

**History Through Film and Literature I**  
HIST E-100W (Fall 2001)

Harvard University Extension School  
Tuesdays 5:30–7:30 pm (lectures)  
Tuesdays 7:35–9:35 pm (films)  
website: <http://hudce7.harvard.edu/~ostrowski>

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*Course Goals:*

The purpose of the course is to use film and the relevant literature as an introduction to the study of historical topics.

The basic questions we will ask in this course are:

- What does the film get “right”? That is, what in the film corresponds with our available source evidence?
- What does the film get “wrong”? That is, what in the film conflicts with our available source evidence?
- In those cases, where a film is based on a historical novel, what does the novel get right and wrong?
- Where does the film get “creative”? That is, where does the film make up something that does not correspond with the source evidence but that does not conflict with it either? In the case of films based on historical fiction (such as *The Name of the Rose*), this kind of creativity can occur on two levels, the book level and the film level.
- How does the film’s (and novelist’s) interpretation of the events and time depicted relate to serious, scholarly historiographical interpretations of those same events and time?
- To what extent is the film (and novel) affected by events and conditions contemporary to when it was made? The corollary to this question is: To what extent are scholarly interpretations affected by events and conditions contemporary to them?

*Writing Assignments:*

The course is designed as a writing-intensive course. Undergraduates are to write five short “response” papers (600–750 words each) and one 10-page research paper (3000 words). Graduate students are required to write six short “response” papers (600–750 words each) and one 15-page research paper (4500 words). In a semester, we will view 14 films. You will be required to write response papers to about 40% (36% for undergrads; 43% for graduate students) of those, although you will be expected to view and do the reading assignments for all films. The research paper is intended for you either to focus on a particular aspect of the relationship between film and historical study that ties a number of the films together or to research in depth the historical aspects of one particular film. A preliminary draft of the research paper will be required on **December 11**, so you can receive comments back on January 8, and revise it for a grade by **January 15**.

In the computation of the final grade, the response papers will count for 60% and the research paper for 40%.

## Reading List

### *General texts (Very handy to have as reference books):*

- Joseph Roquemore, *History Goes to the Movies*, New York: Doubleday, 1999.  
Provides good historical background on a number of films shown in the course. Heavy emphasis on films dealing with American history, but Chapters 1, 11, and 12 discuss world history films.
- Mark C. Carnes, ed., *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, 2nd ed., New York: Henry Holt, 1997  
Over twenty historians, including Stephen E. Ambrose, Frances Fitzgerald, Peter Gay, Gerda Lerner, Simon Shama, and Jonathan D. Spence, examine film treatments in their special areas of research and provide critiques of the historical accuracy of those films. Demonstrates how historians analyze films on historical topics for accuracy.
- George MacDonald Fraser, *The Hollywood History of the World*, updated ed., London: Harvill, 1996. [**Note:** out of print; available through [bibliofind.com](http://bibliofind.com)]  
Novelist, historian, and screenwriter Fraser writes: "There is a popular belief that where history is concerned, Hollywood always get it wrong—and sometimes it does. What is overlooked is the astonishing amount of history Hollywood has got right, and the immense unacknowledged debt which we owe to the commercial cinema as an illuminator of the story of mankind." With a long list of historical references, Fraser examines British and American film treatments of historical topics to see what they got right and what they did not.

### *Other texts relating to specific films (unless otherwise noted, available at the Coop):*

- Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992
- Flavius Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, trans. Aubrey De Selincourt, Hammondswoth, Penguin, 1976
- Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose (Il noma della rosa)*, trans. William Weaver, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.
- Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *Cleopatra: Histories, Dreams and Distortions*, New York: Harper & Row, 1990. [**Note:** out of print; available through [bibliofind.com](http://bibliofind.com)]
- Margaret Irwin, *Young Bess* (first published 1947, various subsequent editions). [**Note:** out of print; available through [bibliofind.com](http://bibliofind.com)]
- Edison Marshall, *The Viking* (first published 1952, various subsequent editions). [**Note:** out of print; available through [bibliofind.com](http://bibliofind.com)]
- Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan*, Baltimore: Penguin, 1964.
- Samuel Shellabarger, *Captain from Castile* (first published 1945, various editions). [**Note:** out of print; available through [bibliofind.com](http://bibliofind.com)]
- Sally Hovey Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

General Supplemental (Not Required) Reading (not ordered through the Coop):

Louis Giannetti, *Understanding Movies*, 7th ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996.

