollywoodization, understood virtually everywhere in the world)?” .Rosenstone’s position is a resounding: yes. In addition, Rosenstone’s stance as a historian is even more interesting because it is important in understanding how medievalisms function because Haydock is sometimes inconsistent with his argumentation by leaning on inaccuracies in describing medievalisms. In my viewpoint, this does help not clarify why then a film not set in the Middle Ages can have medievalisms. I discuss this criticism of Haydock in further detail later in the chapter, along with Rosenstone’s theories on historical films.

⁴² Landy, M. (2001). *The historical film: History and memory in media* (p. 10). New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.

film’ or cinematic history and whether this differs from cinematic medieval representations or ‘medieval film’. Furthermore, demarcating the terminology of medievalism is important since it is analytical terminology. In doing so, it is important also to understand how medievalism is understood among historians, literary scholars and film scholars alike.

Since the lacunae of the Middle Ages are due to lack of historical documentation in some instances and in other instances due to perceived notions that exist in the interpretive community, it has allowed for multiple temporalities and notions of the period, and with postmodernism medievalism has become an even richer subject. Indeed, the renowned literary scholar Terry Eagleton paraphrases Derrida’s maxim: “[i]n the so called postmodern condition what was previously displaced to the margins returns to haunt the very center”.⁴³ In fact this quote is quite descriptive of the recent surge of medieval themed cultural productions throughout the world in various media since, as Umberto Eco states, “indeed it seems like that people like the Middle Ages”.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, for a long period of time the medieval period has been a *carte blanche* either to explore high fantasy, as Tolkien did or G.R.R Martin does, or to invent a myriad of stories – and all this was done under the guise of medievalism, which was most prominent under Walter Scott and the Pre-Raphaelites. Alternatively, the Middle Ages has been imagined to be a feudalistic dark age, thus giving rise to the term Renaissance.⁴⁵ However, before defining medievalism it is prudent to utilize an archeological method to understand the framework in which medievalism operates. The arbitrary categorization of mankind’s history into the medieval period or Dark Ages began during the 14th century, which helped foster some of the more enduring tropes of the medieval period that still exist; including the flat earth thesis, constant cold and famine, religious strife and

⁴³ Eagleton, T. (1987). “The end of English”. *Textual Practice: Issue 7, Volume 3, Issue*.

⁴⁴ Umberto Eco mentions that there is a renewed interest in the Middle Ages in his essay “The Return of the Middle Ages” Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays*. London: Pan Books. However, as I argue the Middle Ages is now more popular than ever, especially in comparison to 1983 the year of the publication of his essay within the book *Travels in Hyperreality*. *Game of Thrones* is one such example, as is Tolkien’s mythology and various games such as *Diablo III*, *Skyrim*, *Dark Souls*, *Assassin’s Creed* and *Dante’s Inferno* to name only a few highly popular videogames on current generation consoles and PCs. Some of these cultural productions belong to the genre of fantasy however their thematic grounding is also rooted in the Middle Ages since it influences the works heavily, especially in the case of Dante’s *Inferno*, *Skyrim* and *Game of Thrones*.

⁴⁵ Individuals such as Petrarch and Leonardo Bruni helped created this conception of the Middle Ages.

rampant anti-intellectualism. In fact this reification, by both scholars and the public, of the Middle Ages has always operated within a dichotomy that has constantly pitted the Enlightenment and Renaissance against the Middle Ages. Because of such hyperbole, the Middle Ages have gained a negative connotation within the social consciousness of many cultures, e.g. if one types into a search engine in Icelandic the term ‘miðaldarhugsun’ (i.e. medieval thinking), one is confronted with a numerous array of results that reveal this to be a derogatory term in modern Icelandic language that is used in an *ad hominem* attack.⁴⁶ Throughout Western civilization the *lacunae* of the Middle Ages are what enable the medievalisms to run rampant, as Carr argues:

... what we know as the facts of medieval history have almost all been selected for us by generations of chroniclers who were professionally occupied in the theory and practice of religion, and who therefore thought it supremely important, and recorded every relating to it, and not much else. The dead hand of vanished generations of historians, scribes, and chroniclers has determined beyond the possibility of appeal the part of the past.⁴⁷

And precisely, because there are so much *lacunae* between the exemplary texts and tales along with other literary texts and medieval history, there is a void to be filled by agendas and ideologies, whether by historians, film-makers or film studios.

The historiographical debate relevant to medievalism is introduced in Nietzsche’s “On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life”.⁴⁸ In this work Nietzsche reflects on historical interpretation and introduces three concepts of historiography: the monumental approach to history, the antiquarian approach and the critical approach. The first approach is actually analogous to the representation of the Middle Ages in medieval films such as *Alexander Nevsky* and *Braveheart*; in them great heroes, nations and events are shown that reflect upon contemporary times.⁴⁹ This approach in the words of

⁴⁶ Ögmundur mótmælir „miðalda tollakerfi“ - DV. (n.d.). Retrieved October 14, 2013, from <http://www.dv.is/frettir/2013/11/4/helvitis-graedgi-W3K432/>

⁴⁷ Carr, E. H. (1961). *What is history?*. (p. 34) New York: Vintage.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche, F. W. (1980). *On the advantage and disadvantage of history for life*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co.

⁴⁹ Nietzsche argues that monumental history reveals contemporary times as feeble to the historical and great past, whereas in recent cinematic representations monumental history is told to convey ideology. I go into this in further detail later in the chapter when discussing Rosenstone’s categorizations of historical film.

Nietzsche is for those “who find no inspiration in daily life look to history—monumentalize it—for inspiration and motivation; they use it as a driving force in other words. Politicians often employ this method since they lay claim to history for the common good and monumentalize history for the good of collective”⁵⁰. Indeed, if one were to insert film studios for politicians, one would be none the wiser as Pugh and Ramey note regarding contemporary political discourse: “September 11th immediately began to function as a kind of medievalizing engine in American political discourse, creating a dualism that at that attempted to separate the modern West from the ‘premodern world’.”⁵¹ The second approach is the antiquarian approach, the one that is quite common and it is a stance that wishes to revere the past and its tradition, but it does not “monumentalize” history through historical figures or ages in comparison to contemporary times. The final approach is a critical history that Landy describes as follows:

Critical history attempts to “break up and dissolve a part of the past,” it is concerned with what is deemed to be a necessary reexamination of the methods and values that have animated historians; but this form of history can also be excessive. In challenging the past without a regard for what is to be maintained and what is to be forgotten, the historian employing this method can end up disillusioned, completely denying the past, and refusing to understand and accept imperfection and injustice.⁵²

Employing all methods in unison within historiography is, according to Nietzsche’s viewpoint, the correct way of practicing the discipline. Obviously, it is evident that Nietzsche was wary of the burgeoning rise of empirical science and positivism due to this lack of subjectivity in the role of historiography, especially since his near contemporaries in the humanities had begun to practice fact-gathering history that emphasized a

⁵⁰ *ibidem*.

⁵¹ One need only reiterate the words spoken by former American president George W. Bush: “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while”, *President: Today We Mourned, Tomorrow We Work*. (n.d.). Retrieved April 3, 2014. These words gave rise to the analogy of the 10th crusade and the rhetoric and discourse surrounding Islam after 9/11. Bruce Holsinger notes this tendency within political discourse as well. See Holsinger, B. W. (2005). *The premodern condition: Medievalism and the making of theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁵² Landy, M. (2001). *The historical film: History and memory in media* (p. 3). New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.

reorientation of history as an exact, objective science.⁵³ Historians such as Ranke were wary of ideology and subjectivity, and one of the monumental tenets of historiography that began with Ranke has had the following words as a guiding principle: “*wie es eigentlich gewesen?*”. This mode of thought within Western European intellectual history held strongly to the belief that, by examining all source material and through rigorous academic training, subjectivity could be avoided thereby enabling mankind to attain objective truths.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, such methodology ignores cognitive and sociocultural biases that are inherent in all humans. Indeed scholars of the 20th century did point out these mistakes that had become entrenched in academic circles and had been accentuated with positivism, or as the influential historian H.L. Carr wrote: “the belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which is very hard to eradicate”.⁵⁵ Still, many academics insist on viewing cinematic representations, visual culture and other cultural productions that do not adhere to a certain ‘fidelity’ of history as being a certain falsification of history or in some cases “the Americanization of the Middle Ages”.⁵⁶ As a consequence a significant amount of criticism against medievalism in general has been the charge that medieval cinematic representations are full of inaccuracies.⁵⁷ A poignant example is Lindley who in his article “The ahistoricism of Medieval Film” takes such an extreme theoretical position that he argues that “medieval films [are] not working from the assumption that the past was of inherent interest or historically connected to the present”.⁵⁸

⁵³ Chadwick, O. (1990). *The secularization of the European mind in the nineteenth century* (p. 233). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁴ Beiser, F. C. (2011). *The German historicist tradition* (p. 255). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵⁵ Carr, E. H. (1961). *What is history?* (p. 13). New York: Vintage.

⁵⁶ Lindley claims that this is the “Disneyfication of the Middle Ages” *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from Retrieved from:

<http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

Mike Wallace, on the other hand, calls it “Mickey Mouse history” Wallace, M. (1996). *Mickey Mouse history and other essays on American memory*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

⁵⁷ Landy correctly points out this trend: “The major genres that rely on images of the past are historical films and costume dramas, and the tendency to describe these films as unhistorical, escapist, and unrealistic has been a dominant trend of film and historical criticism until recent decades. Film criticism has begun to rethink the cinematic representations of political events that occurred during the twentieth century”. Landy, M. (2001). *The historical film: History and memory in media* (p. 7). New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.

⁵⁸ The ahistoricism of Medieval Film. (1998, May 28th). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

However, such an approach becomes problematic when dealing with cinema since cinema is at once art and a representation, and functions as history within the interpretive community to the utter dismay of certain scholars.⁵⁹ Yet, Lindley among others is guilty of issuing demands to cinematic representations to be historically correct because as Pugh and Ramey point out, “cinematic representations of the Middle Ages are concerned with constructing a historically accurate and faithful visual portrayal for the general audience yet nonetheless most of the criticism against medieval themed cinema by scholars is heavily based on pointing out all inaccuracies and anachronism”.⁶⁰ In doing so, scholars avoid the thematic basis of many films and their political and cultural messages, and how they hijack the Middle Ages for their purposes. Admittedly, Lindley avoids falling into the pitfall of only pointing out inaccuracies yet his entire article is quite elucidating as to how the reception of cinematic medieval representations is within certain academic circles.⁶¹ Lindley’s thesis as quoted earlier has to do with his perceived notion that cinematic medieval representations are less interested in the past, and there is disjunction not found in other historical representations. Lindley argues that the film *The age of innocence* (Martin Scorsese, 1993) is a meticulous recreation of a recent period, while also being a meditation on the evolution of modern sexual mores and visual codes during the period. Lindley, states that he feels that for cinematic portrayals of the Middle Ages should adhere to exhibiting characteristics that most historical films share, nonetheless the lacunae of the Middle Ages make it impossible to compare 19th - century recreations to medieval ones.⁶² Evidently, comparing the temporalities of two distinct periods does

⁵⁹ Lindley uses the interesting nomenclature: historiophoty, which is a term that originates with Hayden White.

⁶⁰ The premises of this argument is something I do not agree with entirely as I argue in the following paragraphs and in the thesis in itself. I do however concur with the inaccuracy methodology is flawed.

⁶¹ It is common for numerous homepages to dissect *Braveheart* and list the numerous inaccuracies and deplore the film’s historical inaccuracy. In fact few films have garnered so much attention to historical accuracy, thus perhaps invoking Nietzsche’s approach to historiography. However, Lindley argues differently: “At the risk of defending a film generally considered indefensible, I think the prevailing critical tendency to attack *Braveheart* for a failure, essentially, of literalism represents a misunderstanding of its genre which in turn reflects a larger misunderstanding of medieval film (not to mention, a misunderstanding of history as a set of objective facts.”

The ahistoricism of Medieval Film. (1998, May 28th). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

⁶² The ahistoricism of Medieval Film. (1998, May 28th). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm> One can easily point out the Western centric approach Lindley is guilty of when discussing “modern sexual mores”, not to mention what he really means by “a meticulous representation”. The reader is unaware what “of its recent

not strike Lindley as being problematic, especially since the film's source material is barely one hundred years old. His theoretical approach towards medieval 'reel' cinema is not only to point out the *errata* within the medieval cinema, but also to accuse it of perpetuating *unheimliche* historical representations or as Lindley argues:

Where films of the more recent past habitually construct their subjects as existing in linear and causative historical relationship to the present, films of the medieval period present their *matere* in an analogical relation: as type or anti-type of current circumstances, as allegorical representation of them, or as estranged retelling. The distant past may mirror us -- we, not it, are the real subject.

Nonetheless, despite Lindley's objections, films such as *Ironclad* (Johnathan English, 2011) are obsessed with presenting the viewer with a historical representation that reminds us of our linear heritage.⁶³ In doing so they employ numerous narrative strategies. Because as Rosenstone states it is crucial to investigate "the codes, conventions and practices"⁶⁴ employed to understand history that are brought to the screen. Among the strategies frequently used in medieval history films is a medieval template of topoi and tropes that are medievalisms intended to invoke a certain mood in the interpretive community and to inform the viewer as well.⁶⁵ Indeed, there is a twofold dynamic that can be seen within a film such as *Ironclad*, especially since it follows Rosenstone's history as drama theory, since "the historical setting is intrinsic to the story and meaning of the work".⁶⁶ Furthermore, historical codes and techniques are employed that immediately appeal on an emotional level to the viewer.⁶⁷ In the beginning and

period" really refers to. Is it the representation, the adaptation itself or the period itself that the adaptation supposedly is representing, albeit in historically accurate manner?

⁶³ Many of the characters are not fictional but based on historical characters, albeit with historical inaccuracies. However, there are referents to historical events, not only fictional. Another instance of presenting a film with historical context was the premiere of the film *Ironclad* in Los Angeles, which was accompanied with a special exhibition of one of the *Magna Carta* manuscripts from Oxford's Bodleian Library. See: *IRONCLAD Screening At LACMA During Magna Carta Viewing And Britweek! | Twitch*. (2011, April 28). Retrieved from <http://twitchfilm.com/2011/04/ironclad-screening-at-lacma-during-magna-carta-viewing-and-britweek.html>

⁶⁴ Rosenstone, R. A. (2006). *History on film/film on history*. (p. 28) Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson.

⁶⁵ I explain medievalisms later in this chapter and I clarify this statement further.

⁶⁶ Rosenstone argues that history as drama cannot always be easily distinguished this way and quotes the Civil War film *Glory*, a film that places fictional characters among historical characters. Nonetheless, this is not a pretext nor is *Ironclad's* claim to historicizing.

⁶⁷ Current academic film studies focuses on cinema as an emotional agent. Films that seem to be the most 'genuine' or have the most compelling medieval portrayals onscreen invite the interpretive community to

ending of the film historical events, have a narrator together with camera shots that match the voiceover, including narrative techniques such as an insert shots.⁶⁸ In fact, the stills below from the film *Ironclad* reveal the historicizing attempts within the film that are accompanied by non-diegetic narration.⁶⁹ Immediately the viewer is introduced to this mimetic world with an insert short that explains the Norman conquest of William the Conqueror and the despotic behavior of his great grandson, Henry II, all within one insert shot. Obviously, the narrative techniques that medieval cinema employs to convince the interpretive community of the veracity of these historical representations is an earnest attempt to historicize and entertain simultaneously. Regardless, within these narrative tropes there are historical inaccuracies. In the following film still the audience can see the signature of King John, who is made to sign the *Magna Carta* charter, after being subdued with the assistance of the Knights Templar.⁷⁰

partake in a shared cinematic medievalism; in fact the immediacy of medieval themed films is based on senses and emotions as well as interlinked issues of loyalty, faith and identity. Of course, nationalism is to be added to this taxonomy and it would prudent to suggest identity politics along with identity. For this discussion, see Driver, M. W., & Ray, S. (2004). *The medieval hero on screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (pp. 39-41). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

⁶⁸ In *Ironclad* the viewer is treated to manuscript insert shots that correspond with the narrator explaining the vices of John the King, his losses against Philip II of France and Louise VIII of France (who are not mentioned), his punitive taxes and his lecherous behavior of sleeping with barons' wives which to certain members of the interpretive community might be interpreted as repeated *droit de seigneur* behavior towards the barons. The concept *droit de seigneur* itself seems to be one of the more resilient medievalisms along with the excess piety and flat earth beliefs. It is also known as the *ius primae noctis* and is a plot point in *Braveheart*. Of course, one might question why the filmmaker chose to include this since many films in the Robin Hood narrative have betrayed King John as a one dimensional foil to Robin Hood. Especially, since King John is depicted as an inferior king, and even usurper, to Richard the Lionheart, for example in *The Prince of Thieves* (1991). Eliot notes this tendency when he states: "Richard becomes ideal simply by virtue of "not being John" Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world* (p. 58). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland. Yet in *The Lion in the Winter* (1968), John is portrayed as a rather asexual dolt, both in the film and play. Perhaps it is a better attempt at historicizing since there has been a revisionist turn in historiography and John the King has certainly benefitted from the revision; nonetheless as can seen on the subtitles in the third still from *Ironclad*, the aforementioned hypothesis might be more correct. However, Hollister discusses the historical representation created in historiography by chroniclers, see Hollister, C. W. (1961). King John and the Historians. *Journal of British Studies*.

⁶⁹ King John's death in the end of the film is implied visually, but explained by a narrator's voice that informs the viewer that the king died of dysentery.

⁷⁰ The Knight's Templar trope is Eco's ninth category of medievalisms, the one of tradition, and is immensely popular in modern culture. The fiction author C.M. Palov has written numerous novels that connect them with hidden knowledge from the East and/or Egypt; thereby enriching the Holy Grail trope even further.

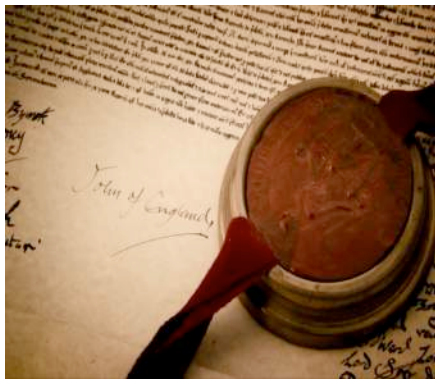


Figure 4 A visual still from the film *Ironclad*, depicting the signature of the *Magna Carta* by King John under duress.



Figure 5: ‘History’ has not been kind to King John due to men such as Matthew Paris, the chronicler. This still is from the beginning montage of *Ironclad*.

If inspected closely, it is possible to spot a seal of the regency along with King John’s signature in an attempt to represent accurately the ‘feel’ of the Middle Ages or what Andrew Eliot argues is a cinematic aesthetic of ‘authenticity’ as opposed to ‘accuracy’⁷¹. Clearly the writing on the manuscript is meant to portray the manuscript tradition or the contemporary script of the time in the region. One of the methods employed by cinematic representations of the Middle Ages is to utilize historicons. The term historicon was coined by Andrew Eliot and refers to objects that are meant to signify a specific historical period and these objects are iconically linked to the period in question and can be “an object, item, character, gesture or historical reference”.⁷² If one looks closely at the historicon displayed on figure V, there are numerous visual ‘inaccuracies’ on display. First of all the word “Lord” appears on the historicon, as in film still V above, thus denoting the vernacular, but according to the numerous histories of the English language, medieval English would have been the vernacular at the time of the signing thus rendering the spelling: louerd, loverd, lhoaverd. Therefore, any concerns for linguistic fidelity are

⁷¹ The *Rotuli Chartarum* reveals that this particular material object would have been signed *Johannes Dei gratia Rex Angliæ, Dominus Hiberniæ, Dux Normanæ, Aquitanniæ, et Comes Andegaviæ*. Hardy, T. D. (n.d.). *Rotuli Chartarum In Turri Londinensi Asservati: Ab Anno 1199 - 1216*. Retrieved October 21, 2013, from <http://gallica.bnf.fr>. As for accuracy and authenticity it is a key element in Eliot’s reception theory.

Elliott, A. B. R. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

⁷² Andrew B.R. Elliott. (2010). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* (pp. 210-211). McFarland & Co., Publishers. Eliot makes note of his personal correspondence with the French scholar Amy de la Bretèque and historicon seems analogous to the term iconogram in Bretèque’s writings.

ignored. Moreover, the *Magna Carta* was also written in medieval Latin,⁷³ a historical fact that can be seen on the still. Despite the historicizing there is no conclusive proof that King John signed the *Magna Carta*, at Runnymede, since it is not a single document but rather a text. This conviction is echoed by the recent rendition of Robin Hood in Ridley Scott's *Robin Hood* from 2010, in which Robin Hood is instrumental in the process of acknowledging the rights written down in the form of the document that later evolved to become known as the *Magna Carta*. This historical explanation is a first occurrence for the *Robin Hood* narrative cycle. Another blatant inaccuracy in *Ironclad* is that the Danish army speaks Hungarian, as well as the assumption that John had mercenaries from the region of modern day Denmark.⁷⁴ In fact the film's narrative is centered on the immediacy of the protagonist's plight due to the treacherous and villainous nature of King John as seen on the visual still number six, below, invoking a hyper-violent portrayal of medieval life intended to be somewhat historically accurate. All this raises the question of what medievalism is precisely, since these historical inaccuracies do not immediately bring to the fore a proper definition of the term medievalism. One of the more intriguing hypotheses to help solve the concept is Lindley's following argument:

We are dealing here, I realize, with a conflict between two different discursive constructs of history, one linear, the other non-linear. I am arguing, however, that one of these constructs incorporates a denial of historical process and connection, and that that construct is the one usually applied to films of the Middle Ages. The dominant mode of medieval film -- regardless of country of origin or degree of commercial calculation -- is fabular, whatever claims, usually unfounded, a given film may make to factuality.⁷⁵

⁷³ Many medieval films have ignored this fact entirely, so *Ironclad*'s representation is refreshingly accurate.

⁷⁴ At least not according to the historical sources, yet that might be *lacunae*? As a native speaker of a Nordic language, others such as Danish are rather intelligible. Furthermore, having studied in Hungary the use of Hungarian instead of Old East Norse or even Danish is quite noticeable. In addition, the warriors are said to be Danes yet the voice credit is for Hungarian voices: *Ironclad* (2011). (n.d.). Retrieved June 23, 2014, from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1233301/combined>. Using the Maygar language is thus perhaps a cost saving measure rather than a historical stance taken by the filmmakers. As regards to King John's armies the English chronicles do not mention Danish soldiers.

⁷⁵ The ahistoricism of Medieval Film. (1998, May 28th). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>



Figure 6: From the vignette of *Ironclad*. Typical historicons of the Middle Ages on display.

2.1: Medievalisms as fantasies

“What is required to make a good Middle Ages?” Umberto Eco from *Travels in Hyperreality*

After exploring historical films and theory regarding them in general, the following question must be raised: is medieval film in some way counterfactual or anti-historical, or just less historical than historical films and are, thus, medievalisms?⁷⁶ Perhaps it is wise to define what a historical film is according to certain theorists before proceeding further, so it is possible to delineate medievalisms from historical films in more precise detail. This is crucial since, as Haydock asks: can cinematic depictions of the Middle Ages be defined and analyzed under the rubrics of error and inaccuracy?⁷⁷ Pierre Sorlin argues that all historical films are based on historical sources, yet they still have to “reconstruct in a purely imaginary way the greater part of what they show”⁷⁸. Obviously medieval films do share that quality of simple visual representation. In order to be more illuminating it is prudent to explore how the historian Robert Rosenstone defines historical film. First there is the 'costume drama' that does not attempt to explain events, movements, ideologies or people. These films are in fact romances parading under the guise of history, and the medium is utilized to relate adventure and romance such as

⁷⁶ For the sake of clarity I would like to emphasize the terminology. When I refer to medievalism I refer the cognitive models, attitudes, entertainment, literature and other culture that seeks inspiration in the Middle Ages, yet implicitly or explicitly deal with the contemporary concerns of the social period of the work. See Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present* (p. 3). London: Routledge. So, when I state later that *Ironclad* exhibits medievalisms, it is dealing with many tropes that are under the referent: medievalism.

⁷⁷ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 10). Lonson, UK: McFarland

⁷⁸ (Sorlin, P. (1980). *The film in history: Restaging the past* (p. 34). Totowa, N.J.: Barnes & Noble Books

Titanic or *Gladiator*.⁷⁹ With these categories in mind it is useful, to introduce Umberto Eco's taxonomy of medievalisms. Eco's first category is analogous to Rosenstone's costume drama, since Eco's definition of this medievalism is that it utilizes the "Middle Ages as a pretext".⁸⁰ There is no interest in the historical background. Under this category, Eco places 'cloak and dagger' novels and juxtaposes them with historical novels; in the latter there is a need for "real historical figures" while in the former there is no need for them, since historical novels attempt to convey a better historical understanding of the period in question.⁸¹ On the basis of such arguments it can be said that cinematic representations such as *The Da Vinci Code* and *Ladyhawke* and *A Knight's Tale* fit into this category of Eco's medievalism⁸², whereas *The Lion in the Winter* and *Henry V* are historical costume dramas that are mainly free of certain traits of medievalisms, especially since they are adaptations of existing dramatic plays. In order to further distinguish historical films from cinematic medievalism, introducing the rest of Umberto Eco's taxonomy of medievalisms is crucial. Since, I have introduced the first one I will now introduce the remaining nine. All ten categories demonstrate tropes associated with our medieval past.⁸³ The second category is the one of ironical revisitation. The third category category is the one of the barbaric ages can seen in film

⁷⁹ Rosenstone, R. A. (2006). *History on film/film on history*. (p. 23). Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson. Landy explains this further in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*. The sound films of the 1930s and 1940s – the biographical film (biopic), the costume spectacle, and the historical film – depicted significant individuals and events associated mainly with traditional and watershed moments of a country's past. Historical films employed major stars and celebrated significant events in the forging of national identity. These films frequently served as a form of collective morality as well as source of morale. They were often produced on a grand scale in the mode of "monumental history". Thus it can be argued that this narrative technique is still alive and well in Hollywood cinematic representations of history. Admittedly, *Gladiator* is more complex however on level of interpretation the general viewership might take it only as 'historical blockbuster'. On a second level it can be interpreted as continuation of previous Hollywood historical epics; whereas on another level it can deal with hegemony, power structures and ideological conflicts especially if it is read in conjunction with Ridley Scott's other films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001) and *Kingdom of Heaven* (2005).

⁸⁰ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays* (p. 68). London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg.

⁸¹ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays* (p. 68). London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg.

⁸² Eliot argues for a different notion of pretext. Citing Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* and the cold war cycle of *Arthurian* film as example he points out that the pretext is the third level of interpretation that the medieval films must be analyzed. The pretext can be used or misabused. Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world* (p. 138). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

⁸³ I briefly introduce them now since I utilize them and explain later in the text to avoid a long summary of Eco's theoretical taxonomy.

capture from Ironclad above and reiterates the argument made in the introduction especially the quote from *Pulp Fiction* (1994). The fourth category is Romanticism, which is heavily tied to the Gothic aesthetic.⁸⁴ The fifth category is the one of *philosophia perennis*, while the sixth is the Middle Ages of Decadentism which is associated with kitsch reimaginings of the Middle Ages and national restorations in the vein of Gothic revival or Romanticism. The eighth category is the one Eco names philological construction and is tied to scholars of the Middle Ages, and the ninth category is the Middle Ages of what Eco says is the “so called tradition”.⁸⁵ Numerous novels such as *The Da Vinci Code* the Knight’s Templar novels from C.M. Palov are firmly rooted in this medievalism and these cultural productions employ tropes from this medievalism. The tenth and final category deals with eschatology and millennialism and thus films such as *Black Death* (Christopher Smith, 2010) and *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957) can be thematically linked by utilizing tropes of this medievalism category.

In order to further discern the differences between cinematic medieval representations it is helpful to utilize Rosenstone’s theoretical framework. because when defining historical film further, he argues that there is the mainstream drama category, which is exhibited in films such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Battleship Potemkin*. These films and their directors were in Rosenstone’s words “very early practitioners of the three types of arguably serious history films that have been produced ever since: the mainstream drama ... the opposition or innovative history and the compilation documentary”.⁸⁶ The first methodological approach which is essentially nationalistic cinema is cinematic historicizing that negates any temporal alterity and is often a project intended to reinforce nationalistic ideologies or be part of the national cinema oeuvre or, as Haydock states, these films function within a framework where the construction of national identities is crucial”.⁸⁷ At first glance, this category is also analogous to Eco’s sixth category of medievalisms, “The Middle Ages of *national identities*”, or “when the medieval model was taken as a political utopia, a celebration of past grandeur, to be

⁸⁴ I mention this later regarding the medievalism of the Notre Dame.

⁸⁵ Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in hyper reality: Essays* (p. 134). San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

⁸⁶ Rosenstone, R. A. (2006). *History on film/film on history*, p. 28. Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson.

⁸⁷ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 67). Lonson, UK: McFarland

opposed to the miseries of national enslavement and foreign domination”.⁸⁸ Between these categories there is evidently an intersection that Lindley rightly points out, as does film scholar David Bordwell: “films of the recent past have been and continue to be dominated by narrative codes derived ultimately from nineteenth-century fiction, just as they remain one of the last bastions of classic Hollywood Cinema technical conventions”⁸⁹. Under this category and narrative strategy films such as *Braveheart*, *Alexander Nevsky*, *Teutonic Knights* and *Michael the Brave* can be included as well as the cycle of Arthurian films in the cold war era.⁹⁰ Despite the similarity that these two categories possess along with mainstream drama historical films, there seems to be a difference in the narrative strategies employed by cinematic medieval representations. It is these differences that separate historical medieval films and medieval themed cinema from historical films and other films in general.

Medievalism refers to the whole enterprise of representing and interpreting the Middle Ages. Scholarship, literature, art, visual media, medieval fairs and other recreation hobbies are all endeavors that seek inspiration in the Middle Ages and are simultaneously are a comment on the sociocultural milieu. In their definition of medievalism, Pugh and Weisl mention part of Leslie Workman’s definition of the terminology and that the Middle Ages are a shelter to reveal discontent on contemporary times.⁹¹ On the other hand Clare Simmons defines it as the reception of the Middle Ages.⁹² Hence, medievalism is a notion, or a dreaming, in the words of Eco, of what the Middle Ages were and are. Each fantasy the interpretive community has of the Middle Ages is a medievalism. For example, cultural products such as *Disney’s Adventures of the Gummi Bears* and the Japanese videogame *Chrono Trigger* can exhibit tropes of medievalism; within this framework they can have different forms of medievalisms. If medievalism is the general notion or fantasy, medievalisms are the

⁸⁸ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays* (p. 70). London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg.

⁸⁹ Bordwell, D., Staiger, J., & Thompson, K. (1985). *The classical Hollywood cinema: Film style & mode of production to 1960* (p. 45). New York: Columbia University Press.

⁹⁰ This along with race and ethnicity, in Arthurian film, is the focus of my next chapter.

⁹¹ Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present* (p. 23). London: Routledge.

⁹² Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present* (p. 23). London: Routledge.

numerous tropes and icons that help constitute the umbrella term of medievalism. The videogame *Chrono Trigger* will exhibit tropes of medievalism, since it has themes that belong firmly in three of Eco's medievalism categories while the cartoon *Disney's Adventures of the Gummi Bears* can often only employ Eco's first category. Therefore, all the tropes, icons and historicons associated with medievalism are examples of medievalisms.⁹³ Medievalisms can be portrayed visually, aurally and by employing other codes and methods as opposed to other historical tropes, as well as with historicons. To clarify this point, I wish to point out a self-evident argument that Rosenstone mentions: "visual media are the chief conveyor of public history in our culture" and the visual media practice that Hayden White names historiophoty, which is a term coined by White denotes our attempts to represent history with visual media such as film.⁹⁴ However, there is a fundamental difference in how the interpretive community reacts to the visual representation, since there is a difference in indexicality because intertextuality plays an immense role. On one level there is what Pierre Sorlin defined as "historical capital."⁹⁵ This is the idea that the audience is in possession of certain episteme when viewing a historical film. Nonetheless, this theoretical framework works in tandem with Fish's term interpretive communities. The audience as well as the film makers constitute the interpretive community, since the Middle Ages or rather medievalism are culturally constructed.⁹⁶ The creators of visual material who depict the Middle Ages on the screen often share the same expectations and cinematic conventions with the audience. On one level the interpretive community can have historical capital and shared beliefs about the Middle Ages, and if the film makers deviate from these interpretations of history, the audience can criticize the work as being factually incorrect, or as being not genuine.⁹⁷ On a basic level, this can be called the factual and expressional within Panofsky's framework, which takes into account reader response theory.⁹⁸ To demonstrate how

⁹³ Weisl and Pugh are among the many scholars that use the term medievalism/s interchangeably.

