Fantasy Medievalism

On the Aesthetic of the Mythical

Racha Kirakosian

Our image of the Middle Ages is contaminated. But is there actually a pure, authentic Middle Ages behind it? This notion – the hypothetical existence of an authentic Middle Ages – has been called into question by the historian and cultural studies scholar Valentin Groebner. The material he examines consists of books, photographs, advertising texts, and other marketing strategies, particularly those used in the tourist industry. My paper, in contrast, will bring together two groups of sources which are seldom analysed together: medieval literature and the TV series *Game of Thrones*. When medieval texts are associated with *Game of Thrones*, it is usually with the aim of tracing historical or literary instances that served as inspiration for the popular series. Such comparisons have already been carried out many times and this is not my objective here. In juxtaposing medieval texts – specifically the literary material concerned with Mélusine and Herzog Ernst – with the *Game of Thrones* series, my aim is to develop the idea of an aesthetic of the mythical. I will begin by (1) addressing the place of medievalism in the Fantasy film genre and (2) explaining my concept of myth, before (3) considering – with reference to the objects of this study – what an aesthetic of the mythical could mean. As we will see, medieval sources themselves already contain mythical dimensions.

1. Medievalism in the Fantasy Film Genre

Since Tolkien's creation of Middle Earth, his specific notion of the European Middle Ages has served as the standard backdrop for Fantasy worlds. Some decades before Tolkien, the popularity of the historical novel had already laid the groundwork for a ›return of the Middle Ages‹. This was one of many revivals of the Middle Ages in the modern era, as described by Umberto Eco in his essay *Dreaming of the Middle Ages* (1986: 63).[1] Today the Fantasy film – and here I include the HBO series *Game of Thrones*

1 See also Eco: »Immediately after the official ending of the Middle Ages, Europe was ravaged by a pervasive medieval nostalgia« (Eco 1986: 66).

(2011–2019) – displays, arguably more than any other genre, processes of appropriation that deploy various more or less dominant notions of the Middle Ages. This type of creative reception of the medieval past, which is inspired by history but lays no claim to historical accuracy, can be aesthetically and intellectually appealing.[2] Yet there is a fundamental difference between history and the past: the past is irrevocably gone, whereas history is about the representation of this absent past. In the words of Groebner, »It [history; R.K.] must be recounted and presented« (Groebner 2013: 408f.). In this sense, every image of the Middle Ages, whether produced and consumed in an academic or popular context, is fundamentally a construction.

At the same time, there is undoubtedly a discrepancy between the frequently reproduced stereotypes of the Middle Ages and the world that medievalists study in their research.[3] This disparity between historical research and popular perceptions is certainly, though not exclusively, due to the academic structures and traditions of the study of the Middle Ages itself. A perennial problem in my field, medieval studies, is the term 'Middle Ages' itself and its geographical implications. To name just one of the issues: the use of the term to refer to the period between around 500 and 1500 arose in connection with European history, whereas large parts of the world periodize their past differently.[4]

Conceptions of the Middle Ages are the product of countless overlaps between imaginary projections, often influenced by political and economic interests. These condense to form a supposed whole, which is then related to the past on the basis of a temporal separation, meaning that the period is perceived as long gone. Groebner uses the term »post-production« to describe this process; post-production works with images of affect and with the use of emotions (Groebner 2013: 428).

---

2 At the same time, we can also currently observe a political instrumentalization of the reception of the Middle Ages, e.g. when alt-right groups use runes to promote the idea of a medieval, white, male-dominated European past. One example is the so-called Nordic Resistance Movement, the Nordiska motståndsrörelsen, a political party in Sweden, which embraces a proto-national and ahistorical idea of the North. Politicized forms of medievalism correspond to Eco's sixth type of nostalgic thinking about the Middle Ages – the Middle Ages of 'national identities', celebrating a putative former grandeur (cf. Eco 1986: 70).

3 This imbalance caught the interest of the media a few years ago. Dorothy Kim, for example, wrote about the need to reclaim the history of the Vikings, which white racists were using for their imaginary past (Kim 2019). Other articles have drawn attention to a more widespread misuse of the Middle Ages, which also affects academia; see e.g. Gabriele/Rambaran-Olm 2019.

4 Academics have begun to seek new ways to periodize the Middle Ages, by calling into question geographic definitions, e.g. Kulke 2016. However, Central Asia is often overlooked, as Yücel Sivri noted critically in his review of Kulke's book (Sivri 2017). The Centre for Medieval Literature also encourages efforts to build networks that extend beyond the European region. See https://cml.sdu.dk [accessed 26 August 2020]. See also Cohen 2000a and Borgolte 2022.

In his study on the development of the tourist industry, Groebner evokes the quest for the authentic, which highlights the relevance of stereotypes of the Middle Ages for identity politics. In tourism, which is based on images of artificial worlds, projections of the Middle Ages become a code for authenticity. Just as »tourism is an image machine, which literally creates economic realities from imaginings« (Groebner 2013: 409), the Fantasy genre has developed its own medieval repertoire, generating billions of dollars in earnings.[5] Here I see clear functional parallels between the exploitation of history in the tourism industry and the medievalism encountered in the Fantasy genre.

Medievalism relates to a concept of the Middle Ages based on a concentration of superimposed projections. One way to conceptualize how these projections come together is what Astrid Erll has called the construction of places of memory via »premediation« and »remediation«. In »premediation«, images are transferred from the media into our collective memory, supplying the thought patterns with which we then encounter new experiences and representations. »Remediation« occurs when this repertoire is repeatedly reproduced, creating a canon of existing media which no longer has any connection to an original event (Erll 2012).[6] The characteristics of the specific media are crucial in medievalist processes of projection, since they largely dictate the conditions of perception and interpretation that define something which I call the aesthetic of the mythical.

Medievalisms in film were the subject of a 2008 monograph by Nickolas Haydock, informed by psychoanalysis and media philosophy. Although Haydock makes no distinction between historicizing films about the Middle Ages and Fantasy films, it is worth summarizing a few points from his study, which clarify the special nature of medievalism in (Fantasy) film. Haydock's reading of Lacan, in particular Lacan's concept of the imaginary, is based on the interpretation of Lacan scholar Malcolm Bowie: »The Imaginary is the order of mirror-images, identifications and reciprocities. It is the dimension of experience in which the individual seeks not simply to placate the Other but to dissolve his otherness by becoming his counterpart […]« (Bowie 1993: 92; quoted in Haydock 2008: 7). The imaginary as a hall of mirrors, a repertoire for identification, and an interplay that serves to draw boundaries – all this can be applied to notions of the Middle Ages. In Fantasy film, such notions create the impression of another world; this casts the viewer's own world as the Other, promoting identification with its counterpart.

