THE MEDIEVAL MOTION PICTURE

THE POLITICS OF ADAPTATION

Edited by
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INTRODUCTION: TEMPORALITIES OF ADAPTATION

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This collection of articles is concerned with the intersection of medieval film studies and adaptation theory. Both fields, medieval film studies and adaptation studies, are among the most rapidly expanding subdisciplines of an interdisciplinary mix within the humanities: of film studies, literary studies, cultural studies, history, musicology, art history, theater studies, to name only a few. Within the last six to seven years the number of publications in both fields has exploded, as has the sophistication of their approaches, and it is high time to assess the kinds of questions, problems, and issues that link both fields in order to gauge ways in which advances in one may be put to productive use in the other.

Medieval film studies and adaptation studies have shared similar problems in the past, in that an outspoken or merely implicit desire for accuracy—be it for an “authentic” representation of the literary “source” or of the historical “fact”—has led to the privileging of the “source text” itself. However, long gone are the days when medievalists felt they had to apologize for dabbling in medieval film or else when their principal concern seemed to be to protest against the inaccuracies and anachronisms they found in medieval motion pictures. Long gone, too, are the days when literary source texts occupied center stage in adaptation studies and when articles typically confirmed the supposed differences between books and films. Essays are no longer motivated by the question as to whether a film adaptation does justice to the book. Or are they?

As Thomas Leitch poignantly observes:

The challenge for recent work in adaptation studies…has been to wrestle with the un-dead spirits that continue to haunt it however often they are repudiated: the defining context of literature, the will to taxonomize and...
the quest for ostensibly analytical methods and categories that will justify individual evaluations... These contradictions between the desire to break new ground in adaptation studies and the constraints of a vocabulary that severely limits the scope and originality of new contributions are often frustrating, especially to readers who think that they are encountering the same essay over and over and over with only the names of novels and their film adaptations changed... Absent the silver bullet that will free adaptation studies from the dead hand of literature, taxonomies and evaluation, the temptation to succumb to these orthodoxies is greatest in the essays commissioned for collections because the orthodoxies are built into the premise of each collection.\textsuperscript{3}

And this is where the current volume takes its point of departure. Meeting the challenge of questioning, as well as moving beyond, constraining orthodoxies within adaptation studies and medieval studies, it employs the format of the edited collection precisely to show the variety of approaches that medieval film studies twined with literary studies of various national literatures has to offer for the study of adaptation and vice versa.\textsuperscript{4}

\textbf{Layers of Temporality}

Recent discussions of medieval film display a remarkable sensitivity toward the most innovative advances in the kind of theory that informs medieval studies and medievalism, on the one hand, and the theoretical concepts that have shaped film theory, on the other. Within the study of medieval film there is a powerful pull toward methods and theories that conceptualize the complex relationship between the past and the present and theories that explain the specific nature of cinematic vision and storytelling. And these two developments are increasingly seen to converge, with scholars frequently striving to derive a particular notion of medieval film from the way that medieval film both encapsulates and problematizes the typical ways in which film as a particular medium encounters, shapes, and questions notions of the past. This has even led to attempts to define “medieval film” as a distinct genre, a genre that need not exclusively encompass films set in what we conventionally see as a medieval time frame, that is films set in a (predominantly Western) historical time frame between ca. 500 and ca. 1500.

One of the most daring of these recent stabs at completely re-defining the idea of “medieval film,” indeed, at turning “medieval film” into a theorized genre of its very own, is arguably Anke Bernau’s and Bettina Bildhauer’s definition of medieval film:
INTRODUCTION

We...suggest a...theoretical definition of medieval films: as those characterised precisely by their uncertain temporality. This definition complements generic and thematic definitions, enabling a more nuanced approach to medieval films while also emphasising their relevance for film studies and medievalism in general.5

Careful not to exclude the more conventional aspects of theme and genre, this definition focuses on one of recent medievalism’s most important issues: the role the Middle Ages have been made to play in establishing ideologically entrenched systems of temporality. For Bernau and Bildhauer, as for an increasing number of medievalists, whether engaged in medieval studies proper or in medievalism,6 it is the notion of chronology that lies at the very heart of this debate. Chronology, with its supposed dependence on unidirectional linearity and its tendency to impose a hierarchical order onto the successive stages of a time line, is thus seen if not as the root of all evil, then certainly as a means of understanding time that lends itself to all manner of colonizing the past.

That chronology has moved to the center of attention in medieval studies should not come as a surprise, given that medievalists have long been criticizing the ideological implications of, and gross falsifications inherent in, what arguably constitutes the greatest chronological step in Western historiography: the medieval/Renaissance divide.7 Though the last decade has seen a spate of publications bridging this divide,8 powerful forces still strenuously resist this movement as is evinced by the latest books by Stephen Greenblatt and Jack Goody, respectively. In a move that appears to have more to do with the religious right in present-day America than with the time period he is actually concerned with, through a most single-minded celebration of the Renaissance’s supposed re-discovery of classical antiquity, Greenblatt viciously relegates the Middle Ages to an abyss of religious superstition. According to Greenblatt’s narrative, it is through an individual humanist’s heroic act that the original text of Lucretius’s De rerum natura is re-discovered, thus paving the way for an intellectual revolution directly leading to the United States’ constitution with its famous proclamation of the individual human’s right to the “pursuit of happiness.”9 Jack Goody by contrast seeks to undermine the notion of a purely European Renaissance by spreading the concept all over the world. To a certain extent, this may be seen as a specifically postcolonial move attempting to decenter the West and critique its claims to cultural exceptionality and superiority.10 But since Goody considers it necessary simultaneously to buttress an extremely conservative concept of the Renaissance, we find him undermining his own project even as he seeks to wrest from the hands of Western historiography one of its most
powerful weapons in establishing the West’s superiority over the rest. Thus, unwittingly, Goody reinforces Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s observation that postcolonial theory

has neglected the study of the “distant” past, positing instead of interrogating the anteriorty against which modern regimes of power have supposedly arisen. This exclusionary model of temporality denies the possibility that traumas, exclusions, violence enacted centuries ago might still linger in contemporary identity formations. It also closes off the possibility that this past could be multiple and valuable enough to contain (and be contained within) alternative presents and futures.¹¹

How do these developments relate to the discussion of medieval film and its intersections with adaptation theory? It seems obvious that the vast majority of sophisticated discussions of medieval film center on issues of temporality. At the same time many seek to link the issue of temporality to something that is particular to cinema as an artistic medium.