⁹⁴ White, H. (1988). *Historiography and Historiophoty*. *American Historical Review*, 93(5), 1193.

⁹⁵ Sorlin, P. (1980). *The film in history: Restaging the past* (p. 34). Totowa, N.J: Barnes & Noble Books.

⁹⁶ Buchanan, I. (2010). *A dictionary of critical theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹⁷ I also discuss this later in regards to authenticity and accuracy.

⁹⁸ This is part of Panofsky's theory of art objects and is part of the first level of identification and is immediate empirical knowledge; such as objects we know through our cognitive processes. In addition this can be all the resources used to display the material culture of the historical period, whether it be weapons or clothes. Thus, for one in possession of significant historical capital certain fallacies can immediately be

different this first level can be between medieval films, due to medievalisms, and serious historical films can be seen in the following film stills.



Figure 7: A scene from *Ironclad* that employs a historicon.



Figure 8: A scene from *Willow*, which employs the same historicon, giving rise to an example of medievalism.

Displayed on the two film captions above in figures 7 and 8 is the medieval practice of gibbeting criminals. This technique is one of the more common identifiers of codes, indicating one is viewing the Middle Ages or, as Eco states for this third category of medievalism, this is “a barbaric age ... also the Middle Ages of early Bergman ... [t]hese ages are Dark par excellence”.⁹⁹ In the first film still the interpretive community is treated to a medievalistic ‘meme’ or medievalism since it contributes nothing to the plot, it only signifies that the audience is truly witnessing a reconstruction of in the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁰ This historicon or practice can also be seen in the Arthurian film *The Black Knight* (1954). In this sense, *Ironclad* is a historical film that can operate within the serious historical drama genre, however, it does exhibit medievalisms, because as Rosenstone points out:

Whether the mainstream drama focuses on documented people or creates fictional characters and sets them amidst some important event or movement (most films contain both actual and invented

recognized as anachronisms, or certain objects can function as historicons that signify the Middle Ages. So on one level this is how historical film and medieval film (medievalisms) are connected.

⁹⁹ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays* (p. 69). London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg.

¹⁰⁰ This medievalism is so common that appears in numerous medieval themed cultural productions. For example, in the *Game of Thrones* novels, the tavern keeper Masha Heddel is gibbeted and special notice is made of this by Tyrion Lannister in his POV chapter. In the videogame *Skyrim* there are numerous torture devices and even numerous torture chambers, many include gibbet cages or other medieval torture devices. Another example of such a medievalistic meme (medievalism) is the idea of the tavern itself which appears in everything medieval from Sierra Game’s *Quest For Glory*, *the Lord of the Ring*, both films and novels, to *Henry V*. Not to mention the fact one can listen to medieval tavern RPG videogame music compilation online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4Bcl1EeenM>

characters), the historical thinking involved is much the same: individuals (one, two, or a small group) are at the centre of the historical process. Through their eyes and lives, adventures and loves, we see strikes, invasions, revolutions, dictatorships, ethnic conflict, scientific experiments, legal battles, political movements, holocausts. But we do more than see: we feel as well. Using image, music, and sound effect along with the spoken (and shouted, whispered, hummed, and cooed) word, the dramatic film aims directly at the emotions. It does not simply provide an image of the past, it wants you to feel strongly about that image – specifically, about the characters involved in the historical situations that it depicts.¹⁰¹

In the second still, we can see Madmartigan from the medieval infused fantasy film *Willow* in a gibbet cage. The cage functions as marker for the barbaric practices of the land and rulers in question, which helps invoke the barbaric Middle Ages. Thus, both images function on the factual and expressional level as medievalisms and are codes that indicate the visceral ‘medieval’. This is what Andrew Eliot describes as being a common dream of the Middle Ages or as he elaborates:

we are back in the Middle Ages. It is the world of barbarity and squalor, in which dark forces sweep unchecked through defenseless villages, storm monasteries and ransack their way into the annals of history. It is the world of superstition and religious zeal, too, in which the earth is still flat.¹⁰²

Other historical periods are not as indebted to such indexicality or what Richard Osberg names “communal medievalism”.¹⁰³ For example, Stanley Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon* is a many-layered film that is a serious historical film; in fact it is an earnest attempt to visualize the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, it is highly historical and Kubrick’s great attention to details and the amount of historical details for this particular film is well

¹⁰¹ Rosenstone, R. A. (2006). *History on film/film on history*. (p. 15) Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson. This also is closely tied to the emotive nature of successful historical and medieval films as discussed earlier in my thesis and appears in “Authenticating Realism in Medieval Film” Driver, M. W., & Ray, S. (2004). *The medieval hero on screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

¹⁰² Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world* (p. 14). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

¹⁰³ Osberg, R.H. (1996) Pages Torn From the Book: Narrative Disintegration in Gilliam’s The Fisher King, *Studies in Medievalism* (p. 7): 194–224. This term also reverberates the term interpretive community.

¹⁰⁴ Kubrick was a fanatic about the historical figure of Napoleon and the period as numerous anecdotes reveal. He had a copious amount of sources and notebooks dedicated to bringing Napoleon and that era to the screen.

documented.¹⁰⁵ Yet, Sorlin's historical capital reveals how problematic it is for other time periods, especially the Middle Ages, to rely on historical capital. In *Barry Lyndon* Kubrick utilizes Thomas Gainsborough's painting *The Blue Boy*, or as Maria Pramaggiore argues regarding Kubrick's cinematic aesthetic and historical perspective; in his Napoleon War era film *Barry Lyndon* he employs a strategy of "the cinema of seeing". Kubrick achieves this aim by exploiting the visual art tradition, because he employs these aesthetic objects as history, or rather he employs historicons.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, if Kubrick or any other director for that matter had attempted to use Bruegel the Elder's painting *The Triumph of Death* or Hieronymus Bosch's *Ship of Fools*, it would be more accessible to the interpretive community, since these paintings function within a medievalism framework and depict medievalisms we associate the Middle Ages: they are constructions and the genealogy of many medievalisms.¹⁰⁷ These paintings, along with other cultural productions dealing with the Middle Ages, employ numerous tropes of the Middle Ages that have since been the basis of medieval representations in literature, history art and film. It is in this manner that medievalisms reveal themselves and facilitate in distinguishing mainstream historical drama from medieval cinematic representations, revealing one fundamental difference in Rosenstone's and Eco's theories. Cinematic portrayals that depict different forms of medievalism are not associated with factual concerns, since they are often based on assumptions, *mouvance*, stereotypes and previous erroneous scholarship that aggregated together form the medievalisms.¹⁰⁸ To disassociate medieval cinema further from historical cinema and its generic borders, Thomas Green has introduced helpful parameters and categorizes five different types of anachronisms: naïve anachronisms, abusive anachronisms, serendipitous anachronisms, creative anachronisms and tragic anachronisms.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ See Naremore, J. (2007). *On Kubrick*. London: BFI.

¹⁰⁶ Rosenstone, R. A., & Parvulescu, C. (2013). *A companion to the historical film* (p. 245). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁰⁷ It is important to note the temporal parameters that Western civilizations operate, because both painters belong to the Flemish Renaissance. Medievalisms are thus not only rooted in 19th-century ideas of the Middle Ages.

¹⁰⁸ Some scholars argue that the term *mouvance* can be applied to cinematic texts since cinematic representations of the Middle Ages are retold and open in accordance to prevailing social-cultural concerns.

¹⁰⁹ Greene, T. (1986). *The vulnerable text: Essays on Renaissance literature*. New York: Columbia University Press. This is also the main focus of the sixth chapter of Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present*. London: Routledge.

Nonetheless, employing anachronisms as the sole criteria for detecting medievalisms is quite problematic. Since the aesthetic and narrative effect of medievalism is embedded within the interpretive community, Green's categorization is originally applied to the Renaissance and thus immediately a theoretical paradox can arise if medievalism is forced into such a limiting perspective. This is especially true when critics such as Haydock can suddenly claim that *Braveheart* and *The Patriot* are the same film being shot,¹¹⁰ yet they do not explain why medieval cinematic representations should automatically be thrown into the medievalism heap except for giving ambiguous statements such as “[h]istorical accuracy is seldom a consistent feature” while simultaneously discussing other historical films under such rubrics, including *Gladiator* and the *Patriot*. This hyperreductionism and formalism is detrimental to analyzing medieval cinema. A cinematic representation of the ancient world might illuminate why inaccuracies and anachronisms itself are by themselves not sufficient for defining medievalism, and why such a statement is faulty.¹¹¹ Historiography itself is largely subjective. A film such as *Gladiator* can also exhibit inaccuracies due to the cultural reception of one object, whereas medieval cinematic depictions are an intertwinement of previous nationalistic scholarship, lacunae, prejudices and literary inventions. One such particular inaccuracy is the *pollice verso* that has disseminated through the cultural conscious of the interpretive community due to the representation, first through Gérôme painting *Pollice Verso*, and then into *Gladiator*.¹¹² It is an inaccuracy that has seeped into the collective consciousness; however, film makers when dealing with the ancient world, consciously choose to eschew historical sources despite the copious amounts of source

¹¹⁰ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 143). London, UK: McFarland. Haydock is conflating concerns over hegemony, nationalism and a total lack of historical reality from both films as the one and same thing. The ideology and heroic ideals intersect yet the emotive response of the interpretive community is quite different, e.g. the immediacy of *Braveheart* is made even more significant in light of Scotland's referendum. *Braveheart* invokes concerns of colonialism that has succeeded, *The Patriot* obviously does not: a film regarding the Civil War such as *Birth of a Nation* would be more akin to *Braveheart*.

¹¹¹ The problematic issue is that it entails that all historical films are based on inaccuracies, invoking a paradox if one argues from the theoretical standpoint of inaccuracies. Every historical period is represented extensively by fiction in cultural reproductions: it is the fantastical element of medievalisms that makes them distinct thus making such a claim about *Braveheart* and *The Patriot* is too reductionist.

¹¹² The following article clarifies the matter of pollice verso.

Pollice Verso. (n.d.). Retrieved October 2, 2013, from http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/gladiators/polliceverso.html

material; whereas medieval cinema builds upon previous imaginations and interpretations.

Furthermore, medievalisms separate medieval themed cinema from historical film in another distinct manner. In the aforementioned examples, familiarity with objects or events functions in conjunction with medievalisms. Yet, medievalisms can also function on an iconographical level or on a thematic level, since medievalisms are rich in symbolism. As Pugh and Ramey claim: “[w]hat emerges is a recognition that reimaginings of the Middle Ages are essentially fantasies built upon fantasies, for many medievalisms draw more firmly from medieval ideas about fictionality than they do from medieval history”.¹¹³ An example of this can be seen Roman Polanski’s *The Ninth Gate*.¹¹⁴ Despite being set in a contemporary setting Corso the protagonist is hired to locate a valuable book that was supposedly created by Lucifer himself. Of importance are also engravings signed by Lucifer or, as Corso’s employer says: “They form a kind of satanic riddle. Correctly interpreted with the aid of the original text and sufficient inside information, they are reputed to conjure up the Prince of Darkness in person”.¹¹⁵ This description fits neatly into Umberto Eco’s ninth category of medievalisms, the Middle Ages of occult philosophy, a period full of Knights Templar,, alchemists, Masonic traditions.¹¹⁶ This is the category of occultism and the Holy Grail, a category that the film *The Ninth Gate* utilizes for its narrative and most importantly through the engravings. In total there are nine engravings, with each having a double, which is a copy or representation of the original signed by Lucifer. Notably, they also have medieval maxims that immediately connect them to the woodcuts from of Sebastian Brant’s *Narrenschiff*.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present* (p. 13). London: Routledge.

¹¹⁴ The film is loosely based on the novel *Club Dumas*, by Arturo Pérez-Reverte, which is steeped in occultism and medieval themes among other things; including witchcraft and Faustian mythology.

¹¹⁵ Polanski, R. (1999). *The Ninth Gate* [Motion picture]. USA: Artisan Entertainment.

¹¹⁶ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays* (p. 71). London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg.

¹¹⁷ *University of Houston Digital Library: Ship of Fools Woodcuts: Browse*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2013, from <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/p15195coll15/browse>



Figure 9: From *Ninth Gate*: Fortuna non omnibus aequa.



Figure 10: *Frustra*

Both visuals, depicted above, and tarot cards that are prominent in both the film and book, function as iconic representations of the Middle Ages. In fact, they are referents to medievalisms operating on many levels. The jester and The Ship of Fools motif is quite well represented in the cultural community, since the jester is a common icon of the Middle Ages as well as a trans-cultural archetypal figure,¹¹⁸ not to mention Michel Foucault's argumentation regarding the *stultifera navis* and the mentality of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance in his *Madness and Civilization*. In his view madness was considered a path to knowledge, and the madman/jester is somewhat of a prophet. However, there is scant historical information in the sources to validate this interpretation, not to mention the fact that *stultifera navis* is a medievalism, along with the archetype of 'court jesters' as can be seen e.g. in the medieval cinematic production *The Court Jester* (Melvin Frank, 1955). Indeed, there were court jesters. Yet, as Beatrice K Otto argues in *Fools Are Everywhere: The Court Jester Around the World*, the medieval church was quite suspicious of laughter.¹¹⁹ And included within this cognitive damnation were actors, goliards and jesters. Otto cites the Council of Chalons of 813 and the Council of Salzburg of 1291 as proof of this historical fact.¹²⁰ In addition to this trans-

¹¹⁸ Indeed this jester/trickster/fool is an important part of global cultural history, from Loki in the Icelandic mythology to Reynard the Fox in the medieval times, as well as Shakespearean fools. Fools or jesters could be considered wise figures like Feste in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Stańczyk within Polish cultural history. Their 20th-century counterparts would be Švejk and Chance the gardener in the film and novel *Being There*, and last not but not least Forrest Gump. It is important to distinguish between the natural fool and the 'fool in disguise' but nonetheless the medieval jester intersects with both categories.

¹¹⁹ Attitudes towards humor in the Middle Ages were not altogether negative as can be read in Curtius, E. R. (1953). *European literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. New York: Pantheon Books, Brewer, D. (1996). *Medieval comic tales*. Cambridge, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, and Glending Olson's *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Age*

¹²⁰ Otto, B. K. (2001). *Fools are everywhere: The court jester around the world* (p. 174). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

temporal archetype there are the Hebrew letters on all the engravings that further indicate the occultism of this category. The second engraving also alludes to the famous medieval trope of *memento mori*, as does the biblical quote of *ubi est vanitas*. All of these tropes place *The Ninth Gate* and its tropes firmly into the medievalism framework.

The mainstream cinematic medieval representations have not focused heavily on the plague and death, although the most known film for invoking the atmosphere and hysteria associated with the Middle Age is Ingmar Bergman's *Det sjunde inseglet*. To further explore how medievalisms function, it is interesting to incorporate the theoretical underpinnings of Thomas Greene and Andrew Eliot in analyzing the more recent film *Black Death* (Christopher Smith, 2010), especially since both films have the thematic link of presenting the plague, yet are allegorical in nature.¹²¹ Since *Black Death* is a fairly recent film it has garnered less attention from scholars, so it is interesting to examine how its anachronisms and inaccuracies are assessed. Recently, Alex von Tunzelmann, a historian, wrote a review for *The Guardian* under the column titled "Reel History". In her criticism of *Black Death*, the film received disparaging remarks for its historical accuracy and entertainment value. According to her under the rubrics of accuracy *Black Death* fails due its lack of historical accuracy.¹²² In her article she begins by noting that "The Black Death was a bubonic plague pandemic that struck Europe between 1347 and 1350".¹²³

¹²¹ *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (1998, May 29). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

¹²² The film is very graphic in its depiction of the Black Death, including the symptoms as well by depicting peasants as filthy with horrendous teeth thus indicating an 'authenticity' as Eliot argues. Two central characters also reveal to the audience their gruesome infliction in attempt at such authenticity which would remind a viewer with historical capital of an account such as this one given by Gabriele de' Mussi: "Priests and doctors visiting the sick returned from their duties ill, and soon were numbered with the dead. O death! Cruel, bitter, impious death! Which thus breaks the bonds of affection and divides father and mother, brother and sister, son and wife. Lamenting our misery, we feared to fly, yet we dared not remain". See Deaux, G. (1969). *The Black Death, 1347* (p. 75). New York: Weybright and Talley.

¹²³ Von Tunzelmann, A. (2012, March 22). *Black Death should be burned at the stake | Film | theguardian.com*. Retrieved October 12, 2013, from <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/mar/22/black-death-burned-at-stake>

Tunzelmann could herself be accused of sloppy, or at least populist, historical inaccuracy since she does not make note of the simple fact that the plague may not have struck this region of England by 1348; the geographical area is never denoted but is most likely indicated to be northern England. See the following image: Oxford Atlas of World History (2007, August 13). *The Spread of the Black Death in Europe, 1347 to 1352.jpg - QED*. Retrieved from http://qed.princeton.edu/index.php/User:Student/The_Spread_of_the_Black_Death_in_Europe,_1347_to_1352

To make things even more conflated, location shooting was done in Germany thus obfuscating the notion of a 'medieval England landscape'.

However, despite the highly convenient temporal parameters Tunzelmann employs, there has been a reevaluation in academic spheres regarding the plague itself based on epidemiological evidence.¹²⁴ Obviously, Tunzelmann's appeal to historical veracity and accuracy becomes slippery since some academics have come forth to challenge accepted paradigms she argued. Failing to mention the constant evolution of medieval history, Tunzelmann goes even further and eviscerates the films under inaccuracy rubrics, and in her opinion every single historical aspect of the film is at fault, since the film operates under the pretext of historicizing. Yet, if Green's anachronism theory is applied, *Black Death* seems to belong to the same category as Ingmar Bergman's *Det sjunde inseglet*, that is to say the category of tragic anachronism since both comment on contemporary concerns while doing so with the same theme in the foreground, while simultaneously employing tropes of medievalism.

Indeed, the pretext view of medievalism is the theoretical view taken by Arthur Lindley, who argues that:¹²⁵

Unwise as it is to disagree with Eco, especially in his playful moments, it seems to me that the medieval past, in film at least, is *always* pretext. It may be a pretext for revisiting ourselves as children or in simplified and stylized forms, but the subject is always ourselves. The past is signifier, not signified. Eco's other categories, such as the "Middle Ages of Romanticism" are simply subsets.

The problem with such a theoretical stance is that it ignores media paratexts, which help shape and foster medievalisms. Such a stance takes a simplistic diachronic approach to understanding and interpreting medievalisms as opposed to a synchronic approach. Needless to say, medievalisms do not function in an academic vacuum where popular culture cannot be taken into account except when it suits one's own ideological stance or as Lindley notably argues: "[m]y students delight in *The Age of Innocence* precisely because of the opportunities it allows them for empathy and character analysis; they

¹²⁴ Von Tunzelmann, A. (2012, March 22). *Black Death should be burned at the stake* | Film | *theguardian.com*. Retrieved October 12, 2013, from <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/mar/22/black-death-burned-at-stake>

¹²⁵ Greta Austin argues in "Were the Peasants Really so Clean? The Middle Ages in Film" *Film History* Vol 14, No 2. (p. 4) (2002) that one of the problems with 'medieval films' is their tendency to focus on modern anxieties or basically that 'medieval films' are modernity in drag, thus placing many in the pretext category.

recoil from *Excalibur* primarily because it frustrates those reactions. Like *Excalibur*, medieval films are more likely to foreground their mythic status than to obscure it”.¹²⁶ An elementary empirical approach such as this ignores many factors such as Hans Robert Jauss’ “the horizon of expectations”. The belief systems of the students could be inherently biased towards cinematic medieval representations or the students could simply suffer from an excess amount of historical capital and judge the Jungian approach of *Excalibur* in their own manner. In either case, a hermeneutical approach that takes trans-media storytelling must be taken into account when dealing with medievalisms, as well as a paratextual or paracinematic approach, or, as Robert Bartlett notes:

films are analysed almost entirely in terms of the aesthetic and ideological impact of the end product. There is virtually no exploration of the process of creation, such as could be revealed by studio archives or interviews with participants. Behind any film lies a large body of decisions, economic, creative, and ideological.¹²⁷

Indeed, Christopher Smith, the director of *Black Death* (2010), was earnest when asked about the historiographical approach he took and was lauded for, namely that: “the characters have Medieval thinking and are behaving in a Medieval way”.¹²⁹ If one ignores the fact that one can never represent a coherent cognitive stance rooted in temporal or cultural parameters then this notion is coherent; however, the director takes a theoretical approach often taken by more factual historians. In fact, the critical stance taken by Lindley and Austin tends to ignore the paradigmatic associations medievalisms rely on and invoke, which is strange considering the fact they are examining a visual medium. For example, hyper-realistic cinematic medieval representations such as

¹²⁶ Lindley’s limited empirically useful example is painfully ignorant of such concepts such as the Kuleshov Effect or research into emotion based cinema theory or cognitive film theory. Concerns with aesthetic preference, audience comprehension and their emotive responses is ignored with Lindley’s reductionist claims.

¹²⁷ Bartlett, R. (2009, December 18). *Race, Class and Gender in ‘Medieval’ Cinema* | *Reviews in History*. Retrieved October 20, 2013, from <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/615> Bartlett is actually reviewing *Medieval Cinema: Race, Class and Gender* yet he makes a succinct and relevant point. A synchronic approach to exploring medievalisms is necessary.

¹²⁹ *Christopher Smith, Interview with the Director of Black Death* | *UnRated Film Magazine – Movie Reviews, Interviews, Hollywood*. (2013, February 24). Retrieved October 20, 2013, from <http://www.unratedmag.com/movies/2011/02/christopher-smith-interview-with-the-director-of-black-death/>

Ironclad and *Black Death* tend to rely on gore¹³⁰ and the historical accuracy of the mise-en-scène.



Figure 11: A film still from *Ironclad*. It has a noticeable intervisuality to *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, due to the aural, textual and visual iconicity.



Figure 12: Film still from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*

In the above film stills we can observe how embedded some elements are within medievalism; for example in the depiction of siege warfare.¹³¹ On another level the intervisual connection is clear: we can witness how siege warfare is made comedic intentionally and unintentionally. The visual stills depict an unintentional paradigmatic association; despite the ironic and postmodern deconstruction of the Middle Ages in Monty Python's *Holy Grail* the cinematic capital of medievalisms can immediately subvert the hyper-realistic pretensions of a film such as *Ironclad*, due to intervisuality with other cultural productions set in the Middle Ages. And with the advent of the Internet it becomes apparent that representation itself is problematic, as Baulrillard notes:

When the real no longer is what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality: of secondhand truth, objectivity, and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of lived experience, a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. And there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production: this is how simulation

¹³⁰ One could argue there is a tendency toward medieval visual porn or a medieval gore fetish under the guise of hyperrealism.

¹³¹ Although *Lord of The Rings* is within the generic boundaries of fantasy it still employs medievalisms such as taunting your opponent in siege warfare when you are in castle battlements; it has become somewhat of a medieval meme which should come as no surprise since depicting siege warfare is featured in many visual works and manuscript illuminations.

appears in the phase that concerns us—a strategy of the real, neo-real, and hyperreal, whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence.



Figure 13: A meme based on Bayeux Tapestry from the website Know Your Meme.

Lindley's argues that there is a "conflict between two different discursive constructs of history, one linear, the other non-linear ... that one of these constructs incorporates a denial of historical process and connection, and that that construct is the one usually applied to films of the Middle Ages".¹³² The diachronic approach towards medieval cinematic approaches is a fundamentally flawed approach. An example can be explored in the static visual seen above, where there are multiple convoluted medievalisms operating. On one level the image relies on the historical capital and cognizance of recognizing the Bayeux tapestry, since it is only a thematic representation of it, or, what Eliot would argue, a historicon, often employed in cinematic medieval representations. On the second level there is the horizon of expectations effect: the viewer recognizes the speech of Boromir from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of The Rings*, a fictional medievalism created by a medievalist: "One does not simply walk into *Mordor*".¹³³ This is a

¹³² *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (1998, May 29). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

¹³³ Youtube (n.d.). One Does Not Simply Walk into Mordor - The Origin Of Memes [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r21CMDyPuGo>

Of course this phrase is taken from the medievalist J.R.R.Tolkien *Lord of the Rings* books and the medievalism of the meme becomes embedded within the romantic dreaming of Tolkien's books transmitted into the films.

medievalism that is rendered into an imagined Middle English register, making it a medievalism upon a medievalism.¹³⁴

Evidently, there is a disconnect between the Middle Ages and their representations in visual culture, a distinction which many scholars have pointed out, including Lindley when he notes that:

this temporally abstract middle ages, unconnected to any period before or after, is the preferred one. Far more medieval films, as we all know, are based on folklore and romance (chiefly of Camelot and Robin Hood) than on history. Historical kings most often appear in their Shakespearian incarnations, i.e. as *literary* figures: not behind us in time, but beside us, in a parallel universe.¹³⁵

The problem is that of the diaphanous boundaries between the fictional representation of the Middle Ages and the historical version that is interpreted as has been noted above; for in some instances the medievalism has become the ‘reality’ or representation, that is to say the dominant expression or ‘authenticity’. This could be for example depicting the medieval period as a superstitious and violent era that was not progressive, which is one of Eco’s medievalisms. And this representation is what the interpretive community comes to expect. Divorcing medievalisms from history is an immense task, since numerous medievalisms have become embedded within the interpretive community. One of the most notable examples of a medievalism is the Notre Dame itself or, as Michelle Camille points out: it is the architectural medievalism of the Viollet-le-Duc that has become the “very essence of gargoyleness, the quintessence of the modern idea of the medieval”.¹³⁶ It is evident that insisting on a linear narrative of the Middle Ages is a faulty premise since the period itself has been invented, reinvented and reimagined so many times it is difficult to discern the historical facts from the ‘medievalism’ or, as Pugh and Ramey argue, “[f]ilms of the Middle Ages without anachronisms are impossible”. Continuing in this vein Tison and Ramey point out that:

¹³⁴ *Know Your Meme*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2013, from knowyourmeme.com/memes/medieval-macros-bayeux-tapestry-parodies

¹³⁵ *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (1998, May 29). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

¹³⁶ Camille, M. (2009). *The gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the monsters of modernity* (p. 11). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

What emerges is a recognition that reimaginings of the Middle Ages are essentially fantasies built upon fantasies, for many medievalisms draw more firmly from medieval ideas about fictionality than they do from medieval history. A distinguishing feature of much medievalism, its anachronism, must be seen both as authentically medieval and as fantastic, for many medieval narratives revel in their own anachronistic constructions of past and present.¹³⁷

Since much of the historical capital that the interpretive community possesses is based on medievalisms it is difficult to accept criticism such as Lindley's that "medieval films depend on the mirroring of the present in the distant past, however, they are almost automatically anti- or non-progressive in their construction of history".¹³⁸ This reasoning is false because it presupposes that other historical films function within a linear narrative of historical veracity, because many lay claim to historical progress or the claims of nationalism, and make use of historical inaccuracies to make such claims. Furthermore, as has been argued in previous paragraphs, the distinction between cinematic medieval representations and historical ones is not so apparent; one cannot just simply label one film a medieval film due to arbitrary temporal parameters. In fact, cinematic medieval representations suffer from the same fundamental dilemma as historical films generally, or as Johnathan Stubbs notes "historical films exhibit a massive variance in iconography, narrative style, setting, plot and character types. Simply being "in the past" cannot be regarded as coherent textual characteristic in itself".¹³⁹ In addition, there also the fundamental problem inherent within the term 'medieval cinema', because Pugh and Ramey point out a similar problem when they argue that:

... 'medieval' films further confound the difficulties of depicting history on the screen. The very phrase 'medieval cinema' encapsulates this problem, as the term seems to denote films created during the Middle Ages, a patently obvious technological impossibility. Medieval cinema suggests a virtually oxymoronic generic classification.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present* (p. 89). London: Routledge.

¹³⁸ *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (1998, May 29). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

¹³⁹ Stubbs, J. (2013). *Historical film: A critical introduction* (p. 4). New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

¹⁴⁰ Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present* (p. 14). London: Routledge.

Labeling films as medieval cinema is not only subjective but an exercise in contemporary concerns. Therefore it is evident that is not enough to criticise a historical representation on the basis of inaccuracy or medievalisms, since Lindley himself argues that “the Middle Ages are not a subject of interest -- though they may be a subject of curiosity -- in themselves. They are, most obviously in *Seven*, a way of reading the present”.¹⁴¹ This criticism of Lindley’s applies to historical films in general, as Ferro, Sorlin and numerous other scholars have pointed out. Historical films are always contemporary affairs and biased representations of Ranke’s “what really happened”.¹⁴²

Admittedly, Eco’s categories of medievalisms are an interesting framework in understanding medievalism as a concept,¹⁴³ yet his approach fails to take into account the interpretive community’s significance since it is within the community that the medievalisms gain their meaning, transform, are born and reborn. The medium of film is an “extension of ourselves”,¹⁴⁴ and through it we interpret history and historicize. Thus by focusing on the reception of the Middle Ages through paratexts and by analyzing the film as an artifact in itself one can explore how the medievalisms are embedded and what codes they convey, or as Pugh and Ramey argue, “cinematic anachronisms need not be seen merely as careless flaws distracting from historical verisimilitude, for anachronisms achieve striking aesthetic, narrative and pleasurable effects”.¹⁴⁵ Instead, as they suggest via Greene’s categorization of anachronisms, they should be categorized into naïve anachronisms, abusive anachronisms, serependitious anachronisms, creative anachronisms and tragic anachronisms.¹⁴⁶ Thus the focus is on how the film-makers interpret the Middle Ages and convey them as representations or interpretations to the interpretive community. Another immensely helpful approach in examining medievalisms and analyzing them is the approach taken by Andrew Eliot, who argues

¹⁴¹ *The ahistoricism of Medieval Film*. (1998, May 29). Retrieved October 15, 2013, from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fir598/ALfr3a.htm>

¹⁴² See Sorlin, P. (1980). *The film in history: Restaging the past*. Totowa, N.J: Barnes & Noble Books.

¹⁴³ Lindley’s categorization is facetious and only sustains the false dichotomy of film history versus history proper.

¹⁴⁴ McLuhan, M., & Lapham, L. H. (1994). *Understanding media: The extensions of man* (p. 34). Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press

¹⁴⁵ Ramey, L. T., & Pugh, T. (2007). *Race, class, and gender in ‘medieval’ cinema*.(p.83) New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁴⁶ Ramey, L. T., & Pugh, T. (2007). *Race, class, and gender in ‘medieval’ cinema*.(p.84) New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

about medievalism that, “[b]y repetition, the audience comes to expect it[medievalism]; through a process of accretion, ironically, *the inaccurate thus becomes authentic*”.¹⁴⁷ So, anachronisms are themselves not the distinctive feature of medievalisms: it is how the anachronisms and how medievalisms are employed as fictive tropes to convey ideology or other meanings. Or, to simply paraphrase Eco, it is not enough to know what Middle Ages one is talking about or dreaming about, it is crucial to know how the Middle Ages are being used.

After having explored some of the problematic issues regarding visual representations of the Middle Ages, it is apparent that medievalisms are often considered to be what is ‘authentically’ medieval by the interpretive community. Since the Middle Ages has so much lacunae there are often many beliefs and interpretations that can fit within the medievalism and these wide array of icons, symbols and notions are medievalisms. In a cultural production such as *The Simpsons*, a medieval fair in one episode or a visual reference to Bayeux tapestry may function only to engage with the interpretive community’s historical capital. In another instance within the same show it might mock this historical capital by having a billboard under the logo of the restaurant “Medieval Times” with the following caption: “Jousting contest: Henry VI versus Spiderman”. However, some medievalisms might be more insidious since they strategically exploit medievalisms to kindle the flames of nationalism, as was the case with the Scottish National Party that appropriated *Braveheart* for political gain and its leader Alex Salmond has been accused in British media of continuing to do so.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, medievalism is in constant transformation, since the cultural construction of medievalisms are transformed by new medievalisms that help shape and foster new ones, which enrich the fertile field of medievalism. Since the construction, or the beginning of medievalism, of the Middle Ages by Renaissance scholars Western culture has been introduced to many variants of medievalism and it seems we will always be introduced to new dreams and uses of the Middle Ages.