5 One example is the films based on Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001–2003) and *The Hobbit or There and Back Again* (2012–2014), also extended into a trilogy. Just one of the films, *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, generated 1.12 billion US dollars globally; all six films together made just under 6 billion US dollars (see Harms 2023).

6 I wish to thank Lea von Berg for drawing my attention to Astrid Erll's research.

A further analytical category used by Haydock stems from the work of Gilles Deleuze and concerns his idea of »l'image-temps« (see Deleuze 1985). According to Haydock, a subcategory of the medievalist film follows this principle, which he also refers to as the »time machine«. These are films that are set in an earlier time but are actually about contemporary crises. One example is Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal* (*Det sjunde inseglet*, 1957), which was produced under the shadow of the nuclear threat in post-war Europe, but tells the story of a crusader and his interaction with personified Death during the time of the plague. Medievalist films, so it seems, appear to be particularly well suited to presenting and exploring contemporary problems in the guise of a past epoch. Another example of this »time machine« in the Fantasy genre is the feared arrival of winter in *Game of Thrones*, which could be interpreted as mirroring the contemporary climate crisis.

In his discussion of Arthurian cinema, Haydock works with a »pincer approach«, considering the studied material from two sides. With reference to Siegfried Kracauer, he writes:

> Kracauer's realist aesthetic and his suspicion of both fantasy and historical cinema (for him much the same thing) represent one arm of my pincer approach to Arthurian cinémedievalism and digitization. With Kracauer I view mass entertainment as the distilled expression of collective desires, which serve not merely to reflect but also to intensify things like patriotism, nostalgia for charismatic leadership, or a belief in the historical destiny of nations. (Haydock 2008: 166; referring to Kracauer 1960: 77–91)

Haydock's next point of reference is Jean Baudrillard:

> The second pincer of my approach is what Baudrillard has called the 'procession of simulacra' into the realm of the hyperreality, where both reference and history are fatally attenuated in spasms of reproduction. The apparent contradiction in Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal is his insistence upon both the erosion of reference to any reality whatsoever as well as the postmodern obsession with technologies of its accurate representation. (Haydock 2008: 166; referring to Baudrillard 1994: 1–42)

The medievalist film, then, is characterized by a politicized heightening of emotions, the gradual dismantling of a realistic frame of reference, and, at the same time, an increasing sense of realism enhanced by technology.

One particular combination in film is that of medievalism and Orientalism, as can be observed in the motif of the crusade.[7] Since David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* in 1962, there have been expectations about what a »typical Western film set in the

7 See the edited volume by Haydock/Risden 2009.

East« should look like. John M. Ganim describes it as »an uncannily stable visual projection of history, a message that the world it portrays is empty, silent and timeless, punctuated by brief images of crowds in the bazaar or armies on the battlefield« (Ganim 2009: 31). This cinematic aesthetic of the timeless 'Orient' has iconographic precursors. The cinematic concept of the 'Orient' has its roots in early photography and nineteenth-century art production, and thus in highly staged images which often recreated medievalist settings. This harks back to a tradition in which Islamic architecture, in the Romantic period and in the colonial age, was perceived as medieval(ist). Imagined Orientalist interiors as depicted in the nineteenth century reappear in films. »Thus, rich hangings, carpets and wall coverings became the sign of the Eastern interior, especially in the Middle Ages« (ibid.: 33). This setting – which worked with strikingly stable stereotypes – also included the personnel associated with the inner realm of the house, such as scantily clad belly dancers: »The sets and locations of motion pictures set in the Middle East comprise a remarkably consistent, but varied, visual array« (ibid.: 35f.). The association of magic with the Orient dates back to the early days of cinema and Georges Méliès's 1907 comedy *Ali Barbajou et Ali Boufà l'Huile*. Méliès, a trained magician, used his technical knowledge to give cinematic form to the image of a magical Orient. In his film, narrative special effects are equated with Oriental magic (ibid.: 36). The excess of »orientalist visual vocabularies« (ibid.) used to create a Middle-Eastern decor, as in Méliès's film, can also be seen in film adaptations of the Fantasy genre. The tradition of an opulent interior contrasted with an empty desert landscape – although »this semiotic opposition between an interior setting of excess and an exterior setting of emptiness is not always as clear-cut as we might expect« – has passed into a kind of collective memory of cinema-goers: »The landscape of Crusades films, like that of biblical epic films, is a landscape of collective memory« (ibid.: 45). Even if Orientalist images may have changed since the middle of the twentieth century, and Oriental landscapes no longer necessarily appear as mythical and timeless, the above-mentioned stereotypes and patterns still have a firm place in the cinematic repertoire of Orientalist films – which, incidentally, are not produced exclusively in the West.

In the research presented above, no distinction is made between historicizing medievalist films and the Fantasy genre. This is to be welcomed, since precise differentiation in medievalist »post-production« would be impossible and in any case questionable: in both types of film, medievalist images undergo the same process of canonization. If we juxtapose Groebner's analysis of stereotypes of the Middle Ages in popular culture with research on the medievalist (Fantasy) film, we can see parallels in the way that medievalist notions are perceived and utilized. A »supposedly fixed temporality« is made elastic and available for personal experience (Groebner 2018: 34). Moreover, it is historical novels and films that generate a sense of history within modernity. Images familiar from these novels and films appear as »›proper‹ or ›original‹ historical events«, which then feed into the »imaginings of ›times past‹«

(Groebner 2013: 427). »In this post-production of the past«, Groebner argues, »the connections with images of affect from other media (historical paintings, novels and films) clearly play an important part. For the use of history in tourism, artificiality is not an obstacle, but a reservoir of possibilities« (ibid.: 428). This kind of medievalist reservoir of possibilities is also characteristic of Fantasy film, which is likewise concerned with the intensification of feelings, shifts in perception, and imaginary but collectively identifiable images. I would like to suggest that these aesthetic processes follow the principle of mythical thinking, as conceived by Ernst Cassirer.

2. Mythical Thinking

Myths are a popular topic and always have been. In the last forty years, research on myths within medieval studies has undergone a shift; the focus is no longer on examining the history of the myths themselves, but more on understanding their narratological and poetological workings against the background of discursive phenomena. Gerhart von Graevenitz initiated this change of course in his mythological study of 1987, highlighting »traditions of thought« that are based on the myth in its distinctive character as a fiction and illusion, and arguing that it was time to move away from a »realism of the myth« (von Graevenitz 1987).[8] Viewed from this perspective, myths are discursive phenomena, as Bent Gebert suggests in his study on the Trojan War (Gebert 2013). The reception of the Middle Ages is a multilayered »post-production« (Groebner) of history, in which »traditions of thought« (von Graevenitz) are based on imagined but quite consistent pictorial processes. To find the analytical tools to deal with this complex phenomenon, I will draw on Cassirer's idea of mythical thinking. The reception of the Middle Ages, I suggest, functions on the basis of a particular perspective on the world and on history which can be described as mythical thinking.

