UC Riverside
UC Riverside Previously Published Works

Title

REVERSING THE CRUSADES: HEGEMONY, ORIENTALISM, AND FILM LANGUAGE IN YOUSSEF CHAHINE'S SALADIN

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2tf273s4

ISBN

978-1-4039-7427-3

Author

Ganim, John M

Publication Date

2007

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

Erotic Discourse and Early English Religious Writing
by Lara Farina

Odd Bodies and Visible Ends in Medieval Literature
by Sachi Shimomura

On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages
by Valerie Allen

Women and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity
edited by Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman

Race, Class, and Gender in "Medieval" Cinema
edited by Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh

RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN "MEDIEVAL" CINEMA

Edited by
Lynn T. Ramey and Tison Pugh

palgrave
macmillan

activities: "My job was to plant bombs. I carried death with me in my handbag, death in the shape of time bombs. One day, I was supposed to put a bomb in a café managed by a Frenchman. I did it. I was unlucky. I fell into their hands. They arrested me. They locked me in a cell" (Walid 'Ahwad, "Interviews with Jamilah Buhrayd, Legendary Algerian Hero," *Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak*, eds., Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattan Bezirgan [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977], p. 252). It is an extraordinary example of how the world has changed that this interview praising a terrorist was once printed without qualification in a mainstream academic publication. Jamila is especially piquant, of course, because she is a woman, and a remarkably beautiful one at that (see the photograph on p. 250), and because of her suffering at the hands of her French torturers. Nevertheless, it is unimaginable that today a positive report of a Muslim freedom fighter could be published in any but the most radical, and thoroughly investigated, venue.

14. There is also an historical reality behind this pairing, since the poets of al-Andalus were as celebrated as their philosophers, and probably considerably more popular.
15. Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, p. 25. Fawal also points out that this painful moment is the basis of a scene in *Alexandria. . . Why?*.
16. Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, p. 25.
17. Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, pp. 25–26.
18. Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, pp. 188–189. His summary review of critics, such as Christian Bosséno, David Kehr, and Bérénice Reynaud are informative, particularly for the way they praise Chahine for his courage and then proceed to avoid the issue.
19. See Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). See especially the argument presented far more subtly in the essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," pp. 14–26.
20. And a footnote it remained it seems for Condoleeza Rice until roughly 9AM EST on 9/11/2001.
21. The activities of the Brotherhood, since its founding in Alexandria in the 1930s, had assured that the threat of fundamentalism never entirely vanished from Egyptian consciousness. The Alexandrian origins of the movement may as well have given it a special urgency for Chahine.
22. Stephen Holden, "Philosophy as a Red-Hot Adventure in Twelfth-Century Spain and France." *New York Times*, 4 October 1997. Cited in Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, p. 185.
23. Averroës did, in fact, believe in immortality, but only in the immortality of the soul, not, like the Christians, in the immortality of the body. See Majid Fakhry, *Averroës*, pp. 22–23.
24. It is, of course, as unfair and erroneous to assume that all believers in Islam are terrorists as it is to assume that all Southern Baptists go about bombing family planning clinics.

CHAPTER 3

REVERSING THE CRUSADES: HEGEMONY, ORIENTALISM, AND FILM LANGUAGE IN YOUSSEF CHAHINE'S *SALADIN*

John M. Ganim

This chapter focuses on one of the landmarks of Arab, third world and political cinema, Youssef Chahine's *Saladin* (1963).[1] Sponsored in part to celebrate Nasser's consolidation of power, it was directed by one of the leading figures in modern Egyptian cinema, whose lifetime achievement in film has been complex, critical, and resistant. It is often cited as one of the few film versions of the Crusades from the point of view of the Saracen leader, and one of the few to regard the Crusades through Arab eyes. The geographic and medieval Other, that is, seems to be filming itself. The screenplay was partly written by Naguib Mahfouz, who later won the 1988 Nobel Prize for his novels. Chahine was appointed to replace the original director, Ezzeldine Zulfiqer, who fell ill in an early stage of the planning. Given Chahine's reputation in world cinema, it is surprising how—at least superficially—conventional *Saladin* turns out to be, and how much it resembles in some respects the Hollywood versions of the Crusades that it seeks to answer. I will argue that this impression is in fact a result of the film's strategy, which is as much to enter into dialogue with Western filmic representations of the Crusades as it is to set the historical record straight. Its status as a historical film depends more on its "film" than its "historical" nature. My inquiry depends heavily on David James's important description of the inescapable hegemony of industrial cinema in his classic study *Allegories of Cinema*, which argues that even the most resistant and critical cinema cannot avoid the terms set by Hollywood.[2] Chahine, while critical of most of the