¹⁴⁷ Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world* (p. 123). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

¹⁴⁸ McArthur, C. (2003). *Brigadoon, Braveheart, and the Scots: Distortions of Scotland in Hollywood cinema* (p. 137). London: I.B. Tauris.

3. Chapter II: Knights and Others

“I believe in the Grail, not the Swastika”, Dr Elsa Schneider from *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*.

In my previous chapter I introduced the term medievalism and its uses in modern visual culture and other media. In the following chapter I analyze certain films that belong to the Arthurian cycle of film, or are closely related, because of the transposability of the Arthurian myth helps reveal nationalistic and political agendas of cinema makers.¹⁴⁹ In this chapter, I mainly deal with the Arthurian legend and its tropes and in what manner certain medievalisms enhance the thematic strands within the framework of American nationalism; these medievalisms are embedded within these films and appropriate the Arthurian legend for nationalistic purposes. This particular category of films belong in the chapter I name: Cold War in the Middle Ages: American Medievalism’s Other. These films are rooted in nationalism and nation building strategies, especially since they are infused with cold war anxieties. The films in this category are films that represent the Middle Ages, yet the depiction of the Middle Ages in these films is often only a pretext, which is one of Eco’s medievalism categories. In fact these particular films reinforce nationalistic identities and the hegemony of nationalistic ideology. The ideology in question is of course set within a dichotomy of democracy versus communism, with ‘medieval’ villains functioning only as pastiches for modern concerns and agendas. In the next part of the chapter, I focus on the shift in Arthurian cinema within American cinema and British cinema after these nationalistic films. In doing so, I examine how medievalisms within the British tradition are less contingent on nationalistic medievalism than their American counterparts. In the third section of this chapter I discuss the appropriation of the Arthurian heritage in recent American cinema. I do this by analyzing two Arthurian themed films, which both deal with ethnicity and alterity, as well as discussing the cinematic blockbuster *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. In doing so, I

¹⁴⁹ The Arthurian myth and its iterations are so pervasive that it has even influenced the narrative of modern blockbusters such as *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989) due to its employment of narrative elements of the legend, including the myth of the Fisher King and the Holy Grail itself. The aforementioned component of the Arthurian legend was the focus of Terry Gilliam’s, *The Fisher King*. Furthermore, Terry Gilliam has tackled other medieval topics in films such as *Erik the Viking* and his collaboration with the Monty Python group in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

will examine these cinematic medieval representations dealing with race and ethnicity that are connected to the Arthurian myth, either through direct linkage or through transmission of the legend. I analyze how these films and their medievalisms deal with contemporary concerns of alterity such as ethnicity, race and class in comparison to the more classically inclined narrative of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, which looks back to previous films yet is different. Before analyzing these cinematic representations of the Arthurian legend, however, I briefly discuss the literary and history tradition of the Arthurian legend along with a synoptic discussion of its representation in cinema for purposes of intertextuality and interpretation.

The ubiquity of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend is so embedded within Western civilization that compiling a list of its presence in cultural productions is best left to compendia;¹⁵⁰ in fact one can state with considerable certainty that this legend is so entrenched within the interpretive community that it is often difficult to divorce the literary tradition from the medievalisms unless one is a scholar of the tradition.¹⁵¹ However, as Helen Fulton argues, “there is no ‘original’ author and no ordinary or authentic Arthurian legend”.¹⁵² Still, within the interpretive community there are accepted versions that would be contingent on what was discussed in chapter 1 as being the ‘authenticity’ of medievalism opposed to the ‘accuracy’ or historicity, which is concerned with depicting the ‘real Middle Ages’.¹⁵³ In this manner, it is possible to understand how Disney’s *The Sword in the Stone*, a cinematic adaptation of T.H White’s *The Once and Future King*, can be an analogous medievalism to the 2004 adaptation *King Arthur*. The former is an animated retelling that is filled with medievalism, whereas the latter attempts

¹⁵⁰ See for example: Sklar, E. S., & Hoffman, D. L. (2002). *King Arthur in popular culture*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

¹⁵¹ The tradition itself is filled with historical medievalisms especially in how has been appropriated to legitimize British kingship. Abert points this out and cites Edward III’s exploitatin of the Arthurian legacy for his own political gain and also the chronicler Jean Froissart who compared Edward to Arthur. Aberth, J. (2003). *A knight at the movies: Medieval history on film*. New York: Routledge. Furthermore, as Fulton argues there has been constant reproduction, reinvention and remediation. Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature*. Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁵² Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature* (p. 16). Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁵³ Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world* (p. 215). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

to reconstruct a ‘real’ King Arthur, and both fulfill the authenticity and accuracy rubrics. Yet, both employ historicons in their narrative strategies.¹⁵⁴

Certain cultural productions that deal with the Arthurian myth are such blatant medievalisms one could argue that they function as hyper-medievalisms.¹⁵⁵ The reason for that being is the introduction of conflicting historicons and subversion of the ‘authenticity’ that the interpretive community comes to expect from the cultural product in question. Indeed, the cartoon series *King Arthur and The Knights of Justice* and its videogame counterpart reside within this spectrum of medievalism as can be seen in the following stills, where the former still exhibits a typical medievalism trope of a dragon.¹⁵⁶ Whereas in still number two, Arthur and his valiant time traveling knights confront Gorgon statues, thus conflating medieval tropes with Graeco-Roman mythology, generating a new layer of Arthurian medievalism and, perhaps, altering the horizon of expectations, since consumers of such medievalisms will associate these ‘inaccuracies’ with the Arthurian myth.



Figure 14: An example of a medieval authenticity artifact in the videogame *King Arthur and The Knights of Justice*: a dragon.



Figure 15: Here Arthur can be seen as a golden knight along with an ‘anachronistic’ representation of Medusa, who perhaps could have been a statue in Roman Britain.

¹⁵⁴ To reiterate, historicon is what Eliot refers to any medieval referent or object that is intended to invoke ‘medievalness’. This can a particular item, body gesture, character or an aural feature.

¹⁵⁵ Finke and Schictman have pointed out how the technological mediums of film and Internet have created new content or medievalisms and are not neutral carries of the content or in this instance, conduits of the Arthurian legend. They speak of a remediation process. They focus on how films alter the interpretive community’s relationship to the material but also mention important to also take into account other visual media and hyper-media such as Youtube, as well as the role that film commentaries play in creating medievalisms.. Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature*. Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell

¹⁵⁶ I point out in my Viking chapter that monsters and ‘regular’ animals were often conflated and considered to be fantastic creatures and one can argue that dragons are a part of this heritage, while also being a part of medieval fantasy.

Despite such playful medievalisms, most cultural productions adhere to the ‘fidelity’ of the Arthurian tradition, yet that itself is problematic since their have been various depictions and iterations of Arthur and the characters within the tradition. The problematic nature of fidelity is articulated by Kathleen Coyne Kelley, who poignantly states that cinematic retellings in general enact the problem of the copy for which there is no original “—the problem of the desire for an original—in this case, for an original *Arthuriad*”.¹⁵⁷ If we attempt to trace the genealogy of Arthurian legend and Arthur himself, we are presented with numerous dilemmas. Is the genuine version to be found in Nennius’ *Historia Brittonum*, the *Annales Cambriae* or in hagiographies? The nature of the Arthurian legend offers readers, historians and audience members only tentative answers. In his chapter on the Latin sources of a ‘historical’ Arthur, N.J. Higham raises these questions of an original or correct text.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, as Higham points out that, not only are we faced with textual transmission problems but with altered narratives suited to fit political needs, yet all belonging to one and the same tradition.¹⁵⁹ In addition to the aforementioned problems, one must demarcate the ‘historical Arthur’ from the literary tradition, which has its medieval and Renaissance traditions not to mention different national cycles, despite having been transmitted from the Chrétien paradigm. Notable examples are the Germanic and Old Norse versions of *Le Chevalier au Lion* and *Parsifal*. In order to clarify matters I will focus on Arthurian narratives and the literary tradition rather than analyzing the historiographical and archaeological traditions, since the former ones are the dominant form of ‘authenticity’ within the interpretive community but, since Aberth argues that the “King Arthur of history became an ideal blank slate on which succeeding ages could write their own versions of his legend that suited their particular tastes and ideological needs”, a brief mention of the historical tradition of King Arthur is important.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Kelly, K. C. (2007). *Hollywood Simulacrum: The Knights of the Round Table (1953)*. *Exemplaria Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*.

¹⁵⁸ Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature* (p. 43). Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁵⁹ Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature* (p. 43). Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁶⁰ Aberth, J. (2003). *A knight at the movies: Medieval history on film*. New York: Routledge

The historical Arthur is considered by some scholars to have his origins in Roman Britain and was possibly connected to Lucius Artorius Castus,¹⁶¹ who most recently has been appropriated by the Croatian municipality of Podstrana.¹⁶² This theory was first espoused by the linguist Kemp Malone and has in recent years resurfaced as the Sarmatian Connection theory.¹⁶³ In fact, this theory was highly influential in the 2004 cinematic portrayal *King Arthur*. In paracinematic texts, the film is advertised in the following manner:

Based on a more realistic portrayal of ‘Arthur’ than has ever been presented onscreen. The film will focus on the history and politics of the period during which Arthur ruled -- when the Roman empire collapsed and skirmishes over power broke out in outlying countries -- as opposed to the mystical elements of the tale on which past Arthur films have focused.¹⁶⁴

When reading the text, what strikes readers is the discourse that creates a dichotomy of realistic and mythical, and in fact scholars such as Lupack, Shippey and Haydock argue that an historical attempt or rather ‘accuracy’ attempt is faulty since historians do not in fact agree on these matters and as Haydock argues some scholars are reluctant to step away from the reel-real distinction between cinema and history.¹⁶⁵ Arguing for any genuine version of Arthur is a futile exercise in the denial of subjectivity, but, allows for the possibility of intriguing medievalisms, as I will now analyze.

¹⁶¹ I prefer to say some since there is disagreement among scholars. Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature*. Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 47.

The name Lucius Artorius Castus is attested to Mommsen’s seminal work *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum – Books Mommsen, Theodor.: Inscriptiones Asiae, provinciarum Europae Graecarum, Illyrici Latinae*. (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://arachne.unikoeln.de/arachne/index.php?view%5bblayout%5d=buch_item&search%5bconstraints%5d%5bbuch%5d%5balias%5d=CILv3pII1873&search%5bmatch%5d=exact

¹⁶² King Arthur tourism sites: Croatia claims British King as its own in new battle for tourists | Mail Online. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/article-2024083/King-Arthur-tourism-sites-Croatia-claims-British-King-new-battle-tourists.htm>

¹⁶³ Lacy, N. J. (2006). *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, p. 18.

¹⁶⁴ *King Arthur (2004) – IMDb*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 27, 2014, from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0349683/>

¹⁶⁵ Fulton, H. (2009). *A companion to Arthurian literature* (p. 528). Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell.

3.1 Cold War in the Middle Ages: American Medievalism's Other

American exceptionalism and appropriation of the Arthurian myth had an early beginning. The most notable and early example of this trend is the ideologically fused medievalism that commenced with the film *The Black Knight*¹⁶⁶ (Tay Garnett, 1954). However, before beginning to analyze the film, it is prudent to delineate briefly the cultural background of this film to explain how it is thematically linked with its cinematic brethren. At the end of the Second World War, the tensions between the world's two superpowers, America and the Soviet Union began to culminate. Churchill famously described the Russian sphere as the Iron Curtain, and both sides gave economic aid to the countries within their sphere of influence. In American culture, there was a surge in thinly veiled allusions to communism and its threats in science fictions films, while the anxiety of a nuclear holocaust along with the belief that Soviet spies and allies were plotting to overthrow American values permeated the cultural landscape, most noticeably with McCarthyism. During these cultural wars cinematic medieval portrayals such as *Black Knight* were released that exhibited these cold war anxieties; these portrayals are infused with political medievalisms.¹⁶⁷

Indeed, *Black Knight* is an intriguing example of movie medievalism or, as Harty writes, 'the reel Middle Ages',¹⁶⁸ since it is a film that ignores history or, in the words of Haydock, it "is history in a hurry".¹⁶⁹ Theoretically, it is possible to state that this film is ahistorical by having Saracens pretend to be Vikings while also inhabiting the spatial and temporal framework of Roman Britain. By placing such historicons within the universe of King Arthur and his round table the audience is treated to historical inaccuracies that make the medieval setting of this film seem to be a pretext, according to the medievalism

¹⁶⁶ *The Black Knight*, dir. by Tay Garnett (Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1954)

¹⁶⁷ Kathleen Coyne Kelley argues that *Knights of the Round Table* was also influenced by communist and cold war anxieties and that the intervisuality of seeing Robert Taylor as Lancelot among contemporary viewers would had an intervisual connection with Taylor testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). See Kelly, K. C. (2007). Hollywood Simulacrum: The Knights of the Round Table (1953). *Exemplaria-a Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*. doi:10.1179/175330707X212868

¹⁶⁸ Harty, K.J., *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films About Medieval Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Incorporated Pub., 2006), p. 62.

¹⁶⁹ Haydock, N., *Movie medievalism: The imaginary Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Incorporated Pub., 2008), p. 7.

category of Eco, since there is no interest in the historical background.¹⁷⁰ However, before analyzing the film, a short synopsis is in order. In the film the audience is introduced to a short scene, before the credits and title screen that has the effect of framing the story and the film's ideology. The framing is done by having a wandering bard narrate the tale of a poor blacksmith who desires a woman of noble rank and wishes "to win the love of a lady".¹⁷¹ This phrase introduces a trope utilized by many films including *King Richard and the Crusaders* (David Butler, 1954) and the more recent *A Knight's Tale* (Brian Helgeland, 2001). This motif has its roots in the "fair unknown" hero found in medieval romance, yet within the medieval context these heroes have aristocratic lineage and there is no social mobility.¹⁷² This motif is part of the thematic ideology contained within *The Black Knight*; it is the positioning of American values of social mobility and the realization of the American dream, because John's rags to riches story is the narrative thrust of the film, which is made even more apparent by his non descriptive moniker: John. The hero of the film is John the Blacksmith, played by Alan Ludd, who speaks with an overpowering American accent, in Arthurian Britain that helps add to the medievalism effect. John loves the damsel Lady Linet, but she is above his station in life and he has no hidden aristocratic heritage as is custom in medieval romance narratives; furthermore John is employed in the court of the Earl of Yeovil, which in medieval times perhaps would have not allowed for much social mobility. John's mentor is Sir Ontzlake, who is part of the Le Morte d'Arthur tradition. At the beginning of the film, John is made to pay for his transgressions, since he is made an exile from the court because the Earl discovers the affection that John and Lady Linet share. John is however encouraged by Sir Ontzlake to keep the sword he had been creating for the earl. Of course, for the sake of the narrative suddenly enemy forces attack the earl's court. John follows suit and discovers the heinous plot of King Mark and the foreigner, who is played by Peter Cushing in blackface, Palamides. In a scene analogous to the narrative of *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion*, Palamides taunts Mark just as Kay mocked and taunted Yvain and

¹⁷⁰ Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in hyper reality: Essays*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

¹⁷¹ *The Black Knight*, dir. by Tay Garnett. This quotation is from the film and all following quotes are as well, unless stated otherwise. The song is sung by a famous folk singer of the time Elton Hayes, who is garbed in medieval markers.

¹⁷² Driver, M. W., & Ray, S. (2004). *The medieval hero on screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (p. 136). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

his cousin. Because of John's lowly status he cannot persuade Arthur and his court of the treachery of Palamides and King Mark. However, John is allowed three months to prove his case and he uses this time and manages to save Lady Linet from the clutches of the Cornish henchmen of King Mark, who are dressed as Vikings at Stonehenge. Finally, in a dramatic battle between King Arthur's loyalists and the men of King Mark and Palamides, John defeats Palamides in hand-to-hand battle and the denouement is followed with Sir John having proved he is worthy of Lady Linet's hand.

What makes *The Black Knight* such an interesting film is that its medievalisms incorporate the Arthurian legend, yet it is only a façade or pretext for nationalistic ideology. In the film, King Mark¹⁷³ seeks to overthrow Arthur with aid of the Saracen Palamides and the most striking feature is that Palamides is in blackface and he is also made to be even more exotic by having him represent an Oriental foreigner at the court of King Arthur; indeed, his features create a discursive space within the film that connects ethnicity and race with paganism in the film.¹⁷⁴ This ideological point is also revealed in the traditional medievalism of Vikings. King Mark's men masquerade as Viking raiders and attack the Earl of Yeovil's castle, where the protagonist of the film, John, is a lowly blacksmith. In addition, in one of the climactic scenes the medievalism trope of the Viking horned helmet can be seen with numerous pagan worshippers who are attempting human sacrifice. The innocent victims are held in gibbets and the Vikings are depicted to dance irrationally and intent on sacrificing their victims until John arrives to save the day.¹⁷⁵

Accordingly, Palamides' utterance that there is "an enemy in our midst" becomes a key to understanding the ideological underpinnings of the narrative. John the protagonist and his quest might at first glance seem to function within the medieval paradigm and even the modern one Western, Caucasian heroes should operate in;

¹⁷³ King Mark belongs to the legend of Tristan and Isolde, which was later conflated with the Arthurian legend cycle, despite some arguing for it predating the Arthurian romance; especially those that connect it to Persian sources, which makes King Mark's alliance with Palamides an interesting intertextual connection. *Tristan and Isolt | Robbins Library Digital Projects*. (n.d.). Retrieved March 23, 2014, from <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/theme/tristanisolte>

¹⁷⁴ Umland, R. A., & Umland, S. J. (1996). *The use of Arthurian legend in Hollywood film: From Connecticut Yankees to fisher kings* (p. 112). Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

¹⁷⁵ As I mentioned in Chapter 1, such an apparatus functions to signify the Middle Ages in various films, including *Willow*.

nonetheless this is a problematic aspect since “Arthurian romance – and medieval romance in general – abounds with examples of men and women who initially perform menial tasks but who turn out in the end to be noble.”¹⁷⁶ John undergoes certain trials and tribulations that are common tropes of medieval literature, especially in the Arthurian context. From a formalist or structuralist approach this is self-evident, and within Arthurian context it can be found in *Sir Gareth, Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion* and additional medieval romances since it is a common motif.

What makes *The Black Knight* so interesting is that its medievalisms are deeply rooted in the political and cultural concerns of the contemporary period. During the production and release of the film *The Black Knight* the political landscape was dominated by fears of potential spies and by cold war anxieties. In his analysis of the film, Alan Lupack argues that John is symbolically representative of American values, which are under assault from foreign invaders; he even claims that the threat to Camelot is a thinly disguised allegory for the scourge of the Communist threat.¹⁷⁷ In fact, *The Black Knight* falls neatly into the sixth category of medievalisms as listed by Eco, which is connected to “national identities” and applies to cases when “the medieval model was taken as political utopia, a celebration of past grandeur, to be opposed to the miseries of national enslavement and foreign domination”.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Lupack argues that director Tay Garnett was fashioning an American version of the Arthurian mythos, one that reflects American values and ideals and concerns of the cold war era.¹⁷⁹ Lupack argues that the rags to riches myth are employed in the film. This myth is common in American society, that a self-made man can succeed, and it is also referred to as the “*Horatio Alger* myth”. The thematic structure of the film follows this myth, since the narrative focuses on John’s rise and his marriage into aristocracy, not to mention the framing narrative technique at the beginning with the wandering minstrel.¹⁸⁰ This

¹⁷⁶ Harty, K. J. (2002). *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty essays* (p. 65). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co.

¹⁷⁷ Lupack, A., & Lupack, B. T. (1999). *King Arthur in America* (p. 315). Cambridge [England: D.S. Brewer.

¹⁷⁸ Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in hyper reality: Essays* (p. 70). San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

¹⁷⁹ Lupack, A., & Lupack, B. T. (1999). *King Arthur in America* (p. 65). Cambridge [England: D.S. Brewer.

¹⁸⁰ Horatio Alger is an important reference in American culture regarding the trajectory of an individual going from rags to riches and it is a common trope in American films and novels, including reversing the roles in films such as *Trading Places*.

analysis is also repeated by Rebecca and Samuel Umland,¹⁸¹ as they argue that Sir Ontzlake encourages John to better his station in life by admitting that: “Some are born to knighthood, I was not”. These words are evidence of the social mobility aspect present in the film.¹⁸² Clearly this film is heavily influenced by American cultural concerns, especially if it is compared to the more traditional narrative of the *Knights of the Round Table*, which came out in 1953, a year before *The Black Knight*, and where only aristocrats and knights are part of the narrative.

Nonetheless, despite the social inclusion and belief in social mobility, provided one has the correct moral and value alignment, *The Black Knight* is also a film that is obsessed with the idea of the ‘Other’, and as such seems to utilize nationalistic sentiments to legitimize nation building attempts or, as Michelle Warren describes this ideology accordingly, it is: “a legitimate, and legitimizing, narrative of ethnic identity”.¹⁸³ Indeed, the nexus of race, ethnicity and nationality is an important part of the narrative strategy of *The Black Knight*. The ideology of conflating democracy and societal good with Anglo-Saxon constructions of race is analyzed in Alan Lupack’s article “An Enemy in Our Midst: The Black Knight and The American Dream”.¹⁸⁴ Lupack argues that *The Black Knight* depicts the forces seeking to undermine Arthur’s rule as a threat to Christian civilization and that there is no ambiguity about Arthur’s realm that is sometimes found in [the] Arthurian story”.¹⁸⁵ Another salient point that Lupack mentions is the ahistorical nature of the film since, as mentioned previously, Saracens are present at the court of King Arthur and are involved in political intrigue, while Vikings are the barbaric ‘Other’ lurking in just beyond the utopia of Camelot.¹⁸⁶ The alterity of both Saracens and Vikings is essential to the plot of the film; within it Vikings are portrayed as savages that barely speak, but grunt, and wear winged helmets, an enduring medievalism of the Victorian

¹⁸¹ Umland, R. A., & Umland, S. J. (1996). *The use of Arthurian legend in Hollywood film: From Connecticut Yankees to fisher kings* (p. 106). Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

¹⁸² Umland, R. A., & Umland, S. J. (1996). *The use of Arthurian legend in Hollywood film: From Connecticut Yankees to fisher kings* (p. 107). Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press.

¹⁸³ Warren, M. R. (2000). *History on the edge: Excalibur and the borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (p. 12). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

¹⁸⁴ Lupack, A., “An Enemy in Our Midst: The Black Knight and the American Dream.” In *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty Essays*, edited by Kevin J. Harty, (p. 64–70). Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002.

¹⁸⁵ Harty, K. J. (2002). *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty essays* (p. 68). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co.

¹⁸⁶ Lupack, A., “An Enemy in Our Midst: The Black Knight and the American Dream.” In *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty Essays*, edited by Kevin J. Harty, (p.64–70). Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002.

era. The Saracens, on the other hand, are shown as decadent and, as Aberth points out, *The Black Knight* follows a familiar pattern set by other cold war films in “tainting its villain with homosexuality. When not wearing his outlandish ‘red’ armor, Palamides wears outlandish makeup and jewelry”.¹⁸⁷ This positioning of Palamides as a hostile and dangerous ‘Other’ is a narrative detour from Malory’s *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In the film Palamides represents a threat to the normative values of Christianity, which in the film are associated with American values as well especially if the cold war context of the era is taken into consideration. However, in the literary sources Palamides is a valiant knight who competes with Tristan for the affection of Iseult. Not only is Palamides depicted as immoral in the film, but his servant is presented as a blood-thirsty and reprehensive soul, while the undertones of Orientalism help constitute Christianity as the normative paradigm. This depiction of Palamides is even more intriguing if the film *King Richard and the Crusaders* is examined. In the film Rex Harrison dons ‘blackface’ to act as the benevolent Saladin in disguise, who assists Sir Kenneth of Huntingdon against noblemen that wish to assassinate Richard the Lionheart, yet he lacks the evil connotations that are made explicit with Palamides in *The Black Knight*.

In addition this ethnic element of the film, the binary, between Christianity and other religions, chiefly paganism, is explicit through the film’s visual language as well as its dialogue. The chief villains and Palamides are not only depicted as pagans and enemies of the Christian faith, but just before a climatic scene at Stonehenge where John rescues Lady Linet and the abbot, he is framed as a knight of Christ. As can be seen on figures 16 and 17.



Figure 16: John having a conversation with the priest



Figure 17: A knight of Christ

¹⁸⁷ Aberth, J. (2003). *A knight at the movies: Medieval history on film* (p. 27). New York: Routledge.

In accordance to the inner logic of the film, John is depicted as an industrious social climber and a knight of Christ, which is of course a cinematic medievalism. From a historical perspective, the audience is not aware of when the narrative occurs in time since, as mentioned above, this film exhibits the tendency of having history in a hurry and there is no demarcation of time. Arthur co-exists with an American knight, Vikings exist within the cultural consciousness of the denizens of the kingdom, and Saracens are frequent visitors at the court of Arthur.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, despite the ahistorical nature of the film the audience is made to accept that John could easily climb within the ranks of a highly hierarchical society.¹⁸⁹ This is despite the fact that some scholars claimed that the social demographics of Western Europe only went through dramatic changes due to the *Black Death* or, as Herlihy claims:

In considering the effect of the epidemics upon the economy, it is necessary to distinguish short-term and long-term repercussions. The chief short-term repercussion was shock. And shock in turn broke the continuities of economic life and disrupted established routines of work. The high mortalities left numerous posts in society unfilled and services unperformed.¹⁹⁰

As for the narrative logic of the film, Lupack points out that medieval romance and Arthurian romance have almost no examples of non-nobles or non-aristocrats being the subject matter of a narrative, or in fact achieving social mobility.¹⁹¹ If anything, John's ascendance is an American medievalism.

¹⁸⁸ However, regarding Saracens. Maghan Keita argues that black individuals, or Saracens depending on how you conceive certain ethnicities, were not uncommon within medieval Celtic folklore and discusses the Saracen Sir Priamus, and also mentions that black skinned individuals were called *blámenn*, which is also the denotation in medieval Icelandic literature.

Chazelle, C. M. (2012). *Why the Middle Ages matter: Medieval light on modern injustice* (p. 134). London: Routledge.

¹⁸⁹ The paradigm of a feudalism reigned long in academia and recent revisionism has disputed this school of thought; nonetheless the interpretive community still accepts the rigid nature of medieval hierarchy in the Middle Ages. See: Brown, E. A. (1974). The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe. *American Historical Review*, 79(4), 1063-1088.

¹⁹⁰ Herlihy, D., & Cohn, S. K. (1997). *The Black Death and the transformation of the west* (p. 40). Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Herlihy also argues that this seismic event forced technological breakthroughs. Interestingly, enough in *Knight of Camelot*, Dr. Vivien Morgan played by Whoopi Goldberg is the catalyst for technological and political change in Arthurian England.

¹⁹¹ Harty, K. J. (2002). *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty essays* (p. 65). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co.

In addition to ethnic and religious demarcation, the alterity of paganism is also depicted through scenes featuring the iconic historical landmark Stonehenge, which is displayed as being the site where the pseudo-Vikings perform sacrificial rituals to the sun-gods. In the scenes within Stonehenge, paganism is made to be decadent with the Oriental-sounding aural signifiers made to amplify the alterity. As can be seen on figure 18, Stonehenge is depicted in a radically different manner than modern day Stonehenge.



Figure 18: The figure above is taken from the film *The Black Knight*.

In the narrative of the film, Stonehenge becomes a ruin due to the fact that John defeats the pagans and the Cornishmen, and the stones are pulled down while Stonehenge is depicted as being a heinous site. However, this medievalism is at direct odds with the popular Romantic medievalism of Britain, which is a topic Clare A. Simmons discusses at great length in *Romantic Medievalism in Romantic-era Britain*. She argues that Stonehenge's genealogy was a topic of great interest to poets and scholars and many did view Stonehenge as an icon that constituted national continuity and pride.¹⁹² Yet, within *The Black Knight* Stonehenge is where an ideological battle takes place, since King Mark wishes for the high priest of Stonehenge to become the religious leader of Britain and later reveals to Palamides that he has deceived Arthur by pretending to be Christian. In this manner, paganism and Orientalism are intertwined and function as metonymic tropes for atheism, and by extension communism. Nonetheless, in an attempt to be historical *The Black Knight* has Stonehenge 'authenticated' by the virtue of 'medievaesque' Gothic

¹⁹² Simmons, C. A. (2011). *Popular medievalism in romantic-era Britain* (pp. 20-32). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

font that is meant to indicate Stonehenge despite the Spanish landscape. This cinematic facsimile invites the audience to a “shared cinematic medievalism ... [w]hen medieval films are made and when they are viewed, modern notions, emotions and sensibilities are projected forward in the past, shaping and being shaped by what is known of the medieval world”.¹⁹³ Evidently, the entire plot of *The Black Knight* makes light of the historiographical tradition and one can argue as Haydock does that the interpretive community’s conception of the past is often more vulnerable to the lure of cinema since falsehoods and myths can run rampant because there is no immediate falsification. By default, the Middle Ages alterity functions in order to preserve and create numerous medievalisms.¹⁹⁴ The fantasy in *The Black Knight* is the insertion of American values into the Arthurian legend.

Similarly, in *The Siege of the Saxons* (Nathan Juran, 1963) the audience is reminded of what Harty describes as being a very complicated film legacy of the King Arthur tradition:

... a film about Arthur – indeed any film with a medieval theme – is an example, first and foremost of medievalism, the attempt as old as old as the birth of the early modern or Renaissance period to revisit or reinvent the medieval world for contemporary purposes.¹⁹⁵

The Siege of the Saxons functions within this framework of appropriating the Middle Ages to comment on the enemy within Camelot or America, most notably communism. Furthermore, *The Siege of the Saxons* ‘suffers’ from a hybrid form of medievalism that conflates different medievalisms together. The synopsis of the story is as follows. After a joust that Edmund of Cornwall (Ronald Howard) wins, King Arthur (Mark Dignam) becomes ill. Arthur is in need of rest and with his daughter Katherine (Janette Scott) travels to a castle in the countryside. On their way in the forest they encounter Robert Marshall (Ronald Lewis), who is a mixture of Robin Hood and a knight. Instead of robbing King Arthur and his party, Marshall becomes part of Arthur’s retinue and becomes a guide and a hunter. The Limping Man (Jerome Willis), who is a miscreant in

¹⁹³ Driver, M. W., & Ray, S. (2004). *The medieval hero on screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy* (p. 39). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

¹⁹⁴ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 27). Lonson, UK: McFarland

¹⁹⁵ Harty, K. J. (2002). *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty essays* (p. 5). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co.

the service of Edmund, later ambushes Marshall. Marshall is wrongly framed for an assassination attempt on Arthur's life. However, Marshall discovers Edmund's plot to overthrow Arthur by disguising his men as Saxons. Edmund's plan is to murder Arthur and force Katherine to marry him, and though he and his men succeed in slaying Arthur. Nonetheless, Marshall manages to escape with Katherine. They manage to find Merlin (John Laurie) and it is announced that Arthur's true heir must be able to wield Excalibur.

One of the more interesting medievalisms in the films is pointed out by Harty, when he argues that the film conflates two English medieval hero storylines: the ones of King Arthur and Robin Hood.¹⁹⁶ Robert Marshall's outlaw status as a loyal subject of the true king is an implicit connection to Robin Hood. Indeed, the film blends together the Roman-British chronology of the Arthurian mythos while including various iconological elements that invoke Panofsky's second level of iconological analysis, that is to say the interpretive community, as the audience would of course be familiar with the themes and concepts.¹⁹⁷ For example, French kingship and regal propaganda is on display in an Arthurian setting.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, as Harty argues, the connection to Robin Hood is explicit even more so when one compares certain scenes from *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Michael Curtiz, 1938) to the opening scenes of the film when Robin Marshall encounters Katherine and King Arthur. For just as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* is a dream of the Middle Ages, *Siege of the Saxons* suffers from what Ramsey and Pugh argue about cinematic medievalism in general, especially since these films deal:

¹⁹⁶ Harty, K. J. (2002). *Cinema Arthuriana: Twenty essays* (p. 65). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co.