**Media-Determinism versus Media Multi-Vocalism**

Laura Mulvey’s work, in particular, has attracted the attention of many students of medieval film, since she argues that cinematic as well as photographic images have “a privileged relation to time” in that they not only conserve the moment when an image was filmed, but also need to be deciphered later, when the filmed event has already passed.¹² In other words, we witness a trend toward associating with the cinematic a capacity for establishing specific notions of temporality, and this trend easily tempts medievalists to claim for medieval film an especial status with respect to these cinematic notions of time.

And this is where we believe a cautionary intervention may be in order. Students of medieval film can profit here from the wider implications of the more recent approaches towards adaptation, since any form of medievalism is a form of adaptation in the wider sense—and, especially in the case of medieval film, often also in the narrower sense. Adaptation theorists have criticized essentializing definitions of film as involving a certain genre-specificity, whereby, say, the literary is simply “translated” into the medium of film. As Leitch puts it: “There is no such thing as a single source for any adaptation”,¹³ and, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us, media “differ in the specific constraints and possibilities of each medium’s conventions,”¹⁴ but “the creative transposition of an adapted work’s story and its heterocosm is subject not only to genre and medium demands, . . . but also to the temperament and talent of the adapter—and
his or her individual intertexts through which are filtered the materials being adapted.”

It seems only natural that medievalists working on film should draw on concepts developed in film studies. And it is equally natural that—since film studies is about the motion picture—any attempt to theorize film as opposed to, say, static images as in photography, must necessarily impinge upon our understanding of the temporal in one way or the other. This is all as it should be. Things look a little different though, as soon as we attempt to canonize certain film-studies approaches as encapsulating something like the aesthetic/generic essence of film and attempt to derive a specific notion of temporality from these characteristics, or else as soon as we attribute a particular concept of temporality to these characteristics. Such an approach, we would argue, gets us into hot water.

First of all, any essentializing approach to film will in most cases focus on issues such as the-camera-as-gaze or on editing as a form of narrative. Obviously, both issues deserve considerable attention and in both cases medievalists have learned a lot from film theorists and will doubtlessly continue to do so. Nevertheless, any attempt to fix a certain type of cinematic device as predominantly crucial to the way that film creates meaning or establishes a particular sense of illusion will inevitably run the risk of aesthetic or generic essentialism. And this is especially the case when such supposedly fundamental aesthetic characteristics of film are linked to a specific perspective on questions such as chronology or temporality. To argue that film, due to its basic technical and visual characteristics by definition conveys this or that notion of the temporal not only leads to an essentializing notion of the aesthetic of film, but will unavoidably remove film from the field of temporality itself—however strong claims to the contrary may be. Any stable notion of a purely cinematic aesthetic or purely cinematic mode of storytelling that is primarily grounded in the technological specificities of film production, threatens to result in an ultimately atemporal concept of the cinematic, and this would result in a denial of the historicity of film, since, as Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman have pointed out: “[T]echnology itself is thoroughly imbricated in cultural, social, economic, and semiotic networks.”

When such a stable view of cinematic temporality is applied to medieval films, cinematic renditions of the Middle Ages will end up being subjected to a rigid temporal grid that denies its own location in culture and temporality. Such a temporal grid may well come in many shapes and sizes, it might come packaged in the language of poststructuralism, or in that of psychoanalysis, or even in that of state-of-the-art cinematic technology—or it may represent a combination of some or all of these. To be fair, the critics who employ the approaches just sketched...
are usually very much aware of the pitfalls of what Finke and Shichtman call “technological determinism.” Yet the danger of the medieval being overwhelmed by, or absorbed into, certain notions of cinematographic technology is undoubtedly there. For example, shortly after warning their readers of the ever-present threat of technological determinism, Finke and Shichtman themselves embark on a rapturous celebration of present-day DVD technology and the way it supposedly enables a (post)modern audience to return to a form of viewing that mirrors the medieval manuscript experience as described in the theories of Bernard Cerquiglini:

In many ways a film text is becoming more like a medieval manuscript than like a printed book. Rather than being a text fixed through the processes of mechanical reproduction, the very technology that produces the film text has rendered it, as Cerquiglini notes of the medieval manuscript, variance itself.

Here Bernard Cerquiglini’s essentializing and heavily romanticized notion of the aesthetic freedom of the medieval manuscript experience is projected onto modern DVD technology. The DVD thus becomes a revolutionary break in the history of media technology, a revolutionary break capable of directly connecting the postmodern to the premodern, while bracketing the media experience of modernism, to which both the printed book and a certain type of cinematic culture are thereby relegated. Richard Burt has made similarly essentializing claims for digital technology:

My mapping of medieval and early modern historical film onto the uncanny transition from celluloid to digital film will take a psychoanalytic turn: I attend to reanimation, repetition, and doublings involved in digital cinema, to various kinds of loops of cinematic and media history from the past and present... The shift from celluloid to digital film has what Freud calls an uncanny dimension not only in its reanimation of the inanimate and blurring of the human and the mechanical but also in its insistence on recognition as a delay, a rereading in which the distinction between error and its recognition may also blur, in which recovery may serve as a cover-up.

