

*Paper prepared for the
8th Euroacademia Forum of Critical Studies*

Asking Big Questions Again

24 – 25 January 2020

Venice, Italy

This paper is a draft

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Middle Ages in Cinema: A Paradoxical Flight

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Abstract

The word *postmodernism* unleashes a certain fear in some people's minds, similar to a phobia of the so-called modernization and liberalization of society. Postmodernism bid its farewell to the big ideologies of humankind and, therefore, questions values and truths alike, which before were believed to be eternal or acultural. Movies and films tend to provide a fantasy for its audience, where the realm of thoughtful criticism is replaced with unquestionable social orders and hierarchies. This is especially the case when considering the Historical Film of the 21st Century.

The proclaimed time-travel, however, cannot fulfil its promise. Although the public wants to partake in a journey to the past and to the imaginary place "where everything was better and clearer", they nonetheless import their own ideals and world view into a newly created fantasy. The escape from postmodernism is, in conclusion, a half-hearted one.

I would like to present the pop-cultural figure of the Knights Templar as an example for this paradoxical state of postmodern society. The monastic knights in their depiction by postmodern cinema refrain from using unnecessary violence, for example, but handle duels with the sword quite skilfully, when they have to defend a just cause. This depicts a growing confusion on how persons, who identify themselves as male, employ physical action against other human beings. The historical movie provides a situation where the use of violence is completely legitimized by undiscussable values. Viewers can hence enjoy the sense of individual power and violence without regret. This is one of many discussed topics that can be shown in the Templar movies of the last few years.

Cinema helps us to observe the cultural longings and problems of its society, such as the continuous internal conflict between looking back and marching forth.

Key Words: Historical Cinema, Postmodernism, Knights Templar, Reception of History, Values

A General Introduction: Time-Travel Cinema and the Postmodern

The following paper will describe the paradoxical character of historical cinema as an ideological time travel, trying to perform a return to a national utopia and at the same time a damnation of a supposed backward society by postmodern thinking. After giving a general introduction and an overview of my proceedings, considering theories and sources, I will list four aspects of this flight from the presence in order to illustrate overlaps or differences between the two roles of historical cinema.

Already in the early stages of cinema at the end of the 19th century, directors chose historical material for their scenarios. The first evening filling blockbuster was made by David W. Griffith's and named "Birth of a Nation"ⁱ. This early example illustrates how the new technologies were promptly discovered by political ideologists and used in order to disseminate their message. In Griffith's questionable opus, the infamous Ku-Klux-Klan is depicted as a religious order, sweeping up from the South with the goal to defend everything that is "true and right". On the other side of the Atlantic, French, British and German directors, such as Abel Gance, undertook a reinterpretation of their national history with similar means. The Soviet movie industry, led by the ingenious personality of Sergei Eisenstein, endeavoured to give their products a leftist allure, high-lightening the role of the Russian peasant or of the simple man throughout the history of the former tsarist Empire and of the medieval city states like Nowgorod. The tone, as can be ironically stated about Stalinist politics as well, often stayed thoroughly patriotic ("Alexander Newski"ⁱⁱ or "Ivan Grozny"ⁱⁱⁱ).

Historical Cinema served as a tool to formulate a supposed continuous national history from the Antique Era up to modern day and consequently to create a form of collective identity and memory, described by Maurice Halbwachs.^{iv} The reinterpretation of the past induced the public to share a common world view and an understanding of how politics and everyday life are supposed to function. By connecting certain values with a long, most of the time eternalized, history, they gained value and were legitimized. To follow these values or rules became a rather sacred and mystical duty than a rational one.^v Heroic origins, symbolized by the biographies of national heroes, so-called *charismatic personalities* to speak with Max Weber, gave the ideological narrative of history an unquestionable and

holy allure, which was by this rendered hard to criticize.^{vi} One can only imagine that it was, for example, a daunting venture to question the deeds of the French Revolution in 19th century France, or to deconstruct the truth behind the persona of Germany's Hermann/Arminius during the nationalist first half of the 20th century. The collective myth functions as an ideological and cultural tool with immense efficacy, since, due to its emotional and irrational character, reflexive argumentation is doomed to stay without impact, when facing a good story about a historical hero. Similar patterns can be observed while watching movies.^{vii}