¹⁹⁷ Panofsky's theoretical approach has three levels of studying art objects or images; the first level is familiar to all subjects since it is simple visual identification, e.g. factual and expressional imagery. Whereas the second level is iconography when one needs to rely on themes and concepts within cultural codes and knowledge and this level can be contrasted to Jauss' "horizon of expectations".

¹⁹⁸ In "Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy: Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422-1432", McKenna discusses a political propaganda campaign that was spearheaded by Henry VI's political advisors and court. In this paper McKenna speaks of dual monarchy or kingship. McKenna points out that "in 1423 the Regent commissioned Lawrence Calot, an Anglo French royal notary, to compose some verses setting forth the dual descent of Henry VI from King St. Louis IX of France." The importance is that evidently this symbol coincides with the High Middle Ages; and most notably is considered to originate with 13th century French kings, *vide Spiegel* "The Fleur-de-Lis Frontispieces to Guillaume de Nangis's Chronique abrégée: Political Iconography in Late Fifteenth-Century France". McKenna, J. W. , 'Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy: Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422-1432', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 28, (1965), 145-162, in <<http://www.jstor.org/>> [accessed 20 March 2013].

Hindman, S. and G.M. Spiegel, 'The Fleur-de-Lis Frontispieces to Guillaume de Nangis's 'Chronique Abregee': Political Iconography in Late France', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 12, (1981), 381-407, in <<http://www.jstor.org/>> [accessed 21 March 2013].

with a dream of the Middle Ages or of someone else's dream of medievalism doubled upon itself, for many medieval tropes are themselves fantasies of the period: are not courtly love and chivalry both realities of the Middle Ages (as the numerous treatises on these subjects attest) as much as they are dreams of what medieval people believed their world should be?¹⁹⁹

Indeed there are many fantasies that occur in *Siege of the Saxons*. A very notable one is the prototypical medieval proclamation, a staple of film medievalism.

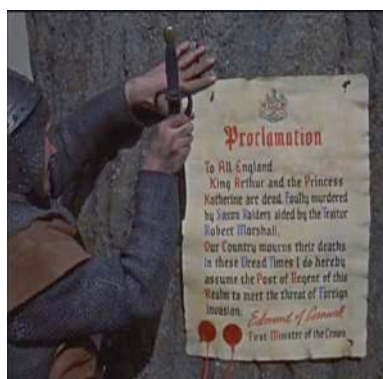


Figure 19: The picture above is taken from *Siege of the Saxons*

To a trained medievalist's eyes the medievalisms that are on display in figure 19 are intriguing. The most evident medievalism is the language itself, for the proclamation is written in a crisp RP British, showing no signs of either Germanic influence or, of being a distinct dialect of Old English, especially if the audience is to believe this is during the reign of the historical King Arthur. Should Gildas be taken to be a credible source, then Arthur and the Battle of Mount Badon would have occurred around 500 A.D. However, despite the problematic nature of historical sources, Arthur is considered by many scholars to be a king of the post-Roman period, nonetheless this is a medievalism in itself since the legacy of Arthur was used for propaganda purposes already in the medieval era. In *Siege of the Saxons* Arthur reigns during an unspecified temporal era in which modern English is used, which is of course a medievalism. Another intriguing factor is the placement of the proclamation itself. For the cohesion of community, proclamations in general were required to be placed in areas where they could be seen and interpreted, not

¹⁹⁹ Ramey, L. T., & Pugh, T. (2007). *Race, class, and gender in "medieval" cinema* (p. 49). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

to mention the issue of literacy during the period in question. Placing a proclamation on a random tree, as can be seen in the film still, would have been highly illogical given the social circumstances of medieval life. In fact, in his article “The Public Space of The Marketplace”, Masschaele argues the importance of the marketplace in disseminating cultural practices, and how important markets were as medieval institutions in the Middle Ages. Masschaele essentially argues that from early medieval times royal proclamations functioned in two ways. Their first purpose was to bring the community’s attention to an enactment, to enforce it accordingly, and to announce executive acts formally. However, the usage of such legal tools decreased as parliament encroached on the powers of kingship. Furthermore, these proclamations were recorded in instruments such as close rolls and patent rolls.²⁰⁰ The placing of proclamation in modern English is quite often a very persistent medievalism seen in many other medieval films. For example in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (Kevin Reynolds, 1991) the audience is treated to such a medievalism along with other curiosities. In the caption below, the proclamation has connotations with an American Western, since one of the tropes of the genre is the accentuation of the text “Wanted Dead or Alive” on posters.



Figure 20: Proclamation placement from *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*

Indeed, these proclamations are an example of medievalism since, as Masschaele states:

[b]y the end of the thirteenth century they had developed a fairly standardized procedure for proclamations, and the frequency with which they used the procedure suggests that they were well aware of the role markets played in forming opinions and shaping perceptions about what went on in the world at large.

²⁰⁰ Masschaele, J., 'The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England', *Speculum*, Vol. 72.No. 2, (2002), 383-421

When a king wished to circulate news to his subjects, he typically sent writs to all of his sheriffs, instructing them to proclaim royal initiatives in cities, towns and “ville mercatories” ... in documents using Anglo Norman French.²⁰¹

Obviously, some might object that it is problematic to apply 13th-century practices and customs to the normative social customs of the fictional world of *Siege of Saxons*. Yet, one can argue that these practices had been codified before, and there was a continuation, and, as Masschaele does point out, kings would display their kingship by utilizing a sheriff to project his kingship through such proclamations and this was a practice from the Anglo-Saxon period onwards.²⁰² Accordingly, the cinematic medievalism of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* is correct in having the Sherrif of Nottingham place the edict.²⁰³ Nonetheless, as mentioned previously, these proclamations had formulaic aspects indicative of social customs and laws such as the following law: “If any one sells his own countryman, bond or free, though he be guilty, over sea, let him pay for him according to his “*wer*”.”²⁰⁴ An example such as this helps elucidate how the proclamation within *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* owes more to American cinematic tradition than medieval historical sources. The spatial and linguistic elements of this medievalism are therefore striking when compared to historical sources. Thus, the cinematic narrative of both films of using proclamations for seeking outlaws and having the community assist seems to be a modern-day projection of medievalism.

In fact, the proclamation is such a common staple of medievalism in medieval cinema that one can see it numerous times in *Camelot* (Joshua Logan, 1967). Commoners are reading proclamations that are handed both in manuscript form and distributed in locations where they were not likely to be seen; nor could they be read. Directly related to this logistic medievalism is the medievalism related to the conception of medieval literacy itself, a factor most Hollywood films often tend to ignore. This discrepancy between medieval social practices and cinematic depictions can be juxtaposed with the

²⁰¹ *ibidem*

²⁰² Masschaele, p. 391.

²⁰³ As I mention above, Masschaele notes that the practice of sending a sherriff was common since Anglo Saxon times, this coincides with my argument that there were certain practices associated with proclamations. The outlaw aspect of both films is a projection of modern narrative technique.

²⁰⁴ Stubbs, W., *Anglo-Saxon Law – Extracts From Early Laws of the English*. (2008) <<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/medieval/saxlaw.asp#defin>> [accessed 28 March 2013].

argumentation of Walter Ong, who argues that medieval culture or medieval communities depended on literate individuals, and that many were only cognizant of the literary texts since they had someone to read the texts to them; if anything medieval literacy and illiteracy were different functions of social communication rather than the predominantly solitary and personal attribute we associate it with in contemporary times.²⁰⁵ Nonetheless, many Hollywood cinematic portrayals of the Middle Ages depict medieval citizens and society in general as functionally literate, although, as pointed out above, this is a fallacy.²⁰⁶ Indeed, this utopian fantasy, and medievalism, of the literate and joyful peasant, is actually also found in the melodramatic musical *Camelot*: it is an important plot point within the film itself. In *Camelot* there are numerous, successive shots of medieval folk reading “manuscripts” or scrolls because Arthur has issued an edict concerning his forthcoming betrothal to Lady Guinevere. This is done at the behest of King Arthur, played by Richard Harris, who says “we’ll send the heralds riding through the country, tell every living person – far and near”. The first “reading” shot is of medieval folk in the courtyard, and then there is a medium close-up shot of a multitude of ‘manuscripts’ being thrown out a castle ‘window’ as if they were confetti. The next shot has the heralds ride out; additional shots include the courier or herald throwing the document in different locations to the peasants; the audience is then treated to a close-up of the peasants reading from the scroll. Additional shots that depict medieval people reading in *Camelot* are first, of a young couple in meadows, who seem to be enjoying a picnic. A subsequent shot depicts more distinguished folk on horses who glance at a proclamation nailed to a tree – and next to it the audience can see a heart carved out. Following, the audience is also treated to a whimsical shot of a sailor reading the document, and finally the audience sees part of the document, written in modern English, itself: with the header of proclaiming, and the documents being tied to doves. The

²⁰⁵ Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word* (p. 178). London: Methuen. I would also like to mention that Marco Mostert’s classes and work has helped with understanding literacy in general and during the Middle Ages.

²⁰⁶ This is however not a practice in *Monty Python’s Holy Grail*. In the film medieval peasants are not only illiterate but they are displayed as filthy morons as can be seen in the scene often referred to as “We found a witch”, since Sir Bedivere is conducting a witch trial that Arthur witnesses and the peasants deduce that if she weighs the same as a duck, she must be made out of wood. Therefore she must be burnt because she is a witch.

medievalisms seem to project the ideal of a glorious past along with satisfied masses that are indeed literate.²⁰⁷

At first glance, *Prince Valiant* (Henry Hathaway, 1954), the next film to be discussed, might not seem to have much in common with the former two films and the “medieval model” which is a political utopia and a celebration of past grandeur.²⁰⁸ But in fact the film, based on the comic by Harold Foster, shares a similar thematic structure to the other two. However, a brief synopsis is needed before continuing. In *Prince Valiant* we are introduced to the protagonist Valiant, played by Robert Wagner, who is instructed by his father King Aguar to seek out the assistance of their friend King Arthur, because King Aguar has been made an exile by the usurper Sligon. After arriving in England from Scandia, Valiant observes a mysterious black knight conversing with allies of Sligon. They are plotting to overthrow King Arthur. Prince Valiant is discovered and barely escapes, but by chance he stumbles upon Sir Gawain accompanied by the Green Knight, played by Sterling Hayden. Prince Valiant follows Gawain and meets King Arthur, and later becomes Gawain’s squire despite Sir Brack’s sinister attempt to obtain Prince Valiant as a squire. Due to the trickery of Sir Brack, Prince Valiant is injured and Gawain is severely injured while searching for Prince Valiant. After this Prince Valiant meets princess Aleta. Later on Prince Valiant falls in love with her. However, Aleta’s father is determined for her to win a prestigious champion and a knight, not a ‘barbarian Viking’, since Valiant comes from the fictional Viking kingdom of Scandi. To try and win her hand, Valiant dons the injured Gawain’s armor but loses the joust to Sir Brack. Sir Gawain wins the day, however, and it would seem the princess. Yet, due to chivalric code of the film, Prince Valiant is charged for a crime against the round table by impersonating one of their knights. Prince Valiant is made to swear he will stay in his quarters while awaiting judgment, but Sir Brack tricks him by having his father’s ring and signet put in his room. Prince Valiant escapes to Scandia and defeats Sligon, Finally comes back to Camelot to bring charges against Sir Brack, resulting in their fight to the death for honor.

²⁰⁷ In the final shot of this medievalism montage, Arthur and Guinevere are exploring what seems to a modern day map of England and their kingdom, which evidently includes the aptly named Irish Sea.

²⁰⁸ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays* (p. 70). London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg.

Prince Valiant shares epistemes with *Siege of the Saxons* and *The Black Knight*. One of the more important sources for Arthurian literature are the romances of Chrétien de Trois. Maddox argues that the Arthurian romances of Chrétien de Trois can be read in a manner that depicts anxiety in an age of transition as well as revealing social mores and customs.²⁰⁹ With this kind of socio-cultural reading in mind, it is interesting to investigate how similar *Prince Valiant* is to the previously discussed Arthurian films. All of the films in question were released at the zenith of the cold war era and they do share contemporary anxieties in their thematic structures. The main plot points of all three films have to do with social mobility as well as alterity, with each film's protagonist going through trials as they attempt to become knights in chivalric society. The main difference is that Prince Valiant is not only the main protagonist, the hero, of the story, but also 'The Other', because he is referred to as Viking or a barbarian throughout the film. Nonetheless, Prince Valiant and his family are exiled for being Christians by the rebellious pagan Vikings that have taken control of Scandia, which seems to function as a geographical marker for the entire region of Scandinavia. Prince Valiant even claims that: "the cross is our salvation" after being threatened to be crucified by Sligon and his henchmen. In fact there are multiple medievalisms that run rampant in this film and the shared thematic motif is not only the emphasis on honor but on the dichotomy of Christianity and paganism. The iconographical depiction of Christian symbolism is blatantly explicit in the film, which it shares in common with the previous two Arthurian films as can be seen in the captions below.

²⁰⁹ Maddox dwells quite deep into the matter within *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions*. He synthesizes the romances into coherent thematic structures; *Yvain* according to him deals primarily the custom of the fountain, including legal indictments reflected within the battles scenes depicted by Old French words. Maddox, D., *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). However, the anxieties in *Prince Valiant* and the other Arthurian films share anxieties of social mobility and the alterity of others whether it is through physical embodiment or cultural practices.



Figure 21: Sir Galahad, the pride of Christendom according to King Arthur in *Prince Valiant*. A notable medievalism is the Viking drinking cups.



Figure 22: Angelic damsel in distress. The picture above is taken from *Siege of the Saxons*.



Figure 23: The picture above is taken from *The Black Knight*, and the protagonist is frequently framed in this manner.

In the first film still the camera zooms in on Sir Galahad at the round table in *Prince Valiant*. The viewer can notice the emphatic accentuation of Sir Galahad and the Christian symbolism, and how striking it is. In the second figure there is a shot of Princess Aleta who is framed like an angel, with a halo and holding a cross. Similar to the two previously discussed Arthurian films, *Prince Valiant* emphasizes the Christian nation-building mythos, as does the third figure taken from *The Black Knight*.²¹⁰ In fact, as Ramsey and Pugh argue “[u]nderstanding medievalisms, thus, becomes a methodology for understanding the production of cultural and historical fantasies out of the fragments

²¹⁰ There are actually numerous shots of Alan Ludd and the cross in his abode.

of real material”.²¹¹ Indeed, the cultural production of *Prince Valiant* reverberates the analysis given by Lupack of *The Black Knight*. All of these films share cold war anxieties. In one scene Sir Gawain states: “A man does not risk banishment or death in borrowed armor unless the stakes are high”, which functions a thin referent to the cold war anxiety because all of the films share the trope of a traitor within the court of Camelot, a traitor that wishes to usurp King Arthur through some diabolical pact with pagans in the form of Vikings or other barbarians; thereby highlighting alterity. Furthermore, the Christian/American knight who fights the hordes of paganism/communism always thwarts the traitor.

3.2 The Arthurian Turn in Britain

As mentioned above, all of the aforementioned films deal with nation building strategies and take ideological stances. Nonetheless, within medieval film one can discern a paradigm shift in themes, and most importantly the idea of postmodernism enters the construction of many films, or as Haydock argues:

This loss of distance and distinction is especially striking in postmodern movie medievalism because the gap these films bridge is profound. Our knowledge about the Middle Ages contains many lacunae and our sense of their alterity is perhaps the founding distinction of the historical consciousness [Fredric] Jameson laments.²¹²

In fact, postmodern cinematic medieval portrayals tend to forgo any notion of historical accuracy. Haydock makes special notice of, *Monty Python's Holy Grail*. Within the film there can be erudite jokes that only a small section of the audience will grasp, while simultaneously Arthur is shown wearing a crusader's tunic and is witness to The Peasant's Revolt and the Black Death. All of this occurs within the same diegetic narrative universe of the film, and Arthur seems to be living in the sixth, twelfth and fourteenth centuries – thus the creators of the film can mock the accuracy and

²¹¹ Ramey, L. T., & Pugh, T. (2007). *Race, class, and gender in "medieval" cinema*.(p.84) New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹² Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 98). Lonson, UK: McFarland

authenticity rubrics the audience has become accustomed to when the Middle Ages are depicted in cinema.²¹³

An excellent example of this postmodern turn is an entirely different film that has garnered less critical attention in academic circles, namely *Sword of the Valiant: The Legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Stephen Weeks, 1984).²¹⁴ In many ways the film is a paragon of cinematic postmodern medievalism because not only is the source material rather well known among the general public, yet the film script in no way adheres to fidelity. In fact the film is a pastiche of medieval literature. In their article on the film, Blanch and Wasserman make note of the obvious fact that *Sword of the Valiant* is based on the romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and they even state that “despite their impressive origins, both films [*Sword of the Valiant* and *The First Knight*] have remained easy targets for derision from the general public and academics alike”.²¹⁵ Nonetheless, despite their important analysis that notes the tension between “the institutional and the personal”,²¹⁶ they ignore a very important factor of the *Sword of the Valiant*, which is the obvious debt it also owes to Chretien de Trois’ *Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion*. However, before discussing this other literary allusion, it is necessary to give a short synopsis of the plot of *Yvain ou le Chevalier au lion*.

In the romance, Yvain is a knight who goes on a quest because of the vicious taunting of Kay towards Yvain and his cousin Calogrenant. After setting out on a quest in a liminal world full of mythical creatures outside the boundaries of Camelot, Yvain comes across the knight Esclados after opening a spring, thereby causing a storm that makes Esclados appear. Yvain bests him in battle only to discover he was protector of the realm and Yvain, aided by handmaiden Lunete, manages to avoid capture in this realm while also gaining the love of Escaldo’s widow, Laudine. Interestingly enough, Yvain

²¹³ Haydock, N. (2008). *Movie Medievalism: The Imaginary Middle Age* (p. 94). Lonson, UK: McFarland

²¹⁴ With the exception of Blanch and Wasserman’s article “Fear of Flying: The Absence of Internal Tension in *Sword of the Valiant* and *First Knight*” and Harty’s *The Reel Middle Ages*. Henceforth, I will always refer to *Sword of the Valiant: The Legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as *Sword of the Valiant* for the sake of brevity. Blanch, R. and J.N. Wasserman, ‘Fear of Flying: The Absence of Internal Tension in The Sword of the Valiant and First Knight’, *Arthuriana*, Vol. 10. No. 4, (2000), 15-32, in <<http://www.jstor.org/>> [accessed 17 April 2013].

²¹⁵ *ibidem*, p. 15.

²¹⁶ *ibidem*, p. 21.

Blanch and Wasserman make note of his tension, the conflict between love and Arthurian ideals, which I agree with and is also an important part of *Yvain, the Knight of the Lion*.

forgets his promise to Laudine as a result of his chivalric duties undertaken by him because of a challenge issued by Gawain. Yvain goes mad and becomes a hermit in the woods, and where a noble woman eventually heals him. Shortly afterwards, Yvain sees a lion and a serpent entangled whilst engaged in combat. Yvain slays the serpent and the lion becomes his companion. Among his later adventures, Yvain meets Gawain in combat and they do not recognize each other. Yvain later meets Lunete who has been captured by two knights and is to be burned at the stake by them for treason and finally he battles Harpin the giant before being reunited with his love.

Although many medieval films can be accused of suffering from a lack of historical consciousness, as quoted previously, *Sword of the Valiant's* historical shortcomings are not only intriguing for postmodern semantics but also for its lack of textual fidelity. As mentioned above, the plot of the film does not follow the Middle English romance literary source, but in addition it incorporates elements of the structure of *Yvain, the knight of the Lion*. In the film, Gawain comes across Morgan La Fay who directs Gawain in his quest for a magical horn. Once Gawain blows the horn a rainbow appears, thus resulting in a textual reference to the initial storm scene of *Yvain*, which is made even more evident with the appearance of the Black Knight.²¹⁷ After besting the Black Knight who is the protector of Lyonesse in battle, Gawain meets Linet, not Lunete from the *Yvain* romance, who also gives him a magical ring that makes him invisible because he is being chased by the inhabitants and court just as in *Yvain*. However, the important difference is that the Lady of Lyonesse, the widow of the Black Knight, is portrayed as old as opposed to Laudine in *Yvain*. This is important since Yvain and Laudine are romantically involved in the romance. *Sword of the Valiant* conflates the medieval period into one mosh-pit of medievalism or post-modernism or as Harty argues about its similar counterpart *Monty Python's Holy Grail*:

One of Monty Python's favorite butts is Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du lac* (1974), an experimental film that often frames shots of bodies from the torso down, and includes a great deal of un-synched, extradiegetic sound. In mocking Bresson's idiosyncratic film (and avant-garde cinema as a whole) the Monty Python troop settle some very old scores about the French appropriation of Britain's

²¹⁷ Interestingly enough in the German and Icelandic version of the tale, Escaldos is described as being a Moor/black thus lending a certain unintended intertextuality to the pilfering of the film.

nationalist myth, albeit within the diegesis the Arthurian knights are unable to breach the walls of the stubbornly French grail castle.²¹⁸

Indeed, *Sword of the Valiant* follows the template of Monty Python by avoiding nationalist myths and focusing on symbolic retellings of medieval legends and archetypes. Whereas American medieval cinematic portrayals have focused on this appropriation, and French ones, as well as Harty argues. Evidently, *Sword of the Valiant* firmly belongs to the sphere of postmodern Arthurian films along with *Monty Python's Holy Grail*. This Arthurian turn is what separates *Sword of the Valiant* from previous Arthurian films that are filled with nationalistic tropes and ideological tensions, and which Eco states in his medievalism categories only use the Middle Ages a pretext to historical accuracy, since they are appropriating the myths and literary tales for nationalistic purposes. Related to this this postmodern turn is Jane Gilbert's succinct and powerful point regarding Arthurian discourse in general, in which she elucidates the difference between postmodern Arthurian films such as *Sword of the Valiant* and *Excalibur*. Gilbert discusses the "Arthurian moment",²¹⁹ and she argues that "Arthurian ideals remain unrealizable and irreconcilable even for Arthurian heroes", which makes the previous dominant idealism found in other films distant.²²⁰ Yet in the nationalistic Arthurian films this is not the case. An important point must be raised to emphasize this difference because at the beginning of *Sword of the Valiant* decay has set in the court of Camelot and Arthur rebukes his knights who have become fat and lazy and the myth of Camelot seems tarnished. This was not the director's first cinematic retelling of the romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and both films seem to function as metaphors for the decline of the British empire, while earlier British Arthurian films, such as *Knights of the Round Table*, focused on the glory of the British Empire.

²¹⁸ Ramey, L. T., & Pugh, T. (2007). *Race, class, and gender in 'medieval' cinema*.(p.73) New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

²¹⁹ Gilbert argues that the Arthurian scene is never now, and that Arthurian chivalry always lies in a past discontinuous from the present or in some fantastical elsewhere, and is contemplated at a distance by a consciously "modern" commentator. Arthurian discourse therefore incorporates two distinct moral spaces, one identified as Arthurian and other portrayed as that of the text's own present.

Archibald, E., & Putter, A. (2009). *The Cambridge companion to the Arthurian legend* (p. 155). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

²²⁰ Archibald, E., & Putter, A. (2009). *The Cambridge companion to the Arthurian legend* (p. 156). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Furthermore, in postmodern Arthurian films such as *Sword of the Valiant* the protagonist is often portrayed as being foolish, since he is unsure of his new-found role as knight or hero. There are tongue-in-cheek jokes, as can be seen in the following lines:

Sir Gawain: I forgot to ask one question during my quick initiation into knighthood.

Humphrey, his squire: Oh? What's that?

Sir Gawain: How to relieve myself in this tin suit.

Films such as *The Fisher King* (Terry Gilliam, 1991) continue this tradition of mocking the heroic template and romance tradition. In *The Fisher King*, the two protagonists discuss Arthurian mythology between themselves. Lucas, the radio jock asks Parry “where would King Arthur be without Guinevere” to which Parry replies: “happily married, probably”. Indeed, deconstructing the cultural and nationalistic narrative of Arthurian literature and cinema is often a common feature of this narrative turn, associated mainly with British cinematic portrayals of Arthur. In fact, in *Sword of the Valiant* Gawain only begins his quest because the decrepit and old King Arthur says all his knights have become fat and placid due to *pax Arthuriana* and no knight, dares to accept the Green Knight's challenge. Decay has set in within Camelot and the symbolism of *pax Arthuriana* is evident by the frequent and numerous close-up shots of the camera of food.²²¹ In addition, there is great emphasis on magic or symbolism, as is the case in *Excalibur*, which is heavily influenced by Jungian concerns rather than nation building strategies.

3.3 Pax Americana and Real Black Knights

American cinema dealing with the Arthurian legend also underwent a paradigm shift from previous iterations that dealt with overt nationalistic sentiments. The medievalism of this particular film cycle is more concerned with cultural heritage and dealing with alterity in the internal narrative structure. Films such as *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989), *Black Knight* (Gil Junger, 2001) and *A Knight in Camelot* (Roger Young, 1998) are specific examples of this cycle of films. In *Indiana*

²²¹ One shot focuses entirely on an enormous platter of meat and another shot displays anachronistic tropical fruit during high winter during Arthurian times.

Jones,²²² the enemy is not within but the convenient cipher for postbellum Hollywood, the Nazis, recalling to mind Francis Fukuyama's influential essay "The End of History?" that proclaimed the permanent ascendancy of liberal democracy and the arrival of a post-ideological world without an external enemy. In the film the dichotomy between good and evil has a simplistic internal logic. This is most noticeable by having the Nazis function as the ultimate evil that not only is the antithesis of American values, This ideology could not be summarized by Henry Jones senior who says that: "The quest for the grail is not archeology, it's a race against evil. If it is captured by the Nazis the armies of darkness will march all over the face of the earth". Nonetheless, before analyzing *Indiana Jones*, I will etch out the plot briefly. The film commences with Indiana Jones as an idealistic young boy scout who begins his archaeological career early in his life by attempting futilely to stop hired mercenaries from plundering archaeological treasures. In the film's present time, Indiana has established himself as an academic and a treasure hunter in a small liberal arts college in New England. Indiana discovers a mysterious parcel addressed to him and in it is his father's Holy Grail journal and compendium. Indiana discovers his father had been working with Denholm Elliot, who encourages Indiana to seek his father and the grail. Seeking out his missing father, Indiana Jones travels to Venice. While searching for his father Indiana meets the scientist Elsa and they become embroiled in intrigue that leads Indiana to discover a knight's tomb with directions to the Holy Grail. Following the trail of his father, Indiana travels to Castle Brunwald on the Austrian-German border where he locates his father and discovers that Elsa is a Nazi agent in league with Denholm Elliot and they take the grail diary from Indiana. Indiana and his father Henry Jones senior manage to escape and travel to Berlin, where they recover the diary amidst a Nazi rally that features Hitler among the crowd. After Indiana retrieves the diary back from Elsa, Indiana and his father proceed to escape in a Zeppelin. Later, Indiana Jones and his father meet up with their colleagues in Hatay, or modern-day southern Turkey. Indiana Jones, his father and their companions manage to locate Elliot and Elsa within the temple housing the Grail. However, the Jones's are captured yet again and Indiana is forced to retrieve the Holy Grail by passing three different tasks that rely on Christian faith. After, completing the tasks Indiana meets the

²²² Abbreviated from now on as *Indiana Jones*.

last surviving knight of the three brothers who guarded the Holy Grail. Elliot, however, follows Indiana and selects a magnificently ornate cup out of the many available. This results in Elliot's death and Indiana Jones then proceeds to choose a more humble cup that would fit Jesus's humble stature; with the Holy Grail Indiana Jones also heals the near fatal bullet wound his father received but Elsa, despite the old knight's warning, takes the Grail beyond the great seal of the temple causing it to destruct, and she falls into an abyss while Indiana and his father ride off like knights into the Oriental sunset.

With this synopsis, it might be difficult to discern how *Indiana Jones* fits within the nationalistic framework hitherto discussed; nonetheless this film clearly thematically belongs to the Arthurian genre or, as Susan Aronstein argues, this film functions as narrative template for reintroducing and redefining existing power structures and authority in crisis, which reverberates with previous arguments made previously in this chapter regarding Arthurian romance as transitional and displaying signs of anxiety.²²³ Furthermore, Aronstein argues this is an attempt to create a simplistic binary worldview and *Indiana Jones* achieves it through utilizing the paradigmatic nature of Arthurian romances.²²⁴ While the construction of alterity is not a dominant feature in the thematic structure of the film, the film does not share the comedic nature of *Sword of the Valiant* and certain postmodern cinematic portrayals of the Middle Ages but it does share the cultural politics of previous Arthurian films that create and shape medievalisms to foster nationalistic sentiments.

On the other hand *Black Knight* is an intriguing case study, since it introduces an alterity discourse that was missing from many other cinematic depictions of the Middle Ages and reflected in the multiplicity of its referents within the film title.²²⁵ On one level the audience is aware of the medieval trope of the black knight, while the film title also refers to the character's ethnicity and alterity. This difference is a crucial factor for the tensions within the film, and is often the focal point of comedic scenes, which is poignantly pointed out by Finke and Shichtman: "The first thing everybody notices (or

²²³ Cinema Journal, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Summer, 1995), pp. 3-30. Also see footnote 54.

²²⁴ Cinema Journal, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Summer, 1995), p. 7

The Nazis are depicted as two dimensional zombies throughout the film who perform *auto-da-fé*.

²²⁵ It is also released during 2001 just before thematic concerns regarding Orientalism and the renewal of crusade films such as *Kingdom of Heaven* that deal with the binary of East versus West, and thus deals with ethnicity in general not ethic and religious strife.

perhaps does not even need to notice) about films set in the Middle Ages is that all the characters are usually white”.²²⁶ Indeed, almost every narrative strand of *Black Knight* is dominated by the alterity of an African American within the medieval context. Before discussing the film and its medievalisms a brief synopsis will be provided.

Jamal (Martin Lawrence) is an African American employee for the medieval themed amusement park named Medieval World that is facing an upcoming theme park named Castle World. Jamal is an apathetic and opportunistic individual, caring little for his community, but one day he finds an artifact in an artificial moat. By doing so, Jamal travels through a vortex to medieval England where he at first thinks is a rural area of California. Wondering around he discovers a castle that he mistakenly believes to be the new competition Castle World. The medieval denizens believe that Jamal is a Moor from Normandy, because he gives them his street address. In the narrative, Jamal becomes a trusted aid to King Leo, however, the king is an usurper who has dethroned the queen and who also happens to be cruel tyrant. Jamal discovers this through Victoria the chambermaid who also happens to be the only other person of color, and he rallies to the cause of the queen and her knight, Sir Knolte. In the end, Jamal helps the queen restore her throne and manages to travel back to his own time a changed man.

The framing fiction of the film is not only Jamal’s ethnicity but also his cultural capital, and this is framed numerous times within the film by having Jamal exhibit his cultural distance from the medieval period, and presumably from the audience. Kathryn Wymer points out that American cinema has an awkward relationship to people of color within fictional medieval settings.²²⁷ Indeed, there are numerous examples in the film when Jamal replies to King Leo’s request of news from Normandy to which Jamal responds “What news? Well a couple of drive-bys, other than that, same ole same ole”. Other instances of this cultural distance include a scene where Jamal gives himself the moniker of Skywalker, thus creating associations with basketball and its predominant association with African American culture. Jamal also introduces the court to “soulful

²²⁶ Finke, L., & Shichtman, M. B. (2010). *Cinematic illuminations: The Middle Ages on film* (p. 354). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. However, if one considers the *Hobbit: Desolation of Smaug* as medieval film, albeit it a fantasy one than the audience is treated to different types of ethnicities.