Theoretical approaches that use the medieval artwork to define film, or that use notions of film to characterize the essential character of the medieval work of art, find their early precursor in Walter Benjamin’s highly influential essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” first published in 1936. According to Benjamin’s theory of film, film is a specifically modern medium because it depends
entirely on its exhibition value—film is thus conceived of as the opposite of the auratic work of art embodied most perfectly in the medieval religious work of art.  

But, as Margitta Rouse has recently shown, medieval film itself is capable of resisting such essentialist views of both film and of the medieval artwork.  

The consequences that such essentializing ideas of a technology-driven cinematic temporality may have for our understanding both of the Middle Ages and of adaptations will become even clearer if we remind ourselves of the familiar way that medieval studies has repeatedly been harried by essentialist notions of the media supposedly governing and, hence, delimiting the range and power of medieval artistic expression and negotiation. How often have we been told that orality and literacy are linked in a stable, indeed, essential relationship to be found all over the world in different societies—which is why the epic traditions surviving in early twentieth-century Yugoslavia were considered to provide an unmediated access to the correct way of reading and interpreting *Beowulf*? And how often have we been told that preliterate cultures are incapable of entertaining complex notions of temporality whereas literacy, and especially the printing press, has supposedly spawned all manner of sophisticated forms of understanding historicity and subjectivity?

For supporters of the oral-formulaic theory and some—but not all—of its more sophisticated successors, the specific nature of poetic composition and the particular forms of reproduction and performance provide a paradigm that governs not only how something is said within a given literary culture but also what is actually sayable within that frame of reference. Hence, certain theories of the way medieval media were employed arrogated to themselves the power as to judge which interpretations of a given medieval literary text were to be considered as historically valid and which were not. Any reading beyond the boundaries of what a certain medium or genre supposedly permits will thus be branded as anachronistic.

Similar effects can be observed with respect to the role linear perspective has played for art history. Here again, a whole world view is linked to a specific artistic and (apparently) epistemological technique and a certain way how a given artistic medium is developed and employed. This is not to say that we ought to disregard topics such as the printing press or linear perspective. On the contrary, orality and literacy, the printing press, and linear perspective must all be seen as fundamentally important cultural developments—but their role in cultural historiography has overwhelmingly been to buttress totalizing and unidirectional narratives of artistic, cultural, and epistemological progress. And since all these narratives heavily rely on the principle of a revolutionary point of origin—the triumph of literacy, the invention of the printing press, the discovery of
linear perspective—they combine their essentialist and hence a-temporal notions of artistic genre, technique, and medium with a rigorous ordering of temporality following a strict before-and-after model, which grants vastly superior powers and potentials to the side that comes after the revolutionary rupture caused by the new discoveries. Simultaneously, this approach to cultural history tends to fix what went before in a state of immaturity or innocence or archaic primitivism or uncultured darkness, and so on. In other words: Here we encounter a paradoxical link between the supposedly a-chronic essentialism of a specific mode of artistic production and a radically determinist and progressivist history of human (media) culture.

**Adaptation as Aesthetic Layering**

In order to avoid treating medieval film in what might easily turn out to be an essentialist and a-temporal manner, we wish, therefore, to proceed from a perspective that makes it possible for us to draw on all the recent developments in the study of medievalism, film studies, and adaptation studies, without, however, privileging any notion of film that focuses on any one of cinema’s supposed dominant aesthetic properties to a degree that might amount to re-introducing the paradoxically ahistorical but also deterministically historicizing essentialism of a particular medium or genre.

Instead of offering an alternative definition of medieval film we wish rather to propose that medieval film as a specific form of adaptation ideally—though by no means necessarily—makes it possible to establish dialogic relationships between various past(s) and present(s). Such relationships might well be seen in terms of an “uncertain temporality” as Bernau and Bildhauer have put it, but they should not be understood as diametrically opposed to the notion of chronological time. On the contrary, we would argue that temporal relationships ought to be seen as relying on chronology for the specific purpose of commenting on and undermining notions of temporality. This is something that medieval film does not perform simply through belonging to the medium of film. Rather, we would argue, medieval film questions and explores notions of temporality by exploiting cinema’s hybrid and multigeneric nature while simultaneously drawing on, or alluding to, medieval forms of expression and representation; an approach that works well within the adaptation paradigm since the hybrid and multigeneric are ultimately typical properties of all forms of adaptation.

Medieval film at its best is capable of critically addressing and playing with the fact that the motion picture as an artistic product cannot help
but be a combination of various artistic elements. And each of these artistic elements or layers must, to a certain degree, inevitably obey aesthetic conventions of its own. Each of these aesthetic conventions derives from an aesthetic history and tradition of its own, but in the context of film they all coalesce in surprising and multidimensional ways in order to contribute to the cinematic work of art as a whole. This multidimensionality potentially—though not automatically—facilitates a sense of layeredness which easily translates into a temporal experience of layeredness. This layeredness results from the way different aesthetic levels in film interact, levels such as the much-discussed gaze, the narrative editing, the setting and decor, the actors and their public images, a film’s themes and narrative structures, the music, the color or visual effects such as grainy images as opposed to brilliantly contrasting black-and-white, or even the conventions associated with a specific genre of film—and last but not least, the expectations that an audience might bring to the material being adapted.

All these elements combine in a form of aesthetic totality that may constantly be shifting throughout a given film. It is this sense of aesthetic totality that Richard Wagner already theorized in the nineteenth century, albeit in the context of the opera, long before actual motion pictures came into being, as is discussed in Stefan Keppler-Tasaki’s contribution to this book. But rather than seeing this aesthetic totality as something that automatically overwhelms the viewer—as Wagner would have preferred—we see it as something that can give expression to tension and conflict, as it pits its individual elements against each other, none of which will ever gain complete dominance over the others. It is adaptations’ general tendency to produce an inherent tension between their different artistic layers that enables them to explore different notions of temporality. It is with regard to these different layers that medieval film’s capacity for drawing on and adapting aesthetic artifacts, cultural concepts, and artistic practices from the Middle Ages becomes most volatile.