The pictures, the sound and speed of information can move the fiercest cinema critic, but the pages of a book can be reflected on because of their material and static character. This was the idea of Walter Benjamin, who encountered the new revolutionary media, meaning cinema, with utter mistrust. According to his paper of 1936^{viii}, a painting or a singular artefact owned a certain *aura* that made the material unique and accessible for individual contemplation. One was able to inspect the different aspects of a masterpiece, while gazing upon it in the atmosphere of a museum. The cinema, however, bombards us with many hundred pictures a minute, making it impossible for the human brain to process the gained information consciously. Therefore, we are mentally teleported into another world and leave the sphere of our current embodied situation. We believe to experience the plot-line in real life and often fusion our identity with that of the main character. Now, while this is a major advantage of cinema, since it gives us emotional pleasure and the feeling of real adventure, it can also be interpreted as a menacing power, according to Benjamin. The broad public (One has to take into account that Benjamin, being child of his discourse, feared the general "masses" and their gaining importance in politics.) would not be able to critically reflect on the pictures, shown by the camera. The camera, a machine, would take control over the human brains and, hence, become the true ruler of society.^{ix} This words might remind us of the "Matrix"-Trilogy^x, or, around 60 years later none the less, of the thoughts of Bruno Latour^{xi}, but most importantly, they criticized the political inflictions of cinema and further its values. Taking into account that his theory was written in 1936, one might imagine which regime was the target of such accusations. The Nazi movie industry was professional in using the moving picture for propaganda purposes. Although nowadays their films are frowned upon and only shown in a historical critical context, directors like Leni Riefenstahl had a lasting impact, especially on monumental cinema concerning past events. A far more conclusive interpretation of their work can be found in the writings of Siegfried Kracauer, the father of critical movie analysis.^{xii} However, Benjamin awed the function of cinema as a provider of values, and we should, too.

At the beginning of the 20th century, historical cinema is getting popular again. During the national crisis of the 60's of the Western hemisphere, represented by the dismantling of the old colonies and the Vietnam war, monumental productions were used to impress the audience and to reassure them of the state's power, often equating Ancient Rome with the United States of America. Eventually, after the financial fiasco of "Cleopatra"^{xiii}, their popularity began to fade.

Cinema critics interpret the motivation behind historical cinema as a wish to overcome a national insecurity. Nowadays, history is again used to tell the story of a continuous, eternal state by including big events with big men into their timeline.^{xiv} The actor Russel Crowe is fighting a Roman tyrant in "Gladiator"^{xv}, "300"^{xvi} Spartans hold their ground at the Thermophiles against an ethnized East and Mel Gibson shouts "Freedom!" in order to fight the English oppression as a Scottish highlander in "Braveheart"^{xvii}.

In this context, one has to ask, if cinema really became postmodern. Lyotard bid his farewell to the "Grand Theories" of modern and fordist society, such as socialism and nationalism. The current neo-liberal thought underlines the importance of individual values, different opinions and a federalist approach to truth. Ideologies lost their impetus to encompass the whole world and to assemble all its inhabitants under the same lemma. By arguing in favour of moral and cultural pluralism, one enforces new ideals like tolerance, critical thinking and a questioning of the notion "truth", according to Lyotard.^{xviii}

Is this also the case in historical cinema, or can it rather be seen as a national attempt to re-enforce a patriotic collective? I would argue that fiction concerned with the past does both at the same time, leading to the anticipated paradox of this paper. While the historical film employs values of cultural neo-liberalism, it also obtains conservative ideas and functions after the schemes of 19th century romanticised novels, theatre plays and historiographies. This contains conflicting messages as a consequence. But while watching the film, functioning as an emotional myth as described before, one does not grasp this ideological schizophrenia. Furthermore, the storyline manifests a motivation to please as much viewers as possible, and hence tries to render the movie enjoyable for conservatives and liberals alike. Each individual is given his own message that is provoked by the shown pictures but ultimately formed in the persons mind itself. Considering this, there are as much different receptions of a movie and therefore of the historical plot as there are viewers. Consequently, one has to ask if we really experience a postmodern world, or if we just proclaim it, while in reality just describing our own, egocentric mind-sets. Cinema and public opinion, including the numbers of votes in favour of Nationalist parties, show that the Grand Theories and their perception of history are still present. The following chapters will demonstrate this ambiguous behaviour of modern historical fiction and its consumers.

Sources and Methodology

In order to fulfil the before mentioned goal, I employed the theories of Quentin Skinner, member of the Cambridge School of Political Thought. His strategy was to follow a certain term that he discovered in different texts and to

observe the changes in its meaning over time. He analysed the connotations of virtue in Ancient Roman culture but also in the ethical works of Niccolò Machiavelli.^{xix} In my theory, historical personalities, groups and institutions can also signify a political term, entailing a long list of symbolic layers. They change their meaning according to context, time and discourse. When talking about Winston Churchill, for example, it makes a significant difference, if the topic is the Second World War, Gallipoli or amusing banter during dinners of the upper class. All those partial aspects are tied in connection to each other but also give, in this case, a diverse appearance of the personality.

The Templar, although being rather a religious institution than a single person, functions as a stereotype for monastic orders, who partook in military action during the crusades. The other institutions are rarely mentioned, because the lore of the Templars has a more mythical and prestigious tone to it. If authors or directors include this figure into their stories, they use them to express a repertoire of connotations and messages that can be transmitted directly to the audience without further ado.

