Course title (English): Imagining the Middle Ages: From The Hunchback of Nôtre Dame to A Game of Thrones

Course title (Hebrew): לדמיין את ימי הביניים: מabusן מנוטר דאם עד משחקי הכס

Course number: 132.1.029
Course slot (semester/s, weekday/s, hours): שנתฯ, יומון, 14-12

Lecturer: Dr. Olga Kuminova

Lecturer’s conference hour and contact details:
Monday 14:00 – 16:00, Room 501 or online
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Course description & objectives:
The adjective “medieval” is commonly used as an emphatic synonym of backward, uncivilized and even “inhuman.” This seminar will inquire into the phenomenon that seems to flatly contradict this usage – the immense popularity of fiction, art, music and film that imaginatively reconstruct the medieval as a cultural site of fascination for successive generations of audiences until today. We will proceed in reverse chronological order, from the latest literary works and media franchises – A Game of Thrones, The Lord of the Rings, The Hunchback of Nôtre Dame (musical) – to earlier works, Victor Hugo’s Nôtre Dame de Paris, Sir Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe, and Mark Twain’s Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court that takes a step back from the popular enchantment with the medieval to reflect on it humoristically. Our seminar work will engage diverse critical and theoretical perspectives on the Middle Ages as a historical reality and a powerful imaginary cultural construct in the last two centuries. The main objectives are acquiring a complex, nuanced and systematic perspective on this strain in literature and other artistic media, and building skills towards writing a longer research paper (15-18 pages) that makes appropriate use of secondary sources while centering on the student’s own reading of the primary text.

Course requirements:
Attendance required: yes, at least 80% of the classes
Shorter written work: 30%
Presentations: 10%
Seminar research paper: 60%

Topics & bibliography
John R.R. Tolkien, The Return of the King (we will focus on the last volume of The Lord of the Rings, but knowledge of the entire trilogy is highly desirable)
George R.R. Martin, A Game of Thrones (optionally – the rest of the volumes of A Song of Ice and Fire)
Mark Twain, The Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court
Victor Hugo, Notre Dame de Paris (excerpts in English translation)
Walter Scott, Ivanhoe