We are fully aware that, in purely logical terms, this multilayeredness we claim not only for film but for adaptations of any genre may look just as essentialist as do the concepts of film focusing predominantly on technology-orientated or supposedly media-specific characteristics such as montage or as the camera’s gaze. Nevertheless, we do believe that our approach differs in at least two important respects. First, as opposed to approaches that privilege one cinematic characteristic over all others, we strive critically to preserve the independent play of film’s different aesthetic levels, rather than subject them to a unified form of artistic agency. Second, we do not deny that any given film’s individual aesthetic layers each may, indeed, be strongly shaped by their particular technological characteristics.
conditions. But we do contend that the overall combination of these layers will achieve a relative degree of autonomy from any individual technology or medium, however dominant that technology or medium might appear within a particular film’s aesthetic. As a composite medium, film thus both brings together and opens up many approaches to the past. And even if we do conceive of this notion of compositionality as a fundamental characteristic of film, this sense of different artistic and aesthetic layers simultaneously cooperating and competing can still be seen as a powerful antidote against any kind of cinematic essentialism. Consequently, it must also be considered a powerful antidote against the static idea of temporality any form of cinematic essentialism might entail. It is in dialogue with specifically medieval forms of aesthetic expression and cultural understanding, we argue, that this combination of different layers is capable of realizing its full potential.

Though it is true that not every medieval film will of necessity exploit very actively the opportunities presented by film’s composite aesthetic nature, we do think that this composite nature does lend itself particularly well to explorations of complex temporalities, to dialogic interventions into chronological time, to an archaeological structuring that juxtaposes and keeps in play various and potentially conflicting approaches to temporality at the same time. Moreover, film’s compositionality makes it possible to adopt and adapt, to frame and reconceptualize aesthetic ideas, structures, and objects from the Middle Ages themselves. Precisely because for us, the modern audience of medieval film, the Middle Ages survives only in the form of material remains, aesthetic objects, archaeological artifacts, and literary sources, the overwhelming majority of which we would classify as “art” of one type or another, is it possible for medieval film, by exploiting its own compositionality, to draw on, and comment on, a multitude of different aesthetic traditions in the process of adapting them.

Thus we posit that, as a genre epitomizing processes of adaptation, medieval film enters into a dialogic relationship to the Middle Ages rather than simply appropriating objects from the medieval past. Through its very archaeological layeredness the medieval experience as transmitted to a modern audience through cultural relics always already poses the challenging question of its own historicity. That the past might represent itself as a historically laden archaeological site is not a modern discovery. Medieval literature itself is full of hidden treasures, submerged objects, and unexpected discoveries of the material remains of an unknown past. Medieval objects of art and cultural artifacts frequently not only stage, but actually problematize, this sense of historical layeredness in their own compositionality. The medieval Gesamtkunstwerk—be it a cathedral, a reliquary, a sarcophagus, a cycle play, or an illuminated manuscript—thus
betrays a powerful tendency toward exposing the historical tensions inherent in its own compositionality, a tendency toward encapsulating what Carolyn Dinshaw has termed “multiple temporalities.”

The archaeological nature of the medieval experience is mirrored and commented on as it becomes subject to adaptation in the composite aesthetics of film. This is not to say that a medieval aesthetic experience is similar to, or even prefigures, the modern experience of watching films. Rather, as the historical objects present themselves as tension-ridden already in the Middle Ages, they will often—though by no means automatically—provoke tension-ridden adaptations in film, thereby contributing further to the very aesthetic layeredness already present in films of any genre. Moreover, what we do seem to observe is that medieval-themed films frequently explore with an impressive degree of sophistication the provocative tensions historical objects create. It is important to stress that such a sense of the past as embodied and dramatized in an aesthetic of layeredness generates a dialogic relationship between different layers of the past as well as between various pasts and various layers of the present as further, but not necessarily privileged, layers of temporality.

Medieval art and cinematic art easily enter into dialogue when it comes to investigating the complex relations between the past, the present, and the future. In this sense then, as in so many others, medieval notions of the past help to shape our notions of the medieval, especially if they are adapted by modern films, and this is a phenomenon that all the texts in this collection seek to unravel in one way or another.

The following brief descriptions provide an overview of the way how this book’s individual contributions each investigate the intersections between the medieval and the cinematic, as well as explore the aesthetic layering of cinematic adaptation: even in films that do not seem to be recognizably medieval-themed at first glance. What unites all essays is a strong concern with the temporalities of adaptation in various media. Using a wide range of methodological and theoretical approaches, the essays collected in this book all demonstrate that the chosen films’ implicit articulation of their poetics of adaptation is strongly linked to the cultural practice of “doing time,” or to what Jocelyn Keller and Wolfram R. Keller, in their chapter on Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran* (1985), call “temporalizing.” Kurosawa’s *Ran*, they argue, ought to be treated as a medieval film, where layers of temporality are themselves the focus of adaptation. An adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Lear*, a play concerned with the transition from medieval to modern, the motion picture transfers Shakespeare’s engagement with multiple temporalities into a medieval Japanese setting. Zooming in on the transition period from a decentralized feudalism to a unified version of feudalism, Kurosawa, like Shakespeare, scrutinizes
the imperial politics that bring about the ideologies of periodization. Kurosawa’s *Ran* constitutes what we could call a multi-temporal and multi-spatial adaptation, in that the motion picture not only adapts a European stage play to Japanese film, but also an early modern take on English transitions from medieval to modern into a historical Japanese setting accessible to a present-day Japanese (and by extension present-day international) audience.

