The Iberian Middle Ages in Audiovisual Media

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The early modern concept of a "middle time" or "middle era" (from Latin *medium aevum*, *media tempestas/aetas*) depended on a European periodization of ancient, medieval, and modern/contemporary that, like any periodization, was inevitably arbitrary. Coined for the first time in the middle of the 15th century, this concept reflected that century's contempt towards what it saw as the dark and often brutal centuries from which it had emerged. Over time, associations with the period have continued to embody caricatured, often disparaging conceptions, with the categories of "medieval" and "Middle Ages" conveying to the popular imagination a homogeneous vision of Christian Europe between approximately 500 and 1500 CE. These oversimplifications have persisted, despite the well documented ethnoreligious diversity of Europe during these centuries. Although "medieval" and "Middle Ages" have entered the everyday vocabulary of specialists and non-specialists alike, they remain problematic and in constant need of interrogation —all the more so, as the contributions to this volume make clear, considering their pervasive place within and shaping of our collective imaginations.

In 19th-century England, "medieval" and "mediaeval" became popular alongside another term, "medievalism", which would become widespread thanks to, among others, John Ruskin (Matthews 2011).

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The term "medievalism" had less coverage until the 1970s, when it was recovered by English-speaking scholars such as Alice Chandler and Leslie Workman (Chandler 1970; Workman 1979). In its refined application, "medievalism" articulated a research area that entails all forms of allusion to or re-imagining of medieval histories, narratives, themes, beliefs, and practices. Artworks set in fictional worlds or representing alternative histories —in other words, making no claims to historical veracity— similarly fit the English-speaking definition of "medievalism" through their inclusion of themes, archetypes, or aesthetics associated with the idea of the Middle Ages. The Italian philosopher Umberto Eco also popularized "neomedievalism" in the 70s to define a field of scholarly inquiry similar to that proposed by Leslie Workman, and political theorist Hedley Bull coined "new mediaevalism" in 1977 to define the reincarnation of an overlapping or segmented state authority that he contended had characterized medieval Christendom (Eco 1986; Bull 2002).

While the term and category of "medieval" has remained relatively stable as a spatiotemporal category assigned to the period of European history between the 5th and 15th centuries, both "medievalism" and "neomedievalism" have fluctuated enormously as terms from the 1970s to the present. They have been accumulating various meanings, they have been generalized in very different disciplines and areas of knowledge, and they presently generate great theoretical and methodological debates. Three examples drawn from Iberophone academias exemplify some of the larger global inconsistencies and disputes that exist around these categories. Regarding "medievalism", the term in Spanish-speaking academia generally refers to Medieval Studies, namely the study of the Middle Ages as a historical period. It therefore addresses the plural and varied historiographic discourse elaborated on the European Middle Ages, with various trends, problems, and questions raised from multiple points of view (Monsalvo Antón 2020). Accordingly, the scientific journal published periodically by the Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales is titled, precisely, *Medievalismo*. Until

very recently, this term was not used with the meaning that Leslie Workman assigned to it in the 1970s (Gonçalves and Sanmartín 2021). For its part, Portuguese academia traditionally differentiates between *Estudos Medievais*, that is Medieval Studies, and *Medievalismo*, or the ways the Middle Ages are represented and imagined over time (Martins and Rosa 2020), although recent approaches have brought together both notions under the *Medievalismo* umbrella (Barros Dias *et al.* 2020). Finally, one of the most recent theoretical contributions to the field of Latin American studies is the rehabilitation of "neomedievalism" as a substitute for the Leslie Workman's notion of "medievalism" (Altschul 2023; Altschul, Bertarelli, and Amaral 2021; Altschul and Grzybowski 2020).

Being fully aware of the current intense theoretical debates generated by the terms of "medievalism" and "neomedievalism" —and the simple matter of linguistic inconsistency— the editors of this volume prefer "representation" and "reception" as concepts that capture the global afterlives of the period in a range of media and contexts. Thus, this volume analyzes the Iberian Middle Ages in audiovisual creation from the perspective of the representation, deployment, and projection of that historical period in film and television.

As a field of scholarly inquiry, the audiovisual representation of the Middle Ages applies to a variety of media. While the present volume focuses on film and television, the Ancient Greek κίνημα (*kínēma*, "movement") suggests future applications in a range of newer media, among them video games, augmented reality, and online content. As multimodal media in which verbal, visual, and auditory systems of communication coexist, film and television invite cross-disciplinary approaches into innumerable histories of communication. The treatments of the Middle Ages in literature, music, and the visual arts, and their associated scholarly study, have direct implications for analyses of film and television, which engage with or regularly incorporate conventions that first emerged in other media.