In part, Giannetti provides an introduction to what is considered traditional film study, e.g., photography, movement, editing, sound, acting, mise-en-scène, etc. But he also provides an introduction to those who would like to study films from the perspective of historical study, e.g., narratology, ideology, historiography of theory, etc. Ideal introductory text for those who want to make the transition from the study of film qua film to the study of film as historiography.

Peter Lehman and William Luhr, *Thinking About Movies: Watching, Questioning, Enjoying*, Harcourt Brace, 1999.

A college text whose aim is “to make students more perceptive and critical viewers of the kinds of films that they already watch as well as to expand their tastes to include a broader variety of material.” An introduction to the study of film that is written from the standpoint that “entertainment” often provides a means to consider serious social issues. The authors argue that “[p]art of understanding movies is understanding the complex ways they relate to the society that produced them.”

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *The Oxford History of World Cinema: The Definitive History of Cinema Worldwide*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Standard reference for world cinema. Helps place films on historical topics in the context of filmmaking in general.

Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*, Harvard University Press, 1995.

A professor of history investigates “how a visual medium, subject to the conventions of drama and fiction, might be used as a serious vehicle for” historical study.

Leger Grinden, *Shadows on the Past: Studies in the Historical Fiction Film*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

A professor of film and television studies “explores how ... films can appropriate historical events, insinuating a film’s authority on its subject.” He looks at how the genre of the historical film can advance “a political agenda, which frequently supercedes the influence of scholarship on the public’s perception and interpretation of history.”

*Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past*, ed. Robert A. Rosenstone, Princeton University Press, 1995.

Thirteen essays by historians who analyze “the historical film ... as a unique way of recounting the past.”

*Specific Supplemental (Not Required) Reading (not ordered through the Coop):*

Maurice Collis, *Cortes and Montezuma* (first pub. 1954) New Directions, 1999.

An excellent introduction to the conquest of the Aztec (Mexico) Empire by the Spanish. If you cannot easily get Shellabarger's novel *Captain from Castile*, you may read this book instead.

Darrell William Davis, *Picturing Japaneseness: Monumental Style, National Identity, Japanese Film*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Examines the role of the Japanese cinema in the construction of a national identity. Excellent for understanding the context of Japanese historical films.

Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, rev. ed., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.

A professor of Classics looks at over 400 films on topics dealing with the ancient world and assesses their historical accuracy.

Maria Wyke, *Projecting the Past: Ancient Rome, Cinema, and History*, London: Routledge, 1997.

Study of two cinematic traditions—Hollywood and Italy—and how they have continued to resurrect ancient Rome to address present-day concerns. Focuses on treatments of Cleopatra, Nero, Spartacus, and the destruction of Pompeii.