Cordula Lemke, too, explores various layers of temporality, and the ways in which the subject of time seems central to a cinematic poetics of adaptation. Frequently scorned as a more than disappointing adaptation of Stoker’s classic, among other things because it introduces a clichéd romance plot between medieval lovers, Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992) adapts not only the novel, but also offers the director’s own version of the Middle Ages—which is shown as encroaching on the present in the figure of Dracula as a “quintessential anachronism.” Coppola’s adaptation, too, is multi-temporal and multi-spatial: As Lemke shows, it is precisely the clichéd entanglement between Dracula and Jonathan Harker’s fiancée Mina, redoubling and reanimating a past love between the undead Count and his deceased wife Elisabeta, which makes it possible for medieval and present-day notions of time to converge through a notion of eternal love.

In her chapter on Richard Donner’s 2003 film adaptation of Michael Crichton’s science fiction novel *Timeline*, Margitta Rouse explores the critical potential of cinematic anachronisms further. If they are not regarded as mere “errors” or “liberties” in the service of present-day concerns, anachronisms are typically thought of as adding little to our understanding of the Middle Ages, especially in films making abundant use of medieval-themed clichés. Both Lemke’s engagement with the figure of Dracula, as well as Rouse’s close reading of Donner’s strategic deployment of anachronisms however show that cinematic anachronisms provide glimpses of the past that open up new perspectives on history and blur the well-worn boundaries between past and present. In approaching anachronisms from various temporal perspectives, *Timeline* stages an ultimately futile search for a historically “accurate” past, while it simultaneously envisions a multi-temporal model of history where alternative pasts, presents, and futures not only exist side-by-side but actually intersect.

Judith Klinger investigates the poetics of adaptation as an intercultural and inter-period exchange in unpacking the various cultural exchanges taking place in *The Thirteenth Warrior* (1999), another screen adaptation of a novel by Michael Crichton. Film and novel are in turn chiefly based on two medieval sources: the Old English epic *Beowulf*, and the tenth-century travel narrative of the Arab poet-cum-diplomat, Ahmad ibn Fadlan. When
cultured Ibn Fadlan meets the barbaric Viking leader Buliwyf, an unusual dialogue unfolds between an enlightened Oriental world and a Northern “heroic” medieval culture. Although *The Thirteenth Warrior*, too, is not free of the well-known stereotypes of movie medievalism, it presents this dialogue as a multifaceted and laborious process of translation and interpretation, confronting in complex ways concepts such as religion, gender, rulership, and power. Instead of seeking to reveal “eternal truths” behind the medieval masquerade the movie underscores cultural difference by its redoubling of historical distance.

Whereas Klinger discovers in *The Thirteenth Warrior* what could be called a Bakhtinian poetics of adaptation allowing voices of different periods and cultures to exist side-by-side, Kepler-Tasaki contrasts two very different adaptations of the *Tristan* material in the light of Richard Wagner’s lesser-known medievalist theory of adaptation, which drew on the Middle Ages as an inspiration for the “artwork of the future.” Wagner insisted that his operatic adaptations did not simply derive from the high medieval sources but were actually closer to their “true” but lost “origins”—origins Wagner felt he was in fact reconstructing. In his analysis of Veith von Fürstenberg’s *Feuer und Schwert* [*Fire and Sword*] (1982) and Kevin Reynolds’s *Tristan & Isolde* (2006), Kepler-Tasaki examines the ways in which cinematic adaptations purport to reinstate the multi-medial and synaesthetic force of medieval modes of expression in radically diverse forms. He argues that both films paradoxically break free, as well as depend on, the proto-cinematic authority of the composer’s all-pervasive legacy. Arguably, film adaptations are no further removed from their origins than Wagner’s operas; in fact, such apparently different films as Fürstenberg’s and Reynolds’s can be understood as the continuation of a cultural work that not only precedes and forestalls opera, but also Wagner’s high medieval source material.

Philipp Hinz and Margitta Rouse likewise investigate a fantasy of adaptation as capable of reconstructing the “true” artwork beneath the medieval source text: Robert Zemeckis’s *Beowulf* (2007), an animated adaptation of the Old English epic based on a script by Roger Avary and Neil Gaiman. *Beowulf* is a cinematic landmark in terms of its use of novel film-technology: Live actors’ appearances as well as movements were transposed into digital images, and transferred into computer generated sets to create an entirely digitized performance animation. Insisting on having recreated a version of *Beowulf* much closer to the supposed pre-Christian, pagan origins of the Anglo-Saxon epic, the filmmakers use the so-called hyperrealist aesthetics of computer generated images (CGI) to re-interpret the *Beowulf* myth psychoanalytically as a myth of a never-ending family trauma, a trauma, which is potentially banned by
the advent of Christianity. On the one hand, CGI stakes a claim to recreating the medieval aesthetic experience, and on the other it visualizes the aesthetics of trauma as aesthetics of historical recursivity. Exploring the film’s poetics of hyperrealism, Hinz and Rouse unearth the contradictions between the film’s interpretation of history as a psychoanalytical trauma narrative on the one hand, and its teleological understanding of history as a narrative of linear progress on the other.

Martin Bleisteiner, too, is concerned with disruptions of lineage and linearity in his investigation of incest narratives in HBO’s television series *Game of Thrones* (2011 to present) and the associated series of novels by George R. R. Martin. Sexual relationships between siblings, mother and child, as well as between father and child not only constitute a powerful plot-generating device in *Game of Thrones*, but also illustrate the novels’ and TV series’ poetics of adaptation. Just like the results of incestual relationships complicate notions of ancestry, parentage and progeny, the multi-medial publishing and broadcasting phenomenon that is *Game of Thrones* essentially thwarts any clear-cut hierarchical distinction between “source” and “target” medium. What is more, in ever proliferating episodic entanglements *Game of Thrones* showcases incest in a manner similar to medieval romance, a literary genre which likewise refuses to be subjected to neat taxonomical classification.