²²⁷ Wymer, K. (2012). A Quest for the Black Knight: Casting People of Color in Arthurian Film and Television. *The Year's Work in Medievalism*, 27.

music”.²²⁸ In fact this same motif occurs in *A Knight in Camelot*, where the temporally displaced visitor to medieval England is also an African American who introduces soulful music to medieval times, thus creating contemporary concerns seem to be projected on to medieval times where the proclivity of African Americans towards dance enables them to connect to the simplistic medieval person. This is further exemplified by the paracinematic text or soundtrack title from the film named “*Medieval Hood*” that further highlights the ethnicity of Jamal. Most of the humor is derived from the fact that Jamal does not conform to the notions of ‘accuracy and authenticity’ as Eliot argues regarding cinematic medievalisms: not only because Jamal is cast as a court jester, but due to the twofold othering of Jamal as an African American in medieval times. Similarly, in *A Knight in Camelot* Dr. Vivien Morgan’s (Whoopi Goldberg) skin color is addressed under the authenticity rubrics by having villagers believe she is an ogre. Yet, as mentioned previously Jamal’s presence is explained by him being a Moor. The greatest impact of the medievalism in these films is felt by making ethnicity as uncanny within the fictional world since the lacunae within the Middle Ages is filled with contemporary concerns regarding race and ethnicity. This is noticeable by Percival’s, King Leo’s main henchman and ally, frequent usage of ‘Moor’ as a pejorative, with it having connotations with the modern socially constructed and loaded word ‘nigger’. Simultaneously, the use of Moor in *Black Knight* also has a causal link to anxieties regarding Turks and is contingent on the dichotomy of West versus East, although this trope does not appear within the film. By utilizing the Mark Twain template of having a modern individual visit the Middle Ages the same temporalities apply: authenticity and accuracy. Nonetheless, despite the fact that colored individuals may not seem to fit in within the accuracy and authenticity rubrics, scholars such as Maghan Keita have dealt with themes such as racial diversity with the Arthurian universe.²²⁹ For example, Keita argues that ethnicity and race are topics that appear in Malory and in the Middle Dutch work *Morien*. However, cinematic depictions of the Middle Ages choose to follow the ideologies formed during the 18th and 19th – centuries, when the Middle Ages were appropriated to create and

²²⁸ Skywalker is most famously known from Star Wars but numerous NBA players have appropriated and it has become popular in the African American community depicting leaping prowess.

²²⁹ Chazelle, C. M. (2012). *Why the Middle Ages matter: Medieval light on modern injustice* (p. 134). London: Routledge.

mould medievalisms for ideological purposes. During this period scholars helped to create a homogenous Western Europe medievalism utilizing the Middle Ages to support nationalistic power structures, while racial theories created myths that helped foster racial constructions and national identity. Now, by taking advantage of historical and documental lacunae, filmmakers and scholars have been able to project nationalistic concerns regarding faith, communism and atheism or contemporary concerns such as race through the spurious camera lens, producing new Arthurian and knightly medievalisms.

4. Chapter III: The Vikings!

“Deyr fé, deyja frændur, deyr sjálfur ið sama. En orðstír deyr aldregi hveim er sér góðan getur” from Hávamál.

“*A furore normannorum libera nos domine*” – a common phrase²³⁰

Outside of academia the representations of Vikings in popular culture have been widely different,²³¹ ranging from the brave but beardless Prince Valiant, or *Hägar the Horrible*, to videogame heroes such as the *Lost Vikings*. However, cinematic portrayals of Vikings have gone through dramatic revisions throughout the 20th century.²³² Evidently, there have been numerous medievalisms pertaining to Vikings both in textual and visual culture, and the genealogy of many of these portrayals can trace their genealogy to the Romantic period.²³³ The early portrayals of Vikings have always focused on them as ‘Others’ and barbarians; yet in different ways. This is especially true after the reinvention of Vikings during the Romantic age, because there have been a dyadic relationship

²³⁰ Many argue that this is a myth and some attribute it to monks of England, however the closest approximation can be found in fol. 24 of the Antiphony of Charles the Bald.

²³¹ I use the term Viking with a capital letter since it conveys the attributes associated with them in both Nordic and non-Nordic contexts, it can be an adjective but also function as an ethnicity marker as I discuss later.

²³² I argue that there are two distinct strands of cinematic representations of Vikings. They are indeed functioning within a framework where they are ‘the Other’, while simultaneously being appropriated, this is done a myriad of ways.

²³³ Some portrayals are more lighthearted than others, e.g. *Hagar the Horrible* which is a comic strip

between the cinematic portrayals of Vikings and their Western European counterparts.²³⁴ That is to say, the depictions of Vikings are constituted in an interlocked manner: they are both part of the Western heritage, because Viking culture and heritage is appropriated, while simultaneously there is a cognitive dissonance within the visual representations of Vikings because they are also portrayed as the barbaric ‘Others’. This dyadic relationship became a significant part of the socio-cultural history during the 19th century; especially since the Victorians and later fringe groups such as the Thule Society both appropriated Nordic culture for their own political and ideological agendas. In doing so these entities reconstructed history for their own agendas. As Mees points out, the Thule society sought to “evoke a Nordic connection” and relied heavily upon “a smorgasbord of references to German, Norse, and other Indo-European traditions”.²³⁵ Nonetheless, before dwelling on the former constructions and understandings of the term ‘Viking’ and ‘Norse culture’ during the Victorian and Nazi time periods, it is prudent to elucidate the difference between the 20th century cultural presentations and modern day representations, and how current cinematic and other visual representations of Vikings are constructed.²³⁶ I will attempt to do so by contextualizing the concept of the term ‘Viking’ and demarcating the understanding of what constitutes a Viking, thereby facilitating my task in using the terminology; as well as exploring how medievalisms involved in medieval cinematic representations and other visual re-imaginings function in general. A brief historical background is needed before analyzing the medievalisms within cinematic representations. After that I will move on to representations in classical Hollywood, then I will deal with the portrayals of Vikings in the Nordic tradition, and finally I will move on to modern day cinematic and visual representations of Vikings. In doing so I will utilize other visual studies sources as well, since I ascribe to Nicholas Mirzoeff’s

²³⁴ In my previous chapter, I analyzed how *Prince Valiant* functioned within such a framework, since Prince Valiant’s alterity is highlighted by the fact that he is a ‘Viking’ within the Christian community; whereas he is also treated in an inferior manner within his homeland.

²³⁵ Völkische Altnordistik: the politics of Nordic studies in the German-speaking countries, 1926-45 | Bernard Mees - Academia.edu. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/1011838/Volkische_Altnordistik_the_politics_of_Nordic_studies_in_the_German-speaking_countries_1926-4

²³⁶ I wish to focus on other visual representations as well by utilizing Henry Jenkin’s theoretical framework, of trans-media storytelling, which by I mean that the horizon of expectations of the audience is informed by numerous visual cultural productions but they also can interact with the cultural production in such cases as *Skryim* and transmutate or codify the medievalisms; thus I include the videogame *Skryim* within this chapter.

intervisuality theory, which explains how there is interaction among different visual depictions, which are heavily influenced by context. In this case it is the Vikings.²³⁷

4.1 What is a Viking?

Viking is a nebulous concept – in different contexts Vikings have been marauders, merchants, manufacturers, poets, explorers, democrats, statesmen, or warriors. It is also a relatively recent concept – originally used to refer only to pirate activity, it came to be used as an ethnic term to refer to a whole people, and then as a chronological label, giving its name to the Viking Age. With this fluidity it did not mean the same in 10th-century Scandinavia, 15th-century Iceland, and 19th-century England. In fact, our modern usage of Viking owes more to later reinventions than any original reality.²³⁸

In trying to understand the genealogy of the word ‘Viking’, Richard’s succinct definition of what a Viking is becomes a practical instrument in understanding the ontological nature of the problem. The concept of what a Viking is and what constitutes such a historical icon has become a fictionalized reality,²³⁹ or as I pointed out in my previous chapter: “[b]y repetition, the audience comes to expect it”.²⁴⁰ Not only is this fictional representation of a Viking embedded into Western European culture, it has also seeped into the collective historical capital of other cultural areas.²⁴¹ In order to disentangle the iconological medievalisms associated with Vikings it is crucial to investigate the genealogy of the concept itself.

The word ‘Viking’ appears in Old Norse saga narratives such as *Laxdæla Saga* and *Víga-Glúms saga*.²⁴² In the narratives, the meaning of Viking is quite clear depending on the context of the narrative: it is an individual that seeks his fame and fortune either through adventure or marauding. The word *víking* is cognate with the Old Norse word *vík*

²³⁷ Mirzoeff, N. (2002). *The Visual Culture Reader*. London: Routledge.

²³⁸ Richards, J. D. (2005). *The Vikings: A very short introduction* (p. 2). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²³⁹ I use icon here because there are internationally known sports brands that use the iconology of Vikings, e.g. the Minnesota Vikings. Furthermore, I use this term to better tie into my argument of Eliot’s historicism.

²⁴⁰ Elliott, A. B. (2011). *Remaking the Middle Ages: The methods of cinema and history in portraying the medieval world* (p. 123). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

²⁴¹ The clip here is a commercial from Kuwait *Viking Commercial*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 3, 2013, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOtkKfe2EFU>

²⁴² “Rögnvaldur sendi vestur Hallað son sinn og gat hann eigi haldið ríkinu fyrir víkingum”. Rögnvaldur sent Hallað, his son, west. Hallað could not maintain the kingdom against Vikings.

Snerpa (2012). *Vatnsdæla saga*. Retrieved November 4, from <http://www.snerpa.is/net/isl/vatnsdae.htm>.

meaning bay or harbor.²⁴³ It is important to note the distinction between what conception of identity the Nordic people perceived themselves to have, as opposed to the identity later created for them within the historiographical tradition. Within the saga narratives to embark on a journey or ‘víking’ can have negative, neutral or positive connotations depending on the agents involved.²⁴⁴ Further evidence of this is in *Egil’s saga*, where the protagonist is virile and powerful already as a child or, as his mother said, “*en Bera kvað Egil vera víkingsefni ok kvað þat mundu fyrir liggja, þegar hann hefði aldr til, at honum væri fengin herskip*”.²⁴⁵ Another example from *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* reveals the lack of an ethnic component, while also adding to the nebulous concept of the word. In chapter 7 of the saga, Gunnlaugur is referred to as an Icelander who sets sail to England and Norway, and King Ethelred is mentioned, plus the fact that England and the Nordic countries had intelligible languages before William the conqueror. While residing at the court of Olof Skötkonung, Gunnlaugur comes across three burly men and one demands a loan. Describing the individual, Olof tells Gunnlaugur that he is “*hinn mesti ránsmaður og víkingur*”.²⁴⁶ Evidently, the perception of what constituted a Viking among the Nordic people during the 9 to 11th centuries was fluid and not as stereotypical as in modern day medievalisms. Being a Viking was within the normative code of Scandinavian society, yet it was not a pejorative ethnic term.²⁴⁷

Nonetheless, the image of the Vikings within non-Scandinavian societies has traditionally followed the medievalism normative narrative of depicting Vikings as a

²⁴³ *Icelandic Online: Dictionary Entry for vík.* (n.d.). Retrieved October 3, 2013, from <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/IcelOnline/IcelOnline.TEId-idx?type=entry&eid=VIIK&q1=v%EDK>

²⁴⁴ Richards argues that “by the 13th century it was used in Icelandic Sagas to refer to pirates”, which according to the textual sources is not true. Richards, J. D. (2005). *The Vikings: A very short introduction* (p. 4). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Furthermore, as Jesse Byock points out the term could be utilized to those who were considered honorable by plundering other countries as well as those that plundered close to home.

²⁴⁵ “And Bera said Egill was one who was likely to become a Viking and that when he reached manhood that you would have a ship to wage war” *Egils saga*. (n.d.). Retrieved July 19, 2014, from <http://www.snerpa.is/net/isl/egils.htm>

²⁴⁶ *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu.* (n.d.). Retrieved July 19, 2014, from <http://www.snerpa.is/net/isl/gunnl.htm> “He is a great fiend and Viking”. In certain English translations, the word is not translated as Viking. I added this example after a fruitful discussion with Theo de Borba Moosburger, doctoral candidate, regarding the meaning of the word víkingur in the Old Norse source material. It does indeed seem indicate víkingur can often denote a personality trait or occupation rather than ethnicity.

²⁴⁷ Byock, J. L. (1982). *Feud in the Icelandic saga*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 12.

conquering horde or as psychopathic pagans. In what is considered to be the first mention of the word Viking outside of Nordic narratives, the term “*wicinga cynn*” is used in the Anglo Saxon narrative *Widsith* that was written down in the Exeter book, while the narrative itself is considered to be a 7th - century work.²⁴⁸ Here, the connotations of the word Viking seems to be a synonym for ‘pirate’ but this is disputed, since as Chambers in his study of *Widsith* articulates that in Old English the word itself is indeed associated with piracy and refers specifically to Scandinavian pirates, but he adds that the word itself existed in Anglo-Saxon and denoted a warrior and was linked to the sea.²⁴⁹ To complicate the matter further, the two brothers of *Widsith*, Hroðulf and Hroðgar exist within the Anglo-Saxon and Old-Norse narrative traditions.²⁵⁰ In other historical sources the delineation of the terminology is more concise, for example writing in 1075 the chronicler Adam of Bremen described the Vikings as plunderers.²⁵¹ Adam was a magister and canon of the episcopal centre of Hamburg-Bremen and in the fourth book of his “On the Deeds of the bishops of Hamburg”, under the title *Descriptio insularum aquilonis*, he also described the periphery of the known world.²⁵² After briefly tracing the genealogy of the word Viking, it is now vital to see how the tropes associated with the people named Vikings came into existence.

4.2 The Viking invasion, Wagnerian Vikings and Victorian Vikings

The paradigmatic event that is associated with the Vikings, that is the attack on Lindesfarne, is the one that has become embedded within Western society, and from it

²⁴⁸ This is however problematic since the *Exeter Book* is a compilation containing the *Widsith* narrative; nonetheless its oral transmission is elusive and could be a cognate with the Old Norse word. Chambers, however, argues that the word Viking is not a loan word in Old English but rather a word that existed before the Viking Era. Furthermore, he argues that the word viking originally denoted warrior but it came associated with the sea quite early and he quotes the Anglo-Saxon poem *Exodus*, which hosted is in the Bodleian Library MS. Junius 11. In the poem the line appears as: “*sæwicingas ofer sealtne mersc*” which translated into Modern English means: the sea-warriors over the salty marsh.

²⁴⁹ Chambers, R. W. (1965). *Widsith: A study in old English heroic legend*. New York: Russell & Russell, p. 205

²⁵⁰ The brothers are said to have defeated the “*wicinga cynn*” in the *Widsith*, yet for example they are prominent figures in Old Norse literature and Hrothgar appears as a Viking in the film *The 13th Warrior*.

²⁵¹ In the Latin he writes: “*ipsi vero pyratae, quos illi wichingos appellant*”

Adamus: Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum. Retrieved January 12, 2014, from <http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/chrons/bremen.htm>

²⁵² *ibidem*

many medievalisms of Vikings sprung forth.²⁵³ However, as Peter Sawyer notes, “[i]f there was once a tendency to romanticize the exploits of the Vikings overseas, it is now more fashionable to regard them as the maligned and misunderstood victims of a Christian press, or as creatures of their time whose behavior was merely an extension of the normal Dark Age activity”.²⁵⁴ The episteme of Vikings has undergone various transmutations depending on the strategies employed. Nonetheless, the genealogy of the Vikings’s alterity as a violent ethnic identity has its origins in the events described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: in it the terrible portents of the millennium’s fear of apocalypse are described, including fantastical weather phenomena, dragons and, most importantly, the heathens that came to rape and slaughter. Further historiographical evidence of Viking raids can be found in the *The Annals of Saint-Vaast*, which describes the “Dani seu Nortmanni” marauding in the Western Frankish realm.²⁵⁵ In all of these chronicles, whether they be Irish, English, or German, the Danes and Norsemen, often interchangeable, or Vikings are referred to as *pagani* that are savage pirates that plunder and pillaging the realms.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, as Judith Jesch argues, chronicles such as the *Annales Xantenses* exhibit anxieties over the fact that “*multas feminas*” were being taken captive.²⁵⁷

Because, the Vikings seemed to have had such a traumatic effect on hearts and minds, some have argued that there was ethnic cleansing of Viking inhabitants in England, and some argue that the event known as the The Massacre of St Brice’s Day is

²⁵³ As I argue in this chapter, many cultural productions especially the films I discuss have some narratological technique to ‘announce’ the arrival of the Vikings; thus constantly reiterating a cultural trauma. History Channel’s *The Vikings*, incorporates this paradigmatic event within the narrative.

²⁵⁴ Sawyer, P. H. (1997). *The Oxford illustrated history of the Vikings*. Oxford [England: Oxford University Press

²⁵⁵ dMGH | Band | Scriptores [Geschichtsschreiber] | Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi (SS rer. Germ.) | [12]: Annales Xantenses et Annales Vedastini | Annales Vedastini. (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://www.dmgH.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00000764_00057.html?sortIndex=010%3A070%3A0012%3A010%3A00%3A00&sort=score&order=desc&context=Annales+Vedastini+%28&divisionTitle_str=&hl=false&fulltext=Annales+Vedastini+%28

²⁵⁶ *ibidem*

http://www.dmgH.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00000764_00057.html?sortIndex=010%3A070%3A0012%3A010%3A00%3A00&sort=score&order=desc&context=Annales+Vedastini+%28&divisionTitle_str=&hl=false&fulltext=Annales+Vedastini+%28

I would like to thank my supervisor Joanna Szwed-Śliwowska for pointing out Christine Fell’s *Old English Wicing: A Question of Semantics*, in it Fell argues that the ethnic overtones associated with Vikings were not in existence before the invasions.

²⁵⁷ Jesch, J. (1991). *Women in the Viking age*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press.

one such instance and could be the influence of the massacre inflicted on the Vikings in the television show *The Vikings* (2013).²⁵⁸ In fact, the Vikings' alterity was not only emphasized within Western civilization. Although it is precarious to ascribe modern cognitive models to medieval scribes, Daniel Baraz has an adroit analogy when he states that "[t]he modern approximation of the Vikings is terrorism".²⁵⁹ As a social group, Vikings have often had the reputation of being terrorists. In addition 'the otherness' of the Vikings or their alterity was based on their pagan religious practices and the psychological warfare they waged on Latin Christendom.²⁶⁰ Not only did Vikings emerge from the periphery of the known world but they were considered peripheral entities. This can be seen within Islamic culture as well, since the traveller Ahmad ibn Fadlan, whose source material influenced the novel *Eaters of the Dead* which was adapted into the film *The 13th Warrior*, describes the Rus Vikings as follows: "the filthiest of Allah's creatures: they do not wash after shitting or peeing, nor after sexual intercourse, and do not wash after eating. They are like wayward donkeys".²⁶¹

Despite all these negative depictions of Vikings, the decisive medievalisms began in both Germany and England, or to quote Leslie Workman, "when the Middle Ages were perceived to have been something in the past, something it was necessary to revive or desirable to imitate".²⁶² This revival was immensely influential in the German states especially under the auspices of such cultural productions as Wagner's *Ring Cycle*. Combining elements and narrative themes of Teutonic and Nordic mythology with literary works, Wagner's operatic masterpiece helped to establish many tropes of

²⁵⁸ Baker, D. (1993). *England in the early middle ages*. Dallas, TX: Academia

This conjecture is contested in academia though since scholars have wanted to point out shifting social identities and ethnogenesis. This debate is discussed in Matthew Innes, "Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Allegiance, Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in Ninth and Tenth Centuries, pp. 65-88

²⁵⁹ Baraz, D. (2003). *Medieval cruelty: Changing perceptions, late antiquity to the early modern period*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

²⁶⁰ When I state Latin Christendom I have in mind Robert Bartlett's concept. Relations with the Russian and Greek churches made it pertinent as he argues; in fact it has an almost ethnic element and it is discursive term for people of Western Europe and this notion of Latin Christendom assisted in creating a "conceptual cohesion to groups of varied national origin and language". Bartlett, R. (1993). *The making of Europe: Conquest, colonization, and cultural change, 950-1350*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press
 Baraz, D. (2003). *Medieval cruelty: Changing perceptions, late antiquity to the early modern period*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

²⁶¹ Roesdahl, E. (1991). *The Vikings*. London: Allen Lane.

²⁶² *Studies in Medievalism*. (1979). Cambridge, England: D.S. Brewer

medievalism associated with the Vikings.²⁶³ Furthermore, as David E. Barclay postulates, German nationalism was intertwined with *Mittel-Alter Rezeption* because the re-discovery of the Middle Ages helped to foster and create a national German identity, which was especially important in light of Germany's political fragmentation and due to French occupation.²⁶⁴ This cultural appropriation eventually led to Nazi medievalism.²⁶⁵ It is important to point out that the visual culture assisted immensely in reinventing the Viking tradition and iconography; and this was not a sole project of Nazi Germany. It was systematically done in most Nordic countries, and especially in Norway under the Nasjonal Samling party of Quisling, as can be seen in figure 24.



Figure 24: This poster is from a gathering of Nasjonal Samlings' in Vestfold, Norway. The artist is anonymous.

Cultural appropriation of the Viking heritage was also quite prominent in Great Britain, and the Pre-Raphaelite painter Sir Frank Dicksee created one of the more iconic cultural productions of the Victorian age. The painting “Funeral of a Viking” (Figure 25) depicts

²⁶³ Lars Lönnroth summarizes this genealogy in a succinct and accurate manner when explaining the revival of Vikings within, at least in a positive light, popular culture: “Old Norse and early Germanic mythology achieved a new religious significance in the hands of Richard Wagner (1813-83). Things took a dangerous turn when such ideas began merging with Nietzsche's philosophy of superman, giving rise to the various racist ideas of German supremacy that culminated in the horrors of World War II”.

Sawyer, P. H. (1997). *The Oxford illustrated history of the Vikings*. Oxford [England: Oxford University Press

²⁶⁴ Workman, L. J. (1994). *Medievalism in Europe*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer

²⁶⁵ In her article on “Nazi Medievalist Architecture and the Politics of Memory”, Lisbet Koerner discusses Nazi architecture and its Neo-Viking motifs that functioned as pure Germanic answer to Weimar's corrupt modernity. *Ibidem*.

one of the culturally embedded ideas associated with the Vikings, that is to say the Viking burial tradition.²⁶⁶



Figure 25: Sir Frank Dicksee's Funeral of a Viking.

The intriguing aspect of this painting is that it encapsulates 19th - century medievalism and its various tropes: the classical dragon-shaped long ship and the heroic funeral pyre, as well as horned helmets – all Victorian inventions or referents established firmly by then.²⁶⁷ Moreover, the painting is a pastiche, conflating together elements from the Viking era and the Roman era.²⁶⁸ Most likely, Dicksee was influenced by the discovery of a Viking ship burial in 1893 in Gokstad (Norway), the same year the painting was revealed. In popular culture there is the sentiment that the “Victorians invented the Vikings”²⁶⁹ and constructed another layer of medievalism. In his seminal work *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Andrew Wahn discusses that during the Victorian era there was a notable interest in the Viking past: Viking Clubs were established and numerous aristocrats, along with adventurers, went to visit Iceland and its sagasteads.²⁷⁰ This interest did not abate until it was cast asunder in the shadow of the first World War. During the Victorian age the

²⁶⁶ In the film *The Vikings* (1958), the director ‘authentically’ recreated this ritual at great monetary expense, recalling to mind what I have discussed regarding authenticity and historicity.

²⁶⁷ Indeed, the ship’s overexaggerated dragon prow itself is more of medievalism than fact when compared to archaeological finds such as the Skuldelev ships, which were excavated in 1962 and which are now housed in Roskilde Museum in Denmark or the Oseberg ship in Norway.

²⁶⁸ <http://www.manchestergalleries.org/the-collections/search-the-collection/display.php?EMUSESSID=0c3cc41e0d192b86608ed357b3455662&irn=3502>

²⁶⁹ Wahn, A. (2000). *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the old north in nineteenth-century Britain* (p. 3). Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

²⁷⁰ Lars Lönnroth mentions that this was common in Scandinavia as well.

Sawyer, P. H. (1997). *The Oxford illustrated history of the Vikings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

marginal status of Iceland offered world-weary travellers solace and, “romance in the days of steam”, but it also offered a founding myth for many in Great Britain and in the English speaking world. The writer A.J. Symington described the commonality of the Viking heritage to Britain in the following manner: “whilst the Germans are a separate branch of the Great Gothic family, very unlike us in many aspects. Britain has certainly built heroically on its Viking inheritance: it has an empire on which the sun never sets; its great seamen from Drake to Nelson are chips off the old Viking block”.²⁷¹ As can be seen from such sentiments, when constructing a national identity both Germany and Great Britain made use of literature and visual art to reaffirm social cohesion and collective identities; or, in the terminology of Eric Hobsbawm, both nations made ample reference to “invented traditions”,²⁷². This tradition would indeed continue in American cinema, yet it was to emerge in the aforementioned dyadic manner, since there were different narrative agendas that helped establish the genealogy of American national identity and support a racial construct.

4.3 Early Portrayals of Vikings in Cinema

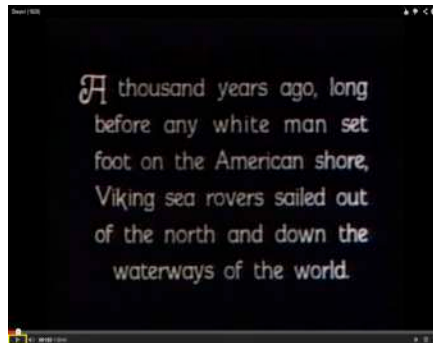


Figure 26: Vikings as the ‘Other’ in the film *The Viking*.

One of the earliest portrayals of Vikings is in the aptly named film *The Viking* (1928). The story centers around Alwin, a Northumbrian prince who has been taken captive by the Vikings who transport him back to Norway, where he becomes the thrall of Helga.

²⁷¹ Wawn, A. (2000). *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the old north in nineteenth-century Britain* (p. 28). Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

²⁷² The concept stems from the following work, Hobsbawm, E. J., & Ranger, T. O. (1983). *The Invention of tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Helga has grown up under the protection of Leifur the Lucky and, also taken part in raids with him along with Egil the black, the sailing master. Alwin becomes Helga's slave, much to the chagrin of Egil who is infatuated with her. Egil tries to pester Alwin and get rid of him.²⁷³ Fortunately, for Alwin, Leifur admires his fortitude and Leifur also bests Egil in fair combat, and spares his life because of Helga. Shortly afterwards, Leifur is at king Ólafur's court discussing his plans to sail beyond Greenland, while also converting to the Christian faith. Ólafur is pleased with Leifur and blesses his journey. All of the aforementioned protagonists sail towards Greenland, where Eiríkur the Red resides. Eiríkur is Leifur's father, and adamantly opposed to Christianity, which is heavily emphasized by the film, since Eiríkur slays a Christian man in his hall for wearing a cross. Upon arriving in Greenland, Leifur admits to his mother Þórhildur and his father that he is love with Helga. Egil overhears this and decides to utilize rifts within Leifur's group by spreading discord among the men by pointing out that Leifur is a Christian and making him confess this at Eiríkur's home. This leads to a dramatic confrontation between Eiríkur and Leifur, which ends up with Leifur fleeing with his men and stolen grain to the ship. On the way to North America, Leifur wishes to wed Helga, and Egil cannot control himself, he loses his all self-control and tries to attack Helga. Alwin manages to stop him but is injured, Leifur then proceeds to fight Egil and impales him. After slaying Egil, Leifur sees Helga leaning over Alwin, thus discovering that they are in love. Leifur reacts angrily but forgives them.

During the voyage there are numerous shots and scenes that call to mind "Leif's embrace of the Christian God – the camera keeps cutting to a crucifix over the doorway to the ship's hold and Leifur's cabin".²⁷⁴ The denouement of the narrative is then resolved by having Leifur plant a cross into the ground, thus creating a national founding myth which is emphasized by the intertitles that state "[a]nd the first white man set foot on the shores of the New World".²⁷⁵ The film then concludes with Leifur establishing contact with natives, or as they are called in the Old Norse sources, "*skrælingjar*". Leifur

²⁷³ These scenes have an intertextual connection the 1958 film *The Vikings*, where a similar motif is part of the narrative.

²⁷⁴ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, p. 116.

²⁷⁵ Lunde, A. O. (2010). *Nordic exposures: Scandinavian identities in classical Hollywood cinema*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, p. 25.

confers crosses on to them and the film ends with a patriotic rendition of the Star Spangled Banner and the claim that the Vikings built a tower that is still visible in New Port, Rhode Island.

Obviously, *The Viking* is an ideological construction for cinematic nation building because, as the scholar Arne Lunde points out, the scene of Leifur and his men arriving in Vinland appropriates tropes from an iconic American painting, John Vanderlyn's *Landing of Columbus*.²⁷⁶ Furthermore, the iconic status of Columbus is invoked and deleted by having the first 'white' or Anglo Saxon or *a race nordique* lay claim to America. The followings images in figures 27 and 28 depict the visual and cultural appropriation of Columbus in *The Viking*.



Figure 27: Leifur arrives to North America in *The Viking* (1928). He is the first 'white man' to arrive since he is Christian.



Figure 28: John Vanderlyn's *Vanderlyn's Landing of Columbus* (1846).

Despite this fact the Vikings are still depicted as 'Others' as can be seen in the intertitle in figure number 26, which was previously mentioned. One can see there is a problematic matter at hand, since it is established that the Vikings are possibly not 'white', or as Haydock argues this is "an unique problem in constructing 'the Other'".²⁷⁷ To conceptualize this dilemma it might help to point out that the film itself is based on the novel *The Thrall of Leif the Lucky: A Story of Viking Days*, which is loosely based on *Eiríks saga Rauða*. The novel reveals many traits of Victorian medievalism, which are exemplified in the following passage:

²⁷⁶ Lunde, A. O. (2010). *Nordic exposures: Scandinavian identities in classical Hollywood cinema*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

²⁷⁷ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages* (p. 118). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

I owe also the love that I have come to bear the heroic Viking-age, — rough and brutal, if you will, yet instinct with such purity and truth and power as befits the boyhood of the mighty Anglo-Saxon race. [...] The Anglo-Saxon race was in its boyhood in the days when the Vikings lived. Youth's fresh fires burned in men's blood; the unchastened turbulence of youth prompted their crimes, and their good deeds were inspired by the purity and wholeheartedness and divine simplicity of youth. For every heroic vice, the Vikings laid upon the opposite scale an heroic virtue.²⁷⁸

Evidently, to paraphrase Symington, the Vikings are indeed cinematically, a problematic chip off the old Anglo-Saxon block. However, despite Harty's analysis of *The Viking*, it is not the Christian that is the 'Other' in this film but the Vikings.²⁷⁹ In fact it is the pagan elements of the Viking which function as 'the Other'. In the source material, or in *Eiríks saga Rauða*, Leifur receives a request from Ólafur "hinn helgi" Tryggvason "*ok skaltu þangat fara með erindum mínum, at boða þar kristni. Leifr kvað hann ráða skyldu, en kveðst hyggja, at þat erendi myndi torflutt á Grænlandi*".²⁸⁰ The request is the main thematic strand in both the book and film. In the film, pagan Vikings are indeed portrayed as 'the Other' since they fulfill the stereotypical trope of Viking associated medievalisms, namely that they are utter barbarians by attacking innocent British settlements. The portrayal of pagan Vikings in *The Viking* belongs to Eco's "shaggy medievalism", and they are depicted as the "dark other of our historical past",²⁸¹ whereas Helga connotes the romantic medievalism of Eco, since Wagner's *Ride of The Valkyries* accompanies many of her scenes and since she stays behind with Alwin to form a Germanic and Anglo-Saxon founding myth of America. In addition, Arne Lunde takes the argument further when he mentions that the Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg's "The Triumphal March" is frequently used in the film, thus invoking the national founding myth by bridging together this piece and "The Star Spangled Banner" and

²⁷⁸ Liljencrantz, O. A. (1902). *The thrall of Leif the Lucky: A story of Viking days*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co, p. 5.

²⁷⁹ "The other here is then the Christian, and in the end the Christian triumphs over the pagan". Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages* (p. 119). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

²⁸⁰ "and you shall go there and do my bidding and spread the Christian faith. Leifur says he will undertake this take, however he thinks it will be a difficult feat to accomplish in Greenland" (My own translation for *Eiríks saga Rauða*).

²⁸¹ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages* (p. 166). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

solidifying the Germanic/Anglo-Saxon/Nordic founding myth of America.²⁸² In this manner, *The Viking* can resolve the problematic dichotomy of Vikings as barbarians and genetically related founding heroes: through Christianity. Because, as Lunde also points out rightly, the leitmotif of Grieg bridges the Nordic tradition to Christianity since the piece is based on the heroic myth of Sigurðr Jórsalafari, a king of Norway in the 12th century who went crusading.²⁸³

The film portrays the pagan Vikings as barbarians quite visibly by having Alwin's sister pray while the intertitles display the ominous prayer "and from all other manner of evil, protect us, O Lord". Shortly afterwards, Alwin along with his mother inspect their surroundings to see what is going on and they see the wrath of the Northmen, while the following intertitle (Figure 29) reveals their reactions:



Figure 29: The Vikings are so horrid that barbaric otherness must be emphasized. This intertitle has many intertextual connections with other depictions, e.g. *Asterix and The Vikings*.

