

HIST 492/707: Game of Thrones and Medievalism **(Winter 2021)**

Dr. Dana Wessell Lightfoot

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Office hours: 2:30-3:30 on Mondays via Zoom (link posted on Blackboard and Mattermost chatboard)

Ever since *Game of Thrones* debuted in 2011, popular media and academic scholars have debated its relationship to medieval history. George R. R. Martin, the author of the book series on which the television show is based and a producer and consultant for the show itself, has stated that he read everything he could on the medieval world in developing his series. At the same time, however, Martin admitted that his interpretive choices are not reflections of medieval Europe, but refractions—in other words, they provide a sensationalized impression of the medieval period that is designed to tell a good story and keep the audience interested.

This course will examine the tension between the historical Middle Ages and its modern representation, using the *Game of Thrones* television series as an example. We will explore how themes such as power structures, disability, gender, class, sexuality, and justice relate to the concept of Medievalism—recent perceptions of the medieval period rather than the historical Middle Ages.

Format

This course is a seminar and is based on discussion in two formats: live during Zoom classes and on demand via a chatboard.

Live Zoom classes:

- Students will be divided into Group A and Group B.
- Group A live Zoom classes will take place on Mondays from 11:30-12:50.
- Group B live Zoom classes will take place on Mondays from 1:00-2:20 pm.
- These classes will be based on discussions with the entire group (12-13 students) and in breakout rooms.
- Please see the “Discussion” section of our course website for details.

Chatboard Discussions:

- We will be using a Mattermost chatboard as our communication tool and for on demand group discussions.
- Students will be divided into 4 groups.
- For more details on the chatboard discussions, please see the “Discussion” section of our course website for details.

- Students will receive an email from me with details on how to sign up for the chatboard.

Course Platforms

For this course, we will be using FOUR different platforms. Each plays a different role. I apologize for the number of platforms you need to navigate, but BB Collaborate makes my computer crash, and Blackboard as a whole is inflexible and doesn't work with my pedagogical goals.

Course website:

- Our course website is available here:
- This website is the launchpad for our course. All podcasts, links to readings, course information (syllabus, assignment details and handouts, schedule) will be posted on the website.

Mattermost chatboard:

- The chatboard is available via the “chat” link on our course website.
- The chatboard will be used for all group discussion, general course communication, and contact with me (please send me a direct message on the chatboard instead of an email; I am much more likely to reply in a timely manner via DM).
- To sign up, see the email from me.

Blackboard:

- Available learn.unbc.ca
- Blackboard will be used to post announcements (the same information will be posted on the chatboard), submission of all assignments, and as a repository for course grades.
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Zoom:

- All live classes and my office hours will be held via Zoom. Permanent links for Groups A and B, as well as my office hours, will be posted on both the chatboard and on Blackboard.

Readings/Other Assigned Materials

There is one textbook for our course, available at the UNBC bookstore:

- Amy S. Kaufman and Paul B. Sturtevant, *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the medieval Past*, (University of Toronto Press, 2020).

We will also be reading a selection of articles which will be posted on our course website as either PDFs or hyperlinks.

Alongside written material, we are watching all eight seasons of *Game of Thrones* over the course of the semester. The library has all eight seasons available via DVD. You also can watch the seasons via Crave.

NOTE: *Game of Thrones* deals with a number of difficult subjects, including incest and rape, as well as contains a great deal of violence. This warning is not designed to discourage those uncomfortable with such material to withdraw from the course but instead is meant to provide foreground of what is to come.

Course Requirements

Student Engagement **45%**

a) Zoom class discussion **20%**

This course is based on class discussion, not lectures from me. My role in this course is to facilitate discussion between students and to encourage conversation amongst you as a means of intellectual engagement with the course material. Your role is to ensure that you have completed the required readings and watched the required episodes so that you can fully engage in class discussion.

To get our discussion going, I will pose questions developed by that week's discussion leaders. This portion of your grade will be determined by: attending live class sessions, participating in entire group discussion, participating in breakout room discussions.

While I hope that we will create an atmosphere in our course where everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas, I do understand that class discussion can be difficult for some students. If this situation is the case for you, please contact me.

Cameras are not required to be on during live classes. For an overview of how live classes will function, please see the "discussion" section of our course website.

b) Mattermost chatboard discussion **10%**

Discussion questions will be posted in each group by the discussion leaders on Tuesday mornings. Students are required to engage in discussion with their group members by responding to at least 1 question and to at least 1 comment by another student. I ask that these be completed by Sunday at midnight.

c) Discussion Leader **5% (live classes); 10% (chatboard)**

2-3 students are responsible for the live and chatboard discussions each week. For live discussions, the leaders will submit 8-10 questions and one activity to me by Saturday at midnight. The same students will be responsible for posting 2-4 questions in each group on the chatboard, as well as monitoring and keeping the discussion going in each group until Sunday. For more details, including a link of where to sign up for groups/topics, please see the “discussion” section of our course website.