Romance excesses loom large also in Hans Jürgen Scheuer’s investigation of M. Night Shyamalan’s blockbuster *The Sixth Sense* (1999). The chapter takes as its point of departure the film’s reference to King Arthur in which the nine-year-old Cole Sear plays a young Arthur as part of a school stage production, pulling the sword Excalibur from its famous stone. Whereas previous studies of the film hardly focus on the sixth sense as an actual sense of perception, Scheuer expands on Kevin J. Harty’s little known observation that *The Sixth Sense* constitutes a fully valid film adaptation of the Arthurian legend, arguing that Shyamalan’s concept of the sixth sense adapts for modern film what is essentially a premodern notion of image perception. *The Sixth Sense* explores a premodern concern with the contact between the living and the dead, in the medium of a narrated and imagined “common sense,” albeit seen from the perspective of a modern director and screenwriter, and brought to life through the genre of horror.

Finally, Andrew James Johnston’s chapter on Richard Lester’s film *Robin and Marian* (1976) takes the Robin Hood legend as an example to show how adaptation is persistently preoccupied with the traditionality of its own traditions. By focusing on the trope of archaeological remains, on medieval processes of mythmaking, and on the religious and spiritual notions explored in the film, Johnston shows that *Robin and Marian*
demonstrates a particular understanding of the political complexities of tradition and temporality which are already an essential part of medieval literature’s cultural legacy. Not only does the film draw on medieval source material for a critical reassessment of the cinematic tradition of Robin Hood, but it also conveys a sensibility for the political nature of temporality already communicated in the film’s medieval source texts. In strategically alluding to premodern cultural and artistic practices and artifacts as well as to specifically medieval forms of religious experience, the film underscores the type of multilayered temporality that medieval texts and artifacts share with a (post-)modern perspective on the Middle Ages. Thus, the film actually visualizes a dialogic interchange between a meta-cinematic reflection on the history of the Robin Hood legend, and medieval ways of constructing tradition, thereby drawing on typically medieval negotiations of the political nature of temporality.

Notes


2. For a recent account of how the issue of accuracy matters for discussions of medieval film see Bettina Bildhauer, Filming the Middle Ages (London: Reaktion, 2011), pp. 18–22. Ironically, the most sophisticated recent studies of medieval film all seem to find it necessary to begin their attempts
at theorizing medieval film by first driving out the specter of historical accuracy in one way or the other.


4. On the potential of medieval film studies to inspire adaptation studies, see also Laurence Raw’s review article “Imaginative History and Medieval Film,” in which he argues that the “writings of medieval film theorists can prove useful in analyzing the processes of textual reconstruction, as well as encouraging the kind of interdisciplinary research that might free adaptation studies from the confines of the literature/media/film/theatre paradigm” (*Adaptation* 5.2 [2012]: 263 [262–67]).


6. For heuristic reasons, it is often helpful to posit a distinction between “medieval studies” in the traditional sense and “medievalism.” In practice, however, that distinction is not at all easy to uphold since there is an element of medievalism at work in every scholarly investigation into medieval culture—any study of the Middle Ages must in one way or other be informed by some notion of the “medieval.” At the same time, since medievalism discusses the construction of the Middle Ages, it must evidently influence the way scholars see the Middle Ages themselves. As Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman state: “‘Medievalism’...may be as old as the medieval itself” (Finke and Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations*, p. 11).

7. See Andrew James Johnston, *Performing the Middle Ages from Beowulf to Othello* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), pp. 1–12.


15. Ibid., p. 84.
16. This is a problem Finke and Shichtman seek to tackle in the context of medieval film by introducing a Bakhtin-inspired notion of “sociological stylistics” (Finke and Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations*, p. 23).
17. Ibid., p. 24.
20. In Cerquiglini’s eyes “medieval writing does not produce variants; it is variance. The endless rewriting to which medieval textuality is subjected, the joyful appropriation of which it is the object, invites us to make a powerful hypothesis: the variant is never punctual” (Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. Betsy Wing [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999], pp. 77–78).
21. Finke and Shichtman, *Cinematic Illuminations*, p. 34.
26. For a recent discussion of the problematic impact some theories of orality/literacy have had on the interpretation of medieval English texts, see Johnston, *Performing the Middle Ages*, pp. 26–45.
27. For an important discussion of the ways in which Heidegger, Blumenberg, and Foucault all contributed to the philosophical underpinnings of this form of cultural history firmly grounded in the epistemologies and techniques of representation, see Andrew Cole and D. Vance Smith, “Outside Modernity,” in *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages: On the Unwritten History of Theory*, ed. Andrew Cole and D. Vance Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 2–36.