During my research, I followed the term *Templar* from the descriptions by contemporaries, over the reinvention of the order during Modern Times unto our present day, focussing on recent cinema. There exist around thirty movies or shows that include the Knights Templar, mostly taking place during certain historical events with a prominent place in the Western mind-set. To follow the Templar through the different eras, to create a so-called *genealogy* of the term, I categorized five genres of movies, concerning the matter, and then consulted older sources on the same topic. It can be deduced that most of the films took their inspiration in the romantic writings by 19th century authors, most famously in those by Sir Walter Scott. The first narrative tradition, that I was able to dissect, circles around the adventures of Ivanhoe, Richard I, Robin Hood and the Document of the “Magna Carta”, that functions as some sort of *lieu de mémoire*^{xx} and *myth of origin* for British and consequently for American history. The following paragraphs will focus mainly on this branch of the Templar movies, because my spatial resources would not allow to include all five narratives. Let it just be said that the second is concerned with the role of the Templars in the Levant during the crusades; the third functions as a French interpretation of the brutal and infamous process that led to the end of the order; the fourth consists out of stories around secret organisations, Freemasons and legendary treasures, while the fifth depicts the knights as zombies, coming back to live to haunt the living.

The first tradition, however, deals with events in the English kingdom at the end of the 12th century. Richard I. returns from the Third Crusade and has to take care of an envious brother and an ambitious French king who conspires to overtake Richard’s belongings in Normandy. According to conventional historical readings of medieval sources, it was established that the heroic king, and nowadays national hero, died soon after, killed by a bolt of a simple crossbowman. His less popular brother, John I., consequently gained access to the throne and continued the war against France but was ultimately defeated in the battle of Bologne in 1204. The costs for a new army led to new taxes which caused a rebellion by the barons. The “Magna Carta” (1215), a now mystified document that is not rarely presented as the founding political act of the constitutional monarchy and the English nation, was the eventual outcome of these struggles. This verified events can be found in medieval records, such as Matthew Paris’ “Chronica majora” (1259), but were soon accompanied by rumours and legends.^{xxi}

The cinema of the 20th century preferred to draw its material from literary authors rather than from the actual sources. Sir Walter Scott, praised as the father of the historical novel, laid with his two huge successes “Ivanhoe”^{xxii} (1820) and “The Talisman”^{xxiii} (1825) the foundation for an ongoing reception of the Templar in fiction. He used original texts to compile his story and was striving to render the plot “authentic” but applied ideas of the 19th century on the medieval storyline.

It is therefore no wonder that the first movie including Templars was an adaptation of Scott’s novel in 1913.^{xxiv} The black and white, one hour long picture sticks closely to the original material and presents the knights as gruesome warriors who function as an antagonist to the main hero Ivanhoe. During the following decade, the same novel was shown in cinema many times, but here the Templar knights were missing, being secularized to French knights. Only a Soviet production^{xxv} of the 80’s included the religious character of the order and used it, like Scott, to criticise medieval piety. The last title of this tradition is a British venture called “Ironclad”^{xxvi}, which was released in 2011. The Templar in this film takes the role of the protagonist. He arrives in England after a disillusion of his faith in the Holy Land. He is clearly traumatised by war and reminds more of an Iraq War veteran than a medieval knight. While the plot develops, he nonetheless decides to retake his sword and to fight the evil king John I. in order to re-establish the laws of the “Magna Carta”.

Last but not least, it should be said that Ingmar Bergman’s “The Seventh Seal”^{xxvii} (1957) had a major influence on the crusade and Templar movies of the second half of the 20th century. In this story, a crusader returns from an unsuccessful adventure in the Middle East that robbed him of his illusions and religious ideology. With his ideas of knighthood, heroism and Christian morality being crushed, he becomes the prototype of the medieval postmodern anti-hero. Deception and disgust of violence led him to an abjection of society and its warlike values and customs. Bergman’s crusader as well as Ironclad’s Templar comport themselves as the typical individual hero who functions as a counterpart to the rest of society. He serves as an identification figure for the audience, thus they are also supposed to reject the medieval mindset. Still, the movies are filled with nostalgic romanticism, other conservative values and exotic fetishism. That is why these films continue to represent a social order with a certain set of morals and a feeling of authenticity and truth but also highlight the importance of individualism. These morals shall be the topic of the following chapters. They will be examined due to their connection to religion (1), to ethnic thinking (2), to their valuation of violence (3), and to their models of gender and sexuality (4).