The term »mythical thinking« derives from Ernst Cassirer's work on the philosophy of symbolic forms (1925). He argues that, in the mythical »understanding and explanation of the world«, spaces are charged with metaphysical meaning: »Each particular spatial determination thus obtains a definite divine or demonic, friendly or hostile, holy or unholy 'character'« (Cassirer 1955: 98). Borders in the mythical space mean symbolic demarcation (ibid: 99f.); they are a type of threshold which can only

8 Von Graevenitz argued that mythological studies should not be focusing on the question of essence (what the myth »really« is), as this leads to a »realism of the myth«. Any reference to reality should be kept at a distance. Myth is, instead, a fiction or an illusion. It is no longer bound to any »thing« (von Graevenitz 1987: VII-IX). Scholars, according to von Graevenitz, should trace »traditions of thought« and explore how today's »habits of thought« are linked with the mythical (ibid.: X-XII).

be overcome in a specific manner, e.g. one fixed by rituals (ibid.: 104). In addition to this spatial definition, Cassirer also discusses temporal aspects of the mythical world:

> By being thrust back into temporal distance, by being situated in the depths of the past, a particular content is not only established as sacred, as mythically and religiously significant, but also justified as such. Time is the first original form of this spiritual justification. (ibid.: 105)

For Cassirer, there is no objectifiable time in the mythical consciousness. Instead, time plays out without differentiation in this prehistorical world; Cassirer speaks of a »timeless consciousness« (ibid.: 106). Here time is correlated with a certain emotional dynamic, i.e. with an intensity of present, past and future to which the subject is exposed (ibid.: 119).

So how are mythical dimensions expressed in the stories in which they occur? Like Tolkien in his novels, *Game of Thrones* uses tropes from medieval literature and extends them into fantastical dimensions. It is no secret that George R.R. Martin takes his inspiration from both medieval and present-day historiography of the Middle Ages.[9] He also makes use of various myths from medieval literature – such as myths of dragons as terrifying creatures from another world.[10] Mythical elements may include vague indications of time and space, or objects and characters. Fairy tales, for example, operate in mythical dimensions to create tension in what Tolkien calls »Perilous Realms«.[11] Because mythical worlds are not structured according to any clear temporal or spatial order, they can only be safely navigated by mythical creatures who are part of the respective world. These creatures possess supernatural powers, though in the terms of the internal mythical world these powers are natural. Stories that play out in a Fantasy world utilize their own mythical sub-worlds, or in Tolkien's term, »secondary worlds«. In *The Hobbit*, for example, when Bilbo Baggins sets out on his unexpected journey, he encounters magic and strange creatures he has previously only known from hearsay and not believed in – and thus discovers that the myths of his world really do exist.[12] In *Game of Thrones*, the White Walkers are part of a mythical sub-world. Their past and present remain a mystery, nobody knows where they come from and what their intentions are, yet they still

9 Numerous publications have examined the medieval inspiration for the world of *Game of Thrones*; to name just a few: Larrington 2015; Pavlac 2017; West 2019.

10 Tolkien writes about the fascination of fantasy creatures which make up an »Other-world«, and admits that he »desired dragons with a profound desire« (Tolkien ^{2}1988: 40).

11 The »Perilous Realm«, conceived as a kind of country, is another term from Tolkien: »Most good 'fairy-stories' are about *adventures* [emphasis in original] of men in the Perilous Realm or upon its shadowy marches« (Tolkien ^{2}1988: 14).

12 For secondary worlds see Tolkien ^{2}1988: 18 and 36.

create an apocalyptic atmosphere. The sub-world of Valyria functions in a similar way. Defined historically rather than geographically, Valyria is a buried landscape in which zombie-like creatures inhabit the ruins of a former great power. Hybrid worlds are formed when border-crossing figures cause the mythical sub-world to break through into the 'normal' world. Encounters with the mythical world challenge the story's protagonists and drive the plot forward.

Many medieval narratives, as well as creative forms of medieval reception, are based on mythical thinking. Despite possible objections to using Cassirer's philosophy to explore medieval texts,[13] the spatiotemporal aspects of mythical thinking prove useful for the study of both medieval literature and Fantasy films. In both genres, remote spaces and times are used to construct worlds that oscillate between the really possible and the fantastic, the imaginable and the supernatural, thus allowing complex plots.[14] In hybrid narrative worlds based on mythical thinking, myth is not the opposite of reason;[15] rather, these narrative worlds presuppose a dialectic idea of myth like the one envisioned by Hans Blumenberg. Mythical elements are used to reinforce or explain supposedly historical events. It could be said that the myth serves to tame and channel reality and to control the unspeakable (Blumenberg 1971). The purpose of myth is not to frighten but to explain, or, in Blumenberg's words, to pro-

13 The theory was developed in the context of a history of ideas, and not with medieval literature in mind. Kiening questions Cassirer's dichotomies and criticizes the implications for epistemology and evolutionary history (Kiening 2004: 36).

14 Despite this, the Middle Ages as a whole epoch cannot be described as mythical itself, however constructed it may be. In his subchapter 'Playing (with) the Legend', Haydock briefly (and without reference) mentions André Bazin's view that »every new development [in cinema technology] must, paradoxically, take it nearer and nearer to its origins« (Haydock 2008: 182). He goes on to quote Robert Burgoyne: »Although Bazin probably meant that cinema would eventually arrive at a perfect replication of the real, computer generated imagery in fact pushes the origins of cinema back beyond the nineteenth-and twentieth-century dream of the mechanical or electronic reproduction of reality, all the way to premodernity, to medieval or mythic times when the line between fantasy, fact and speculation was not yet clearly drawn« (Burgoyne 2003: 234). Haydock does not comment on the implicit assumption that there were no boundaries between fantasy, fact, and speculation in the Middle Ages,. Instead, in his discussion of films that he refers to as »post-medieval« (here he is talking about films that subvert the principle of Enlightenment and the break with the Middle Ages and reveal a still-active, Manichean, medieval worldview), he adopts Burgoyne's idea of a medieval age which is also a mythical age: »Let us begin with Burgoyne's notion […] of technologies of the virtual that blur the distinction between fantasy and reality to a degree thought to be characteristic of 'medieval or mythic times'« (Haydock 2008: 187).