## Films and Reading Assignments

<i>Week</i>	<i>Film</i>	<i>Reading</i>
Sept. 18	<i>Quest for Fire</i> (1981) [1 hr. 37 m.]	handout*
Sept. 25	<i>David and Bathsheba</i> (1951) [1 hr. 56 min.]	2nd Samuel 11–12
Oct. 2	<i>Alexander the Great</i> (1956) [2 hrs. 21 m.]	Arrian, <i>Campaigns of Alexander</i>
Oct. 9	<i>Cleopatra</i> (1934) [1 hr. 40 m.]	# Hughes-Hallett, <i>Cleopatra</i>
Oct. 16	<i>Gospel According to Matthew</i> (1964) [2 hr. 15 m.]	Matthew
Oct. 23	<i>Temptation of a Monk</i> (1993) [1 hr. 58 m.]	Wriggins, <i>Xuanzang</i>
Oct. 30	<i>Gate of Hell</i> (1953) [1 hr. 39 m.]	Morris, <i>World of Shining Prince</i>
Nov. 6	} <i>The Message</i> (1976) [3 hr. 40 m.]	Armstrong, <i>Muhammad</i>
Nov. 13		
Nov. 20	<i>Ceddo</i> (1977) [2 hr.]	* Davidson, <i>History of W. Africa</i> (excerpt)
Nov. 27	<i>The Vikings</i> (1958) [1 hr. 54 m.]	# Marshall, <i>The Viking</i>
Dec. 4	<i>Alexander Nevsky</i> (1938) [1 hr. 47 m.]	* <i>Life of Alexander Nevsky</i>
Dec. 11	<i>The Name of the Rose</i> (1986) [2 hr. 10 m.]	Eco, <i>Name of the Rose</i>
Dec. 18	<i>Captain from Castile</i> (1947) [2 hr. 20 min.]	# Shellabarger, <i>Captain from Castile</i>
Jan. 8	<i>Young Bess</i> (1953) [1 hr. 52 min.]	# Irwin, <i>Young Bess</i>
Jan. 15 (5:30)	<i>Life of Brian</i> (last day to hand in writing assignments)	no reading

# Out of print. Copies available through [Bibliofind.com](http://Bibliofind.com).

\* These readings will be made available to you.

## Response Papers Schedule

Undergraduates are required to write five (5) response papers for the course. The course is divided into three phases. For Phases I and II, you are to choose two (2) films about which to write your response papers. In Phase I, you will write a draft of each of the two papers and, after you receive the course assistant's comments, a revised version of each for a grade. You then have the option of revising your papers still further up to the *terminus post quem non* (TPQN) date. In Phase II, you write a draft of each of the two papers and, after you receive the course assistant's comments, a revised version of each for a grade. You do not have the option of revising further for Phase II response papers. In Phase III, you write for a grade (no draft and no option for further revision). Each response paper is to be no longer than two (2) pages. Graduate students follow this schedule and add one in Phase III.

<i>Film</i>	<i>Draft</i>	<i>For Grade</i>	<i>TPQN</i>
Phase I (obligatory draft, obligatory for-grade version, and optional further revision)[choose 2]			
<i>Quest for Fire</i>	Sept. 25	Oct. 9	Oct. 23
<i>David and Bathsheba</i>	Oct. 2	Oct. 16	Oct. 30
<i>Alexander the Great</i>	Oct. 9	Oct. 23	Nov. 6
<i>Cleopatra</i>	Oct. 16	Oct. 30	Nov. 13
<i>Gospel/Matthew</i>	Oct. 23	Nov. 6	Nov. 20
Phase II (obligatory draft and obligatory for-grade version; no further-revision option)[choose 2]			
<i>Temptation of a Monk</i>	Oct. 30	Nov. 13	
<i>Gate of Hell</i>	Nov. 6	Nov. 20	
<i>The Message</i>	Nov. 20	Dec. 4	
<i>Ceddo</i>	Nov. 27	Dec. 11	
<i>The Vikings</i>	Dec. 4	Dec. 18	
Phase III (obligatory for-grade version; no draft and no further-revision option) [undergraduates choose 1; graduates choose 2]			
<i>Alexander Nevsky</i>		Dec. 11	
<i>Name of the Rose</i>		Dec. 18	
<i>Captain from Castile</i>		Jan. 8	
<i>Young Bess</i>		Jan. 15	

## Response Papers Directions

For each response paper you write, see the film, listen to the lecture, and read the required reading connected with it. In your response paper, you are to write about an aspect of the film connected with the lecture and reading. You are *not* expected to make a point-by-point comparison. Instead, you should choose something that struck you as significant and meaningful, which could be either a difference or similarity between the film, on one hand, and the reading and the lecture, on the other. Your response paper should follow the following structure:

- (1) an introduction of a paragraph in length, in which you tell the reader what the main theme of your paper is;
- (2) the body of your paper, in which you present your evidence fairly and succinctly, and you analyze it briefly;
- (3) your concluding paragraph, in which you recapitulate your theme for the reader and show how the evidence and your analysis relate to it.