To give one example, the category of "verbal" communication covers diegetic speech (audible to the characters), such as dialogue,

and non-diegetic speech (not audible to the characters), such as voiceover narration. In addition, "verbal" includes written words, which can appear within the world of the narrative or on title screens. Depending on context, spoken and written words can convey the idea of the Middle Ages through some relationship with a source text, such as having characters speak words adapted from a primary source (e. g., an adapted folktale); through the uses of particular languages or accents; through visual imitation of scripts in medieval manuscripts, and so on.

In addition to these multimodal qualities, film and television nearly always involve greater numbers of participants and stakeholders than works by single artists, composers, or authors. These range from those most directly involved in production and post-production —writers, researchers, script supervisors; directors; art departments; costume departments; camera, sound, and lighting crews; composers; and editors— to those who initiate, approve, oversee, or invest in the project. The more managerial roles include not only production companies and studios but sometimes entire state apparatuses. As such, the resulting engagements with the Middle Ages rarely represent a singular vision.

From the standpoint of reception, film and television have a long history of large audiences. While there have always been experimental, transgressive, or simply independent productions intended for limited viewership, film and television have more often been oriented towards mass markets, partly because of the associated production complexities and costs. Whether educational, propagandistic, or entirely commercially motivated, these media embody the aspirations of those involved in their creation, and often reflect or shape the beliefs of societies at large. The reception of the Middle Ages in cinema and television is therefore more instructive of ideological or political agendas, historical consciousness, or social concerns during the production period.

Independent of specific genre, audiovisual representations of the Middle Ages often rely on what many scholars term the "medieval imaginary" (Amy de la Bretèque 2004; Haydock 2008),

summarized by Andrew B. R. Elliott as "a recognizable set of signs and ideas, coming eventually to form a reflection of the period which —though imaginary— was paradoxically perhaps more 'real' to modern cinema audiences than the Historical equivalent" (2011: 206). For most non-expert viewers, witnessing their own preconceptions of the Middle Ages playing out on screen, as well as simple frequency of reproduction, produces a stronger sense of authenticity than careful alignment with historical fact (Clemens 2014; Elliott 2017).

In addition to elements of the "medieval imaginary", film and television regularly emphasize the fundamental disjuncture between the Middle Ages and the present, both periods existing in a chronology marked by radical breaks. As Bettina Bildhauer notes, "whatever the Middle Ages are, they are not modern. They provide a contrasting foil to modernity, whether as a lost paradise or as a backward precursor" (2011: 10). Many productions take this fundamental difference even further, defining medieval spatiotemporalities as mythical, epic, and often supernatural times and places (Bildhauer 2011: 19).

Concerning the more specific means through which medieval film and television produce their desired effects, scholars generally reiterate certain common features:

- Reality or authenticity effects: Attempts at accuracy generally seek to enhance the audience's perception of authenticity or authoritative information. These effects originate in diverse audiovisual elements, from props, costuming, and filming locations to language and musical score (Salih 2009; Elliott 2011: 206-222; Sturtevant 2018: 117-154). As noted above, they depend more on the medieval imaginary of a given time and place than on scholarly research.

- Anachronism or inaccuracy: Although often treated as involuntary or accidental, inaccuracies can represent deliberate production choices that perform cultural work. They may be deployed

for humorous or experimental effect (Simmons 2014), or in more insidious misrepresentations of history. The latter are not limited to state-sponsored propaganda: "Contemporary anxieties over the supposedly precarious status of masculinity, Christianity, and whiteness continue to promote medievalism as the solution to society's ills" (Kaufman 2014).

- Mixed or non-linear temporalities: Narrative representations of the Middle Ages often blend past and present, creating a new reality that "by turns fetishizes the alterity of the Middle Ages as a temporal Other while compulsively retooling imagined continuities to fit the rapidly changing priorities of the contemporary world" (Haydock 2008: 5). From a practical standpoint, these simultaneities take the form of time stoppages, time travel, cyclical time, and interwoven historical periods (Bildhauer and Bernau 2009). Visually, they also produce audiovisual pastiches in which seemingly incongruous styles coexist.