INDEX

1492 – Conquest of Paradise (1992), 120
adaption
of A Song of Fire and Ice (Martin), 155–65
as aesthetic layering, 8–15
of Beowulf, 129–49
of Dracula (Stoker), 41–54
of Eaters of the Dead (Crichton), 79–101
of King Lear (Shakespeare), 19–35
on the medieval, 59–60
poetics of, 11–14, 82, 90–1, 99, 133, 149
politics of, 21, 26, 75, 98–101
studies, 1–2, 8, 15n1, 16n4, 41, 58, 134, 173
theory, 1–15, 75
Timeline, 12, 58–76
of Timeline (Crichton), 58–76
Adolf, Heinrich, 211n27
Adorno, Theodor, 110, 121
Agamben, Giorgio, 185–6
anachronisms
as aesthetic strategy, 57–76
ambivalent, 68–76
evaluating, 64–8
in Timeline (2003), 68–76
views of, 61–4
Apollonius of Tyre, 167n20
Aquinas, Thomas, 46
archaeology, 10–11, 14, 58, 72–5, 90–1, 133, 193, 195–208
Archibald, Elizabeth, 166n11
Aristotle, 172, 186
Arthurian legends and myth
and Game of Thrones, 156–8, 167n26, 168n29
and King Lear, 24
and The Sixth Sense, 14, 173–88
Asma, Stephen T., 145–6
Aue, Hartmann von, 179, 181
Augustine, 46–9, 51–2
Avary, Roger, 13, 129–34, 137.
See also Beowulf (2007)
Baker, Graham: Beowulf, 131
Bakhtin, Mikhail, 13, 17n16, 86, 89, 166n7
Balázs, Béla, 108, 110–11, 113
Baudrillard, Jean, 132, 150n17
Bédier, Joseph, 115
Benjamin, Walter, 6–7
Beowulf (2007), 129–49, 151n32, 151n35–6, 152n53, 152n41
Beowulf (poem)
archaeological tropes in, 201
and Beowulf (2007), 13, 129–49
and Eaters of the Dead (Crichton), 80, 90–4
Heaney's edition of, 152n40–1
and Outlander (2008), 153n66
and The Thirteenth Warrior, 12, 94, 104n49
Bernau, Anke, 2–3, 8, 140, 144
Biddick, Kathleen, 140
Bildhauer, Bettina, 2–3, 8, 140, 144, 153n64
Bleisteiner, Martin, 14
Bloom, Harold, 23, 37n22
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INDEX

Boethius, 46
Bosch, Hieronymus, 196
Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1992), 12, 41–54, 56n32, 56n35, 56n39
Branagh, Kenneth, 120
Braveheart (1995), 73
Breughel, Pieter the Elder
   The Blind Leading the Blind, 196
   Children’s Games, 196
   Netherlandish Proverbs, 196
   The Slaughter of the Innocents, 196
   The Tower of Babel, 196
   Triumph of Death and Dulle Griet (Mad Meg), 196
Browning, Tod, 41, 48
Buddhism, 27–35, 39n36, 39n44
Burt, Richard, 6, 55n21
Burton, Richard, 114

Celtic mythology, 73–4, 181, 190n18, 196
Cerquiglini, Bernard, 6, 17n20, 17n22
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 24–5, 39n36, 39n44, 168n27, 168n36
Cheney, Patrick, 23
Cheng, Jerome, 145
chronology, 2–3
Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, 4
Colette, Carolyn, 136
Comolli, Jean-Louis, 132
computer generated images (CGI), 13–14, 130–6, 139–49, 152n41, 152n53
Connery, Sean, 194, 209n2, 210n23
convergence culture, 63, 67
Cooper, Helen, 156, 166n6, 168n28
Coppola, Francis Ford: Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1992), 12, 41–54, 56n32, 56n35, 56n39
Coulardeau, Jacques, 55n19
Crichton, Michael
   Eaters of the Dead, 80, 82–4, 86, 89–99, 104n34, 131
   on the medieval, 59–60
   Timeline, 12, 58–76
   See also Thirteenth Warrior, The (1999); Timeline (2003)
Danby, John, 22–3
Dawkins, Richard, 156
Dawson, Anthony, 20
de Grazia, Margreta, 61
derrida, Jacques, 41
Dickie, Kate, 163
Dinshaw, Carolyn, 11, 51–3, 62
Donner, Richard: Timeline (2003), 58–76
Doody, Margaret, 166n7
Driver, Martha W., 63
DVD technology, 6
Dyer, Richard, 56n32

Echard, Siân, 137
Eco, Umberto, 132
Elliott, Andrew, 63–4, 68
ever, 12–13, 44–53
Excalibur (1981), 114

Fassbinder, Rainer Werner, 115
Felski, Rita, 18n29, 62
Feuer und Schwert (Fire and Sword) (1982), 13, 108, 113–24
Finke, Laurie A., 5–6, 16n6, 17n16, 64, 199
Fradenburg, Aranye, 62
Franco, James, 120
Fratello Sole, Sorella Luna (Brother Sun, Sister Moon) (1972), 211n29
free will, 47
Freud, Sigmund, 6, 139–40, 172
Frye, Northrop, 167n19
Funeral, The (1996), 40n45
Fürstenberg, Veith von: Feuer und Schwert (Fire and Sword) (1982), 13, 108, 113–24

Gaiman, Neil, 13, 130–1, 134, 137.
   See also Beowulf (2007)
Game of Thrones (television series), 14, 155–65, 165–6n4, 167n26
Gardner, John: Grendel, 130–1
INDEX 231

Geoffrey of Monmouth, 167n18

Jameson, Fredric, 41, 54

Historia regum Britanniae, 21

Jansen, Marius B., 38n29

Georgaris, Dean, 120–5

Japanese theater, 26–35

Gesamtkunstwerk, 10, 109, 111, 116, 122

Jenkins, Henry, 63

Gest of Robyn Hode, A, 204–5, 208

jidai-geki (samurai film), 26, 31, 38n25

Gladiator (2000), 120

Joe, Jeongwon, 107

Glaser, Hermann, 117

Johnston, Andrew James, 14, 21, 62, 168n27

Goody, Jack, 3–4

Johnston, Edward, 58

Greenblatt, Stephen, 3

Jolie, Angelina, 148

Gregory of Tours, 130

Jones, Chris, 130–1, 134, 151n35

Halter, Michael, 84

Hannibal (2004), 120

Hargrove, Michael, 19

Hansel and Gretel (2003), 117

Haydock, Nickolas, 61

Hansel and Gretel (2007), 11

Heaney, Seamus, 139, 152n40–1

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Heng, Geraldine, 166n8

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Herweg, Mathias, 127n44

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Heron, Werner, 113–14

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Higson, Andrew, 200

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Hinz, Philipp, 13–14

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Hiroshima, atomic bomb attack on, 29, 33

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

historical accuracy, 12, 15–16n2, 57, 60–8, 75, 91, 116, 198

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Hodapp, William D., 133–4

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Huizinga, Johan: Autumn of the Middle Ages, 196