products of the Egyptian film industry, nevertheless never rejects it entirely in an effort to construct an art cinema, and even the most widely distributed of his films remain puzzling to Western viewers partly because of that conscious allegiance.

Viewed in isolation, *Saladin* may appear to be a straightforward, even mythic treatment of its hero and its subject. However, its apparent transparency is not as clear when the film is viewed in larger contexts including the director's career, the rapidly changing political scene of the years of its production, and the relationship of the film to other films about the Middle Ages, especially films about the Crusades. The complex relations of these contexts to each other is in fact the argument of this chapter. I will first consider the apparently anomalous relation of *Saladin* to the other more obviously complex and self-reflective films of Chahine's oeuvre. I will then discuss some of the ways that Chahine references some Hollywood stereotypes about the Crusades, stereotypes that, because of the influence of Sir Walter Scott's novels on Hollywood directors and writers, turn out to be more unstable than they first appear. I will argue that Chahine adapts what is always already a postcolonial narrative. After describing the film's dramatic structure and visual technique in terms of its attempt at coherence, I will then point to the ways that this coherence is undermined, partly intentionally, by conflicting representations of gender, race, and national identity.

Saladin's depiction of the Middle Ages is not so much an attempt to set the historical (filmic) record straight as it is a questioning of how the historical record, at least cinematically, is constructed. The result, as expressed in the conclusion of the film, is a highly provisional and in many ways fantastic mirror of the past as a portal through which we may imagine a more humane future, but in its very provisionality and ironizing of its own means, it exposes the limits of how much of the present, or the future, we can see in the past. By emphasizing its cinematic medium, *Saladin* admits the limits of its own historicization. In so doing, it also questions what the basis for Otherness or identity can be. Like the character Saladin himself, the film depicts both Otherness and transhistorical and transnational humanism dialectically and by example. Just as Islam sees itself as incorporating the religious achievements of Judaism and Christianity and subsuming them into its own starting point of development, the film *Saladin* subsumes within itself the filmic narratives of Otherness, revealing the degree to which the West is its own Other, and the East as embodied by Saladin is the future medium of the values ostensibly cherished by the West. By emphasizing the degree to which Saladin enacts not only the ideals of his own culture, but those of the West, Chahine's film reveals the degree to which American and European film has been filming itself when it is ostensibly filming its medieval Other.