15 Udo Friedrich and Bruno Quast, for example, describe the myth as »the Other of reason« (Friedrich/Quast 2004b: X).

duce »distance from the quality of uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*)«.[16] If the myth is to be instrumentalized in this way, it must be contended that »What matters is not that the written history is true, but that it has to be true« (Blumenberg 1985: 125).

This raises the question of authenticity, which always accompanies images of the Middle Ages. The idea of the medieval period as a singular epoch is in itself mythological. Groebner describes this as follows: »Speaking and writing about the Middle Ages means negotiating wishes. This epoch […] was literally created by wishes, many hundreds of years ago, and since then it has been designed, outlined, equipped and furnished with wishes. Quite a variety of wishes« (Groebner 2008: 11f.). The »powerful fantasies of the Middle Ages, which were used to create tangible realities in the sixteenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries« (ibid.: 23), still determine the popular reception of the Middle Ages today. This now includes the Fantasy worlds of films, as well as computer games and reenactment events (ibid.: 143f.). From the beginning, the tourist gaze at the supposedly European Middle Ages (ibid.: 143) as the Other has been a »combination of the picturesque and the barbaric' (ibid.: 124f.). What Eco calls 'dreamed alterity« becomes »tourist fantasies« in Groebner's work (ibid.: 144): »Clearly this is about the semiotic character of a Middle Ages that, beyond the authentic, views itself very self-confidently as the reenactment of a new, reconstructed commercial counter-world« (ibid.: 142). But how is this semiotic character expressed, and what indexing system is concealed behind it? Here I would like to suggest that there is an aesthetic of the mythical, which performs precisely this indexing function.

3. The Aesthetic of the Mythical

The concept of aesthetics has different emphases in different research disciplines. The focus on art-related beauty is a relatively modern association and is not central here. Etymologically, aesthetics (from the Ancient Greek αἴσθησις/*aísthēsis*) is about perception and sensation, about humans' sensory and – in the broadest sense – cognitive understanding.[17] Following this basic epistemic meaning, I understand aesthetic processes as symbolic processes (cf. Goodman 1968). Mythical thinking as a symbolic form (as defined by Cassirer) shares this semiotic character of aesthetics, as expounded by Nelson Goodman. When mythical thinking is illustrated in literature and film, when the symbol is embodied in the image, then it becomes possible to

16 »Both phenomena, that of the elimination of monsters from the world and that of the transitional forms on the way to the human *eidos*, must have to do with myth's function of producing distance from the quality of uncanniness« (Blumenberg 1985: 117).

17 For a comprehensive overview of the concept of aesthetics in medieval literary studies, see Kobiela 2022: 7–37.

perceive the imaginary. The images of the Middle Ages, repeatable with variations, form an index; this in turn fundamentally influences the popular conception of the Middle Ages.

The functioning of mythical modes of narration, such as those we encounter in *Game of Thrones*, is closely linked with medievalist stereotypes. Among those, there are two I would like to explore. Two striking thematic complexes, femininity in conjunction with bestiality on the one hand and Orientalism on the other, are of structural importance in *Game of Thrones* and constitute core elements in two bestsellers of the high and late Middle Ages: the stories of *Mélusine* and *Herzog Ernst*. The mythical dimensions outlined below relate to ideas of time and space and to the hybridity of the characters involved.

The timelessness of mythical thinking finds expression in the stylistic device of pastiche,[18] defined by art historians as a superimposition of different epochs. In the Fantasy genre, pastiche (or bricolage, Velten 2018, 20) is part of an aesthetic of the mythical. The visual world of *Game of Thrones* combines visual concepts from antiquity with those from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as well as elements from Science Fiction. This causes a collision between the three levels of time mentioned by Cassirer (past – present – future), creating »a sort of historical deep sea« which is perceived as a mythical past (see Groebner 2013: 412 and 421–423). The superposition of a fantasy 'once upon a time' and an apocalyptic 'soon' relies on visual presentation. This type of production of affective images also occurs in literature, however (see ibid.: 411 and 424). One example is the legend of Mélusine, which is French in origin but was rewritten and translated multiple times.[19] The most canonical version was compiled around 1393 by Jean d'Arras and served the real historical interests of his patron, John, Duke of Berry.[20] The fusion of history and mythical world, the motif of the dragon in the context of genealogical myths, and the combination of femininity and animality are elements of *Mélusine* that also appear in *Game of Thrones*, more specifically in relation to the character Daenerys Targaryen.

Daenerys is the paternal aunt of Jon Snow, her confidant and lover. As the youngest child of King Aerys II Targaryen, who had to flee the kingdom after the rebellion of Robert Baratheon, Daenerys lays claim to the Iron Throne and upholds this claim to her dying breath. She is the mother of dragons, has a family bond

18 For this technique for representing the past in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries see Nagel/Wood 2010. See also Groebner: »The past was able to be literally reactivated by means of substitution and technical reproduction of the authentic«; pastiche is the »conscious recombination of different elements of different styles or of new content in the old style from different sources: imitation as recombination to maximize the effect« (Groebner 2013: 426).

19 For an examination of the mythical dimension of the German version (written by Thüring von Ringoltingen in the mid-fifteenth century) see Quast 2004; see also Kiening 2005.

20 For a detailed account of this and the mythical legitimization of claims to sovereignty, see my article in *Bohemia* 61 (2021).

with these mythical beings, and is immune to fire. In short, she is no ordinary mortal and possesses mythical abilities which give her anatomical kinship to these creatures. Within the world of *Game of Thrones*, her origin can be seen as mythical. Daenerys's family originally came from Valyria, an inaccessible kingdom told of in songs and legends. The characters of Westeros sing about it as a lost world.[21] Daenerys learns how to derive political benefit from her origins by inspiring both fear and admiration and using her mythical background to consolidate her claim to power.

Mythical origins also have consequences for the plot in the case of the literary character Mélusine. In the earliest surviving textual witnesses, the protagonist Mélusine is a kind of demon; in later courtly romances she becomes the ancestor of many noble families.[22] In the version by Jean d'Arras, Mélusine's origin remains concealed from most of the characters. The readers, however, learn about the previous history of her parents and about the curse put on Mélusine by her mother, a fairy, as punishment for imprisoning her father in a mountain. They are therefore aware of her non-human origins and the animal side of her life: every Saturday, Mélusine turns into a serpent-like creature from the waist down.[23] She is able to keep her secret fairly successfully and to help her husband Raymondin to achieve prosperity and a good reputation. At the same time, she triumphs as a strong, intelligent, and generous ruler. A beautiful woman (as the narrator assures us), Mélusine cloaks herself in secrecy; the source of her knowledge and her wealth is inexplicable for the characters around her. In general, she succeeds in coping with the demonic spell that partially transforms her into a snake every Saturday. Yet it is manifested in the disfigurement of nearly all her children: the faces of eight out of her ten sons have visible anomalies.