The intertitle demonstrates how ruthless the Vikings are especially since it is used in the Aristotelian narrative manner of not displaying violence on the stage, or in this case on the screen. We see the protagonist's mother scream and the fear in his own eyes, while the intertitles emphasize this fear. The ferocious and horrible nature of the Vikings is a defining trope of the medievalism associated with Vikings. It is important to note that

²⁸² Lunde, A. O. (2010). *Nordic exposures: Scandinavian identities in classical Hollywood cinema* (p. 35). Seattle: University of Washington Press. Lunde points out that sentiments of New-England Norsemen in historical and literary sources in the 19th century making this direct connection was quite prolific. Among these sources Lunde makes note of the renowned poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Lunde mentions an intriguing piece of verse by John Greenleaf Whittier in the poem "Norsemen", where Whittier mentions blue eyed, blonde Vikings sailing to Massachusetts.

²⁸³ Lunde, A. O. (2010). *Nordic exposures: Scandinavian identities in classical Hollywood cinema* (p. 23). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Leif Eiríksson does not resort to violence despite the fact that Helga and Alwin are in love, unlike Egil. Indeed, this trope of Viking barbarism is depicted in *Asterix and The Vikings*. A young man runs hysterically into the village whilst Asterix and Obelix are physically abusing the Romans. The young man informs his interlocutors of the landing of the Vikings through a hysterical speech: “Help, they are coming. They are landing. The Vikings are landing on the beach. We have to tell the others before it is too late. We have to go. What are you waiting for?”, and replying to Asterix the young man says: “Aren’t you listening to me? Don’t you know who the Vikings are?” Obelix retorts by saying “Sure, they are ruthless, savage warriors who destroy everything in their path”. This often repeated medievalism of cinema is a staple of visual and interactive culture in general as can be seen on the videogame cover of the famous medieval game series *Medieval Total War* (Figure 30).



Figure 30: From the massively popular computer game series *Medieval Total War*.

Just like in the film *The Viking*, the videogame and the animated film *Asterix and the Vikings* accentuate the otherness of the Vikings through visual cues such as their clothes, and by depicting their ferocious nature, a common trope of medievalism associated with Vikings.²⁸⁴ The barbaric nature of the Vikings is displayed in further detail later on in the film *The Viking* when Alwin discovers his mother’s sewing apparel, indicating her violent demise, thereby depicting how vile the Vikings are through simple visual coda.

Another frequent trope associated with Vikings through medievalism is a scene displaying them drinking heavily, or scenes depicting their drinking prowess. This trope

²⁸⁴ One of the opening intertitles in *The Viking* is the following paragraph: “Plundering – ravaging – they raided the coast of Europe – until the whole world trembled at the very name – THE VIKING”.

is depicted in numerous cinematic, and visual, representations of Vikings; including *The Vikings* (1958), *The 13th Warrior* (1999) and the new television series *Vikings* (2013). An additional closely associated trope and medievalism regarding Vikings is their feral appearance which is described in sources and depicted especially in visual representations, even within the Byzantine empire Vikings were ‘othered’, as can be seen in this illumination from the Madrid Skylitzes manuscript.²⁸⁵ The illumination depicts the Varangians in the winter of 1034 and relates how one of the Varangians tried to force himself onto the pious woman, for which he had to repent by giving his clothes to her.²⁸⁶ (Figure 31).



Figure 31: Skylitzes ms. fol.208

This feral depiction of Vikings is quite striking when it is compared to source material of a fairly contemporary account to Skylitzes. In *Laxdæla Saga*, Bolli Bollason, a Varangian, in Iceland is described in the following manner: “*Allir voru þeir listulegir menn en þó bar Bolli af. Hann var í pellsklæðum er Garðskonungur hafði gefið honum. Hann hafði ysta skarlatskápu rauða. Hann var gyrður Fótbít og voru að honum hjölt gullbúin og meðalkaflinn gulli vafiður*”.²⁸⁷ This rakish description of Bolli from medieval

²⁸⁵ If one examines other illuminations one can see depictions of ‘ethnic markers’, either through clothes or facial features, lending credence to a physiognomy interpretation.

²⁸⁶ Blöndal mentions that væringi or Varangians is taken from the Old Norse word *vár* meaning faith. Sigfús, B., & Benedikz, B. S. (1978). *The Varangians of Byzantium: An aspect of Byzantine military history* (p. 68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Furthermore, Anna Comnena princess of Byzantine mentions the fidelity of these Vikings/Varangians in book two of the *Alexiad*: “The Varangians, too, who carried their axes on their shoulders, regarded their loyalty to the Emperors and their protection of the imperial persons as a pledge and ancestral tradition, handed down from father to son, which they keep inviolate and will certainly not listen to even the slightest word about treachery”. *Internet History Sourcebooks*. (n.d.). Retrieved December 20, 2013, from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/AnnaComnena-Alexiad00.asp>

²⁸⁷ All of the men were distinguished although Bolli was even more so. He was in fur-coat that the king of Kievan Rus’ gave him. He also wore had scarlet cape and had Footbiter sheathed, which was decorated richly with gold. (My translation). In *Hrafnkels saga Freyrsgoða* there is also a fanciful description of the character Þorkell Þjóstarson who has just returned after seven years in the realm of Byzantium.

source material conflicts with the medievalisms associated with Vikings. A typical medievalism in depicting Vikings in visual culture can be seen in the picture below: Vikings are portrayed as feral, hairy and vicious barbarians. This iconological depiction has become the customary portrayal of Vikings. Another intervisual example would be the Minnesota Vikings logo, which is an interesting example since this region of North America was populated by Scandinavian settlers and it depicts the classical tropes of a Viking: horns, blonde and long hair, as well as bountiful facial hair. Nonetheless, the development of Viking representations was codified and transformed by the film *The Vikings* (1958).

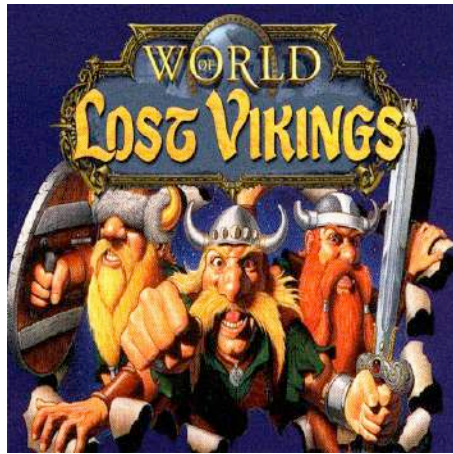


Figure 32: A prominent medievalism: the feral and hairy Viking. From the videogame series *The Lost Vikings*.

4.4 Post-war Viking Cinematic Spectacles: fissures and medievalisms

The Viking was an experimental film since it showcased the technological wonder of Technicolor, an innovation ushered in by the innovator Herbert Kalmus, which was later to dominate the Hollywood screens. The film's paradigm of depicting Vikings in conjunction with American founding myth, while also incorporating new cinema technologies is a feature it shares with *The Long Ships* and *The Vikings*. However, before analyzing these two medievalism touchstones of cinematic representations of Vikings, I wish to discuss Roger Corman's *The Viking Women and the Sea Serpent* and give a brief synopsis. The film commences with a shot of leather-bound book, lending the film a

literary-historical connection since the next shot reveals a caption of the book's title, which is *The Saga of The Viking Women and their Voyage to the Waters of the Great Sea Serpent*.²⁸⁸ Immediately at the beginning of the film, the audience is treated to an omniscient narrator who speaks of the times before the gods had abandoned the race of men.²⁸⁹ Meanwhile, there is a 'medieval' map depicting monstrous sea creatures, often in the form of a sea serpent/dragon.²⁹⁰ Moreover, a very similar map appears in *The Viking* when Leif Eiríksson is discussing his voyage with king Ólafur Helgi.²⁹¹ This is a common feature in cinematic representations of the Middle Ages, the dangerous and barbaric medievalism of the period. This medievalism is made even more apparent in the paracinematic advertisement poster from the film.²⁹² (Figure 33)



Figure 33: A cinema poster of *Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*.

²⁸⁸ I keep the the spelling as depicted in the film since it hints at the filmmaker's attempt at lending more credence to the film with this visual depiction. This is common in Hollywood films as I mention this in the second chapter regarding 'authenticity', especially in connection the introduction of *Ironclad*.

²⁸⁹ Indeed, this invokes up immediate association with the Tolkien mythological medieval world, and the analogous Ainur. In fact I argue for polysemy in the instance of this film since it has been 'canonized' as a cult classic by being depicted in Mystery Science Theatre 3000 with a voiceover, with the initial scene or map I analyse, being referenced to Tolkien's Rivendell.

²⁹⁰ This is a very common trope in cinematic representations of Vikings. It is vital to mention that Miðgarðsormur is an important element of Nordic mythology and it encircled the known world. There are manuscript illuminations of this creature, including in *Flateyjarbók* or *Codex Flateyensis*., the provenance of which can be traced back to the 14th century. It later ended up within the Royal Library of Copenhagen. The manuscript includes the history of Norwegian kings, *Grænlandinga saga*, along with *Eiríks saga rauða* constitutes the *Vinland sagas*. Nonetheless, cartographers depicted sea-creatures on maps, most likely influenced by Pliny the Elder through Greek sources and his own writing. However, our cognitive outlook might limit us especially since what we visualize as fantastical medievalisms or logical fallacies are within the context of the 'medieval time' actually images of real animals. For a more detailed understanding of sea monsters within the intellectual tradition, see the article "A Ketos in Early Athens: An Archaeology of Whales and Sea Monsters in the Greek World" John K. Papadopoulos and Deborah Ruscillo *American Journal of Archaeology* , Vol. 106, No. 2 (Apr., 2002) , pp. 187-227

²⁹¹ The map that they glance at, and which is seen in a close-up shot, has "sea creatures" thus giving it an 'authenticity', of being a 'medieval map'.

²⁹² Paracinematic and paratexts invoke the same concept here.

Incidentally, the question of locating this particular type of medievalism within the cultural tradition is an intriguing Sisyphean task. One can trace this medievalism from such famous Scandinavian sources as Olaus Magnus' *Carta marina* and *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, published in 1539 and 1555.²⁹³

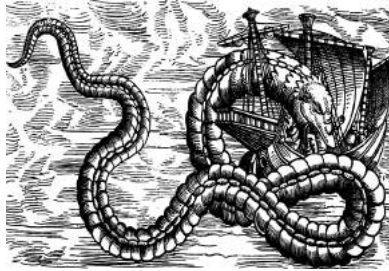


Figure 34: From Olaus Magnus' *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*.



Figure 35: Olaus Magnus' *Carta marina*, the sǫormur or sea orm.

In all three illustrations (Figure 33, 34, 35), the intertextual idea of a sea serpent is paramount, and indeed in initial narrative scenes of *The Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*, there is a sea (w)orm depicted on a map with the Northern sea labeled as the unknown seas. This cognitive world-view of the vastness of the sea and its horrors can be traced back to such primary sources such Adam from Bremen who states “*Post Nortmanniam, quae est ultima aquilonis provintia, nichil invenies habitacionis humanae, nisi terribilem visu et infinitum oceanum, qui totum mundum amplectitur*”.²⁹⁴ However, after the film narrator's exposition the diegetic world is introduced and the audience discovers that the men of the land have left and have not returned, so that the women are *in media res*, deciding by vote whether or not to search for them. Of course, as is common in cinematic representations of Vikings, their marginal and barbaric ways are depicted, as the women vote by throwing spears at a tree, thereby creating a paradigmatic scene analogous to *The Vikings* (1958), where the verdict is established by throwing an

²⁹³ In the case of Iceland, Olaus Magnus' cartography was utilized until the release of Bishop Gudbrandur Þorláksson's map of Iceland in 1590. Whereas there were less fantastical elements in Þorláksson's map, there were still sea creatures.

²⁹⁴ *Adamus: Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*. Retrieved January 16, 2014, from <http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/chrons/bremen.htm>

This “Dragon of the North” or sea-(w)orm is a plot element in *Erik the Viking*, although it is being deconstructed there, which I discuss later in this chapter.

axe at a female who is accused of infidelity.²⁹⁵ However, in *The Viking Women and the Sea Serpent* there is a subversion of the patriarchal mode, since the females are left alone with only a single male on the island. The women decide to leave their land since they see an omen, in the form of a cloud that looks like a Viking long ship. After being attacked by the sea serpent at sea, the Viking women end up on an island. The island is inhabited by the Grimaults, who capture the women. The women discover that this tribe has also enslaved their men. One of the Viking women, Inga, turns out to be a traitor since she wishes to win the heart of Vedric, who is married to Desir. However, they all manage to escape with the assistance of Inga in the end.

Indeed, this film follows few of the patterns established by *The Viking* and later by *The Vikings*. Some tropes that are within the film (such as the ferocious warrior stereotype) are also indicative of the women, since Desir bests Stark's son Seyna. At first glance *The Viking Women and the Sea Serpent* may seem to be a paraleptic text within the framework of the 'Other', however, it is crucial to have in mind the socio-cultural background of the film. Indeed, the epistemological background of the interpretive community would most likely have 'othered', the female characters, since they are frequently portrayed as sexually aggressive and assertive in a society that was/is oriented towards conservative female cinematic roles. By having the females as Viking women the discursive space of the film positions *The Viking Women and the Sea Serpent* firmly under the rubrics of medievalism, because as Vikings they can function outside the normative social practices.²⁹⁶

The paradigm established by *The Viking* continues with Kirk Douglas' *The Vikings*. However, before discussing it in detail, I will give a short synopsis. The Viking Ragnar Lóðbrók kills the king of Northumbria in a *viking* raid. The king has an unknown heir who is kidnapped by the Vikings. This unknown heir is named Erik (Tony Curtis) who is taken into *fóstur* (or adopted) by Ragnar; nonetheless Erik's half-brother Einar Ragnarsson (Kirk Douglas) despises his brother. Conspiring with his father Ragnar, Einar

²⁹⁵ This scene indicates a practice that reminds the viewer of medieval witch-hunting; if the woman is innocent she will not be killed whether her innocence is proved by axe, fire or water.

²⁹⁶ Finke and Shichtman argue differently, but they point out the hermeneutics. At its reception, it would be a mainly adolescent audience thus this transgression of the normative has more sexual undertones in a repressive sociocultural environment. Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

raids a ship and steals Princess Morgana (Janet Leigh); their plan is to use her as a pawn against Aella, while Lord Egbert, who is an exile, discovers Erik's heritage due to the pommel from the regal sword of Northumbria. Erik elopes with Morgana although she is betrothed to Aella, Erik's cousin and current regent of Northumbria. Einar and Ragnar give chase, but a storm wrecks Ragnar's ship and Ragnar is taken alive by Aella only to be executed.²⁹⁷ Aella also dismembers Erik's hand and casts him adrift. Erik miraculously arrives back to Einar and persuades him to invade Northumbria. Both brothers then storm the castle, and there is a dramatic duel between them in the end, leading to Einar's death and a Viking funeral.

Following the narratological structure of many cinematic representations, *The Vikings* commences with a prologue that lends credence to the 'authenticity' of the film by having a medieval artifact association invoked by referencing the Bayeux Tapestry in the vignette at the beginning of the film.²⁹⁸ Similar to *The Viking Women and the Sea Serpent*, the prologue to *The Vikings* also makes use of an omniscient narrator who states that the Vikings "spread a reign of terror then unequalled in violence and brutality in all the records of history".²⁹⁹ The alterity of the Vikings is maintained with other forms of medievalism, such as the rhetorical phrasing "The Vikings. It's the Vikings", which is uttered when Einar is raiding or when the Vikings come to Northumbria. Furthermore, *The Vikings'* narrator, Orson Welles, elaborates further on this medievalism trope of the barbaric Viking by quoting from the English Book of Prayer: "protect us from the wrath of the Northmen" as depicted in Figure 36.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ The poem *Krákumál* is a dramatic retelling of Ragnar Lóðbrók's adventures while he lies dying in Aella's pit of snakes. There is indeed intertextuality and intervisuality since the television show *Vikings* displays Aella's pit of snakes because he executes a captain of his men for failing to defeat Ragnar Lóðbrók, his brother and their men, whereas in the film *The Vikings*, Ragnar dies willingly with a sword in his hand from Erik, in order to enter Valhalla, in a pit of wolves.

²⁹⁸ The sea worm motif is also seen in this prologue. The tapestry is a motif also used in *Ironclad* and *The Long Ships*. Scholars such as Amy Francois de la Breteque have discussed the frequency in which it appears in medieval films.

²⁹⁹ In fact the Vikings are so embedded into the social-cultural memory as violent marauders that even the British Museum invokes this medievalism by advertising their newest 2014 exhibition under the tagline "The Vikings are coming", which is a trope of medievalism that *The Viking* also invoked, including the medieval world view that the world is flat.

³⁰⁰ The musical score by Mario Nascimbene also highlights this by having a piece called "Violences and Rapes of the Vikings".



Figure 36: *The Vikings* ‘Tapestry’

The film itself begins *in media res* with the Ragnar attacking King Edwin and raping Enid the queen.³⁰¹ Nonetheless, none of the Vikings are depicted in the traditional medievalism manner of having Viking helmets or horns, contrary to popular historical belief, which can still be seen in cultural productions such as *Wikie De Viking* from 2009. However, what helps demarcate *The Vikings* from *The Viking* and the lesser-known *Erik, il vichingo* (1965) is not only the Vinland connection, but the thematic difference. As Harty rightly points out, *Erik, il vichingo* is a film that engages with the cold war in its discursive space since “the film has its heroes unflinchingly embrace democratic rather than autocratic ideals of government”,³⁰² whereas in *The Vikings* the prestige of invented tradition is not invoked or, as explained by Hobsbawm and Ranger:

invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.³⁰³

In *The Vikings* a paradigm shift beginning to form within the genre of Viking cinematic tradition. Instead of portraying Vikings, at least pagan ones, as barbaric ‘Others’ there is a gradual shift to portraying them as more benign swashbucklers.³⁰⁴ *The Vikings* is more oriented towards cinematic entertainment and less toward nationalistic narrative strategies, as Kirk Douglas himself said: “It really was a Western set in the days of

³⁰¹ This scene is later deconstructed in *Erik the Viking*.

³⁰² Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages* (p. 23). Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁰³ In *Vikings*, Vikings are less of a social group and more of a topic to utilize technology and tell formulaic stories. There is less concern with ethnicity and more on swashbuckle tradition. Hobsbawm, E. J., & Ranger, T. O. (1983). *The Invention of tradition* (p. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁰⁴ Derek Elley points out in *The Epic Film: Myth and History* that Vikings take on the roles of swashbucklers rather than epic heroes. Elley, D. (1984). *The epic film: Myth and history*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Vikings”.³⁰⁵ In fact, as Kathleen Coyne Kelley argues, it is vital to bear in mind that this film was shot in Technicolor, which was primarily used for musicals, costume adventures, animated films and fantasies. She rightly points out that this helps demarcate the reel world from the real world.³⁰⁶ This is also a contextual link to the film *The Viking*, the first film to utilize this technology,³⁰⁷ which is important to note since *The Vikings* makes an effort in visualizing an authentic portrayal of the Norwegian fjords as advertised in the trailer (Figure 37).³⁰⁸



Figure 37: A screenshot from the trailer of *The Vikings*.

This technological fetishism exhibited by advertising Scandinavian scenery is a feature that *The Vikings* (1958) shares along with its spiritual forbear *The Viking*.³⁰⁹ In the former case it is due to the immense competition to television’s immense growth, and in the latter case the imperative of selling cinema to the burgeoning middle class of the time. However, one must also have in mind the Horatian dictum “ut pictura poesis” and the causal historical link and inter-textuality of the British-American literary heritage since, as argued earlier, there had been a cultural appropriation and the nature topos assists in depicting the Vikings and their habitat in an emotive manner. A famous literary example

³⁰⁵ As quoted in the essay “The Trope of the Scopic in *The Vikings* (1958)” from Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

³⁰⁶ “The Trope of the Scopic in *The Vikings* (1958)” from Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁰⁷ Kelley unfortunately does not point this crucial point in her essay.

³⁰⁸ It is important to note that a television series was later produced based on the film, which evidently did not market itself on this accuracy-authenticity axis.

³⁰⁹ The musical leitmotifs by the composer Mario Nascimbene underline this emphasis on ‘authenticity’ of the landscape and the film itself by having the thematic leitmotif play whilst the Vikings arrive to the fjord with numerous wide angle and close-up shots; meanwhile the diegetic scene takes over a minute, from 10:49 to 12:06. This emphasis on the authenticity of the location does not include Einar’s introduction and ride to greet Ragnar and the crew.

of medievalism is Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poetry. As Geraldine Barnes notes, Longfellow took inspiration from regional landmarks and the nature of New England to create a romantic reconstruction of the Viking past.³¹⁰ Whereas in *The Vikings*, the 'authenticity' of location shooting and costume design helps lend credence to the medievalism of the cinematic representation of the Vikings; but the 'othering' framework is different.

In her essay on *The Vikings*, Kelley examines both the trailer and the film and she mentions the hyperbolic non-diegetic narrator announcing: "[f]or the first time, the saga of the mighty Viking hordes, who swept across the world, breaking every commandment of heaven and earth as they put an age to the torch". As is usual in post war cinema, the medievalism of the barbaric Viking is constituted in the trailer. However, Kelly does not point out crucial detail mentioned in the trailer, which is "[t]here were no women except women taken in battle". This utterance has no claim outside conventional Hollywood narrative strategies, since this is a typical trope of medievalism or "the shaggy Middle Ages", where women are depicted as either maidens or hyper-pious religious figures, unless they are witches. Furthermore, it creates a lacuna in with regard to Scandinavian women. This normative paradigm is so common in visual representations that when the HBO series *Game of Thrones* makes a meta-self-reference to this gender trope through the song "The Bear and the Maiden Fair", the song ceases to be a medieval ribald tune but rather becomes a jarringly self-reference to this tradition, which G.R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones* turns on its head. Because not only does Brienne of Tarth best one of the greatest swordsmen in Westeros, that is to say Jaime Lannister, she also saves his life numerous times since she is "the bear" and Jaime is "the maiden fair". Furthermore, a quick analysis of medieval source material in Old Norse reveals gender roles were not as static as the medievalisms in fiction and depicted on the screen in *The Vikings*. For instance, in *Brennu-Njáls saga* Hallgerður langbrók exhibits extensive power through her social network and manipulates many individuals. She even accuses her husband, Gunnar á Hlíðarenda, of being a coward and sodomite when she says to him: "*Jafnkomíð mun á*

³¹⁰ Barnes, G., & Barnes, G. (2001). *Viking America: The First Millennium* (p. 125). Suffolk: D.S. Brewer

með ykkur Njáli er hvortveggi er blauður“.³¹¹ In addition, in the medieval law codes of Iceland sanctified in Grágas or Grey Goose Laws, numerous stipulations reveal that Icelandic medieval females had a higher status than the medievalisms often displayed. There are a myriad of other examples including Auður djúpúðga, who appears in *Laxdæla Saga* and is prominent in other sagas. Auður is depicted as equal, and in many instances superior to men. Instead of depicting strong female characters in the film, there is a *lacuna* related to gender dynamics within *The Vikings*, which in turn constitutes a medievalism in the film.³¹² Within *The Vikings* the conventional Hollywood narrative depicts an ostensible agrarian idealism, albeit a savage one in the form of the Viking society. As can be from the screen shots below, the heteronormative conventional narrative of Hollywood depicts a patriarchal system, thus ascribing to the medievalism of that Viking society was barbaric and hyper masculinity was the dominant form of gender politics.³¹³ On the first film still taken from *The Vikings*, females are denigrated in Viking society and in the second caption, from *Tarkan versus the Vikings* (dir. Mehmet Arlsan, 1971), this element of medievalism associated with the Vikings can be seen to have benefitted from intervisuality with *The Vikings*. However, Nordic source material shows this to be a medievalism and factual error that helps exhibit the Vikings alterity.



Figure 38: A Viking woman has her honor tested in *The Vikings*.



Figure 39: This still is taken from the Turkish film *Tarkan versus the Vikings*.

In *The Vikings* there are various other visual markers that help create a sense of

³¹¹ “Now you and Njáli are both the same, cowards/homosexuals.” *Blauður* could mean coward and homosexual in Old Norse, whereas in the context of the saga, Hallgerður is making an explicit reference to the close friendship of Njáli and Gunnar. Njáli’s manliness is questioned numerous times throughout the saga including by Flosi Þórðarson.

³¹² History Channel’s *The Vikings* female characters are closer to their medieval Scandinavian counterparts.

³¹³ Fleischer states, as Kelley points out as well, that this “game” was invented by the creators of the film. Fleischer, R. (Director). (1958). *The Vikings* [Motion picture]. United Artists.

authenticity,³¹⁴ thus also functioning as traditional medievalisms.³¹⁵ For instance, according to Scott McGee in order to achieve this ‘authenticity’ the monetary costs were:

[a] \$2.5 million budget doubled with the leasing of an entire Norwegian fjord, the construction of a full-scale Viking village, and design and production of a fleet of authentic longships copied from reproductions in museums. Further ballooning the budget were the transportation costs incurred from shuttling cast and crew to and from the remote set by a fleet of 17 PT boats.³¹⁶

Adjusting for inflation of the U.S. dollar the monetary costs alone for these cinematic props would have been \$20,151,989.62 dollars in 2013. Other examples of authentic medievalism include the scene with Einar and a fellow Viking interlocutor named Ragnar, when his Ragnar says to Einar: “Do you want the English to think we are barbarians?” Adding further to this medievalism, Ragnar states to the exile Lord Egbert: “He is so vain of his beauty, he won’t let a man’s beard hide it. He scrapes his face like an Englishman.” Indeed, a common medievalism associated with the Vikings that also ‘others’ them is the sentiment that they were filthy, lecherous individuals and prodigious drinkers, and numerous cinematic and visual representations depict this sentiment, including *The Vikings*.³¹⁷ When meeting Lord Egbert at first, Einar takes a healthy sip of the English ale straight from the casket and heaves it a Lord Egbert, resulting in Ragnar’s remark mentioned earlier. In a sequence of shots, which are analogous to *The Viking* sequence of drinking and merriment, the Vikings make a toast to Óðinn with their

³¹⁴ Kelley argues that the violent aesthetic of the film was employed “in the name of historicity”. Nonetheless, historicity as a term is too limiting. Using the term ‘authenticity’ takes into account the accuracy debate along with the interpretive community; furthermore it includes the ‘invented tradition’. “The Trope of the Scopic in *The Vikings* (1958)” from Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

³¹⁵ On the DVD version of *The Vikings* there is a documentary called “A Tale of Norway” in which Fleischer the director states that: “Kirk Douglas ... and I decided ... to make this the most authentic picture the Vikings that had ever been made or could be made”. Kelley points out the commitment of the creators of this cultural product to verisimilitude but she also points that Douglas override the decisions of the experts; therefore as I argue medievalisms can function as authentic, while not being accurate, by meeting the expectations of the interpretive community.

³¹⁶ *The Vikings (1958) – Articles – TCM.com*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 12, 2014, from <http://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/17833/The-Vikings/articles.html>

³¹⁷ In the computer game *Skyrim*, which occurs within a fictitious fantasy world with *Skyrim* being portrayed as Scandinavian, taverns play an immense part of the world and often include drunkards, singing *skálds* and fighting.

drinking horns.³¹⁸ However, in a more recent incarnation of History Channel’s *Vikings* (2013), while Ragnarök is explaining his culture to the English monk, the audience can see Ragnar lóðbrók and a fellow Viking companion do not drink from such horns, therefore the material culture in this visual representation strays from the more formulaic Viking horn medievalism.



Figure 40: From the television show *Vikings*. One can ask if this is an example of less medievalism and more accuracy due the production source; thus the dilemma of accuracy versus authenticity is encapsulated in this scene.



Figure 41: From *The Vikings*. The drinking and debauchery of the Vikings. A common trope of medievalism.

Directly linked to this drinking or debauchery trope is the sequence of shots where one Viking is throwing axes at his wife, who is tied to a wooden circular board, as a test/judgement for infidelity. The intervisuality of this drinking trope is also seen in the film *The Long Ships*, although there it is tinted with an element of humor.³¹⁹ However, there is no gaiety in the depiction of Einar onscreen, or as Kelley puts it:

[i]n order to strengthen [Einar] as a rough violent Viking and emphasize the intensity and lust and desire for Morgana ... we developed a sequence of Einar bathing ... in a large barrel of beer with [six] youthful, attractive Viking girls during a festive orgy. Our research indicated this to be a rather mild behavior for Viking warriors accustomed to taking what they wanted. They obviously did not resort to modern social graces.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Admittedly, primary sources do indicate this practice, nonetheless the magnitude seems to have become exaggerated.

³¹⁹ I discuss this particular scene in *The Long Ships* in more detail later, it was crucial to point out this trope though in general. One can do a quick search on youtube and find there are scores of videos that subscribe to this trope.

³²⁰ “The Trope of the Scopic in *The Vikings* (1958)” from Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

In this passage, the medievalism associated with the Vikings can be confirmed in the correspondence between Geoffrey M. Shurlock, who was director of the Motion Picture Production Code before *The Vikings*' release, and the producer of the film, Jerry Bresler. Despite the fact that this is a deleted scene, it is indicative of medievalism sentiments,³²¹ especially Shurlock's reply: "it undoubtedly would be good news to audiences generally to learn that Vikings never took a bath of any kind whatsoever".³²² A perfunctory glance at Old Norse source materials reveal this is far from the truth. *Hungurvaka*, a medieval chronicle of the first five Icelandic bishops in the bishopric Skálholt reveals the practice of bathing in geothermal water, which is also described in numerous Old Norse sagas such as *Laxdæla*.³²³ Evidently, the film follows the normative discursive mode of cinematic medievalism in portraying Vikings.

The alterity of the Vikings is also demarcated in *The Vikings* through religion. One of the common thematic components with *The Viking (1928)*, *The Vikings (1958)* and the television series *Vikings (2013)* is the narrative framework of having a Christian male introduced to the pagan world of the Vikings, while their alterity is juxtaposed or stressed in comparison to the Christian belief system or world view. However, this is the opposite in *Prince Valiant* where the protagonist operates within the Christian world; nonetheless alterity of the Vikings is also achieved in the same manner as in the aforementioned films. In *The Vikings* Princess Morgana's Christianity is heavily emphasized since she is shown wearing a cumbersome cross. In addition her exchange with Erik is revealing: "what is your father's will compared to Óðinn's will? Do you know which of the oceans is the widest? The poison sea? No, the ocean between a Christian and a heathen". However, it must be restated that Erik is the offspring of

³²¹ *ibidem*.

³²² Recent academics such as have tried to combat this medievalism within popular culture. "It seems that the Vikings may not have been as hairy and dirty as is commonly imagined" ... "A medieval chronicler, John of Wallingford, talking about the eleventh century, complained that the Danes were too clean - they combed their hair every day, washed every Saturday, and changed their clothes regularly". Daily Mail discusses this guide from Cambridge University in detail here. *Vikings preferred male grooming to pillaging - Telegraph*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 16, 2014, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/3256539/Vikings-preferred-male-grooming-to-pillaging.html>

³²³ *Hungurvaka: sive, Historia primorum quinqve Skalholtensium in Islandia*: Internet Archive. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/hungurvakasiveh00unkngoog>

hybridity since he is born a Christian, and though raised as a pagan and is shown to identify with certain aspects of it he is not completely a pagan. Erik's narrative resolution follows the route of the majority of Viking cinematic representations where the nationalistic founding myth of cinema is maintained by having Christianity function as civilizing effect.³²⁴ This narrative strategy is evident since Einar's amorous overtures are displayed as barbaric, verging on rape. This is made even more explicit when Einar attacks the priest Godwin when finding Morgana in the Northumbrian castle tower, especially since it highlights the fact that Vikings are immoral pagans. Indeed, even the source material for *The Vikings*, which is Edson Marshall's novel *The Viking*, highlights this medievalism.



Figure 42: The novel *The Viking*, from which the screenplay for *The Vikings* is based on.