Chahine has recently been the subject of several major restrospectives, including the New York Film Festival in 1998, the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland in 1996, and a lifetime achievement award at Cannes in 1997. *Cahiers du cinema* devoted an issue to his work, and in recent years his films have been coproduced with French backing.[3] He was born in 1926, to a Lebanese family of Christian background in a multicultural Alexandria that has been a recurrent theme in his own work. In the early 1950s, he came to the United States to study acting at the Pasadena Playhouse. Returning to Egypt, he began his long career, soon directing the first of his over forty films thus far. These cover a far wider range of genres than most directors attempt in their working lives, at least since the heyday of Hollywood. His first film *Baba Amin* (1950) was a small-scale character comedy, and he followed it with a series of realistic dramatic portraits of Egyptian life, some of them crossing generic boundaries to reflect the influence of Orson Welles and American film noir, as well as various musicals, an important staple of the Egyptian film industry and a genre that Chahine never abandons. In the late 1950s, however, he directed two films often cited in surveys of world cinema during the experimental years of the 1950s and 1960s: the dark *Central Station* (1959), in which Chahine himself plays the lovesick train station vendor tragically obsessed with a local beauty, and the remarkably prescient *Jamila, the Algerian*, which predicts the political docudramas of Costas Garvas and Pontecorvo. Following the success of *Saladin*, however, political differences with a Nasser regime sensitive to even internal criticism found him making a series of films in Lebanon and North Africa. Returning to Egypt, he directed *The Earth* (Egypt, 1973), equivalent to an Egyptian *Grapes of Wrath* and often cited by Egyptians themselves as the high point of their industry. The films that have attracted most attention in the West are his autobiographical trilogy: *Alexandria. . .Why?* (1978), *Memory (1982)*, and *Alexandria Again and Always* (1989), perhaps because their highly individualistic, Fellini-like memoir quality is easy for Western viewers to categorize, and because the potential essentialism of his social realist films gives way here to postmodern manipulations of memory, desire, and technique. In addition, the self-revelations of these films, including explicit allusions to homosexual and bisexual experiences, are themselves revelations to Western viewers who may not be aware of the complexity of what they assume are closed societies. In fact, far more controversial in Egypt have been his version of Joseph and his brothers, *The Emigrant* (1994), for which he was sued in court by fundamentalist Islamicists and *Chahine's Cairo* (1991), which appeared to criticize the Egyptian government's support of the U.S.-led forces in the First Gulf War.

Chahine, very much part of the emerging generation of world cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, would have been keenly aware of his cinematic heritage. Italian and French filmmakers had produced films in North Africa

for decades. He was obviously influenced by the Italian neorealists, de Sica and especially Roberto Rossellini, whose classic *Rome: Open City* (1946) would soon be reprised in a new form in Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1966), a film that in turn was influenced by Chahine's own *Jamila*, which was itself indebted to the earlier Rossellini film. By the late 1950s, Sergei Eisenstein's films had been canonized as the origin point of modern cinema, and Eisenstein's aesthetic reigned especially in third world cinema, partly because of his formal and technical achievements, and partly because of his role in the film culture of the Soviet Union, which supported a number of the new nationalist left regimes. Chahine's film career was well underway before Soviet cultural connections with the United Arab Republics resulted in the training of several Middle Eastern directors in Moscow. Eisenstein's legacy, moreover, was an unstable one, not least of all because of his tenuous relation to official Soviet artistic policy. Eisenstein's own complex relation to official policy is most evident in his "medieval" films, including the antifascism of *Alexander Nevsky*, the story of the great Russian prince who fights off both the Tartar yoke from the east and south and the threat from newly aggressive Teutonic knights from the west, and who through charisma and patriotism unites a disparate people. In *Ivan the Terrible* (1944 and 1958), a long two-part account of the life of the once promising czar, Eisenstein comes very close to a Shakespearian critique of the powers that be, and no one can view the film today without filtering it through the lens of the Stalin years. That is, Eisenstein's films project a Middle Ages that is a point of origin of modern liberty on the one hand, and a figure for modern tyranny on the other. The past is not a parable with a simple lesson, but an urgent interlocutor of a complex present.

At the same time, a film about the Crusades could see itself as answering Hollywood versions of the same material. *Saladin* can be viewed as an answer to a range of popular Hollywood (and Italian Cinecittà) films featuring the Crusades, several of which significantly are based on Sir Walter Scott's ambiguously sympathetic account of Saladin. In 1935, Cecil B. De Mille released *The Crusades* (1935), based on a novel by Harold Lamb, whom De Mille recruited for the screenplay. The historical clash is represented as a love triangle, though Richard eventually sees his role as a higher ideal. As with the representation of Saladin in Western culture generally, Saladin is played as noble and honorable, though his armies and his followers are not. Lamb's novel was influenced in many ways by Walter Scott's various novels involving the Crusades, such as *Ivanhoe* or *The Talisman*. With their cross-cultural humanism layered onto their aristocratic noblesse oblige, Scott's novels allowed sufficient tension to produce film narratives that could present the Crusades as more than a contrast between

good and evil through use of exceptional individuals, rather than a blurring of categories.. Two films more or less based on Scott's Crusade novels were produced in the 1950s. *Ivanhoe* (directed by Richard Thorpe, 1952) starred Elizabeth Taylor and Robert Taylor (who also starred in Thorpe's 1954 *Knights of the Round Table*), but the Crusades are only a background to its Norman and Saxon intrigues, and its message of Western multiculturalism. Ivanhoe, of course, protects Isaac against anti-Semitism, and he is assisted at the end by Robin Hood and company.