What d'Arras tells us about Mélusine's prior history is that her mother, Presine, left her husband, Elinas, king of Scotland, taking her triplet daughters, after he broke his promise not to see her during or after the birth. She fled to Avalon, also known as 'the lost island', which cannot be found by anyone except by chance:

21 Most vividly depicted in the episode when Tyrion and Jorah travel to Valyria (see season 5, episode 5).

22 For an overview of the history of the text, including the sources that Jean d'Arras used for his version, see Vincensini 2003: 8–31.

23 For the visual proximity to medieval ideas of the Fall, in which Eve and Satan look extremely similar, see my article in *Bohemia*.

> L'ystoire nous dit que quant Presine party de Elinas atout ses trois filles qu'elle s'en ala atout elles an Avalon, nommé l'Ille Perdue, pour ce que nulz homs, tant y eust esté de foiz, n'y sauroit rassegner fors par aventure. (Jean d'Arras 2003: 130).[24]
>
> The story tells us that when Presine left him she took her three daughters to Avalon, which was called the Lost Isle because no man, however many times he had been there before, could ever find it again except by chance. (Jean d'Arras 2012: 24)

This place where Mélusine grows up is hidden from most people and is a mythical site within the story. When Mélusine learns the truth about her father, she condemns him for his betrayal of her mother and buries him alive in a mountain. Presine, in turn, punishes Mélusine and her sisters, who were also involved in the deed. Mélusine will now turn into a half-woman/half-serpent every Saturday, until she marries a man who loves her and accepts her secret. Only then will she gradually become a mortal woman.

Both Daenerys and Mélusine, as mythical hybrid figures, are ultimately rejected by the person closest to them: Jon Snow stabs Daenerys to death, Raymondin betrays Mélusine. In both cases there is a link between femininity and animality, and the women rulers' supernatural powers envelop them in a mythical atmosphere. Nobody knows where they really come from or where they obtain their charismatic power from. The characters around them oscillate between admiration and contempt for them. The mythical source of their powers and abilities does not fit into the polar categories of good and evil, real or imagined.

A large part of the *Mélusine* romance is devoted to the story of the sons, who make a name for themselves as crusaders. In fact, for a time the kingdoms of Jerusalem, Cyprus, and Armenia were ruled by sons of the historical house of Lusignan, which laid claim to the mythical ancestress Mélusine. The 'Orient' features heavily in medieval literature.

However, in the literature of the Middle Ages, as in the modern Fantasy film, we encounter a mythical Orient. Mythical worlds do not necessarily have to be remote and far-flung fairy worlds; the region once generally referred to as the Orient was often subject to a mystification that was tantamount to mythical treatment.[25]

---

24 The edition by Vincensini is not based solely on the oldest surviving manuscript in Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 3353, but also takes into account further text variants from other manuscripts, in contrast to the older edition by Stouff in 1932.

25 Mechanisms of othering, used to distinguish between demons and humans, also served to defame non-Christians, i.e. Jews and Muslims, in medieval stories and artworks with an Orientalist undertone. The connections between othering and representations of Jews and Muslims in medieval culture are well known. See e.g. the following studies: Cohen 2004; Strickland 2003; Rubin 2014; Akbari 2009, Burge 2016.

The medieval tale *Herzog Ernst*, a heroic epic with elements of crusader literature, illustrates the role of mythical dimensions in the process of othering.[26] Although the contested, colonialist concept of the Orient was not invented until much later, even in the Middle Ages there were discourses that presented 'the East' as foreign or other. Indeed, Geraldine Heng sees racist ideas as originating in the Middle Ages (Heng 2018).[27]

When it comes to exoticized images of the 'Orient', we do not have to rummage around in the Middle Ages to find examples. Vividly coloured scenes from *Game of Thrones* play with stereotypes rooted in an Orientalist perspective, e.g. when crowds of dark-skinned people worship their white saviour, Daenerys (season 3, episode 10). Further Orientalist aspects are reflected in the dialects of the characters. We can tell whether characters come from Westeros, the equivalent of the West, or Essos, the equivalent of the East, not only from their clothing but also from their pronunciation: characters from Westeros speak English with a British accent, while those from Essos speak poor English with a strong accent.[28] Moreover, there are cinematographic elements that refer visually to the Orientalist art of the nineteenth century, that is, Romantic art by Europeans in which the 'Orient' is imagined and often exoticized. There is an astounding similarity between the depiction of Jamie Lannister's visit to Dorne (season 5, episode 9), the eastern tip of Westeros, and Romantic paintings of the Orient such as *The Harem Dance* by Giulio Rosati (1858–1917).[29] Yet this similarity should not surprise us, since clichés about the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule served loosely as inspiration for Dorne. An HBO featurette on the shooting of these scenes in the Alcázar of Seville shows how the Andalusian architecture and garden landscapes were intensified, e.g. in terms of colour, to make Dorne appear more real (cf. Youtube 2015, online). The featurette leaves no doubt as to the aim here: to superimpose the world of *Game of Thrones* on a supposedly real Middle Ages which can be found in our world. The Middle Ages of tourism meets the Middle Ages of Fantasy. It does not matter that the colourful tiles we see in the episode, the Renaissance gates into the garden and other individual elements cannot have come from the medieval period and must have arrived much later. In the spirit of pastiche, this blending of styles is part of the aesthetic of the mythical. The strategy of the medieval setting is also used, for example, in the CGI-enhanced images of Dubrovnik as King's Landing. The anachronistic side-by-side of different styles flattens differ-

26 For a detailed study of the mythical dimensions in *Herzog Ernst*, see my article in *Bohemia*.

27 See also Sivri 2016; he translates *othering* as »sociocultural stigmatization« (ibid.: 29).

28 The postcolonial implications are obvious.

29 Rosati, The Harem Dance, Christie's auction on 20 June 2002, Sale 6562: '19th century European art including Ottomans & Orientalists', thumbnail reproduction at (Christie's 2002, online).

entiation, it subsumes varying elements to merge into a kind of ahistorical »Utopian continuum« (Velten 2018: 17).