As can be read on the cover (Figure 42), the novel promises “an heroic saga of lust and conquest” with the appropriate medievalism expectations, including the stereotypical helmet. Despite the pulp fiction nature of the novel, one can, however, ignore Marshall's popular status as an author, since he, along with the interpretive community, helped solidify and shape these medievalisms.³²⁵ Therefore, both the novel and the film have

³²⁴ One can take into account the intertextuality of the film *Prince Valiant* for example. Janet Leigh is basically functioning within the same narrative role in the role of Princess Aleta.

³²⁵ Discussing all aspects of medievalism of is a fraught project since as Kelley argues there is *mouvance* within the cinematic representations. For example, due to the degree of difference of censorship in different countries, audience members viewed different versions of the film *The Vikings*, therefore they would have different interpretations. Kelly names two examples: Einar stating he will make Morgana scream so she will be heard in Wales and the fact that the fidelity scene was removed. “The Trope of the Scopic in *The Vikings* (1958)” from Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

helped to shape the evolving medievalisms associated with the Vikings. A recent cinematic example would be Mel Brook's film *A History of The World*, which includes genuine footage from *The Vikings* yet provides an addendum in construction of Viking medievalism.



Figure 43: Pagan Vikings that have horns instead of horned helmets, or devils?

Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 43, Brooks creates a visual riff on the stereotype of horned helmets; yet this visual can also be read as statement of Vikings and their role within cultural productions. Vikings are so peripheral to Christianity that they can function as the demonic 'Other'.³²⁶

In contrast to *The Vikings* (1958), *The Long Ships* (Jack Cardiff, 1964) is a cinematic representation of Vikings that deviates from the narrative conventions in the previous films. It is quite conceivable that this narrative detour can be attributed to the fact that *The Long Ships* is based on novel *Red Orm* by Frans Gunnar Bengtsson, who was of Swedish origin. Despite belonging thematically along with the other films, since it operates within the framework of nationalism and medievalism as the novelist Michael Chabon declares in his introduction to the reissue of the novel,³²⁷ the novel and film are, however, different in many ways.³²⁸ Before discussing how *The Long Ships* differs from its cinematic predecessors it is crucial to delineate the medievalism framework it shares with them. To assist this analysis I will briefly summarize the film's plot. A majestic golden bell, named The Mother of Voices, is a monumental golden artifact. The Moorish

³²⁶ Prof. dr. Marco Mostert reminded me of the horned Moses. Mel Brooks could be making a many layered allusion in this scene.

³²⁷ Bengtsson, F. G., & Meyer, M. L. (2010). *The Long Ships*. New York: New York Review Book

³²⁸ I only mention the novel since it belongs to the same literary tradition from which the film *The Viking* and numerous other cultural productions have roots in; nonetheless it would be too cumbersome to include all aspects of the novel as well. Furthermore, my thesis is about visual representations of medievalism and how they function in regards to alterity and nationalism. Therefore, adaptation studies will not be mentioned.

king Aly Manush (Sidney Poitier) searches for it in vain, and is obsessed with finding it, since it is stated this golden bell was manufactured from the plunder of Christian armies in Islamic lands. Incidentally, the Viking Rolfe (Richard Widmark) is in his lands and is boasting of this legend. Rolfe is detained by Manush's men and almost tortured to reveal the whereabouts; however he escapes. Ragnar obtains a Viking ship and after a maelstrom, Rolfe and his men wind up in Moorish lands again and are captured by Manush and his men. Manush's wife Aminah advises Manush not to execute Rolfe in order to use his ship to find and obtain the mythical bell. Manush accompanies Rolfe and his men. They discover the bell and take it back. However, Harald has reached the Moorish land and conquered them in the meanwhile; a brief scurry ensues resulting in Manush being crushed under the enormous weight of the golden bell.

Thematically *The Long Ships* belongs to the oeuvre of films already mentioned. In the prologue to the film there is a narrator who adds a documentary aspect to the narrative along with it a sentiment of veracity, thus creating a thematic link to previous Viking films that stress 'authenticity'. When Rolfe manages to escape back to the north the scene has an iconological parallelism to *The Vikings*. *The Long Ships* invokes the famous fjord scenes of *The Vikings* with multiple camera shots of the longship arriving at the 'fjord',³²⁹ including numerous close up-shots of the ship and its keel. It is crucial to bear in mind intertextuality since the director of *The Long Ships*, Jack Cardiff, was the cinematographer for *The Vikings* and in lieu of the 'authenticity' of the fjords or topographical 'authenticity', more emphasis is given to the ship. Depicting such a 'fjord scene', or a Viking arrival, is a common trope that can also be seen in other cinematic representations of Vikings, such as the Turkish film *Tarkan versus the Vikings*, which opens in the aforementioned manner. In this way *The Long Ships*, along with numerous cinematic portrayals, operates within the medievalism framework of cinematic representations of Vikings. Nonetheless, the most interesting examples of medievalism are those that underline the alterity of the Vikings and have been discussed previously in other films. For example, immediately after Rolfe and his companions arrive to the 'Viking village' there is a Rabelaisian scene of Vikings drinking from their drinking

³²⁹ The film was shot mainly in Yugoslavia, or to be exact what is now Montenegro and is extremely quite close to Dubrovnik, where King's Landing, from HBO's *Game of Thrones*, is shot. The scenery is strikingly different from Scandinavian/Icelandic fjords.

horns and performing debauched acts. This medievalism is reiterated when Orm and some of the Vikings break into Manush's harem – as the narrator of the original film trailer exclaims: “the lust Vikings warriors who worshipped flesh and devils as they plundered an age”.³³⁰ Within the film the Vikings are depicted as semi-human creatures that are hypersexual and savage, and thus the conventional shaggy medievalism is observed. This portrayal and medievalism trope can also be seen in the opening text scroll of the film *The Norseman*, which commences with the words: “This motion picture is based on fact. As early as the year 793 A.D. a lusty horde came out of the icy mountains of Norway”.

Other depictions in *The Long Ships* include accentuating how superstitious most Vikings are.³³¹ Their superstition, or paganism, makes them wish to offer King Harald's daughter as a sacrifice to the gods, in order to calm the seas. However, Rolfe cleverly makes his companions think he sacrificed Gerða. Shortly, afterwards the other Vikings discover she is still alive and, they fear the wrath of the gods because in a moment of intertextuality, invoking both the film *The Vikings* and the television show, they are stuck in fog and fear they are at the edge of the world.³³² As discussed previously, some of the inherent medievalisms associated with Viking films are the interchangeable tropes dealing with medieval cognitive orientations that center around the themes: the edge of the world or sea monsters.³³³ However, within the diegetic world of *The Long Ships*, the

³³⁰ In the majority of Viking representations they are depicted as either raping or attempting to rape Western females. This is revealed both in an implicit manner in early cinema and depicted in a more explicit manner in later incarnations, however it is comedic in *The Long Ships* despite the proclamations the trailer's narrator.

³³¹ The trailer's narrator also plays on a familiar trope of announcing the Vikings arrival “here they are, the tall men and long ships ... the lusty Vikings searching and slaughtering”. This anxiety is common in popular culture that it can even be seen in works such as the cartoon series *Gargoyles*, which employs many medievalism tropes.

³³² It is a major plot point in the film *The Vikings* that they cannot sail unless they sail near the coast, however Erik manages to do this with a “medieval artifact”, the compass given to him by a mute, black slave named Sandpiper. Because of the fog, Ragnar loses his ship. Of course, the Einar's men fear the fog yet Einar does not. In the History Channel television show *Vikings*, the same thematic structure is followed when a companion of Ragnar Lóðbrók claims the ship is cursed and they will never find land, however he is silenced by Rollo's blade. Immediately after Rollo releases a raven and Flóki states “if there is land they will not return but if they don't” and then a raven flies into the endless fog.

³³³ The thematic heroic music, by the composer Dušan Radić, that can be heard in the fjord scene can be heard in this pivotal scene as well; a scene that has connotations with the Homeric epic *The Odyssey*. Yet, at the same time the bell is heard when the men start articulate modern misconceptions of how medieval people viewed the world. Thus this scene is very intriguing and furthermore John Haines argues that *The Long Ships* functions within a medievalism framework centered on six aural-visual moments and the link of

men hear the Mother of All Voices ringing, but the ship is suddenly caught in a maelstrom as if they were in a medieval odyssey. Yet, despite the alterity of Vikings within the film *The Long Ships*, the film follows the narratological episteme of situating the Vikings within the Western-Eastern binary,³³⁴ thus depicting the dyadic relationship of Vikings within Western Civilizations. In his essay on *The Long Ships*, Donald L. Hoffman analyzes this Western-Eastern opposition, because it also situates the relations of white-black and Christian-Muslim as being diametrically opposed to each other. In addition to this, as Hoffmann does mention, the novel itself does not include Manush, or Rolfe.³³⁵ In fact, Rolfe's brother Orm is the novel's main protagonist and Christianity is somewhat mocked in it; yet in the film *The Long Ships* the Vikings are appropriated within Christian culture since they 'crusade' and regain the bell, which is a Christian artifact. In this manner *The Long Ships* can both exhibit the alterity of the Vikings while also depicting them as belonging to the nation building myth of Western civilization. Thus, *The Long Ships* can also function within the framework of films such as *The Viking* despite the missing topographical element of Vinland (America).

Films within the Vinland cycle such as *The Norseman* establish a binary opposition while operating within the nation foundation myth. In *The Norseman*, the film depicts Native Americans, or savage Iroquois, as the hostile 'Other', while the Vikings are depicted as the founding fathers,³³⁶ thus continuing the Hollywood narrative convention of depicting Native Americans as occupiers rather than inhabitants. Indeed, as can be seen on the film poster (Figure 44:), for *The Norseman*, the medievalisms of national identities and barbaric medievalism are revealed, while simultaneously invoking intervisuality with the epitome of American culture: Star Wars, while also acknowledging Graeco-Roman culture with the costume.³³⁷ Indeed, *The Norseman* is a transitional cinematic representation that follows many of the tropes and conventions of previous

medieval music to cinematic music; and how medievalisms signify 'authenticity'. One of the categories or signifiers is the 'medieval bell' that is a significant factor in the film. Haines, J. (2013). *Music in films on the Middle Ages: Authenticity vs. fantasy*.

³³⁴ Because Haines focuses on the aforementioned six categories, he does not make note of the 'Orientalism' indicated by the musical score, that can be heard when the Vikings are captured, that further highlights the binary of West and East.

³³⁵ "Guess Who's Coming to Plunder? Or, Disorientation and Desire in *The Long Ships* (1964)"

³³⁶ All of the Iroquois are savage with the exception of the "Pocohantas" character "Winetta".

³³⁷ The poster for *Star Wars: New Hope* is so well known that it impossible to think that it did not influence the artwork of *The Norseman* poster.

Viking cinematic incarnations. This tradition of depicting Vikings within the swashbuckling cycle is *Erik the Viking*, which as can be seen on its film poster as heavily influenced by the swashbuckling pastiche *Star Wars*³³⁸. (see: Figure 45) Nonetheless, with *Erik the Viking* a paradigm shift, a deconstruction, in the cinematic representations of Vikings begins to emerge.



Figure 44: *The Norseman* (1978) or Thorvald, who could easily be Luke Skywalker.



Figure 45: The film poster for *Erik the Viking* or swashbuckling *Star Wars*?

4.5 Ironic Vikings, “Nordic” Vikings, Mythical Vikings and Real/Reel Vikings

Before discussing the paradigm shift that occurs with *Erik the Viking* (Terry Jones, 1989), a brief synopsis and a cursory contextualization is vital. The film is loosely based on a children’s novel by the author and filmmaker Terry Jones, who is also known as being part of the comedy troupe named Monty Python. Of course, many among the interpretive community are quite familiar with the group’s films, which include *Life of Brian* and *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*. In the latter, medieval conceptions and misconceptions are playfully reinterpreted, mocked and reworked, similar to *Erik the Viking*. As Susan Aronstein argues, *Erik the Viking* also belongs to the fantasy genre.³³⁹

³³⁸ As I mentioned previously in a footnote, Derek Elley mentions how Viking narratives are often swashbucklers plots in Viking drag. In addition Susan Aronstein in her essay “When Civilization Was Less Civilized Erik the “Viking” quotes the lead actor Tim Robbins (Erik) who states: “It was an action-adventure film”. Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³³⁹ Aronstein also makes note of this how *Erik the Viking* is a hybrid creation since it promises a “send-up of the action adventure blockbuster ... which invokes the iconic *Star Wars* art”. Aronstein points out that the highly formalist structure of the film, which as a young hero who encounters a wise old man (woman,

In fact, this conclusion can easily be reached since the film's synopsis is that Erik is disillusioned with his life as a pillaging and marauding Viking. Learning that the world is bigger than he previously assumed, and that once the sun had been seen, he decides to find the Fenrisúlfur, or the Fenrir wolf, and bring a new age to mankind, that is to say: to free mankind from Ragnarök. In order to do so he must find the musical instrument the Horn Resounding on the island of Hy-Brazil (which seems to belong to the world of Odysseus) where no violence occurs. However, not all agree with this quest since they could lose their wealth and influence. The two main foils are Hálfdan the Black (John Cleese) and Loki (Anthony Sher), with Loki scheming with one of Erik's men. Erik and his men manage to defeat Hálfdan and his cronies in a swashbuckling affair at sea. Afterwards, the Horn Resounding is blown and Erik and his men traverse through Bifröst to Ásgarður, where they meet the gods, who Erik sees as children, in Valhalla. Erik and his men are told that violence resides within men and the gods are powerless in these affairs. They wake up to find themselves back at home, where Hálfdan has captured the village. Fortunately, Harold the missionary (Freddie Jones) in the long ship lands on top of Hálfdan and his crew.

The justification for describing *Erik the Viking* as a paradigm shift within cinema in depicting Vikings can be argued on the basis of Terry Jones's deconstruction and reconstruction of Vikings within this film. *Erik the Viking* inhabits Eco's third category of medievalism, where "the characters in Monty Python movies do not believe in the grotesque period they inhabit".³⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the film is also firmly committed to deconstructing cinematic Viking medievalism tropes while simultaneously depicting a dark, dank and more 'authentic' topographical depiction of the Vikings' lands.³⁴¹ This

played by Eartha Kitt, in this case) that sets him off his case. Evidently, Jones follows Lucas and Joseph Campbell model of hero-questing. Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁴⁰ Eco, U. (1987). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays*. London: Pan Books in association with Secker & Warburg

³⁴¹ Aronstein points out in her essay that the exhibition of Jorvik, an by extension this film is what Laurie Finke and Marty Schichtman name "the Dirty Middle Ages". In fact within *Erik the Viking*, the characters are dirty and do focus on quite practical matters, instead of lofty idealism as witnessed in this exchange between Thorfinn Skullsplitter and his parents, who ironically have their traditional gender anxieties reversed "And don't forget to wash - you know - ALL over ... And if you have to kill somebody, KILL them! Don't stop to think about it" to which Thorfinn replies like an "authentic" Viking: "I never do".

drab and gloomy depiction creates an effect of aesthetic distance, especially since previous cinematic depictions of Vikings are without snow or darkness.³⁴² As Aronstein argues, *Erik the Viking* follows the tradition of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, it invokes the tropes of genre and codes it seeks to undermine.³⁴³ The film begins *in media res* with the Vikings pillaging and plundering, and the audience views Erik enter a tent presumably to rape a fair English named Helga. However, when Erik begins to clumsily fiddle with his garments to undress himself, the maiden asks whether or not he has raped a woman before to which Erik indignantly replies of course he has since he has been pillaging and looting up the coast. Not impressed, Helga asks whether he has raped before, and Erik replies by telling her to hush up with wounded pride. This scene sets the tone for the deconstruction of many cinematic tropes and medievalisms associated with the Vikings, especially since Helga logically refutes, by pointing out his circular argument, Erik’s rationalization of Viking plundering. In fact, one of the most ironic scenes in the film is a cinematic appropriation of the medievalism first displayed by *The Vikings*.³⁴⁴ (see: figures 37 and 38)



Figure 46: The intervisuality of *Erik the Viking* and *The Vikings* (1958).

Ironically, as discussed earlier in this chapter “the dirtiness of the Vikings” is in itself a trope of medievalism. Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁴² As I mentioned previously, despite the fact that *The Vikings* is the only Viking film that is actually partially shot in Scandinavia, it is painfully obvious that cinematic Vikings only seem to inhabit sunny lands in the diegetic world, except for when they are at sea. This creates an aesthetic distance among the interpretive community.

³⁴³ *ibidem*.

³⁴⁴ Aronstein mentions that this scene is borrowed from *The Vikings*. However, as I pointed out earlier, this trope, or a quite similar version, can also be observed in the Turkish film *Tarkan versus The Vikings*.

Just as in the film *The Vikings*, gender politics are on display. However, instead of the conventional narrative, *Erik the Viking* deconstructs this trope because an elderly woman demands the young female be released. The men mock her and one of them punches her in the face. Immediately afterwards a brawl breaks out. Nonetheless, it is vital to elucidate a flaw in Aronstein's analysis of this scene. She states that Erik's reaction "is feminized – wincing, distressed".³⁴⁵ In Old Norse primary sources there, is not such an elementary binary opposition to define gender roles within such generic narrative conventions. In *Brennu-Njálssaga*, Hallgerður langbrók avenges her husband's, Gunnar, physical reprimand by denying Gunnar a piece of her hair for his bow, which he needs to defend himself against his attackers: "muna þér kinnhestinn og hirði eg aldrei hvort þú verð þig lengur eða skemur".³⁴⁶ Numerous females within sagas function as matriarchs, and they do not display typical feminine qualities associated with popular conceptions of medieval gender roles within the collective memory.³⁴⁷ One of the most notable examples from Icelandic medieval literature is Hallgerður Langbrók, and in the novels and television series *Game of Thrones*, Cersei Lannister is revealed to be a manipulative and cunning female that explains courtly and practical matters to the more traditional feminine Sansa Stark³⁴⁸: "Tears aren't a woman's only weapon. The best one's between your legs". The depiction of Cersei Lannister is so intriguing since she is antithetical to such medieval feminine constructs such as the Lady of Shalott or Don Quixote's Dulcinea, yet she fits in with medieval Icelandic (Viking) society.³⁴⁹ Evidently, *Erik the*

³⁴⁵ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁴⁶ My own translation: "I remember you slapping me and it does not concern me whether you defend yourself for a brief time or a long time"

³⁴⁷ Roberta Frank argues that the role of women spiraled down with the advent of Christianity within Scandinavia, especially in Iceland, and this is quite evident in the nicknames given to women in comparison to earlier times when Nordic paganism was still strong. Frank, Roberta. "Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland". *Viator* 4 (1973): 473-484.

³⁴⁸ Despite being a fantasy, *Game of Thrones* is heavily indebted to medieval history for its source material and Cersei and Sansa function as intriguing opposites in the beginning arc of the narrative. Cersei is also an interesting example since she correlates with femme fatale figures such as Hallgerður Langbrók in Icelandic medieval literature. Asha, an Ironborn who are obviously meant to index Vikings does not have this strong association with medieval Icelandic females in literature.

³⁴⁹ One can argue that *Don Quixote* is intriguing example of medievalism since Don Quixote's quest is an ironical and comical reatment of medieval chivalaric literature, which is often quoted within the diegetic narrative; not to mention the fact that Dulcinea is idolized in the manner that Dante and Petarch idolized their respective paramours, a love never requited though. Indeed, Edward Dudley argues that *Don Quixote* is the ultimate book about reading as a cultural phenomenon and furthermore that book focuses on the reception of *Amadís de Gaula*; a work that in turn is influenced greatly by the paradigmatic Arthurian heros

Viking also seems to operate within traditional aspects of medievalism, yet the film deconstructs these cinematic representations. Previous representations such as *The Viking* or *The Vikings* are based on an idealized romanticism because such a construction highlights the alterity of the Vikings, who are depicted as barbaric to their own women whereas in many instances Viking society was on the periphery of the dominant patriarchal societies of Western Europe, and often more amicable to females.

In addition, to deconstructing such tropes, *Erik the Viking* also deals with other elements such as the berserker motif. Throughout the film Sven “the berserker” conveys one of the tropes associated with Vikings, since he is quite impulsive and dangerous. The reflexivity of the film accentuates this trope, including when Sven’s father says to him: “No no... you'll never make a Berserk.³⁵⁰ If you let it out now you'll have nothing left for battle”. This ironic take one of the tropes of Viking medievalisms reaches its zenith when Sven finally manages to go berserk ‘properly’.



Figure 47: Sven the Berserker from the film *Erik the Viking*

In fact, multiple tropes are deconstructed and ironically utilized in *Erik the Viking*, including the idea of the edge of the world, which becomes a comedic and reflexive scene when Erik says to the villagers before embarking on his quest: “though we may be swallowed by the Dragon of the North Sea or fall off the Edge of the World... don't cry”. Even the conventional trope of Vikings’ teleological affairs is deconstructed since Sven the beserker gets into a physical altercation with Thorfinnur Skullsplitter over the fact

and virtues of chivalry and courtly love. Dudley, E. J. (1997). *The endless text: Don Quixote and the hermeneutics of romance* (pp. 54-55). Albany: State University of New York Press.

³⁵⁰ At the beginning of the second series of *Vikings*, this is alluded to by having Rollo and jarl Borg intake what seems to be hallucinogenic mushrooms.

that Ketill denied Sven's grandfather place in Valhalla claiming he died of old age.³⁵¹ This scene has an intervisual and textual link to *The Vikings* to both Erik and Ragnar's deaths, for as Aronstein argues the film "explicitly invokes and then displaces key myths linked to our Vikings past: the myth of progressive history and the myth of regeneration through violence".³⁵² What Aronstein means is that the cinematic depictions of Vikings advocate traditional and masculine virtues of Western civilization as an alternative to the over-civilized and feminized condition of modern society.³⁵³ This is the framework in which representations of Vikings operate: they are paragons of alterity while being concurrent ancestors to Western civilization,³⁵⁴ an important node in the network of Western civilization's nation-building or, more commonly, in cinema, the nation building of the United States. Moreover, most importantly the world view of Erik the Viking is changed since the pagan gods are literally depicted as ineffectual and children and Óðinn even replies: "Erik the Viking! The things you seek are not in our power. We don't make men love each other or hate each other" and the one of the two foils of the films, appropriately named after the trickster god Loki, also says to Erik: "What right have you to try and stop men fighting, Erik the Viking? There is glory in battle. There are riches to be made and won". The pagan gods fail Erik, and he and all his men would have died within the diegetic world if not for Harald the Christian missionary who, when in Valhalla with the men, states: "There isn't anything" and like a *deus ex machina* falls from the sky in a longship, killing Halfdan the Black and his men who were about to kill Erik and the entire village. Therefore, Erik the Viking's pagan ways are obliterated, facilitating the process of appropriation.

Hitherto, mainly American films have been discussed. They were also well received in Scandinavia, or at least in Iceland, since in a cinema advertisement from 1959 in Icelandic's oldest and most prestigious newspaper, the film *Víkingarnir* or *The Vikings*

³⁵¹ "He's not in Valhalla! He died of old age." Reaching Valhalla is a medievalism associated with Vikings.

³⁵² Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁵³ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland.

³⁵⁴ Despite being a deliberate anachronism, there is a Japanese character or slave driver on Hálfdan's ship who satirizes Western civilization in the following manner: "Row! You incomprehensible, horizontal-eyed, Western trouser-wearers! Eurgh! You all look the same to me! How I despise your lack of subtlety and your joined-up writing! You, who have never committed ritual suicide in your lives!"

was described in Icelandic as being: “an internationally renowned, magnificent, epic film from the Viking age. The film is in color and in Cinemascope at the historical relevant sites of Norway and England. Shown again due to popular demand for a few shows”.³⁵⁵ Obviously, audiences in Iceland clamored to see cinematic representations of Vikings despite the obvious differences between the cinematic narratives and the source material such as the sagas. However, Scandinavian countries exhibited little interest in producing cinematic Vikings, an exception is the Swedish film *Här kommer bärsärkarna* (Eng. Here come the berserkers), which has more in common with the *Carry On* film franchise than with Viking source material. However, with the emergence of a national Icelandic cinema at the beginning of the 1980s, there was a demand for Vikings. Indeed, in a full-page advertisement, in the newspaper *Morgunblaðið*, from 4th of March in 1984, there is a collection of reviews of the film *Hrafninn Flýgur* (e. *When The Raven Flies*), which state that Hrafn Gunnlaugsson, the director, has managed to write a new Icelandic saga, and that Icelandic’s golden literary age has been commoditized into an attractive cinema product.³⁵⁶ It is not a coincidence that the thematic link of Hrafn Gunnlaugsson’s three Viking films is the Icelandic sagas, which is contingent in the construction of Icelandic national identity.³⁵⁷

Before discussing all three Icelandic Viking films and how they interpret and deal with the cultural heritage, I will briefly give a synopsis of all three films in chronological order, since they are thematically linked.³⁵⁸ *Hrafninn flýgur* is the tale of a Viking man, Gestur who was taken by force from his native land of Ireland as a young boy. The

³⁵⁵ Morgunblaðið, 20.10.1959 - Timarit.is. Retrieved from http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=111070&pageId=1324694&lang=is&q=Kirk
The film is eviscerated by a cultural critic though, deploring the depictions of Iceland’s ancestors. Mánudagsblaðið, 06.07.1959 - Timarit.is. Retrieved from http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=261525&pageId=3663243&lang=is&q=Douglas

³⁵⁶ Morgunblaðið, 04.03.1984 - Timarit.is. Retrieved from http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=119554&pageId=1589253&lang=is&q=Hrafninn%20fl%FDgur

³⁵⁷ I adhere to Paul James theory of abstract communities. Despite the fact the institutions and associations and other intermediaries have been on the wane, mass media offers citizens a chance to partake in nation building, by maintaining their own sense of identity while also belonging to a national collective.

James, P. (1996). *Nation formation: Towards a theory of abstract community*. London

³⁵⁸ I discuss all three films since they belong to the corpus of Hrafn Gunnlaugsson’s Viking cinematic representations and because they are considered a trilogy.

Viking raiders, fóstbræður,³⁵⁹ Þórður and Eiríkur kill his mother and abduct his sister. Twenty years later, Gestur seeks revenge on these men. Through guile and manipulation, Gestur pits the men against each other and eventually discovers his sister is married to Þórður. Meanwhile Þórður's brother Þór is also plotting to usurp his brother's position. All of the machinations of the characters are revealed, and Gestur kills all of the other men. The narrative is resolved with Gestur burying his weapons and deciding to become Christian, while the audience also discovers that Gestur's nephew digs up Gestur's weapons, presumably to avenge his father by killing his uncle. *Skugga Hrafnisins* (*Shadow of The Raven*) is a liberal adaptation of the tragic legend of Tristan and Isolde.³⁶⁰ The story is set in the year 1077, during the age of Christianization and shortly before Sturlungaöld or The Age of the Sturlungs, the most sanguinary period of Iceland's history. In the film the protagonist Trausti (Reine Brynolfsson) arrives to Iceland after completing his theological education abroad. Immediately after arriving his clan has a dispute with Eiríkur, Ísold's father.³⁶¹ Eiríkur is slain and Ísold mistakenly believes that Trausti is to blame. However, the love potion of the legend manages to unite them. Yet, they do not follow immediately in love.³⁶² After Ísold sees Trausti's gentle nature, she becomes infatuated with him after he defeats Hjörleifur in combat. Hjörleifur is the bishop's son and his defeat results in the bishop becoming furious and setting off a blood-

³⁵⁹ *Fóstbræður* or blood brothers is a crucial component to the saga narrative of the film as well as an important trope within the convention of the genre, and was a very important sociocultural factor in Icelandic society. It is main narrative element of *Fóstbræðrasaga* as well as being the dramatic essence of *Laxdælasaga*.

³⁶⁰ The Old Norse version is *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, which is based on Brother Robert's translation, *Tristrans saga ok Ísöndar*, of the Old French. As Norris J. Lacy reveals the Old Norse version can read as a parody of the romantic conventions, since there are ironic reversals and more comedic elements, not to mention a happy ending. Of course, this is then a very interesting cinematic adaptation since it follows the Old French version of the legend. Lacy, N. J., & Ashe, G. (1988). *The Arthurian handbook* (p. 108). New York: Garland.

³⁶¹ The name Tristan is changed into the more Icelandic name Trausti in the film.

³⁶² It is important to note that Ísold has a child, named Sól, out of wedlock with a thrall. This is a vast narrative departure from the literary tradition but is more culturally accurate within Icelandic settler society. Joan Tasker Grimbert and Claudia Bornholdt mention that Gunnlaugsson wanted to recast the heroine as an unwed mother in order to break the mold of frustrating virginity and make Ísold a woman with her own will. Interestingly, Grimbert and Bornholdt argue that "[e]very version of the Tristan legend has a love triangle ... the Icelandic saga offers a bizarre variant". They argue that is bizarre since Gunnlaugsson replaces the Cornish king with the bishop's son Hjörleifur. However, since chivalric literature is often contextualized within the Nordic culture, this argument does not suffice; spatially it would seem quite difficult and furthermore Icelandic society was based on values that stressed independence from being royal subjects or vassals. Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

feud by trying to burn the lover's alive in their domicile. Trausti manages to escape along with Ísold's daughter Sól. Hjörleifur unsuccessfully tries to kill Trausti two more times until Trausti finally is forced to kill him. The final film in this trilogy is *Hvíti Víkingurinn* (e. *Embla/ The White Viking*).³⁶³ In this film Askur and Embla are betrothed according to the old pagan customs, however King Ólaf forces Embla's father to accept baptism or watch Embla die. Embla's father accepts and King Ólaf leaves behind Askur and elopes with Embla. On the way to the monastery Embla is harassed by bishop Þangbrand. Askur tries to save Embla, but he does not succeed, and is forced by King Ólaf to go to Iceland to preach Christianity. Meanwhile, King Ólaf tries to win the hand of Embla, and manipulates her into believing that Askur's father, who is a pagan, has killed his son. Nonetheless, at the end of the film we see Askur returning to Embla.

It is apparent from the synopses that the thematic structure of all three films is the struggle between paganism and Christianity at the periphery of the Christian core. This is not surprising, since there is considerable tension in the sagas surrounding the issue. In describing how the Danes' gradual conversion came about, Robert Bartlett argues that they adapted the mounted warfare characteristic of feudal Europe, as well as German costume.³⁶⁴ As for Iceland, which was a liminal part of the periphery, conversion was painfully slow for proselytizing kings such as Ólafur Tryggvason. Historically, Ólafur's Icelandic envoy Stefnir Þorgilsson was quite fierce for societal standards, and because in his conversion attempts he consecrated sanctuaries and images, Stefnir was outlawed from Iceland. As a result legislation such as "kin shame" or *frændaskömm* was passed at Alþingi, which stipulated that families prosecute Christians that were impious or blasphemous to the Norse gods.³⁶⁵ Incidentally, the man that Ólafur Tryggvason sent to Iceland after Stefnir is Þangbrandur, who makes a cinematic appearance in *Hvíti Víkingurinn*.

When analyzing the tension between religions depicted in *Skuggar hrafnansins*, Grimbert and Bornholdt mention the symbolic use of ravens within the film, since the raven symbolizes Óðinn along with the pagan religion, society, culture and value system

³⁶³ There are two versions of the film. The original version from 1991 was *Hvíti Víkingurinn*, whereas the director's cut is named *Embla* and it was released 2007 at the Reykjavík International Film Festival.

³⁶⁴ Bartlett, R. (1993). *The making of Europe: Conquest, colonization, and cultural change, 950-1350*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

³⁶⁵ Byock, J. L. (2001). *Viking age Iceland*. London: Penguin Books.

that were dominant in Iceland in pre-Christian times.³⁶⁶ In *Hrafninn flýgur* Gestur's father commences the film with the Christian inspired words: “þannig holar dropinn steinninn, þannig sigrar penninn sverðið”.³⁶⁷ Tragically, this narrative is circular, since the film ends with the Gestur's nephew digging up his weapons, thus continuing the blood-feud. Notably, the phrase “þungur hnífur” is heard numerous times in the narrative, thus reminding the viewer of Gestur's Christian heritage which he disowns to avenge his parents.³⁶⁸ The narrative element of feud is at the core of numerous sagas; in *Brennu-Njálssaga* a feud between two matriarchs leads to the deaths of those lower on the social ladder. Later in the *Brennu-Njálssaga* narrative, Gunnar is killed along with the death of Njáll's family which is burned alive. The Christian hero Kári Sölmundarson wishes to avenge them but does not continue the cycle of violence. The theme of circular violence is, however, heavily emphasized in *Skuggar hrafnsins*, since, as Grimbert and Bordholt note the presence of ravens are a bad omen and symbolize the coming bloodshed and feud.³⁶⁹ Indeed, throughout the story Trausti tries to arbitrate for a peace which even the bishop does not accept since he still believes partially in the social-cultural practices of feud, as opposed to Trausti who studied theology abroad.