Major Research Project **55%**

For this assignment, you will be using the framework of medievalism to analyze one aspect/theme of *Game of Thrones* in light of academic scholarship and popular media in essay format. I have listed a number of suggestions for potential topics, as well as more detailed information about each step of the assignment, on the “course requirements” section of our course website.

There are three steps to this assignment:

1. Proposal **15%**
 - Due **February 1st**
 - For format and requirements, please see course website.
2. Short Essay OR Draft **15%**
 - You have the option of completing a short essay (based on an analysis of 2 articles and one *Game of Thrones* episode) OR a draft of your final essay.
 - The short essay is due **March 15th** and the draft is due **March 22nd**.
 - For format and requirements, please see course website.
3. Final Essay **25%**
 - Due **April 20th**
 - Length: approximately 12-15 pages.
 - For format and requirements, please see course website.

Course Policies

Late Assignments

There is a zero tolerance policy for late assignments in this course. This policy means that late assignments will not be accepted.

Extensions

All students get one “shit happens” extension this semester. The extension gives students an additional 4 days to complete the assignment. To use this extension, please contact me via direct message on the chatboard.

If you need time beyond the “shit happens” extension, please contact me.

Students with exceptionalities

The Access Resource Centre (ARC) provides service to students with documented disabilities or health conditions, ranging from permanent to temporary, including but not limited to mental health disabilities, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders, chronic health issues, brain injury, hearing and visual impairments, mobility and other physical disabilities. ARC staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations to assist students in achieving their academic goals. Students who may have a need for special accommodation are encouraged to contact ARC by email at arc@unbc.ca or by phone 250-960-5682. For more information, please visit unbc.ca/arc.

Academic Success Centre

The Academic Success Centre provides students with **FREE** access to academic support services:

- Tutoring (by appointment, asynchronous online, or drop-in)
- Personalized study skills assessments
- Peer-led course supports
- Downloadable handouts
- Access to self-assessment sites
- Customized programs and workshops

ASC services are fully available online for distance, regional, or physically distanced students. We utilize a variety of technology solutions to ensure you can connect to us!

For more information or to book an appointment, see the Academic Success Centre website at www.unbc.ca/asc, visit the circulation desk on the first floor of the library, or phone 250-960-6367. Toll-free: 1-888-440-3440 (wait on the line and ask for the ASC).

Learning Commons

Check your Blackboard course list on <https://learn.unbc.ca> or in the student portal at <https://my.unbc.ca> for a link to the **Learning Commons**. The UNBC virtual learning commons is a “one stop shop” for student supports and collaborative online spaces, including Academic Success Centre tutoring, Student Technology Troubleshooters, the online forms of MACE and Nucleus, other drop-in services like Resume and Career help, as well as links to services such as the Library Research Desk and the Academic Advisors. Also keep an eye on the Learning Commons for links to events and workshops!

Course Schedule and Readings

All readings are available via the course website or assigned textbook. Podcast links and reading links are available on the course website in the “course schedule” section. *Game of Thrones* episodes are numbered for the whole series rather than by season.

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	EPISODES (Focus for week in bold)	PODCASTS
11/1	Introduction: What does <i>Game of Thrones</i> have to do with Medieval history?			
18/1	Medievalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kavita Mudan Finn, “<i>Game of Thrones</i> is Based in History--Outdated History”, <i>The Public Medievalist</i> (May 16, 2019) https://www.publicmedievalist.com/thrones-outdated-history/ Kaufman and Sturtevant, “Introduction: Weaponizing History” and Chapter 1 “The Middle Ages: Foundational Myths” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Episodes 1-3 Episode 4 “Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things” 	PODCAST: Interview Dr. Alicia Mackenzie on Medievalism
25/1	Playing the Game of Thrones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gerd Althoff, “Lords and their Men” in <i>Friends, Family, and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in early Medieval Europe</i>, (Cambridge, 2004): 102-135. Marcus Schulzke, “Playing the Game of Thrones: Some Lessons from 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Episodes 5-6 Episode 7 “You Win or You Die” 	