The long history of creating copies and apocrypha unites medieval creations and their post-medieval reincarnations. When cultural artifacts recreate or reimagine specific medieval visual or material culture, source texts, or musical compositions, they should not be judged or understood according to their historical fidelity but rather, as Andrew B. R. Elliott argues, "on their *function* in the modern media, and the *effect* of this kind of discourse on other media representations in a complex media environment" (2017: 16). As was the case in the Middle Ages, the significance and success of "copies" stem from contemporary intentions, media mechanisms, and reception.

The Iberian Middle Ages in film and television

Monographs and edited volumes on the Middle Ages in film and television tend to foreground productions set or filmed in northern, eastern, and western Europe, focusing on historical-mythological

heroes (Robin Hood, Joan of Arc, Arthurian characters) and archetypes (knights and crusaders, Vikings, kings and queens, monks, saints), including the Hollywood treatments of these same settings, themes, and characters (Amy de la Bretèque 2004 and 2015; Heinrich and Kiening 2006; Elliott 2011). The overwhelming majority examine Anglo- and Francophone cinemas, and especially the reception and reinterpretation of medieval history unfolding north of the Pyrenees. Of the 564 films Kevin J. Harty describes in *The Reel Middle Ages* (1999), only nine were produced entirely in Spain and two in Portugal, with Spain listed for six additional co-productions; in other words, only 3% of the inventoried films are Iberian in whole or in part.

While certain of these more general texts discuss medieval Iberian topics, they generally do so from a North American perspective. For instance, in the aptly named chapter "God (and the Studio) Wills It! Crusade Films", John Aberth dedicates significant attention to *El Cid* (1961), directed by Anthony Mann and produced by Samuel Bronston (2003: 125-147). Aberth examines the film's presentation of "the Cid as a national hero who lived to unify Spain, which finds no precedent in any medieval source" (2003: 130), but also America's evolving relationship with Spain. Aberth calls *El Cid* "the icing on the cake for America's new ally in its anti-Communist crusade" (2003: 147).

Much like this study of *El Cid*, publications on representations of the Middle Ages in regional cinemas often note the uses of the period to strengthen national identities and political ideologies, or even to support heritage tourism (Higson 2009: 220-222). For example, Bildhauer examines the Middle Ages in German cinema from the Weimar Republic (1919-33) to contemporary German productions and co-productions (2011). While the study of the Iberian Middle Ages reimagined under periods of Iberian dictatorship benefits from similar inquiries into state-sanctioned misuses of the past, medieval-themed cinema and television from Spanish and Portuguese creators and industries are limited neither to these periods nor to a single set of ideological concerns.

The contributions to this volume

In general terms, contributions to this volume analyze both personal and national visions of the Middle Ages, examining the links between history and the cinematic experience: Which aspects related to the real or imagined Iberian Middle Ages do films capture or fabricate? How do these acts of (re)creation intersect with elements of identity, political ideology, and legitimacy? Additionally, this volume creates space for methodological reflection, in the sense that it brings together researchers interested in this topic from very different disciplinary perspectives, including the histories of art, music, and literature; philosophy; and film, communication, and cultural studies.

The contributions are subdivided into three parts, although many of their themes and underlying questions intersect. In the first part, "Historias y memorias disputadas", authors focus on a range of twentieth- and twenty-first-century concerns, and the ways in which the evolving attitudes or aspirations of creators and audiences are filtered through visions of the past. The chapters in the second part, "Recuperación y revivalismo", address this topic as a means of knowledge excavation, whether the final products recover stories, models for behavior, or forms of creation. "Técnicas de medios audiovisuales", the third and final part of the volume, draws attention to the constructed natures of film and television, and specifically the means, vehicles, and effects used to represent the Middle Ages cinematically.

Part 1: Contested histories and memories

Contested aspects of the past, especially the bases for claiming a narrative as legitimate or accurate, come into sharp focus in the comparative studies of Part 1. The authors bring multiple productions into dialogue with each other to reveal the highly contextual, evolving nature of cinematic "truth". They center historical case studies (e. g., notable individuals, events, and historical periods) as a means of assessing some of the propagandistic, mythic, and nationalistic motivations for reimagining the Iberian Middle Ages.

Juanjo Bermúdez de Castro addresses the ways in which the figure of Joanna of Castile (r. 1504-1555), often denoted "the Mad", has been rewritten throughout the history of Spanish cinema. He posits that the film industry, in a bidirectional relationship of reproduction and ideological construction, paralleled different and evolving conceptions of gender in Spain during the second half of the twentieth century and first decades of the twenty first. Each socio-cultural context reframed the queen cinematically. A dangerous or "insane" queen reinforced the idealized submissive woman of Franco's dictatorship. In turn, a wild, rebellious, but ultimately superficial queen embodied certain countercultural features of the so-called "Madrilenian scene" during the early eighties. Finally, the #MeToo era ushered in visions of a lucid queen unfairly perceived as mad.

