

HIST 492/707: Game of Thrones and Medievalism

Final Project (Winter 2021)

For this assignment, you will be using the framework of Medievalism (as we define in class) to analyze one aspect/theme of *Game of Thrones*, in light of academic scholarship and popular media. In other words, you will look at how *Game of Thrones* “turn[ed] to the Middle Ages for [its] subject matter/inspiration, and in doing so, explicitly or implicitly, by comparison or contrast, comment[ed] on the artist’s (i.e. the producers/writers)”¹ own time period. You’ll also be exploring how *Games of Thrones* has “reimagined the Middle Ages for the modern world” and how scholars and the popular media have studied “the development and significance” of these reimaginings.

Your essay will therefore be thinking about the intersection between contemporary popular culture and medieval history, in terms of: how popular culture has reimagined and recreated medieval history, why it has reimagined/recreated medieval history in the ways that it has, and what that can tell us about our own society.

Your essay will **NOT** be an analysis of the historical accuracy or even really authenticity of *Game of Thrones*. Rather, it should consider where the *Game of Thrones* producers and writers took their inspiration from (I’m including the author of the books, George R. R. Martin as a writer here), how they have reimagined that aspect of history, how scholars and the popular media have discussed/debated those reimaginings, and what these can therefore tell us about contemporary society and our understanding of the past.

Steps of Assignment and Due dates:

Proposal 15%	Due February 1st
Short Essay 15%	Due March 15th
<u>OR</u> Full Draft 15%	Due March 22nd
Final Paper 25%	Due April 20th

Potential Topics

The topics listed below are some ideas of where you can take each of the broader topics. There are many options and you do not need to choose one of those listed below.

- Politics and political theory (kingship/queenship/ lordship or political power in general; political theories such as feudalism or Machiavellianism)
- Warfare (weaponry; battle tactics; specific battles; manpower; naval power)

¹ Pugh and Weisl, “Medievalisms: The Magic of the Middle Ages”, in *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (Routledge, 2013), 1

- Disability (representations of specific disabilities; disability rights; disabled characters; masculinity)
- Sexuality (prostitution; LGBTQ+ characters; castration; incest; sexual violence; gendered sexualities)
- Masculinity (The Nights' Watch; warfare; chivalry; castration/eunuchs; kingship; disability; sexuality)
- Children (representations of; specific characters; as rulers/lords; violence toward; and families)
- Motherhood/Fatherhood (gender; specific characters; good/bad mothers/fathers; ideas of motherhood/fatherhood)
- Race (representations of groups like the Dothraki or Unsullied; White Saviours; White Supremacy; specific racialized characters)
- Religion (Beliefs specific to certain groups such as the Sparrows, the Faith of the Seven, the Drowned God, the Old Gods of the North; connected to violence or extremism; "heretical" groups like the Lord of Light; women as leaders)
- Magic (Magical practices related to religious faiths; specific characters and magic; gender; the White Walkers and the Night King; the Children of the Forest; the Three-Eyed Raven)
- Education (of children; and the Citadel; the Maesters and their roles)
- Architecture (castles; the Wall; cities in Westeros or Essos)
- Costuming and Clothing (gendered; of queens or kings; of the nobility; military)
- Environment (Game of Thrones as climate change; the Wall and north of the Wall; the White Walkers and the Night King; Seasons; the role of landscape)
- Women (as queens/rulers; nobility; violence; military role; working; specific characters; clothing; as mothers/sisters/wives/widows; Wildling versus others)
- Animals (dragons; house sigils and animals; wolves etc).

I will be holding a series of appointments with all students to discuss their topics for this project the week of **January 18-22nd**. Make sure to sign up.

Components

- Proposal (due February 1st)
Your proposal should include:
 - A 250-300 word description of your paper topic and why you chose to focus on this specific subject. What aspect of *Game of Thrones* intrigued you to write about it?
 - An annotated bibliography of the sources you are going to use for this project. This list must include at least 3 academic sources and at least three popular media sources. They cannot be sources we read in class

(these sources can be used on top of the 6 required above). Each source should be referenced according to the Chicago Manual of Style, include a brief summary of what the source is about and why you think it will help your project. At this point, I am not assuming you have read the source but I want to know why you included it in your bibliography.

- An annotated list of the episodes from *Game of Thrones* that you expect to use for your project.
- Short Breakout Essay OR Full Essay Draft (Short Breakout Essay due March 15th; Full Essay Draft due March 22nd)

For the second step of the final project, you have two options:

- Short Breakout Essay

This essay is designed to serve as a foundation for your larger research paper, so it should be based on material for your final project. For this essay, you are asked to analyze ONE academic article, ONE piece of popular media, and ONE (or more) episodes of *Game of Thrones*.

The essay should include the following:

- Around 1500 words in length.
- Use of footnotes according to the Chicago Manual of Style.
- A discussion of your particular topic and how it is represented in *Game of Thrones*.
- A discussion of how your academic article can be used to help analyze the representation of this topic in your episode(s). How do the arguments/ideas in the essay connect to your particular theme? What can it tell us about the representation of that theme in *Game of Thrones*? Do not focus here on authenticity or accuracy of this representation but rather explore how it may have been inspired by this aspect of medieval history.
- A discussion of how this particular topic and its representation is explored in popular media. What is this piece about? How does it intersect with the episode and the academic article? What can it tell us about contemporary views of the medieval period?
- A thesis statement or main argument connecting the various parts of your essay together cohesively.
- An introduction and conclusion.
- The use of SPECIFIC examples from all of your sources (academic work; popular media; episode(s)).
- **You can use material from this essay in your final project (that is the whole point of this assignment). Remember, however, that simply taking sections of this paper and**

putting it into your larger essay will not create a very cohesive paper so you will have to make changes in order to reflect the nature of the major project.

- Full Essay Draft
Instead of the short breakout essay, you can submit a full draft of your paper, complete with footnotes.
 - This draft should be completed according to the requirements listed below under “final essay”.
 - This option provides you with comments on your entire essay.
- Final Essay
 - Essays should be 3500-3800 words in length.
 - For source material:
 - 3 academic sources (books or articles that examine your topic and *Game of Thrones* as academic subjects OR secondary sources that focus on your topic in relation to medieval history)
 - 3 popular media sources (any digital media that discusses your topic and *Game of Thrones*, including audio/video)
 - *Game of Thrones* episodes. There is no particular number, but you must use SPECIFIC examples from the television show as evidence in your essay. These examples should include references to particular scenes and characters.
 - You can use any of the readings assigned for this course in your essays, but they are to be seen as additional to the requirements listed above.
 - Structure:
 - Your essay needs an introduction, conclusion, and thesis statement. It should provide a clear argument about your topic and its connection to medievalism.
 - Use specific examples from across your source material as evidence to support your arguments.
 - The rest of your essay’s structure will depend entirely on your topic and how you develop your argument. Remember that your goal is to explore your topic in the context of Medievalism as represented on *Game of Thrones*. Some of our academic readings from the semester provide examples of developing such arguments.