		<p>Machiavelli”, <i>Game of Thrones and Philosophy</i> ed. Henry Jacoby (Hoboken: Wiley, 2012): 33-48.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Janice Liedl, “This Honourable Fool” https://jliedl.ca/2013/09/30/this-honourable-fool/ 		
1/2	Eunuchs, Castration, and Masculinity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “ ‘I’d Rather Have No Brains and Two Balls’: Eunuchs, Masculinity, and Power in Game of Thrones”, <i>Journal of Popular Culture</i> 51.1 (2018): 50-67. • Kathryn Ringrose, “Eunuchs in Historical Perspective”, <i>History Compass</i> 5.2 (February 2007): 495-506. • Jes Battis, “How Medieval are the Eunuchs in Game of Thrones?”, <i>The Public Medievalist</i> (November 14, 2019) https://www.publicmedievalist.com/got-eunuchs/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episodes 7-11 • Episode 12 “The Night Lands” 	PODCAST: “The Eunuch”, <i>In Our Time</i> (26 Feb. 2015). There may be another option for this week.
8/2	Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irina Metzler, “Disability in the Middle Ages: Impairment at the Intersection of Historical Inquiry and Disability Studies,” <i>History Compass</i> 9.1 (January 2011): 45-60. • Courtney Stanton, “Learn to Fight with Your Other Hand: <i>Game of Thrones</i> as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episodes 13-23 • Episode 24 “And now his watch is ended” 	“Disabilities in the Middle Ages with Kisha Tracy” on <i>The Medieval Podcast</i> https://themedievalpodcast.libsyn.com/disabilities-in-the-middle-ages-with-kisha-tracy

		Complicated Champion of Disability,” in <i>Fan Phenomena: Game of Thrones</i> ed. by Kavita Mudan Finn, (Intellect, 2017): 140-150.		
15/2	READING WEEK: No classes			
22/2	Race, Racism, and the White Saviour Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helen Young, “Game of Thrones’ Racism Problem”, <i>The Public Medievalism</i> (21 July 2017) https://www.publiemedievalist.com/game-thrones-racism-problem/ Kaufman and Sturtevant, Chapters 3-4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Episodes 25-29 Episode 30 “Mhysa” 	TBA
1/3	Law, Order, and Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M.J. Russell, “Trial by Battle in the Court of Chivalry”, <i>Journal of Legal History</i> 29.3 (Dec. 2008): 335-357. David P. Weber, “Legal Structures in a Game of Thrones: the Laws of the First Men and Those that Followed”, <i>South Carolina Law Review</i> 70.209 (July 2018). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Episodes 31-37 Episode 38 “The Mountain and the Viper” 	
8/3	Sexual Violence and Incest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paul Sturtevant, “Was Sexual Abuse Normal in the Middle Ages?”, <i>The Public Medievalist</i>, (May 28, 2015) https://www.publiemedievalist.com/got-rape-and-middle-ages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Episodes 38-45 Episode 46 “Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken” (NOTE: This episode features a 	PODCAST: Interview with Dr. Sara McDougall on sexual violence and justice.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kaufman and Sturtevant, Chapter 5 “Knights in Shining Armor and Damsels in Distress” • Michaela Baca, “Bad Kids: Incestuous Fantasy and Phenomenon in <i>A Song of Fire and Ice</i>, <i>Essays in Medieval Studies</i> 32 (2017): 83-88. 	rape scene)	
15/3	Religion and Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kaufman and Sturtevant, Chapter 6, “Medievalism and Religious Extremism” • TBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episode 47 “The Gift” 	PODCAST: Interview with Dr. Sarah Ifft Deckeron religion and violence.
22/3	Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophie Oosterwijk, “The Medieval Child: An Unknown Phenomenon?”, in <i>Misconceptions about the Middle Ages</i> (Routledge, 2008): 230-235. • Marine Pérot, “Childhood Deprivation: The Dangers of Growing up on <i>Game of Thrones</i>”, https://medium.com/cination-show/childhood-deprivation-the-dangers-of-growing-up-in-game-of-thrones-e8af5db06f52 • TBA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episodes 48-54 • Episode 55 “The Door” 	
29/3	Queenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elena Woodacre, “Afterword: Playing, Winning, and Losing the Game of Thrones: Reflections on Female Succession in George R. R. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episodes 56-59 and 61-62. • We will focus on TWO episodes this week: 	PODCAST: Interview with Dr. Miriam Shadis on medieval queenship.

		<p>Martin's <i>A Song of Fire and Ice</i> and <i>Game of Thrones</i> in Comparison to the Premodern Era", in <i>Queenship and the Women of Westeros</i> ed. Zita Rohr and Lisa Benz, (Palgrave, 2020): 231-252.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA 	<p>Episode 60 "The Winds of Winter" and Episode 63 "The Queen's Justice"</p>	
5/4	EASTER MONDAY-No classes			
12/4	Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ken Mondschein, "The Wager of Battle: Wars, Duels, and Tournament" in <i>Game of Thrones and the Medieval Art of War</i>, (McFarland, 2017): 105-132. • Paul B. Sturtevant, "You Know Nothing about Medieval Warfare, Jon Snow", <i>The Public Medievalist</i> (May 2, 2019) https://www.publicmedievalist.com/got-warfare/ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Episodes 64-69 and 71-72 • Episode 70 "The Long Night" and Episode 73 "The Iron Throne" 	<p>PODCAST: Interview Peter Konieczny, editor of <i>Medieval Warfare</i> and <i>Medievalists.net</i></p>
19/4	Research Week: No class	Use this time to complete your projects.		