If its politics are less clearly articulated than the United Front agenda of *Robin Hood*, to which it alludes in its ending, *Ivanhoe* is nevertheless a relatively coherent and successful translation of Sir Walter Scott. Partly because of the commercial and critical success of *Ivanhoe*, other medieval films were planned in the following years, including, as mentioned above, *The Knights of the Round Table*. In 1954, Hollywood nominally placed the Crusades front and center, with *King Richard and the Crusaders* (directed by David Butler, 1954), based loosely on Scott's *The Talisman*, and clearly as much interested in Scott as in the Crusades. Here too Saladin's humanity is established by his love interest in Richard's sister Lady Edith (Virginia Mayo), who in turn longs for the Lawrence Harvey character. As with Cecil B. de Mille's *Crusades*, emphasis is placed on the treachery and infighting of the Christian allies, so that this theme, which one would think of as unique to Chahine's film, in fact is an elaboration of a motif already embedded in the narrative of Western cinematic accounts of the Crusades.

Two major films dealing with the history of Arab and Western conflict, though not specifically about the Crusades, appeared a few years before the release of *Saladin*, and it is possible that Chahine may have known about them. *Lawrence of Arabia* (directed by David Lean, 1962) has now become the most famous Western film about the Middle East, not least of all because of its uneasy status of both reflecting and criticizing Orientalism. *Lawrence of Arabia* was unlikely to have had sufficient time in release to influence *Saladin*, even though Chahine must have known about the conditions of production from Omar Sharif, whom he earlier had helped make a star, as well as other crew members from the Egyptian film industry. *Lawrence of Arabia* was preceded by the star-heavy *El Cid* (directed by Anthony Mann, 1961). Starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren, the film has Heston's Rodrigo Diaz uniting both Christian and Moslem princes (though mostly Christian) in Northern Spain against invading Moors. What we see in these and other similar films is a marginally (and I emphasize how marginally) more complex view of the Other than one might expect; indeed, the plots of these films often represent the ideals of Western Civilization as most profoundly expressed in those who are not ostensibly part of that culture. Nevertheless, what one finds implicit in the films of medieval East-West conflict is as much

orientalization of the Middle Ages as Orientalism. The Middle Ages, in their colorful excess, emphasis on the heroic pride of the protagonists, regressive social conditions, autocratic and aristocratic rule, are represented in these films as if themselves orientalized. It remains only for Chahine to shift the perspective by a few degrees, rather than invert the picture entirely, to destabilize an already unstable ideological point of view. Chahine's *Saladin*, then, enters a field that is created as much by Hollywood industrial cinema as it is by its indigenous roots and perspective, partly because that perspective has been shaped by a simultaneous attraction to and critique of the dominant film industry. It proceeds by dialogue with previous models, almost as if concerned with correcting and interrogating previous versions as in establishing a coherent statement of its own. If the various Crusade film narratives, particularly in the character of Saladin, project outward ideal Western values onto the "Other," thereby, in Naomi Schor's important formulation, "saming" them,[4] Chahine suggests that those ideal values in fact originate with Saladin and his culture.