The Age of Dark Religion: Postmodern Interpretation of Medieval Faith

Religion is a classical topic for historical fiction when concerning the Middle Ages. The so-called “Dark Age” of European history is perceived as the era of a dim witted peasant majority that served under the reigns of a corrupt nobility and an insidious church. This image was created early on by the humanists of the Renaissance, who were eager to legitimize their new ideas by defaming their intellectual predecessors. The new idol was Ancient Greece with its artists and philosophers. Therefore, the Middle Ages gained their name by simply existing between this glorious utopian imagery and the creators of the definition themselves. This description was radicalised by thinkers of the Enlightenment who faced the church in a contest for truth and an explanation of the universe. While the rule of religion was stylized as irrational and motivated by greed and lust for power, rational thought and logic became the highest ideals.^{xxviii} Our perception of the Middle Ages today is still deeply influenced by this rhetoric but also by the sources that were given to us. Most of them were written by clerics and monks, hence showing the medieval world in a religious reality, probably more religious than it actually was.

Walter Scott was bewildered by the pious movements of his own time and the Templars were exploited to symbolize them indirectly.^{xxix} The medieval church is depicted to follow irrational laws and thereby inflicting cruelty and pain. This can be demonstrated by the finale of the *Ivanhoe* Saga. The master of the Templars, guided by superstitious and intolerant beliefs, accuses a Jewish woman, called Rebecca, of witchcraft. In a last moment, *Ivanhoe* arrives and demands a trial by combat, another legal action that appears random to the modern spectator. *Ivanhoe* is eventually successful in his mission to overcome his opponent, the Templar Bernard de Gui, and to save Rebecca from the monastic order. Scott, consequently also his cinematic adaptations, summarizes by his depiction of the Templars all the accusations that a modern but also postmodern society levels against the church and its history.^{xxx}

Furthermore, religion is often seen as the origin of violent conflicts, inter alia the crusades. Since the Knights Templar acted as one of the major supporters of this semi-religious, semi-politic undertaking, they are held accountable for their “violent crimes” by modern society. This can be discovered in William Marshal’s (the protagonist of “*Ironclad*”) hatred against meaningless violence. In intimate moments with his love, he explains how war made him renounce his order. In general, the medieval church and the Templars are illustrated as a corrupt power system that talks the innocent public into burning witches and killing pagans, while collecting their money and conquering territories for their terrestrial gain. The church is shown as a hypocritical preacher which urges piety while lusting for women, and ascetics while indulging in wine accompanied orgies. These accusations of modern cinema are, however, not revolutionary. One might think of the innumerable religious movements of the Middle Ages, like the Franciscans or the Cistercians, who heavily criticized Rome for its luxurious lifestyle.^{xxxi}

These arguments, nevertheless, stem from an Enlightenment tradition but additionally incarnate a liberal character, since Christendom can be seen as another Grand Theory. Scott and his movie adaptations tried to dismantle a religious ontological concept by underlining its irrationality and power motivated origins. In the end, his criticism follows a rather traditional rhetoric, focussing on the mischiefs of the church, its false pretexts and not on a general absence of truth. Religion as a whole is not neglected, if not re-established. The protagonists keep their connection to God, although they renounce collective rites under the authority of the church, therefore shown more resembling protestant individualists than crusaders for atheism. One might conclude that historical cinema, especially in the case of the Templars, tends to criticise organised religion as a war-wilding, sin inflicting, corrupt institution that one should avoid but favours individual belief. This mistrust against authoritarian rites comes from protestant and rational tradition and cannot be identified as a product of postmodernism. Also, it can be stated that earlier films included the ideas of other Grand Theories. The Soviet version of *Ivanhoe*, for example, criticises the church as an oppressor, alongside the worldly nobles, of the people. The Templar Knights present, in this case, the perfect opportunity to accuse both at the same time. The jargon of movies like “*Ironclad*”, however, and the urge for tolerance and an individualised and pluralistic world view contain postmodern values. One might ask, since postmodernism is claiming to be the absence of a ubiquitous truth, if it is not just trying to replace old models by its own and by giving old symbols a supposed new context.

Ethnic Affiliations and the Nation State

The Middle Ages are not only used to criticise religious world views but also by national history to create a myth of origin.^{xxxii} May it be a certain event during the so-called Migration Period, the ascend of a special king to the throne, or the settlement in a localised area. Medieval times serve as the ideal epoch to project one’s utopian ideas on. The lack of sources allow vague interpretations and multiple possible assumptions. Due to the scarcity of knowledge, it becomes a mystical place where legends intertwine with reality. It is, additionally, portrayed by some as a Golden Age. Society is supposed to have lived in a peaceful harmony; simple men became heroes, women were virtuous, and rural villages resemble the idyllic paintings of the Dutch Masters of the 17th century. This depiction by modern cinema was inherited from the national romanticism of the 18th and 19th century. While the Renaissance and the Enlightenment sought to portray the Antique periods with the goal to devalue a supposed theocratic rule of the Middle Ages, romantics tried to provide an alternative to the current developments of their contemporary era, the Industrial Revolution. The notion of family and friendship, the urge for justice and freedom and the interrelations to nature and nation were stressed in opposition to an anonymization of society in the industrial suburbs, a felt oppression by

nobility and arbitrary law, and a losing grip on collective identity.^{xxxiii} Sir Walter Scott was undoubtedly a member of this movement and cinema should prolong his ideas onto the next generations.