The film *Inés/Inês de Castro*, based on the myth about the love story of the fourteenth-century prince and later king of Portugal, Pedro I (r. 1357-1367), and the one known as his lover, Inés/Inês de Castro, was a Luso-Spanish film productions of the 1940s. Co-directed by Spanish Manuel Augusto García Viñolas and Portuguese José Leitão de Barros, it had two different versions that circulated on either side of the border. The contribution from Alicia Miguélez analyzes the extent to which each version can be considered as part of the propaganda machinery of each of these two Iberian dictatorships that, in the 1940s, used various medieval historical processes, episodes, and figures as elements of political and ideological legitimation. In addition, this paper unravels the sources that served as the basis for the construction of the script and traces the various layers of resemantization of the myth in the twentieth century.

Pedro Martínez García and Juan Botía Mena survey various representations of Columbus and the "discovery" of the Americas, organizing their analyses into (1) the nationalist narratives of the forties and fifties, (2) the shifting emphasis on "encounters", especially in the nineties, and (3) the postcolonial perspectives of the twenty-first century. Their comparative approach focuses on Spanish and American productions, as well as the overarching themes of nationalism, biography and individualism, and contested histories.

Despite the Franco regime's romantic ideas around the Visigoths' conversion to Catholicism and national unification, the Visigothic past is rarely represented in Iberian film and television. Tomás Cordero Ruiz examines this lacuna, which is especially notable when compared to other cinematic traditions deeply invested in the equivalent historical period (e. g., British adaptations of *Beowulf* or films about Viking incursions). In Portugal, an anti-Gothic historiography made the Visigoths unsuitable subjects during periods of heightened nationalism. Meanwhile, the Spanish film industry tended to favor narratives foregrounding Reconquista and eventual unity in the face of a common enemy. The Visigoths were more commonly villains in Italian films featuring the fifth-century Sack of Rome. In this sense, the Visigoths were more broadly perceived as "barbarians" in opposition to imperial glory.

Part 2: Recovery and revival

Creators of film and television series sometimes turn to the distant past in response to more recent censorship, or to seek fading knowledge for a world that could benefit from it. The contributions to Part 2 include not only examples of excavated narratives, for example those previously suppressed in Spain or Portugal, but also instances of creative reengagement with medieval forms of experiencing or understanding the world.

In a chapter on folk legend in Portuguese cinema, Angélica Varandas examines António de Macedo's *A Maldição de Marialva* (1989), a narrative set around the year 1000 merged with a popular legend dating to the fourteenth century and popularized in the nineteenth. The figure of Maria Alva, an ageless "Moorish" woman who has cloven feet, faces persecution and consequently curses the village in retaliation. As Varandas argues, certain images of the destroyed village recall the desolation following the military overthrow of Portugal's authoritarian Estado Novo government on 25 April 1974. The director sets up visual oppositions between the poverty of the film's general population and the opulence and

fearmongering of Church and State. On the one hand, elements of the Middle Ages serve as symbols of darkness and superstition from which Portugal was once again recovering, particularly in the form of authoritarianism and censorship. On the other, the film frames memory as a redemptive force, and the director turns to the Middle Ages in search of fantastical and mythological sources that might help define a uniquely Portuguese cinema.

Erika Loic traces Luis Buñuel's medievalism in his autobiographical writing, personal correspondence, and films, in particular those with explicitly medieval themes: *Simón del desierto* (1965) and *La Voie Lactée* (1969). Buñuel's perception of living through a long Iberian Middle Ages came to shape his unique cinema, as did his interest in religious texts and their descriptions of miracle and theophany. Loic examines the features of Buñuel's cine-medievalism that most resonate with medieval depictions of visionary experience, prophecy, and theophany: the merging of temporalities, of mental and physical space, and of the literal and metaphorical.

Susana Viegas examines medieval Dance of Death (Danse Macabre) iconographies, and the pervasive role of death in cine-medievalism. She focuses on *Danses macabres, squelettes et autres fantaisies* (2019), a documentary in which two film directors (Rita Azevedo Gomes, Pierre Léon) and a scholar (Jean-Louis Schefer) travel to Portugal and discuss this uniquely medieval iconography. Representations of death in this tradition personify and give physical presence to an otherwise abstract concept, rendering animate skeletons as liminal beings and guides between one state and another (life and death, present and future). As Viegas argues, films on the Middle Ages not only shed light on attitudes towards death and mortality but also serve similar bridging and animating roles.