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Hutcheson, Linda, 4–5, 169n41

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

Hutchinson, Rachel, 31, 38n25

Hasegawa, Masaaki, 29

hyperrealism, 13–14, 131–6, 141, 144, 148–9, 151n28

Ibn Fadlan, Ahmed: Risala, 80, 82–3, 85, 91, 98

leadership, 93, 96

incest, 14, 155–65, 166n11, 167n18, 167n20, 167n25, 168n27, 168n36

Leitch, Thomas, 1–2, 4

Inglorious Basterds (2009), 115

Lemke, Cordula, 12, 65

Inouura, Yoshinobu, 40n45

Lester, Richard: Robin and Marian (1976), 14, 193–208

interlace, 161

Leyerle, John, 161

Irwin, William, 166n13

Linton, Joan Pong, 20

Itami, 40n45

Lovecsepp (1981), 114

Jacob, Henry, 166n13

Lucan, 190n18

James, William, 58

Lukács, György, 63, 77n32

Copyrighted material – 9780230112506
Malkovich, John, 133
Manovich, Lev, 134
Martin, George R. R.: *A Song of Fire and Ice*, 14, 155, 157, 161–5, 168n30. See also *Game of Thrones* (television series)
medieval film, defined, 2–3
medieval studies, 2–3, 16n6, 21, 69, 140
medievalism, use of the term, 16n6
memes, 156
Menache, Alberto, 131
*Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975), 65
motion capture, 131, 145
multi-temporality, 62, 72
Multiverse, 58–9, 71
Mulvey, Laura, 4, 139–40
Murnau, Friedrich Wilhelm, 41
Myles, Sophia, 120

Nachträglichkeit, 139–41
Nagasaki, atomic bomb attack on, 29, 33
Nichols, Stephen G., 140
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 146
*nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese-ness), 38n29, 40n45
Nordin, Kenneth D., 27–8, 39n36

Paden, William D., 63
Panofsky, Erwin, 61
*Parsifal* (1982), 114
Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 207–8
periodization, 11–12, 20–1, 31, 36n8, 58, 61–2
poet-playwrights, 20, 23–4, 31
postcolonial theory, 3–4
Preser, Antonia, 114
*privatio boni*, 47, 49
psychological hyperrealism, 141
Pugh, Tison, 209n2, 211n24
quest, 60, 158, 161, 167, 168n29. See also Arthurian legends and myth
Raab, Kurt, 115
*Ran* (1985), 11–12, 19–35, 31, 36n8
Raw, Laurence, 16n4
“Reel History” (blog), 67
Rob Roy (1995), 73
*Robin and Marian* (1976), 14, 193–208
*Robin Hood* (2010), 120
*Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), 102n9, 120, 210–11n23
*Robin of Sherwood* (television series), 210n23
romance genre
Arthurian, 173, 179–80
and *Game of Thrones*, 14, 164–5, 166n7–8, 167n19, 168n28
and *Robin and Marian*, 200, 204
and *The Thirteenth Warrior*, 97
and *Timeline*, 60
*Romeo and Juliet* (1967), 211n29
Rouse, Margitta, 7, 12–14, 56n39
Said, Edward, 81, 98, 102n16
*samurai*, 21, 25–7, 29, 33, 38n29
Saracens, 102n9
Scheuer, Hans Jürgen, 14
Schneider, Manfred, 89
science fiction, 60, 65. See also *Timeline* (2003)
Scott, Ridley, 102n11, 120
September 11, 2001, 99
Sewell, Rufus, 120
Shaheen, Jack, 80, 102n11
Shakespeare, William, 109
*King Lear*, 11, 19–35
*Pericles*, 168n27
*Romeo and Juliet*, 51
See also *Hamlet* (1996)
Sheikh, *The* (1921), 102n15
Shichtman, Martin B., 5–6, 16n6, 17n16, 64, 199

Copyrighted material – 9780230112506
INDEX


Sklar, Elizabeth, 84, 97, 101n3, 103n29

Smith, Julia, 134

Stanbury, Sarah, 136

Starkey, Steve, 132

Stock, Lorraine, 102n9

Stoker, Bram: *Dracula*, 12, 41–54. See also *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992)

Syberberg, Hans Jürgen, 114, 116

Tarantino, Quentin, 115

Telotte, Jay P., 135, 142

temporality, 2–15, 20–1, 26, 28, 31–2, 141, 61–72, 195, 198–200

*Thirteenth Warrior, The* (1999), 13, 79–101, 104n40, 104n51, 105n58
time travel, 58–9, 65–6, 69–72

*Timeline* (2003), 58–76

Todorov, Tzvetan, 172

Tolkien, J. R. R.: “The Monsters and the Critics,” 133, 150n20

Trigg, Stephanie, 63


Tuchmann, Barbara, 71

Türlin, Heinrich von dem: *Diu Crône (The Crown)*, 183–4

Twain, Mark: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, 66

Uccellacci e uccellini (1966), 207–8

Valentino, Rudolph, 102n15

Wagner, Richard, 9, 13, 107–25, 133

*Art and Revolution*, 107, 124

*The Art-Work of the Future*, 109–10

*Opera and Drama*, 110–11

Parsifal, 110

*Tannhäuser*, 111–12

*Tristan und Isolde*, 112, 115, 117, 121, 124

See also *Parsifal* (1982); *Tristan & Isolde* (2006)

Waltz, Christoph, 114–15

Wawer, Anne, 190n18

Wenders, Wim, 114

Westboer, Nils, 172

Winstone, Ray, 145

Woods, William F., 196

Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro, 40n45

Yoshino, Kosaku, 38n29

Zeffirelli, Franco, 211n29

Zemeckis, Robert: *Beowulf* (2007), 129–49, 151n32, 151n35–6, 152n53, 152n41