Postmodernism lays out a basic scepticism against ontological world views and their entailed ideologies, which were supposed to explain the mechanics of society and their relation to nature. Nationalism is known to be one of these ideologies and took his origins, as before mentioned, in the Romantic Movement. Although first impressions that come to mind, nowadays, when talking about politics in this demeanour, are the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini and other dictators, their grip to power was not the necessary outcome of the original idea. One might even argue that many values of romanticism continue to thrive in our self-declared age of postmodernism. This can be illustrated by consulting recent cinema.

The two main slogans, which are employed in both streams of ideas, are the notions of freedom and of individualism. While one might argue that a collective organisation of a nation state does not entail personal freedom, it is proclaimed to do so for ethnic or other groups. Still, patriotic propaganda makes strong allusions to the individual hero who is able to change the fate of society by meaningful actions. Hayden White described in his book on *Metahistory* how history as a romantic genre features a single person with the power to overcome the odds and to change destiny by its own power. This is especially attractive for political exploitation, since it spurs to greater action by the single subject but also provides charismatic idols with the power to transmit values and likeability of the regime.^{xxxiv} The described idealism can be found in the writings of Nietzsche, forming the term *Übermensch*,^{xxxv} or in Heidegger's adoration of the inner-self as the only true authenticity in life^{xxxvi}, and further in Sartre's novels.^{xxxvii}

The underlining of a strong individual hero plays an essential role in cinema, since the audience identifies itself with the protagonist. The viewer will gain the pleasure of being the hero himself and consequently of receiving the adoration of the national collective, the movie character is fighting for. This can be seen in *Ivanhoe*, where the knight overcomes an overwhelming number of enemies in order to win the respect of his king, the love of his future wife and the recognition of his father. The promises resemble the outline of 20th century propaganda. In "Ironclad", the main character defeats the tyrant king John I. to protect the "Magna Carta" and is awarded with the affection of a beautiful princess and his freedom.

As a second term, freedom is recently in usage to promote different political movements. If one is to consult the British slogans of Boris Johnson or Nigel Farage, the statements of Marie Le Pen or the manifestation posters of the AFD, one will discover the virulent urge for so-called freedom. The question remains who should be free of whom or of what. Most of the time, these participations in the general discourse are meant as a pledge for more regional or national self-determination in opposition to a centralised or a foreign power. In some cases, considering discussions around the European Union, the central authority is additionally perceived as a foreign one, multiplying the reluctance towards her. This often undefined and mystified power is supposed to neglect the interests of the common people and to only serve a number of rich elites. The term *tyrant*, with its wide repertoire of pejorative connotations, summarizes the narrative of such a negative ruler who is head of the hierarchy but apparently also its enemy at the same time. This fear for one's own right to partake in public decisions and the demonization of the constructed oppressor stems from a Lockean tradition, urging famously "no taxation without representation"^{xxxviii} and therefore strongly reminding of the aversions of the American Independence movements towards King George. Cinema engages equally in exploiting this topos, as can be illustrated by presenting the earlier mentioned movies. The main enemy is hereby represented by the person of King John I. The scenes of "Ivanhoe" and "Ironclad" alike show him as a brutal ruler who does not refer from unnecessary violence. A compilation of unappealing qualities, such as arrogance, a violent temper, greed and weakness, draw the typical picture of an unfit head of state. *Ivanhoe* or William Marshall, the Templar and protagonist of *Ironclad*, eventually overcome this satiric villain and grant the true, just ruler access to the throne. Freedom is therefore a deeply nationalist term, although it was all the same used by liberal ideologies. Postmodern thinkers wrote against the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century, stylizing them as tyrants and urging personal freedom in opposition to state power. In the end, in the case of freedom and individualism, both ideological movements might follow the same goals but with different perspectives and with different interpretations on how to achieve them.

Accounting the national tendencies of 21st century historical cinema, it is fair to say that it can hardly be described as completely postmodern. Except some examples which dismantle the conventional storytelling of a heroic past, Monty Python's goofy comedies might come to mind, movies orientate themselves on the meta-narratives of the 19th century historiography, as White was able to establish.^{xxxix} The films around the figure of the Templar and their role in events of extraordinary importance to English history employ terms like freedom or underline notions like individualism that are equally shared by nationalism and by its postmodern critics. One has to acknowledge that both movements do not only share differences but also similarities. As so often in the field of humanities, the two cannot be strictly separated due to the dynamical character of discourse and the ambiguity of words.

Just War or Meaningless Brutality? Violence as a paradoxical action

The plurality of meanings of certain terms can not only be visualized by analysing whole religions or ideologies and their representations in historical fiction but also by overlooking the illustrations of separated parts of life, such as violence or sexuality. These are intertwined with each other and with social concepts of society, family and morality.