Western viewers expecting an absolute and authentic difference invariably are surprised by how many aspects of *Saladin* are less a surprise than they wish them to be. Perhaps the first surprise is the music, even before the film is very much underway. The popularity in the West of such hybrid forms as *rai* or knowledge of such popular singers as 'Umm Kalthoum would lead one to expect a musical setting for the film that would be more, well, authentic. Instead, the score turns out to be largely by Angelo Lavagnino, one of Italy's most prolific and best known, along with Nino Rota and Enno Morricone, film composers. Unlike the tight correlation of score to shot found in such films as Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*, with its famous score by Prokofiev, the music dramatically highlights certain scenes, or builds up or releases tension, on a more or less general level, though the battle scenes are particularly successful. David Lean's iconic *Lawrence of Arabia*, with its score by Maurice Jarre, was released the year before, and demonstrated how powerfully music and visuals could reinforce each other. Instead, Lavagnino's score has the same flexible quality one hears in Cinecittà Studios' films of the 1950s, with their loose relationship to the action onscreen, useful and adaptable to relatively rough editing and uncertain postproduction conditions. None of this is as surprising as the fact that the music is what it is at all. But an Egyptian audience, and by extension an Arabic audience given the dominance of the Egyptian film industry from the 1930s onward, would not have been at all surprised. The foundation of the Egyptian film industry was in fact its recording industry, which impressed its singers under contract into service as film actors and actresses, so that, as with other popular cinema industries around the world, including Hollywood in the 1930s, music and dance were as

important as other aspects of film production. While many of these employed more traditional sounding Arabic music (though in fact heavily influenced by European music models), many more had scores influenced by traditionally Western big band, jazz, and even Latin beats through the 1940s and 1950s. The Egyptian commercial film industry, that is, saw itself as part of a world film industry, with its own special sphere of influence.

It may seem as if I am privileging the Western influences and themes in Chahine's *Saladin* by emphasizing its responses to Hollywood and European films, or making it into the sort of postmodern performance that Chahine's later films achieve. In fact, in so doing, I am describing its particular moment in Egyptian cultural history, and, indeed, its Egyptianness, as it were. First, these critical and intertextual responses are framed within a heroic, largely modern frame, one that aspires to epic stature and scale, and that is consistent with national narratives from the Middle Ages onward, though *Saladin* takes pains to present itself as a Pan-Arab statement. Second, while certain aspects of Egyptian twentieth-century culture were traditional, like many third-world nations, its modernization was inescapably connected to its colonial heritage, but in ways that are more complex than they might initially seem. The British Occupation, which ended with Nasser, had begun in the nineteenth century not in response to Egypt's refusal to move forward, but to what the British regarded as its independence and its premature modernity. The aura of tradition and antiquity conferred on Egypt, indeed, its "medieval" state, disguised the forces of modern national identity already in motion. As with early twentieth-century Arab nationalist movements and Young Turk movements, Egyptian national identity saw itself as a modern society with ancient roots whose modernity was being suppressed by colonial paternalism.[5] If Europe persisted in seeing the present state of the Middle East as somehow "medieval," then *Saladin* projects a medieval moment in which the East was more modern than the West, and in which a cosmopolitan humanism would serve as a model for the next moment in human progress. To emphasize the debt of *Saladin* to industrial cinema is no more to disparage its Egyptian identity than to emphasize, say, the impossibility of Mahfouz's novels without the model of Zola or Mann.

The film opens with scenes of Arabs being attacked by Crusaders, and envoys arriving at Saladin's court imploring him to defend them and to reclaim Jerusalem from the Crusaders. Streams of Arabs exiles are shown in an obvious allusion to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A scene of an Arab village, suddenly silent, and the wind stirring a pool of water, as if waiting for an attack, instead announces the appearance of Saladin's forces in the distance. The credits are shown over an extreme close-up of Saladin's face, which becomes full screen. In one of many declamatory scenes of political

ritual in classical Arabic, Saladin calls together his allies and commanders, including one Issa, who turns out to be a Christian Arab, and to whom he entrusts his son Ismael as a knight. The modesty and fidelity of Saladin's allies will be contrasted to the bombast and intrigue of the Crusaders in the next scenes. The Crusader Reynaud plans to attack a Muslim pilgrimage (while at prayer and unarmed) to raise money for the defense of Jerusalem, despite protests from the king of Jerusalem, who warns that this violates the treaty with Saladin, who himself protects Christian pilgrims. A remarkable scene of the Muslim pilgrims at prayer in their white robes against the deserts and follows, with its symmetries suddenly cut through by the attacking Crusaders, who kill men, women, and children indiscriminately and then are seen, less remarkably filmed, gloating like pirates at their newfound booty. To communicate the violence in a stylized image rather than mimetically, Chahine emphasizes the artificiality of the cosmetic blood, and, then, famously, dramatizes the slaughter by filming a spinning cloth disk splattered with red.