The animated series *Ruy, el pequeño Cid* (1980-1981) represents an instance of Hispanophone cine-medievalism aimed at children. Israel Sanmartín Barros examines the series in the context of the Spanish transition to democracy, which began following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, as well as the so-called "years of disenchantment" (1979-1982). The animated series about a child version of El Cid

promotes not only a set of traits considered important for children to emulate (compassion, honor, bravery, faith), but also persistent notions of Christian exemplarity and top-down national salvation made possible through the actions of larger-than-life heroes. Sanmartín argues for the role of this series at a transitional moment in Spanish history when media could be oriented towards building optimism.

Part 3: The techniques of audiovisual media

The chapters in Part 3 examine intentionality with regards to technical and conceptual features of film and television. While all parts of the volume address the constructed nature of media to various degrees, the contributors to this final section analyze films and television programs whose techniques manipulate audience response in specific ways. The techniques run the spectrum from concealed to hyper-manifest, some intending to enact deception and others resisting authenticity effects to bring attention to fabrication and ambiguity.

João César Monteiro's *Silvestre* (1981), a film inspired by folk stories, seeks to reconnect Portuguese viewers to traditions from which they were severed under fascism. In his contribution, José Pinto examines the film's incongruous conjunctions of music and narrative. The soundtrack integrates music dating from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, including compositions by Franz Schubert and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, both recurrent in Monteiro's cinema. Pinto uncovers the soundtrack's ability to produce both authenticity effects and spatiotemporal indeterminacies. Monteiro's goal is not to mask film's constructed nature: audiovisual pastiche and other elements that disrupt the authenticity effect complement a narrative that itself plays on ambiguity, not only of time and place but of character identity, gender, and class. Pinto investigates filmmaking through the concept of "fabulation", the human ability to create reality through the iterative process of retelling —a process that was especially important in a Portugal recently freed from authoritarianism and part of what Monteiro called "an imaginary that is genuinely ours" (Monteiro 2005 [1981]: 324).

Nina Gonzalbez considers the uses of Seville in films and television programs that present both historical and fantastical visions of the Middle Ages. Anglophone productions generally recast the medieval and early modern monuments of the city (the Alcázar, the Giralda, and the Casa de Pilatos, among others) as generic "eastern" backdrops meant to convey the Middle East. In the tradition of Edward Said and Linda Nochlin, Gonzalbez considers cine-medievalism through the lens of orientalism and the medieval imaginary. In particular, she compares the visual strategies of English-language productions to the Spanish series *La Peste* (2018-2019), the latter created for audiences significantly more likely to recognize the palimpsestic monuments of Seville's past.

Paulo Alexandre Pereira examines a film that blends history and queer vision, namely the short film *O Corpo de Afonso* (2013) by João Pedro Rodrigues. In a meta-cinematic narrative about the casting of a future film, hyper-masculine Galician bodybuilders read excerpts from medieval chronicles as they audition for the role of Afonso Henriques, twelfth-century king of Portugal. In making a film reminiscent of self-reflexive pornography about auditions or casting couches, Rodrigues deliberately distances himself from traditional historical cinema. He focuses instead on the seductive intertwining of mythological kingship and national identity, as well as the complete artifice inherent in both. The auditioning bodybuilders unexpectedly embody medieval political theology: they do not represent a king's natural body but rather his spiritual body, one that is idealized and made eternal through representation.

Epilogue

Felipe Brandi's epilogue presents readers with a reflection on the craft of the historian, including the limits of historical knowledge that cinematic medievalism brings to light. French historian Georges Duby (1919-1996) always conceived of history as a communication craft. He therefore sought to broaden his audience and

made use of different modern means of communication (radio, television, and cinema). In the early 1980s, Duby was invited to be part of the film adaptation of his book, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines: 27 juillet 1214*, with Miklós Jancsó as director, Serge July as screenwriter, and Gérard Dépardieu and Michael York as the leading actors. Although abandoned during production, this film project lead Duby to question the ways in which historical knowledge is produced. Through a study of Duby's private archives, kept at the Institut Mémoire de l'Édition Contemporaine (IMEC), Brandi goes behind the scenes of the cinematic adventure of *Le Dimanche de Bouvines* and brings to light Duby's reflections on the cinema as a screen where the very limits of knowledge produced by medievalism are rendered visible.

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