For once, humanity is still occupied with the ongoing question, whenever violence against other persons can be justifiable or not. This topic in the field of ethics is connoted with multidimensional cultural layers and therefore also part of public discourse. If violence can effect good outcomes is, however, a subject that caused fierce controversies

during the Middle Ages, certainly when concerning the Templars. Theologians, such as Bernard de Clairvaux, sought to legitimize the institution of monastic military orders, borrowing their theories from the books of Augustinian. In his interpretation of the holy texts, war can be legitimized when following certain preconditions. Since the Templars officially thought to save the lives of poor pilgrims and to serve God, these were fulfilled, so Clairvaux and others. Although the existence of monks who also took up the sword led to constant criticism throughout the medieval era, religion in combination with special circumstances was one of the rare excuses for violence.^{xl}

In the case of the Templars, medieval sources found arguments in favour of military intervention by a clerical institution. But how was this decision received in modern and postmodern society? During Modern Times, crusades were a main accusation point that was levelled against the church, often oversimplifying historical events and ideologies into polemic rhetoric. As already laid out in the chapter concerning religion, Scott and the entirety of Templar movies criticise their role as warriors during the conflicts in the Holy Land. When fighting for their beliefs, they are shown as bloodthirsty brutes, uncontrolled and enraged. They are symbolically compared to religious fanatics of the 21st century, mainly concerning terrorism in the name of Islam or violent intolerance by White supremacists. This, furthermore, explains the newly gained popularity of Templar and crusade movies after the year 2001.^{xli}

Still, the monastic knights are able to achieve a favourable representation in cinema, if they renounce their order and become secular. The brutality of war and the dubious opportunistic character of politics renders their deception clear. That is why they leave the ranks of *milites christi* and turn to alcohol and drugs (Outcast^{xlii}), sink into general disillusion and depression (The Seventh Seal, Season of the Witch^{xliii}), or they found a new purpose in the hands of a woman, as in “Kingdom of Heaven”^{xliiv}, in “Soldier of God”^{xliiv} or in this case “Ironclad”. The Templar abandons the eternal and heroic reasons to fight for, therefore turning his back to the Grand Theories here represented by Christian religion but implying the ideologies of the 20th century. He decides to focus on his own social circle, his friends who he defends loyally, and his family, mostly represented through a woman. The knight, in a traditional manner, further upholds values that are generally considered as good, such as protecting the weak or providing freedom to a people, which is deeply indebted to long-term ethical discussions and consequently influenced through religion and/or ideologies. In this manner, the Templar of the 21st century bids his farewell to ontological world views on the one hand. On the other hand, he holds on to conservative, classical morals, such as family values and the notion of love.

True Love and Family Values: Gender Roles in their Medieval Reflection

The institution of the classical, bourgeois family was heavily deconstructed throughout the last decades. This is not only due to the rise of gender and queer studies but also to a general deconstruction of sex and its connection to social roles in the ramifications of society.^{xlvi} A partial confusion on what position one is to assume and on what code of decorum one is to follow was created, because no conventional scheme was left to be valid. Cinema can, in this context, be used as a tool to re-establish old orders or to update them step by step. Historical movies tend to uphold a backward, nostalgic image of society but also to actualize it. The recent impact of medieval cinema on the pop-cultural discussion of gender roles is immense.^{xlvii} An emergence of strong female protagonists lead to furore in the ranks of the supporters of traditional versions of history, where women played a passive and secondary role. Since the here mentioned topic could fill books, we will focus rather on the stereotypical masculinity of the Templar, as shown in the moving pictures.

The Templar, as described in the chapter before, is a virtuous knight that protects the weak and upholds the good. He is also, however, separated from the often frowned upon topic of sexuality. His pledge to celibacy provides him with a special allure. The evil Templars in Ivanhoe’s story render themselves guilty by lusting for women and therefore forfeiting their original promise. The stereotype of the sexually deviant cleric is common since their existence, being especially grave because of their adultery not only towards men but also to God.^{xlviii} The Templar William Marshall in the movie “Ironclad”, on the other hand, is initially reluctant to the advances of the princess. The immoral mercenary, who fights on his side, serves as a counterexample. He spends his money on wine and prostitutes and does not follow any code of honour, neither in battle nor in love. As implicit punishment, the sell-sword is killed off close to the end of the film, while the Templar and the princess survive. This topos stems from the popular genre of horror movies, in which the sinful characters find their death one after another, leaving only one virtuous couple alive, resembling a new Adam and Eve. The conduct recommended by “Ironclad”, when considering relationships between man and woman, can therefore be described as deeply influenced by Christian morals.