The slaughter of the pilgrims both appalls and motivates Saladin. His advisers urge an attack on Reynaud's hilltop camp, but Saladin, in a reversal of the usual stereotypes, employs strategy and psychology, as well as military technology, against the rage and pride of Reynaud. Issa, the Christian commander, comes upon a lake, and discovers a woman bathing discreetly behind some brush. She announces herself as Louise, a Knight Hospitaller, whom we know has been assigned to guard the Crusaders' water supply, but in a ruse, wounds him with an arrow and rides off. After a comic scene in which Issa pretends to have fought off a platoon of Crusaders, the discovery of the lake and the water supply leads to Saladin's strategy. He sends commandos to destroy the Crusaders' water tanks, in a scene in which this time, Issa spares Louise's life. Driven to desperation by thirst and spurred on by Reynaud's Roland-like pride, the Crusaders, far outnumbering Saladin's troops, ride into the valley, where they are decimated by Saladin's tactics, which include strategically spaced spikes and barrages of flaming arrows. Reynaud's wife, Virginia, flees to Acre, where she plots with the traitorous Arab ruler of the city and then leaves for Europe, where she urges Phillipe and Richard the Lionheart to revenge the outrages visited upon Christians, outrages that, of course, she has fabricated, and that her husband had in fact visited upon the Arabs themselves. Meanwhile, in the newly liberated Jerusalem, Saladin has the Crusader commanders appear before him, symbolically allowing them to have a drink of water, except for the hateful Reynaud, who grabs the bowl for himself. In a scene straight out of Hollywood, Saladin accepts Reynaud's challenge to a duel, and despite Reynaud's playing fast and loose with the rules of combat, slays him then and there. The parallel scenes in Richard's court, complete with a

somewhat expressionist-style round table, emphasize the intrigue being planned by King John, in cahoots with one of Richard's lead commanders, one Arthur, who, again in a Roland-like move, encourages Richard on the mission in the hopes that he meet his end. Meanwhile, Princess Virginia, who emerges as the Lady Macbeth of the plot, conjures up a separate set of promises with Philippe of France.

With Richard's arrival in the Holy Land, the film alternates between battle scenes, suggesting the ebb and flow of victory and defeat on both sides, and court dramas, especially involving the intrigues in the Crusader camps. Richard retakes Acre, thanks to a fifth column arranged by the treacherous Arab prince of the city, which opens the gates and disperses the weapons needed by the citizens to fight the invasion, and again, the Crusaders are merciless in their slaughter. Saladin rides into the Christian camp with a small retinue, urging peace, but is rebuffed by Richard. In one battle, Richard employs fearsome moving towers, impervious to the flaming arrows of the Arabs, to take a city. In another, Saladin employs his knowledge of the landscape and countryside to lead the Crusaders into a marsh, perhaps reflecting the famous battle on the ice from Eisenstein's *Alexander Nevsky*. Saladin's son is killed in battle, and Richard is appalled at the loss of so many of his troops. An uneasy truce results, though intrigue continues on both sides to break it. In the last third of the film, human motivations and political intrigue dominate, and the film resembles a stage play as much as a cinematic narrative until the spectacle of the end. On the way to a planned meeting in Jerusalem with Saladin, Richard is shot with a poisoned arrow. The Crusaders blame Saladin, but in fact it was arranged by the devious Arthur, in conspiracy with the even more devious and fanatical Virginia. As Richard appears to be dying, Arthur stirs the crusading army into a frenzy of vengeance.