A fantastic and mythical Orient also takes up a large part of the story of *Herzog Ernst*, an anonymous twelfth-century crusade narrative.[30] This epic enjoyed continuing popularity into the seventeenth century, and after 1800 the Romantic enthusiasm for the Middle Ages rekindled the fascination with it.[31] The theme of authenticity is explicitly addressed in the surviving texts, highlighting an awareness of the ambivalent relationship between myth and history. Ultimately, however, it is the nature of the epic genre to claim that it recounts the truth. Hence this is not so much a serious attempt to convince readers; it is more about fulfilling the expectation that the epic will create a world in which myth and reality merge together – a strategy we also encounter in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*.[32]

The adventurous journey (or journey to the Orient, as scholars call it) leads the protagonist and his men into a mythical sub-world or other-world.[33] Access to this world is mysterious: after three days on the high seas, they are driven there by a storm; this is a place that cannot be reached deliberately.[34] The multilayered framing of the plot underlines this remoteness; the adventurous journey is located at the core of several frame narratives. The crusade to the Holy Land leads the men through uncertainty. In the end, guided by natives, they do reach Jerusalem; in other words, the geographical East *is* accessible from the mythical Orient. However, a second storm at sea is needed to lead Ernst and his men back home to the Holy Roman Empire. The foreign Orient of *Herzog Ernst* is full of mythical elements, including the navigation through this fantastical realm and the fabulous beings and hybrid creatures that populate it.[35] Ernst begins to build up a collection of specimens of the different creatures akin to a cabinet of curiosities:

---

30 Several researchers have already pointed out intrinsically Orientalist elements of *Herzog Ernst*, see Stock 2017; Goerlitz 2009; Lazda-Cazers 2004; Sivri 2016.

31 There are many reasons for the popularity of this narrative material, such as the extraordinary adventures and the complex plot structure. As Carey puts it: »The fantastic and the monstrous, the potpourri of medieval and ancient legends of people and places on the outer edge of the known world, would seem to play the deciding role in the dynamic appeal and longevity of this story« (Carey 2004: 54).

32 The existence of hybrid beings such as snake women (as in *Mélusine*) or humans with the heads of cranes (as in *Herzog Ernst*) is also an element that creates a mythical world. See Blumenberg: »Myth represents a world of stories that localizes the hearer's standpoint in time in such a way that the fund of the monstrous and the unbearable recedes in relation to him. This includes the transitional forms between beast and man […]« (Blumenberg 1985: 117).

33 In a sense this is an aesthetic space, such as that described by Stefan Seeber for the island of the griffins in *Kudrun*, see Seeber 2008.

34 For the cartography of the »foreign« or »other«, see Kobiela 2022: 37–55.

35 The crane-billed people of Grippia are always defined by bodily characteristics. For a discussion of identity-defining physical features in *Herzog Ernst*, see Stein 1997.

nu het der fürste lobesam
in sînem hove den Gîgant
und zwên von Perkamêren lant,
vil Ôren und manigen Plathuof.
der fürste in flîzeclîche schuof
swaz sie haben solden
und mêre dan sie wolden.
er hâte sie vür im durch wunder.
disiu seltsæniu kunder
verriben im vil dicke sît
mit kurzerwîle die lange zît.
(Sowinski 2009: 298, V. 5322–5332)

Besides the giant, there were now at the court the two men of Prechami and many Ears and Flat Hoofs, all of whom got whatever they wanted and more from their lord. He kept them with him as wonders, and in afteryears these strange beings often made long hours short and pleasant. (Thomas/Dussere 1980: 118)

The different creatures, including giants, tiny people (*Perkameren*), or people with long ears, are objectified as curiosities: they are defined by the gaze of the observer. To return to Cassirer, the missing representative level points to a lack of abstraction in mythical thinking.[36] In *Herzog Ernst* the strange creatures (»wunderlîch volc«, Sowinski 2009: 270, V. 4816) are to be taken at face value. Their physical qualities do not invite any non-figurative interpretation that would allow for a deeper underlying meaning. Their identification via the gaze of the observer is a fetishizing, Orientalist perspective, made possible by the mythical foundation of the wondrous Orient.

It would be a mistake to believe that the bizarre creatures of the mythical Orient, such as those that appear in the illustrated manuscripts about the famous travels of John de Mandeville, belong to a medieval literary past. In *The Lord of the Rings*, an army of monstrous creatures from the East is mobilized to fight on the side of evil. In *Game of Thrones*, Valyria is teeming with dangerous beings, and even the Dothraki, a nation of horseback warriors, are depicted as strange and bestial. As in *Herzog Ernst*, mythical spaces converge with the mythical Orient and its fantastical inhabitants – whether it be beyond Tolkien's »Edge of the Wild« or in the depths of Essos.

36 According to Cassirer, it is a decisive step in the analysis of the mythical world to take events and descriptions literally: »the 'image' does not represent the 'thing'; it is the thing, it does not merely stand for the object, but has the same actuality, so that it replaces the thing's immediate presence. Consequently, mythical thinking lacks the category of the 'ideal', and in order to apprehend pure signification it must transpose it into a material substance or being« (Cassirer 1955: 38).

4. Conclusion

Our vision of the Middle Ages is influenced by medievalist images from Romanticism nineteenth-century historicism, as well as from the film versions of various Fantasy novels in the Tolkien tradition. In more recent times, *Game of Thrones* has arrived on the scene. What we are dealing with here are reproducible visual processes that create meaning and heighten emotion. This reproducibility of artificial images is a key to understanding that media plays an important part in the emergence and dissemination of dominant stereotypes. The medievalism of the Fantasy genre uses images of the Middle Ages that rely on the imaginary themselves. At the same time, in a reverse process of appropriation, fantasy influences the imaginary. Lacan loathed this tendency of the imaginary to blur the boundary between fantasy and perception.[37] There is no doubt, however, that this blurring exists and exerts an influence. Tolkien had issued a similar warning against the illustration of fairy stories (cf. Tolkien [2]1988). Appropriations are seldom free of moralizing judgments, and they can lead to phenomena of exclusion. This is inherent in every representation of history: »Time and history are always-already colonized and never an inert, innocent Otherness waiting to be excavated« (Cohen 2000b: 5). And it is all the more serious in the case of Fantasy, where there is no historicity in the background to provide orientation.

The aesthetic of the mythical gives the imaginary a face; it makes the fantastic visually perceptible. In the interplay between narration and reception, mythical elements appear on various levels. A story – and the *Game of Thrones* series fits broadly into this category – presents itself as a myth. Within it, ideas about the Middle Ages are mythologized – for example in the visual world of *Game of Thrones*. With repeated viewings, the image of the Middle Ages then gradually moves into a mythical past.