Nonetheless, the knight abandons his belief and loses his faith but regains a reason to live by falling in love. The defiance of conventional collective ideologies or religions shows the postmodern aspect of Templar films. The values they provide as an alternative, however, are equally formed by Christian tradition and follow the rules of a conservative, national middle class. In the end, while criticising history for its supposedly wrong ideologies and obsolete paradigms, historical fiction endeavours still to foster a conventional order and to give the spectator a guide on how to comport himself. Ironically, the actor James Purefoy, who stars as William Marshall in Ironclad, described this impetus perfectly, using few words where I used many:

“I think people are watching, because people are quite confused, nowadays, about sexual roles, and about who they are, and these go back to a time, where men were men, women were women, and you knew who you were, and there is a certain kind of comfort in that, because we live in kind of complicated times, not quite sure what the goal posts are sometimes.”^{xlix}

Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to explain with the help of Templar movies as a cultural source how history is received as a rhetorical tool to establish one's ideology or politics and to legitimize them. Cinema, in this context, does not only follow the impetus to influence the audience but also to gain a financial advantage, therefore trying to please as many viewers as possible. This and the overlapping net of terms and cultural symbols makes it ironically difficult to tell the difference between an ideology and its counterparts.

In the first two chapters, the notions of religion and nationalism were described as examples of Grand Theories. It was established that a certain era sustains a political paradigm in order to separate itself from the generations before and to justify its beliefs by diminishing the sense behind conventional values. Renaissance and Enlightenment tackled the Middle Ages, while national romanticism favoured the nostalgic and constructed image of its epochal "grandfather". Postmodernism rejects the ideas of this movements in order to prevent future totalitarianism and to defend liberal democracy. Still, the constructed epochal cut after the Second World War might not be as hermetic as thought.

The two last chapters concerned themselves with special aspects or values of a society. Violence and sexuality play an essential role in historical drama and function as a motivator for an audience which is not initially interested in nostalgic material. Although employed due to a commercial impetus, both topoi discuss essential moments of human life that demonstrate an escalation of social relations, deeply emotional events and decisive moments in history. It is this dynamical part of the plot which radicalises political opinions and which is able to convince the viewers of a certain mind-set. Violence and sexuality are needed to create a myth, in this case the myth of the Templar as the virtuous and legitimized knight who nonetheless has to renounce his collective in order to become the hero.

Studies on Templar movies tell us three things. As a first point, Historical fiction is filled with contradicting values as a repercussion of the various motivations and participants behind a production. Furthermore, the ambiguous and often overlapping character of ideologies makes it additionally difficult to analyse cinema in clear categories. Thirdly, people tend to follow world views according to the volatile context, to emotional conditions and to social strategies, proofing the legitimacy of the proclamation "anything goes". Ironically, this conclusion identifies me as a follower of postmodernism, although I acknowledge its character as simply another Grand Theory. One cannot think outside the box, as is often urged.