The core element of *Skuggar hrafnsins* and *Hrafninn flýgur* is the feud, since it constitutes a significant period in Iceland's history and its collective memory. Maurice Halbwach introduced the term collective memory to explain how societal remembrance functions and how society evaluates its history and concepts within a social context.³⁷⁰ Feudal revenge is part of Iceland's collective memory; due to the warring factions in Sturlungaöld, Icelandic inhabitants signed the Gissurarsáttmáli or Old Covenant, which incorporated Iceland into the Norwegian kingdom of Norway under Hákon gamli, or Hákon IV. This resulted in Iceland's loss of independence until 1944 and marked the country's literature considerably. Discussing feud in the context of medieval Icelandic

³⁶⁶ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

³⁶⁷ My translation: “That is how the drop of water makes a hole in the stone, that is how the pen is mightier than the sword”.

³⁶⁸ Þungur hnífur (e. heavy knife), however idiomatically the meaning is lost since þungur can also mean being depressed or something is wearing you down mentally.

³⁶⁹ Harty, K. J. (2011). *The Vikings on film: Essays on depictions of the Nordic Middle Ages*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland

³⁷⁰ Halbwachs, M., & Coser, L. A. (1992). *On collective memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

society, Jesse Byock notes that that the model of feud is at the core of saga construction, and that it was a vital, though not destructive, factor within Icelandic medieval community.³⁷¹ It is crucial to delineate what Byock refers to when discussing the terminology of feud. According to his argument, this insular type of feud channelled violence into a socially stabilizing process that facilitated progress.³⁷² From a historiographical perspective his thesis is viable, whereas the hermeneutics involved around the sagas focus on the tragic deaths and doomed love that resonant within such cinematic representations as Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's films, since even within the Nordic tradition pagan Viking's alterity functions within a binary opposition to Christianity, where progression and modernity are embedded with Christian culture as opposed to Nordic paganism.

Recent visual depictions of Vikings have departed from the traditional medievalism narrative of depicting Vikings as barbaric others that are set apart from normative society of Christian Western Europe.³⁷³ Instead, there are two dominant strands emerging in cultural productions depicting Vikings. One strand is the convergence of accuracy and authenticity.³⁷⁴ Thus the horizon of expectations has shifted from more simplistic forms of medievalism into more complex ones. This includes such cultural productions as History Channel's *Vikings* and the cinematic depictions in *Outlander* and *13th Warrior*. The other dominant strand is analogous to post-medievalism.³⁷⁵ Cultural productions that fit within the second category include the videogame *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* and the animated film *How to Train your Dragon*. *Skyrim* is set in the fictitious realm of Tamriel where Nords live on the periphery of the known world,³⁷⁶ inhabited by multiple medieval elements. The world of *Skyrim* is

³⁷¹ Byock, J. L. (1982). *Feud in the Icelandic saga*. Berkeley: University of California Press

³⁷² *ibidem*.

³⁷³ When I say recent I mean within the past two decades.

³⁷⁴ As I have argued before, Eliot refers to 'authenticity' as a claim to historicity, whereas Toswell argues that there is the trope of realism, which is a strong sense of authenticity or rather an attempt at recreating the 'real' Middle Ages, a key factor in many medievalisms.

³⁷⁵ Postmedievalism is often connected to the notion that all pretense to historicity and accuracy is 'betrayed' and that fantasy and the dream of the Middle Ages has become a dream upon a dream.

³⁷⁶ The core of Tamriel is inhabited with citizens and creatures that are strikingly similar to the medieval Latin Christendom; albeit sans Christianity, with a healthy dose of fantasy and medievalism. *Skyrim* does exhibit the anxiety of paganism, displayed in many other visual representations in a certain manner since players of the game can choose to ally themselves with the traditional Stormcloaks or the imperial core the Legion.

divided into many lands, and the landscape and imagery is a simulacrum of Scandinavian topography.³⁷⁷ Included within this realm are skaldic poet or *skálds*, elements of the runic system, Vikings and, finally, dragons. These creatures are one of the many tropes of medievalism,³⁷⁸ as M.J. Toswell argues: “[r]ecreations of the Middle Ages tend to involve dragons, from Spenser to Tolkien”.³⁷⁹ This is important to note, since these aforementioned visual representations have dragons as the narrative crux of their stories.³⁸⁰ In *Skyrim* dragons have become mythical creatures that suddenly awaken; and the main protagonist, Dragonborn, is the only one person in *Skyrim* that can converse with and shout like a dragon, defeat, and even ride a dragon. However, the narrative of *Skyrim* is quite complex and is embedded in numerous medievalisms. In *How to Train your Dragon*, the plot is quite formulaic. The main protagonist, Hiccup, is an outsider from his Viking tribe, since he views the world differently. Hiccup lacks the “masculine and heroic virtues” of the town of Berk.³⁸¹ Hiccup is an inventor, not a Viking. The boy accidentally finds a Night Fury, the most dangerous dragon of all. However, Toothless, as the dragon is named, cannot fly. Hiccup begins to train it and both benefit from their relationship. The boy becomes a town hero since he knows how to tame dragons, but everything falls apart once Hiccup’s father, Stoick, discovers his son’s secret. Stoic decides to go with his men in Viking longships to destroy the dragons once and for all, mistakenly believing there is a nest. Using Toothless to navigate, the Vikings discover a monstrous dragon that has been forcing the other dragons to raid the Vikings. Toothless and Hiccup manage to defeat this dragon, thus changing the stagnant Viking society and defeating the binary opposition of Viking versus dragon. The reason for focusing on this visual portrayal is simple, it is not only meant for children and the interpretive

³⁷⁷ A quick search on the Internet will reveal numerous articles and even youtube videos highlighting the similarities. There was even a course at Rice University which focused on *Skyrim*’s medievalisms. *Rice University Department of English*. Retrieved from <https://english.rice.edu/Content.aspx?id=2147483658>

³⁷⁸ The list according to Toswell includes knights, heroes, swords, treasure hunting questions, witches and works, various representations of the Other and various other elements. In fact, Toswell’s entire enumeration can be found in *Skyrim*.

Fugelso, K. (2009). *Studies in Medievalism XVII: Defining Medievalism(s)*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer

³⁷⁹ *ibidem*.

³⁸⁰ However, as I noted earlier *Miðgarðsormur* is almost analogous to a dragon.

³⁸¹ Many females are depicted as strong and willful characters and the most likely candidate to become a hero, according to prior heroic conventions, is a girl named Astrid. Therefore it is problematic to state masculine.

community does indeed later become partakers in conspicuous consumption.³⁸² One particular scene that reveals the multiplicity of *How to Train your Dragon* shows Stoick, the chief Viking, drawing a battle plan for fighting the dragons that looks like a football tactical play, thus invoking intertextuality with the American sports team The Vikings. Despite the fantastical elements within the film it displays many medievalisms that have become associated with Viking culture. Not only are there horned helmets, but in some cases individuals, such as the twins Tuffnut and Ruffnut Thorston wear helmets that have four horns, indicating that they are even more violent than the average Viking.³⁸³ Accompanying the diegetic world is the non-diegetic soundtrack that has more in common with Celtic rather than Scandinavian musical tradition.³⁸⁴ However, this anachronism should come as no surprise since the actors speak in either Irish or American accents. They cite from the medievalism of *Dungeons and Dragons*, a famous role-playing game. For example, Fishlegs, who is asked by the trainer Gobber: “Today is about survival. If you get blasted, you're dead. Quick! What's the first thing you're going to need?”, to which Fishlegs replies: “Plus five speed?”, which obviously refers the medieval-themed fantasy board game *Dungeons and Dragons* and its successors.³⁸⁵ Despite the obvious lack of historicity there are certain historicons that indicate ‘medieval’ and ‘Viking’. For example, when Hiccup is researching the different species of dragons, he consults the ‘Dragon Manual’, which displays iconic visual markers indicating its medieval aspects while also accurately depicting Viking heritage (see: Figure 48). By being on the intersection of fantasy and medievalism, *How to Train your Dragon* manages to appropriate Scandinavian and Viking culture and heritage within

³⁸² The term conspicuous consumption was coined by Thorstein Veblen. It is often referred to in the context of ostentatious spending, but I am making a point of synergy, which is a known concept in film studies. The film is not an isolated product but has paratexts and numerous cultural productions related to it such as apps, videogames, soundtracks, clothes and countless merchandise. A hugely popular product that depicts Vikings in one manner becomes influential in the cultural consciousness of the interpretive community.

³⁸³ The names in the film are meant to elicit associations with American-Scandinavian patronymy, traditional Viking names and comedic elements, e.g. Stoick the Vast, Jorgenson and Hofferson.

³⁸⁴ *Filmtracks: How to Train Your Dragon (John Powell)*. Retrieved from http://filmtracks.com/titles/how_dragon.html

³⁸⁵ Weisl and Pugh argue, fairly, that “one need look no further than the actors’ mouths do discover anachronisms in ‘medieval’ film: only rarely is dialogue written in Latin or the early precursors of modern languages”. Of course this film makes no claim to historicity but criticism placed against it for not following the rules in regards to the soundtrack come across as inane, especially when a character is quoting a roleplaying game that is based on medievalism. Pugh, T., & Weisl, A. J. (2013). *Medievalisms: Making the past in the present*. London: Routledge

Western civilization, while less focus is given to the alterity of the Vikings and more on their commonality with Western civilization.³⁸⁶



Figure 48: Part of the ‘**Dragon Manual**’ from *How to Train your Dragon*. A pastiche of Isidore of Seville and Linnaeus.

Since Vikings and Viking culture have been appropriated in many ways into the cultural fabric of Western civilization, my claim regarding the convergence of accuracy and authenticity should not invoke incredulity. In fact, *Outlander*, *The 13th Warrior* and History Channel’s *Vikings* all share this narrative paradigm, and thus shift from portraying Vikings as noble savages, focusing on their paganism and alterity, to shedding an anthropological light on Vikings. Therefore, narrative agenda is to depict the Vikings in the most ‘accurate and authentic’ manner possible, since they are a part of Western civilization.³⁸⁷ All three cultural productions achieve this agenda by having an outsider come into the world of the Vikings and position their anthropological gaze into this world.³⁸⁸ In *Vikings* this roll is fulfilled by Athelstan, an Anglo-Saxon monk kidnapped

³⁸⁶ I argue that there is an intersection of fantasy and historical medievalism because there are still various attempts to portray accuracy and situate this world into the context of reality and history. In an scene that has an intervisuality link to *The Vikings* television show, the Vikings of *How to Train your Dragaon* place pikes into the earth as part of their military tactics, which is an important scene in the aforementioned show, in a battle between the Vikings and Saxons. In addition, Hiccup specifically mentions Icelandic cod to Toothless. In the sequel *How to Train your Dragon II*, the influence of the funeral scene of *The Vikings* (1954) can be seen.

³⁸⁷ I only mention *The 13th Warrior*, however I will not focus on *The 13th Warrior* for a few reasons. First, of all because it is from the viewpoint of a non-Christian from a Western viewpoint albeit. Furthermore, because of the adaptation of the novel into the film – and the fact that is a pastiche of the Beowulf myth, which complicates the matter further.

³⁸⁸ Christian Metz’s psychoanalytic theory positions the viewer into the role of a voyeur. However, I disagree with her monolithic gender approach since it operates within a simplistic binary of male and female, thus the spectator’s race, social status and cultural and historical capital is ignored. My argument is however that the narrative convention of depicting a Christian or outsider within the Viking community has

from Lindisfarne by Ragnar Lóðbrók, Rollo, his brother and their companions. To facilitate my analysis, I will give a brief synopsis of the narrative arc of the first season of *The Vikings*. The setting is medieval Scandinavia.³⁸⁹ The main protagonist is Ragnar Lóðbrók, a historical figure, who is married to the shield maiden Lagertha.³⁹⁰ Ragnar's older brother is Rollo, another historical figure, who has lived in his brother's shadow all his life despite being an imposing and fierce warrior.³⁹¹ The Jarl of the community is Jarl Haraldsson, who opposes Ragnar's ideas of going west to raid, since there are rumors of lands there. Hitherto, the Vikings only went east within the diegetic world. Defying Haraldsson, Ragnar enlists the help of his shipbuilding friend Flóki, who creates a new and innovative ship. Equipped with the ship and new navigating technology, a sunboard and a sun stone, Ragnar and Rollo set off for England.³⁹² Ragnar and Rollo arrive at Lindisfarne where an orgiastic decimation of monks takes place. Ragnar spares one monk's, named Athelstan, life. Returning with Athelstan, Ragnar has angered Haraldsson for defying him, which eventually leads to Haraldsson attempting to have his men kill Ragnar, his family and to destroy his farm. Eventually Rollo and Ragnar meet king Aella who tries to ambush them despite them having his brother as a captive. The narrative arc ends with Ragnar have impregnated Áslaug, daughter of Sigurður Fáfnisbanir and Brynhildur the shieldmaiden, and with Rollo having decided to fight on the side of Jarl Borg, pitting him against Ragnar who allied with King Horick.

In no other visual representation of Vikings is the convergence of accuracy and authenticity as apparent as in History Channel's *Vikings*. Indeed, much of the discourse and criticism surrounding the show is the fact that it is not historically accurate, and

functioned as a meditating factor in the dyadic relationship; thus the pagan aspect and alterity of Vikings has been excised due the civilizing effect of Christianity, thereby allowing for the appropriation. This narrative convention is found in many of the films I have analyzed in this chapter and is most obvious in *Erik the Viking* as I argued earlier in this chapter.

³⁸⁹ The location shooting is in Ireland, this is important due to my previous arguments of the importance of location in accuracy and also for moments within the show itself.

³⁹⁰ The narrative and literary sources concerning Ragnar Lóðbrók are summarized in Pulsiano, P., & Wolf, K. (1993). *Medieval Scandinavia: An encyclopedia*. New York: Garland.

³⁹¹ Rollo or Göngu-Hrólfr in Old Norse is attested to in *Orkneyinga Saga*, *Historia Norwegie* and *De moribus et actis primorum Normannorum ducu*. Pulsiano, P., & Wolf, K. (1993). *Medieval Scandinavia: An encyclopedia*. New York: Garland.

³⁹² The navigational techniques have been heavily debated in historiography but many believe they used common calcite crystal or Icelandic spar. *A depolarizer as a possible precise sunstone for Viking navigation by polarized skylight*. (n.d.). Retrieved January 17, 2014, from <http://rspa.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/468/2139/671.short>

verges too close on the rubrics of inaccuracy.³⁹³ Moreover, because it is a cultural production of the History Channel, segments of the interpretive community come to expect a ‘genuine’ version of the Vikings, or what Tom Shippey denotes as “dangerous medievalisms”.³⁹⁴ In her article on “Medievalism, Authority and the Academy”, Gwendolyn A. Morgan discusses this cognitive approach taken by certain members of the general public. This stance demands authenticity when depicting the Middle Ages. She states that popular culture can use the Middle Ages as a filter to understand and tackle contemporary concerns, and that many individuals are only responding to one of many versions of the Middle Ages since possessing significant knowledge of the many aspects of the Middle Ages is rare, even in academia.³⁹⁵ This dangerous medievalism’s presence is very evident on the Internet. Here, an article from a conservative and American website, which is called “History Channel Gets *Vikings* Precisely Wrong: Kirk Douglas would have taken greater care”³⁹⁶ may serve as an example. In the article, Lars Walker, who claims to be of Norwegian descent, argues that the political dynamics depicted in the show are inaccurate and he supports his argument by quoting a book published by the Norwegian scholar Torgrim Titlestad³⁹⁷:

These new ideas argued that everything would work much better if all the power was placed in the hands of a king, who would centrally manage the realm. The old democratic Things, in this view, were outmoded relics of a barbaric and heathen past, due to be stamped out. *In other words, the liberals were autocratic and freedom-hating, and the conservatives were democratic and freedom-loving.*

³⁹³ The discussion board of the website Internet Movie Database, which is immensely influential, has one specific discussion labelled: “I want to like but there’s so many historical inaccuracies”:

I want to like it but there's so many h... - IMDb. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2306299/board/nest/225610894?ref_=tt_bd_2

³⁹⁴ Shippey, T. A., & Arnold, M. (2005). *Correspondences: Medievalism in scholarship and the arts* (p. 23). Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

³⁹⁵ Fugelso, K. (2009). *Studies in Medievalism XVII: Defining Medievalism(s)* (p. 65). Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer.

³⁹⁶ *History Channel Gets Vikings Precisely Wrong | The American Spectator.* (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2014, from <http://spectator.org/articles/33770/history-channel-gets-vikings-precisely-wrong>

As I mentioned before, Kurt Douglas is on record for ignoring accuracy over authenticity because he was tired of the academics involved in the production. So obviously, the subtitle of article is a wishful thought.

³⁹⁷ The last sentence is in italics since it is Walker’s political beliefs being imposed on the historiography.

Consequently, one can easily claim that this is an example what Morgan notes is: “inventing an authority to support our theories, using those theories to prove our intention, ultimately using both to perpetuate visions of the Middle Ages for others to employ in their particular self-justifications”.³⁹⁸ Logical fallacies and appeals to authority are common elements when utilizing academic medievalisms. Of course, despite the fact that *Vikings* television series does have an historical consultant, it is not concerned solely with historical accuracy rubrics.³⁹⁹ This is quite evident at the beginning of the series when Ragnar is surveying the battlefield that is strewn with corpses. Spotting ravens, Ragnar also catches a brief glimpse of Óðinn (Figure 49), but when Ragnar brushes his hand against his bloody covered face, suddenly Óðinn is gone.⁴⁰⁰



Figure 49: Ragnar “sees” Óðinn after battle. From the television series *Vikings*.

Further elucidation of this authenticity tendency can be seen in the same scene, when spirits of the body are being lifted to the heavens or Valhalla.⁴⁰¹ Evidently, this falls

³⁹⁸ Fugelso, K. (2009). *Studies in Medievalism XVII: Defining Medievalism(s)*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, p. 65.

³⁹⁹ Justin David Pollard is not a tenured academic, yet he is an historian. Also, it is a common notion in popular culture to ascribe less historicity or veracity to fictionalized dramatical accounts rather than say historical documentaries. Documentaries, whether or not they use genuine footage, are still liable to subjectivity since they have been edited and selected and the camera has been manipulated for the audience as I argue in chapter 2.

⁴⁰⁰ This scene is highly intervisual. The wandering old man, or wizard, motif is most famously known to the interpretive community as being from Tolkien’s *Lord of The Rings* through the character Gandalf. Tolkien, the medievalist, had a creative debt to Norse mythology. Drout, M. D. C. (2007). *J.R.R. Tolkien encyclopedia: Scholarship and critical assessment*. New York: Routledge, p. 473.

⁴⁰¹ When I refer to ‘authenticity’ I am referring to the audiences expectations, which include paganism and has always been heavily featured in all representations of Vikings, whether visually or aurally.

under the authenticity rubrics, which is the framework that another recent Viking film also operates in. The hyperkinetic, flashy comic book adaptation of *Thor* might have little resemblance to *The Vikings*; however, in a television interview the high priest of Nordic paganism in Iceland, Hilmar Örn Hilmarsson, discusses *Thor's* mythology⁴⁰² by emphasizing Wagner's medievalism of associating the god Þór with Are's attributes, but praising the depictions of the characterizations of the gods within the film and even speaks of 19th - century fantasies of Nordic paganism.⁴⁰³ It is in this manner that *Vikings* operates, because there is also the symbolism of the ravens, just as in Hrafn Gunnlaugsson's film. The birds seem to be portents of bad tidings in the Icelandic films and highlight the negative aspects of paganism. In *Vikings*, the ravens are associated with life changes for the main protagonist, whether good or bad, and also serve as symbolic markers.

Through the eyes of the Christian, Athelstan, who is used as an ethnographical ancillary in exploring Nordic paganism and the social customs of Vikings. Elements such as human sacrifice are contextualized within the cognitive framework of the Nordic people. The show's agenda is not to depict this social ritual as a barbaric practice, but rather as a sacrifice for the good of the community that the truly virtuous accept.⁴⁰⁴ Paganism is also portrayed in a positive manner when Athelstan quotes verse from the Bible, at Flóki's home, and states that "your gods sound similar to mine".⁴⁰⁵ Another intriguing aspect is the positive portrayal of Ragnarök, which is explained to Athelstan when Ragnar says: "let's show this ignorant Christian what Ragnarök is".⁴⁰⁶ Ragnar is seen to be amicable to Christianity, or at least not barbaric, because he says to Athelstan when meeting him: "of all the treasures in the room you chose to save this", referring to

⁴⁰² This is a recognized and legal religious doctrine. It comprises over 2.300 members and is the largest non-Christian denomination in Iceland.

⁴⁰³ *Allsherjargoði um Thor: The Dark World / RÚV*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ruv.is/kvikmyndir/allsherjargodi-um-thor-the-dark-world>

⁴⁰⁴ In the narrative, Athelstan was marked for sacrifice but he was not allowed to by the priests since he was not willing and also still a Christian, and both were an affront to the gods. However, this does not detract from argument since there is revelry the night before. The cinematography also emphasized the tranquility of the scene, giving it religious overtones since this is indeed a religious practice.

⁴⁰⁵ Flóki says to Lagertha when she is ashamed of her family having to live off his winter supplies: "the gods will provide" to which Athelstan replies: "for every time there is a season".

⁴⁰⁶ The explanation given by the Ancient One is preceded by a raven.

the Gospel of John.⁴⁰⁷ When the Vikings attack Christians, the Christians are depicted as lacking in masculine virtue, hiding in garderobes (toilets) and powerless against the Vikings. One of Ragnar's companion's even mentions how pathetic their god is if he is dead and nailed to a cross.⁴⁰⁸

Despite the positive portrayal of paganism, many scenes in *Vikings* ascribe to the horizon of expectations of the audience regarding the alterity of Vikings and the Middle Ages. These are observable in the scenes presenting Viking men as sexually abusive, or even rapists, e.g. when two travellers come up to Lagertha and state: "We will eat and drink after we have satisfied our other needs". The same sentiment is echoed when Knútur attempts to rape a Saxon woman and Lagertha does her best to stop him, but he then tries to force himself on Lagertha. Another scene displaying this type of medievalism is when Rollo ravishes Flóki's slave. However, the scenes that orientate Vikings within the liminality of Western society are seen through Athelstan's gaze; this includes the human sacrifice for Jarl Haraldsson's burial and human sacrifice in Uppsala. Nonetheless Athelstan's narrative arc brings him closer to paganism than in the classical convention of Vikings transforming through civilizing effect of Christianity.⁴⁰⁹

The portrayals of Vikings within the show are quite positive and *Vikings* focuses on historicons, and authenticity are first and foremost. Examples of historicons associated with Vikings are the numerous shots of the nature including what is depicted as the Northern Lights,⁴¹⁰ although the location shooting is done in Ireland.⁴¹¹ Other examples include the use of visual markers such as insistent dirty and squalor that are meant to be iconic utilizations representing the "dirty Middle Ages".⁴¹² Another historicon and an

⁴⁰⁷ Ragnar uses his knowledge of Christian social practices to ambush a town. In a parley with the Vikings, Aella demands one of them become a Christian so he can talk to "an equal" not a barbarian.

⁴⁰⁸ Ragnar's friendship in the series and respect of Athelstan and his faith has been demonstrated for example by the concern Ragnar shows in the second series, for Athelstan after the Viking camp is attacked.

⁴⁰⁹ The issue of human sacrifice in Viking society is a controversial topic, however recent archaeological evidence suggests there is precedent.

Slaves as burial gifts in Viking Age Norway? Evidence from stable isotope and ancient DNA analyses
Retrieved January 27, 2014, from

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305440313003117>
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305440313003117>

⁴¹⁰ *How to Train your Dragon* exhibits the same visual marker.

⁴¹¹ There are numerous scenes that lend credence to the authenticity of the Scandinavian topography.

⁴¹² Vivian Sobchack discusses how dirt can signify the Middle Ages.

The Insistent Fringe: Moving Images and the Palimpsest of Historical Consciousness. Retrieved from <http://tlweb.latrobe.edu.au/humanities/screeningthepast/firstrelease/fr0499/vsfr6b.ht>

‘authenticity’ visual marker is when Athelstan, working on a manuscript, is depicted in a scriptorium along with other brothers of his order (Figure 50).



Figure 50: History Channel *Vikings*: Athelstan is ‘creating’ a manuscript. The minor initial decoration and illumination is in the form of a dragon, like the Vikings ships.

The series operates within an accuracy framework, especially in scenes that allude to Alcuin writing about the Vikings, as well as the fact that Old English, Latin and “Old Norse” are spoken, the contrast between the languages stressing the motif of culture clash.⁴¹³ However, one of the most important scenes in series one of *The Vikings* focusing on authenticity, exhibiting the tendency to appropriate and highlight the alterity of the Vikings, is the wedding between the Jarl Bjarni from Sweden and Jarl Haraldsson’s daughter. This arrangement is done in order to solidify Haraldsson’s power base against burgeoning usurpers such as Ragnar Lóðbrók.⁴¹⁴ In *Vikings*, the framing effect of an over-head shot of Jarl Bjarni and Thyri in bed highlights the alterity of Viking society and its customs, he is depicted snoring and she is awake contemplating her fate.⁴¹⁵ The dyadic relationship of appropriation and alterity is maintained within the

⁴¹³ If fact the Old Norse is more akin to modern day Danish or Swedish but is intelligible up to a limit to an Old Norse speaker. Furthermore, even the cinematography depicts a more ‘genuine’ representation of the period since artificial lighting is sparse.

⁴¹⁴ Maintaining and fostering social bonds was an important factor in medieval Scandinavia. *Vinfengi* or kinship played a tremendous factor within Icelandic society. In *Vígaglúms saga* vinfengi enables Arnórr rauðkinnr to pursue a marriage despite have less wealth and power than his rival due to his familial ties to Glúmr, since Glúmr offers vinfengi to Gizurr, the father of Þórdís, who Arnórr desires. Another example is from *Hæsa-Þóris saga*, when Blund-Ketill can avenge his father’s death properly since his has an alliance through marriage with Þórður gellir. However, gender politics within Medieval Scandinavia allowed for female autonomy in many instances and this topic of autonomy is discussed in Frank, Roberta. "Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland." *Viator* 4 (1973): 473-484.

⁴¹⁵ This scene is not gratuitous since in the next episode after consumating the marriage, Bjarni rolls off Thyri and demands that she go fetch him some herring. She does not “obey” immediately and he threatens

series, despite the utilization of accuracy and authenticity as can be seen on the figures below (Figure 51 and Figure 52). The first one is from *The Viking*, one of the earliest depictions of Viking society along with its paganism in the form of Þór. When compared to History Channel's depiction of an effigy of Þór, the accuracy rubric is more noticeable. In *The Viking*, the authenticity is a genuine medievalism. In the television show *Vikings*, accuracy has replaced previous authenticity by creating a more 'authentic' version of Viking society. The cinematic and visual tradition of alterity and appropriation has been consistent, since films such as *The Viking*; and in this manner Vikings can belong both to the periphery and core.



Figure 51: A depiction of Þór from the film *The Viking*.



Figure 52: Athelstan and Ragnar observe Þór in *Vikings*.

In conclusion, depictions of Vikings can function within alterity rubrics while also being appropriated. In early Old Norse sources the term Viking has different meanings, depending on the agent involved. Only later within chronicles and in historical sources does the term obtain an ethnic meaning, and has pejorative connotations. During the centuries, as with many other objects or individuals categorized medieval, the term Viking was a lacuna, thus enabling it to become a medievalism. For example, certain nations such as Germany, America and Great Britain appropriated the term by laying claim to it as being part of its national heritage, or at least considered Vikings as being closely aligned to their own national identity and cultural mores. This paradigm is evident

to beat her. The narrative seems to suggest that this is barbaric tradition of paganism, an unhappy marriage in juxtaposition with Christian values.

in early cinema as I analyzed earlier. During the middle of the century, Vikings were depicted as swashbucklers and also functioned as ‘the Other’ in adventure films. With postmodern cinema depictions, the previous traditions are mocked but more attention is given to Viking society and medievalism tropes associated with Vikings are made ironic or hilarious. Newer cultural productions depict Vikings with a more nuanced representation that operates within the accuracy and authenticity rubrics. One of the elements in earlier depictions to signify the alterity of Vikings was their paganism. This trope along with other medievalisms helped mark their alterity, whereas in more modern renditions accuracy is used as an anthropological/historical tool to depict ‘genuine’ Vikings. Nonetheless, this dyadic relationship has been maintained but I conclude that the reimagining of Vikings recasts as them action-hero pagans, while casting paganism in a more neutral light; even allowing for an ideological space where Viking alterity is considered desirable. Therefore this new reimagining is appropriated and creates a richer medievalism associated with Vikings.

5. Conclusions

At the beginning of my thesis, I discussed the problematic nature of depicting the past, since we rely on biased sources and the scholarship itself is and will always be full of cognitive orientations, biases and agendas. History is indeed interpretation, although we strive for facts, and not a single truth with a capital “T” or, as Indiana Jones warned his students: “Archeology is the search for *fact*- not truth. If it's truth you're looking for, Dr. Tyree's philosophy class is right down the hall”.⁴¹⁶ However, when searching for facts this should not exclude cinema or other cultural productions because, despite earlier warnings, movies are quite safe for medievalists to enjoy for their own aesthetic and narrative effect as well as intrinsic value. By simply choosing a topic to film and the manner how one films and edits it, subjectivity comes into play. Nonetheless, as scholars of the Middle Ages we must be cognizant of medievalisms. Films can reveal how interpretations of the Middle Ages change in popular culture. The uses of the Middle Ages depends on the interpretive community involved and of course accuracy does not

⁴¹⁶ Spielberg, S. (1989). *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade*. Paramount Pictures.

factor in necessarily, since many medievalisms are based on interpretations and fantasies rather than historical analysis.

Medievalisms like I argued in chapter 1 are embedded within our culture, and they are rooted so firmly they can be dangerous, especially in tandem with historical inaccuracies. In this manner, as I discussed in chapter 2, medieval cinema depictions can exhibit hyper-nationalistic tendencies that feed and encourage discourses that function to thrust other social groups into a status of alterity. In Arthurian cinema productions, communism, atheism and alternative methods to American exceptionalism were demonized. In addition, constructions of race were utilized to ‘other’ and maintain racial hierarchy. Furthermore, by depicting characters of ‘color’ as being foreign to the Middle Ages, an implicit (or explicit) hegemonic agenda constructs a history and narrative that excludes all social groups that do not belong to the dominant social group or race.

On the other hand, this relationship can be circular as is the case with the Vikings. For centuries, due to medievalism, these warriors were constructed into an ethnicity, and a barbaric one at that; belonging to the same category as the Huns and other so-called barbarians. By analyzing the diachronic development of the Vikings as social group in dominant Western discourse, it is possible to see how they were constructed into a romantic medievalism infused by nationalistic sentiments. Emerging from this genealogy, Vikings became an unique social group, yet due to the lacunae of the interpretive community their image could also be reimagined into a new medievalism by introducing new templates such as swashbuckle heroes. Whereas some film makers e.g Terry Jones chose to deconstruct previous medievalisms while utilizing them ironically, with the new television series *Vikings*, the generic borders for Viking visual productions has been enriched, including the medievalisms. Vikings can function as ‘the Other’ in medievalism as well as belong to the hegemony that dominates other social groups, since they have been incorporated within Western culture.

Since medievalism is an important element of medieval studies, medieval cinema dealing with the Middle Ages should be incorporated to see how we all interact with our past, interpret it and, most importantly, to honestly discuss how we manipulate it for our own purposes. The creation of the Middle Ages by Renaissance scholars is a mere medievalism in itself, and the genealogy of medieval studies is rooted in medievalism.

Choosing to ignore cinema, television or other media that partakes in creating medievalism is a hazardous path that might lead us back to the days 19th - and 20th - century medievalism once again.

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