One connection that requires critical attention is the link between medievalism and Orientalism. In addition to the historical sources of inspiration, *Game of Thrones* uses enduring stereotypes, archetypes of the mythical repertoire. Popular stories in the Middle Ages may have functioned in a similar way, interweaving historical paradigms with fictional elements in creative narrative worlds. In Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*, elements from history are displaced into a mythical world. In *Herzog Ernst*, existing spaces become entangled with the Orientalist appropriations of a mythical world. The aesthetic of the mythical, already given literary form in medieval narratives, undergoes a new phase of intensification in the cinematic use of medievalist stereotypes – since the technology can now lend uncanny realism to the on-screen reproduction of fantastic narrative worlds. And the more often medieval-

37 See Haydock: »For the penchant of the Imaginary to blur the distinction between fantasy and perception Lacan retained an abiding scorn« (Haydock 2008: 8).

ist stereotypes are reproduced in mythical thinking, the more authentic they seem.[38] As Cassirer astutely observed, »Today it is openly asserted that no clear logical division can be made between myth and history and that all historical understanding is and must be permeated with mythical elements« (Cassirer 1955: XVII). Umberto Eco also reminds us: »So, before rejoicing or grieving over a return of the Middle Ages, we have the moral and cultural duty of spelling out what kind of Middle Ages we are talking about« (Eco 1986: 72). Dealing with medievalist popular culture requires a critical approach, a *critical medievalism*,[39] which takes into account the aesthetic of the mythical in its indexing function and reproducibility.

Bibliography

Akbari, Suzanne Conklin (2009): Idols in the East. European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450. Ithaca/New York.

d'Arras, Jean (2003): Mélusine ou La Noble Histoire de Lusignan. Ed. by Jean-Jacques Vincensini. Paris.

d'Arras, Jean (2012): Melusine; or, the Noble History of Lusignan. Trans by. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. University Park/Pennsylvania.

Baudrillard, Jean (1994): Simulacra and Simulation. Trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor/Michigan.

Blumenberg, Hans (1971): Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkungspotential des Mythos. In: Manfred Fuhrmann (ed.): Terror und Spiel. Probleme der Mythenrezeption (= Poetik und Hermeneutik, Band 4). München, pp. 11–66.

Blumenberg, Hans (1985): Work on Myth. Trans. by Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, Mass.

Borgolte, Michael (2022): Die Welten des Mittelalters. Globalgeschichte eines Jahrtausends. München.

Bowie, Malcolm (1993): Lacan. Cambridge/Massachusetts.

Burge, Amy (2016): Representing Difference in the Medieval and Modern Orientalist Romance. New York.

Burgoyne, Robert (2003): Memory, History and Digital Imagery in Contemporary Film. In: Paul Grainge (ed.): Memory and Popular Film. Manchester, pp. 220–236.

Carey, Stephen M. (2004): »Undr unkunder diet«. Monstrous Counsel in Herzog Ernst B. In: Daphnis 33, issue. 1, pp. 53–78.

38 Cf. a similar argument in Groebner: »The past seems more authentic the more often it is reenacted« (Groebner 2018: 119).

39 See my call for »critical medievalism« in *Bohemia* 61 (2021).

Cassirer, Ernst (1955): The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol. II: Mythical Thought. Trans. by Ralph Manheim with Introductory Note by Charles W. Hendel. New Haven.

Christie's (2002): Giulio Rosati (Italian, 1858–1917). The harem dance. Available online: https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/giulio-rosati-italian-1858-1917-the-harem-3934830-details.aspx [accessed 21 August 2020].

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome (ed.; 2000a): The Postcolonial Middle Ages (= The New Middle Ages). New York/New York.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome (2000b): Introduction. Midcolonial. In: Cohen (ed.): The Postcolonial Middle Ages, pp. 1–17.

Cohen, Jeremy (2004): Synagoga conversa. Honorius Augustodunensis, the Song of Songs, and Christianity's ›Eschatological Jew‹. In: Speculum 79, issue 2, pp. 309–340.

Deleuze, Gilles (1985): Cinéma 2. L'image-temps (= Collection Critique). Paris.

Eco, Umberto (1986): Dreaming of the Middle Ages. In: Eco: Travels in Hyperreality. San Diego/California, pp. 61–72.

Erll, Astrid (2012): Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures. Premediation, Remediation and the ›Indian Mutiny‹. In: Astrid Erll/Ann Rigney (eds.): Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory. Berlin, pp. 109–138.

Friedrich, Udo/Bruno Quast (eds.; 2004a): Präsenz des Mythos. Konfigurationen einer Denkform in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit (= Trends in Medieval Philology, vol. 2). Berlin & New York/New York.

Friedrich, Udo/Bruno Quast (2004b): Mediävistische Mythosforschung. In: Friedrich & Quast (eds.): Präsenz des Mythos, pp. IX-XXXVIII.

Gabriele, Matthew/Mary Rambaran-Olm (2019): The Middle Ages Have Been Misused by the Far Right. Here's Why It's So Important to Get Medieval History Right. In: Time, 21 November 2019, online at: https://time.com/5734697/middle-ages-mistakes/ [accessed 12 August 2020].

Ganim, John M. (2009): Framing the West, Staging the East. Set Design, Location and Landscape in Movie Medievalism. In: Nickolas Haydock/E.L. Risden (eds.): Hollywood in the Holy Land. Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes. Jefferson/Georgia, pp. 31–46.

Gebert, Bent (2013): Mythos als Wissensform. Epistemik und Poetik des Trojanerkriegs Konrads von Würzburg (= Spectrum Literaturwissenschaft, vol. 35). Berlin & Boston/Massachusetts.

Goerlitz, Uta (2009): »… Ob sye heiden synt ader cristen«. Figurationen von Kreuzzug und Heidenkampf in deutschen und lateinischen Herzog Ernst-Fassungen des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters (HE B, C und F). In: Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik 156, issue 4, pp. 65–104.

Goodman, Nelson (1968): Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols. Indianapolis/Indiana.

von Graevenitz, Gerhart (1987): Mythos. Zur Geschichte einer Denkgewohnheit. Stuttgart.

Groebner, Valentin (2008): Das Mittelalter hört nicht auf. Über historisches Erzählen. München.

Groebner, Valentin (2013): Touristischer Geschichtsgebrauch. In: Historische Zeitschrift 296, pp. 408–428.

Groebner, Valentin (2018): Retroland. Geschichtstourismus und die Sehnsucht nach dem Authentischen, Frankfurt a.M.

Harms, F. (2023): Produktionskosten und weltweites Einspielergebnis der Herr der Ringe- und Der Hobbit-Filme in den Jahren 2001 bis 2017, in: Statista, published 5 May 2023, online at: https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/309374/umfrage/produktionskosten-und-weltweites-einspielergebnis-der-herr-der-ringe-filme/ [accessed 4 September 2023].

Haydock, Nickolas (2008): Movie Medievalism. The Imaginary Middle Ages. Jefferson/Georgia und London.

Haydock, Nickolas/E.L. Risden (eds.; 2009): Hollywood in the Holy Land. Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes. Jefferson/Georgia.

Heng, Geraldine (2018): The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages. Cambridge.