- i *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by D. W. Griffith, performed by Lilian Gish and Mae Marsh, Epoch Producing Company, 2015, film.
- ii *Alexandr Nevskiy*, directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein, performed by Nikolay Cherkasov and Nikolai Okhlopkov, Mosfilm, 1938, film.
- iii *Ivan Groznyy*, directed by Sergei M. Eisenstein, performed by Nikolay Cherkasov and Lyudmila Tselikovskaya, Mosfilm, 1944, film.
- iv Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).
- v Yves Bizeul, „Politische Mythen,“ in *Politische Mythen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. Heidi Hein-Kircher/Hans Henning Hahn (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2006), 3.
- vi Charles Lindholm, „Authenticity, Anthropology, and the Sacred Author(s),“ *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 331.
- vii Bizeul, „Politische Mythen,“ 14.
- viii Walter Benjamin, „Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,“ in *Walter Benjamin – Gesammelte Schriften Band I*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1980), 431–470.
- ix Ibid, 469.
- x *The Matrix*, directed by Lana Wachowski and Lilly Wachowski, performed by Keanu Reeves and Laurence Fishburn, Warner Bros., 1999, film.
- xi Bruno Latour, „On Actor-network Theory. A few Clarifications,“ *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 369–382.
- xii Siegfried Kracauer, *Propaganda and the Nazi War Film* (New York: Museum of Modern Art Film Library, 1942).
- xiii *Cleopatra*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, performed by Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, Twentieth Century Fox, 1963, film.
- xiv Christian Kiening, „Mittelalter im Film,“ in *Mittelalter im Film*, ed. Christian Kiening and Heinrich Adolf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2006), 34.
- xv *Gladiator*, directed by Ridley Scott, performed by Russell Crowe and Joaquin Phoenix, DreamWorks and Universal Pictures, 2000, film.
- xvi *300*, directed by Zack Snyder, performed by Gerard Butler and Lena Headey, Warner Bros, 2006, film.
- xvii *Braveheart*, directed by Mel Gibson, performed by Mel Gibson and Sophie Marceau, Icon Entertainment International, 1995, film.
- xviii Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).
- xix Quentin Skinner, *Macchiavelli* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- xx Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire: I La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).
- xxi Matthew Paris, „Monachi Santi Albani, Chronica Majora,“ ed. Henry Richards Luard (London: Longmans & Co, 1872).
- xxii Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, trans. Otto Randolf (Leipzig: Reclam, 1900).
- xxiii Walter Scott, *The Talisman* (The Gutenberg Project, 2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1377/1377-h/1377-h.htm>.
- xxiv *Ivanhoe*, directed by Herbert Brenon, performed by King Baggot and Leah Baird, Independent Moving Pictures Co., 1913, film.
- xxv *Ballada o doblestnom rytsare Ayvengo*, directed by Sergey Tarasov, performed by Tamara Akulova and Peteris Gaudins, Mosfilm, 1983, film.
- xxvi *Det sjunde inseglet*, directed by Ingmar Bergman, performed by Max von Sydow and Gunnar Björnstrand, Svensk Filmindustri, 1957, film.
- xxvii *Ironclad*, directed by Jonathan English, performed by Paul Giamatti and Jason Flemyng, Mythic International Entertainment, 2011, film.
- xxviii Melford E. Spiro, „Postmodernist Anthropology, Subjectivity, and Science: A Modernist Critique,“ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 38, no. 4 (Oct. 1996): 764.
- xxix Andrew Lincoln, *Walter Scott and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 73.
- xxx Ibid.
- xxxi For example the writings of John of Salisbury: John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: of the frivolities of courtiers and the footprints of philosophers*, ed. Cary Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 173–174, https://archive.org/stream/JohnOfSalisburyPolicraticus/JohnOfSalisbury/John%20of%20Salisbury_%20Policraticus%20-%20John%20of%20Salisbury_djvu.txt.
- xxxii Katja Ludwig, „August Wilhelm Schlegels politische Rezeption des ‚Nibelungenliedes‘,“ in *Politische Mythen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. Heidi Hein-Kircher and Hans Henning Hahn (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2006): 53.
- xxxiii Hedwig Röckelein, „Mittelalter-Projektionen,“ in *Mittelalter im Film*, ed. Christian Kiening and Heinrich Adolf (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2006), 52–54.
- xxxiv Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 135–162.
- xxxv Jochen Kirchhoff, *Nietzsche, Hitler und die Deutschen. Vom unerlösten Schatten des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin: Edition Dionysos, 1990): 175.
- xxxvi Lindholm, „Authenticity,“ 336.
- xxxvii „Sartre et la Liberté,“ La-Philo, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://la-philosophie.com/sartre-liberte>.
- xxxviii William S. Carpenter, „Taxation Without Representation,“ in *Dictionary of American History, Volume 7*, ed. James Truslow Adams, (New York: Scribner, 1976).

- xxxix Hayden White, „The Modernist Event,“ in *The Persistence of History. Cinema, Television, and the Modernist Event*, ed. Vivian Sobchack (New York: Routledge, 1996), 18.
- xl Sandra Pierach, „Die Haltung von Clairvaux zur Frage der Heidentötung am Beispiel von De laude III, 4,“ in *Geist, Gesellschaft, Kirche im 13.-16. Jahrhundert*, ed. František Šmahel (Prag: Centre for Medieval Studies in FILOSOFIA Verlag, 1999), 41.
- xli Simona Slanička, „Kingdom of Heaven – Der Kreuzzug Ridley Scotts gegen den Irak Krieg,“ in *Antike und Mittelalter im Film. Konstruktion-Dokumentation-Projektion*, ed. Mischa Meier and Simona Slanička (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 391.
- xlii *Outcast*, directed by Nick Powell, performed by Nicolas Cage and Hayden Christensen, Notorious Films, 2014, film.
- xliii *Season of the Witch*, directed by Dominic Sena, performed by Nicolas Cage and Ron Perlman, 2011, Atlas Entertainment, 2011, film.
- xliv *Kingdom of Heaven*, directed by Ridley Scott, performed by Orlando Bloom and Eva Green, Twentieth Century Fox, 2005, film.
- xlvi *Soldier of God*, directed by W. D. Hogan, performed by Tim Abell and Bill Mendieta, The Anabasis Group, 2005, film.
- xlvi For more information see for example: Judith Butler, *Undoing gender* (New York/London: Routledge, 2004).
- xlvi I am currently writing my Master's Thesis about this topic. If one is to overlook the comment section of YouTube videos, containing material of the series „Vikings“, one will find many political as well as cultural discussions on various aspects of life.
- xlvi Anne Gilmour-Bryson, „Sodomy and the Knights Templar,“ in *Journal of the history of sexuality* 7 (1996): 183.
- xlvi James Purefoy: "It's criminal to be a boring history teacher!", *Digital Spy*, YouTube, February 28, 2011, video, 03:37–03:57, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3uh7pYCYLM>.