The response papers will be evaluated on the basis of three criteria: (1) correspondence to the evidence; (2) logical coherence of your analysis; and (3) the conceptual elegance of the interpretation (your main theme). These criteria are discussed further in the handout “Three Criteria of Historical Study.” In writing your response paper, remember that this course is one of historical study, so try to contextualize your findings within a historical framework.

## Research Paper Directions

Whereas the response papers can be written without recourse to research other than viewing the film, reading the required reading, and listening to the lecture, the research paper requires you to do research outside of the confines of the required reading and lectures. You can focus your research paper one of two ways. One approach is for you to analyze, from a historical perspective, one film in greater depth than you could in the response paper. A second approach is for you to analyze a theme that you find in two or more films. The structure of your research paper should follow the same basic structure as your response papers (see above). And the criteria for evaluating the research papers are the same as those for evaluating the response papers (see above and below).

### Formulating a Logical Argument

A logical argument is a chain of reasoning, such that if the premises are accepted, then the conclusion must be accepted. An example of a chain of reasoning formulated in the early fifth century A.D. follows. It is from Augustine’s *Confessions* and is an argument against astrology:

I turned my attention to the case of twins, who are generally born within a short time of each other. Whatever significance in the natural order the astrologers may attribute to this interval of time, it is too short to be appreciated by human observation and no allowance can be made for it in the charts what an astrologer has to consult in order to cast a true horoscope. His predictions, then, will not be true, because he would have consulted the same charts for both Esau and Jacob and would have made the same predictions for each of them, whereas it is a fact that the same things did not happen to them both. Therefore, either he would have been wrong in his predictions or, if his forecast was correct, then he would not have predicted the same future for each. And yet he would have consulted the same chart in each case. This proves that if he had foretold the truth, then it would have been by luck, not by skill.

The outward signs of a logical argument can include “if..., then...” phrases, and words like “therefore” and “thus.” Sometimes these words and phrases are only implicit. In the passage above, Augustine uses two “if..., then...” constructions and one “[t]herefore.” The point is that, unless the argument is a fallacious one and, therefore, not logical, the only way to avoid acceptance of the conclusion is to attack the premises or the evidence.

### Constructing an Interpretation

An example of an analytical interpretation follows. It is taken from Garrett Mattingly, *The Armada* (p. 397), in which Mattingly explains what is and what is not significant about the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 at the hands of the English:

Historians agree that the defeat of the Spanish Armada was a decisive battle, in fact one of the Decisive Battles of the World, but there is much less agreement as to what it decided. It certainly did not decide the issue of the war between England and Spain. Though no fleet opposed Drake, ... the war dragged itself out for nearly fourteen years more ... and ended in no better than a draw. Some historians say that the defeat of the Armada “marked the decline of the Spanish colonial empire and the rise of the British.” It is hard to see why they think so. By 1603, Spain had not lost to the English a single overseas outpost, while the English colonization of Virginia had been postponed for the duration. Nor did the Armada campaign “transfer the command of the sea from Spain to England.” English sea power in the Atlantic had usually been superior to the combined strengths of Castile and Portugal, and so it continued to be, but after 1588 the margin of superiority diminished. The defeat of the Armada was not so much the end as the beginning of the Spanish navy.

Mattingly characterizes his interpretation in the last line and presents this explanation as a way of understanding the evidence and the logical surmises we make from that evidence. The statement that the Armada’s defeat represented the beginning of the Spanish navy is also a hypothesis that can be tested against the evidence by doing further research.