Kiening, Christian (2004): Arbeit am Absolutismus des Mythos. Mittelalterliche Supplemente zur biblischen Heilsgeschichte. In: Udo Friedrich/Bruno Quast (eds.): Präsenz des Mythos, pp. 35–58.

Kiening, Christian (2005): Zeitenraum und mise en abyme. Zum ›Kern‹ der Mélusinegeschichte. In: Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte 79, issue 1, pp. 3–28.

Kim, Dorothy (2019): White Supremacists Have Weaponized an Imaginary Viking Past. It's Time to Reclaim the Real History. In: Time, 15 April 2019, online at: https://time.com/5569399/viking-history-white-nationalists/ [accessed 12 August 2020].

Kirakosian, Racha (2021): The real Game of Thrones? Mythical Dimensions of Medieval Tales. In: Bohemia 61, pp. 6–34.

Kobiela, Olivia (2022): ÄsthEthik der Fremde des Herzog Ernst B. Die Kartographie des 12./13. Jahrhunderts als ästhEthisches Reflexionsmedium der mittelalterlichen Literatur (= MittelalterStudien, vol. 33). Paderborn.

Kracauer, Siegfried (1960): Theory of Film. The Redemption of Physical Reality. London.

Kulke, Hermann (2016): Das europäische Mittelalter – ein eurasisches Mittelalter? (= Das mittelalterliche Jahrtausend, vol. 3). Berlin & Boston/Massachusetts.

Larrington, Carolyne (2015): Winter is Coming. The Medieval World of Game of Thrones. London.

Lazda-Cazers, Rasma (2004): Hybridity and Liminality in Herzog Ernst B. In: Daphnis 33, issue 1, pp. 79–96.

Nagel, Alexander/Christopher S. Wood (2010): Anachronic Renaissance. New York/ New York.

Pavlac, Brian A. (ed.; 2017): Game of Thrones versus History. Written in Blood. Hoboken/ New Jersey.

Quast, Bruno (2004): »Diß kommt von gelückes zuoualle«. Entzauberung und Remythisierung in der Mélusine des Thüring von Ringoltingen. In: Udo Friedrich/ Bruno Quast (eds.): Präsenz des Mythos, pp. 83–96.

Rubin, Miri (2014): Ecclesia and Synagoga. The Changing Meanings of a Powerful Pairing. In: Israel Jacob Yuval/Ram Ben-Shalom (eds.): Conflict and Religious Conversation in Latin Christendom. Studies in Honour of Ora Limor (= Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, vol. 17). Turnhout, pp. 55–86.

Seeber, Stefan (2008): »Vor dem holen steine erstuonden aber diu sunderbaeren maere« (84,4). Zu den Raumstrukturen der Kudrun. In: Burkhard Hasebrink (ed.): Innenräume in der Literatur des deutschen Mittelalters. XIX. Anglo-German Colloquium Oxford 2005. Tübingen, pp. 125–146.

Sivri, Yücel (2016): Mitteldeutsche Orientliteratur des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts. Graf Rudolf und Herzog Ernst. Ein Beitrag zu interkulturellen Auseinandersetzungen im Hochmittelalter (= Beiträge zur Mittelalterforschung, vol. 28). Frankfurt a.M.

Sivri, Yücel (2017): Rezension zu Hermann Kulke: Das europäische Mittelalter – ein eurasisches Mittelalter? In: Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur 146, issue 3, pp. 384–388.

Sowinski, Bernhard (ed.; 2009): Herzog Ernst. Ein mittelalterliches Abenteuerbuch. In der mittelhochdeutschen Fassung B nach der Ausgabe von Karl Bartsch mit den Bruchstücken der Fassung A. Mittelhochdeutsch/Neuhochdeutsch (= Reclams Universal-Bibliothek, Band 8352). Stuttgart.

Stein, Alexandra (1997): Die Wundervölker des Herzog Ernst (B). Zum Problem körpergebundener Authentizität im Medium der Schrift. In: Wolfgang Harms et al. (eds.): Fremdes wahrnehmen – fremdes Wahrnehmen. Studien zur Geschichte der Wahrnehmung und zur Begegnung von Kulturen in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit. Stuttgart & Leipzig, pp. 21–48.

Stock, Markus (2017): Knowledge, Hybridity, and the King of the Crane-Heads. In: Daphnis 45, issue 3/4, pp. 391–411.

Stouff, Louis (ed.; 1932): Mélusine. Roman du XIV^{e} Siècle par Jean d'Arras (= Publications de l'Université de Dijon, Band 5). Dijon.

Strickland, Debra Higgs (2003): Saracens, Demons and Jews. Making Monsters in Medieval Art. Princeton/New Jersey & Oxford.

Tolkien, J.R.R. (^{2}1988): On Fairy-Stories. In: Tolkien: Tree and Leaf. Including the Poem Mythopoeia. London, pp. 9–73.

Thomas, J.W./Carolyn Dussere (ed.; 1980): The Legend of Duke Ernst. Lincoln/Nebraska.
Velten, Hans Rudolf (2018): Das populäre Mittelalter im Fantasyroman – Erkundungen eines zeitgenössischen Phänomens. In: Nathanael Busch / Hans Rudolf Velten (eds.): Die Literatur des Mittelalters im Fantasyroman. Heidelberg, pp. 9–21.
Vincensini, Jean-Jacques (2003): Introduction. In: Jean d'Arras: Mélusine ou La Noble Histoire de Lusignan, pp. 7–98.
West, Ed (2019): Iron, Fire and Ice. The Real History that Inspired Game of Thrones. New York/New York.

Films and Series

Ali Barbajou et Ali Bouf à l'Huile (1907) (F, director: Georges Méliès).
Det sjunde inseglet (1957) (SE, director: Ingmar Bergman).
Game of Thrones, 8 seasons (2011–2019) (USA, director: David Benioff et al.).
Season 3, episode 10: 'Mhysa' (2013) (USA, director: David Nutter).
Season 5, episode 2: 'The House of Black and White' (2015) (USA, director: Michael Slovis).
Season 5, episode 5: 'Kill the Boy' (2015) (USA, director: Jeremy Podeswa).
Season 5, episode 9: 'The Dance of Dragons' (2015) (USA, director: David Nutter).
Lawrence of Arabia (1962) (GB, director: David Lean).
The Hobbit, 3 parts (2012–2014) (USA/NZ, director: Peter Jackson).
The Lord of the Rings, 3 parts (2001–2003) (USA/NZ, director: Peter Jackson).
Youtube (2015): Game of Thrones Season 5: Episode #2 – Dorne & the Water Gardens Featurette (HBO). Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7MpjS3_4A [accessed 15 March 2023].