Then, in one of the most remarkable scenes in the film, Saladin, led by Louise (who has put down her arms and become a nurse), appears in Richard's tent and administers an antidote. Richard recovers from his delirium, but still leads the Crusaders against Jerusalem. A Syrian chemist, however, has discovered a substance that could indeed burn Richard's fearsome siege engines, and the battle ends in something of a draw, though Virginia is badly burned and dies, after confessing her perfidy to Louise. The news of the plot comes to Richard, who realizes that his own people, rather than Saladin, are the enemies of Christian principles, and agrees to peace. An alternation of striking court scenes—with Richard absolving Louise at the last moment after she has helped Issa escape, and Saladin forthrightly condemning the traitorous betrayer of Acre—takes place on the same set, with lighting used to shift from one court to the other, and therefore underlying the parallel between Richard and Saladin. The film ends with a self-consciously

ahistoric pageant that owes more to musicals than to historical epics. Saladin, instead of destroying the Crusader armies on Christmas Eve, invites Richard into Jerusalem. A series of phantasmagoric images—snow falling on an almost postcard-like image of Jerusalem, a choir singing a Christmas carol that had not yet been written alternating with a muzzein calling to prayer at an entirely inappropriate time of night—ends with Richard's army marching home to the acclaim of the citizens of Jerusalem waving what appear to be olive branches. At the very end, Richard allows Louise to remain in Jerusalem with her now beloved Issa, and the Hollywood ending pairs individual romance with political destiny.

But the narrative is more interesting for the way it breaks down than the way it holds together. *Saladin* has been criticized, even by Egyptian and Arab critics, for its relatively hagiographic characterization of its hero, who starts out good and ends up perfect, hardly a movement conducive to dramatic conflict and development. In fact, if the intertextual strategy I have identified above is valid, the "hero" of the film is not so much Saladin as it is a "character" that is developed through the interaction of Saladin and Richard the Lionheart, and dramatic conflict is developed as much through Saladin's "directing" of Richard, who becomes Saladin's double. Saladin is necessary for the full development of Richard's heroism, the film seems to say, just as Richard's own pride and the disunity and treachery of his forces serve as an admonitory lesson to the Arabs themselves. Although the film was seen by Arab viewers as presenting an Arab defense of Saladin against Western crusading propaganda, in fact, Saladin has always been the "good Saracen" in Western literature, from Dante (where he is in limbo with other virtuous non-Christian classical and medieval heroes) and Boccaccio (where he is a wise and self-aware leader in contrast to narrow Italian nobles) through Sir Walter Scott. Saladin appears in the film simultaneously as an opposite figure of the fanatical Crusaders, as the enlightened exception found in Western accounts themselves, and as the legendary military hero of Islam. Indeed, it can be argued that the nature of heroism in *Saladin*, and its treatment of history, owes as much to Shakespeare as to medieval chronicles, either Christian or Moslem. Sir Lawrence Olivier's *Henry V* (1946) and his *Richard III* (1956) offered versions of both heroism and villainy that Chahine could access, and given the central importance of *Hamlet* as a metaphor for dramatic constructions of the self in Chahine's later films, it is entirely possible he borrowed or alluded to these films, as almost certainly the staged filming of the trial scenes of Issa and Conrad in the second third of *Saladin*, and some of the battle scenes throughout, are Shakespearian in inspiration. Nevertheless, the film's version of heroism is embedded in double coding. For if the representation of Saladin himself can be seen as part of this Shakespearian pageantry from a Western perspective, from a non-Western point of view Chahine is conflating the versions of charismatic leadership practiced in the Middle East, that of mahdi, mystic, sheik, and sultan, into one figure. In so doing, the film pays tribute to Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, and the partial triumph, for Egypt at least, of the Suez Crisis.[6]

Saladin's Muslim biographers assert his tolerance toward Jews as well as Christians. Indeed, there are a number of ethnic ironies implicit in Saladin's own career, not least of all the fact that he was himself a Kurd, and that his own rise to power was subsequent to the dominance of the first wave of Turkish invaders after their conversion to Islam. It is also relevant to some controversies about Chahine's representation of Jews in the concluding satiric fantasy sequence in which the autobiographical protagonist is met in New York by an angry group of Hassidic Jews collocated with a Statue of Liberty done up as a whore (*Alexandria. . . Why?*). If Chahine was attempting to satirize intolerance wherever he found it, the image came dangerously close to traditional anti-Semitic propaganda. Elsewhere in his films, Chahine presents sympathetic portraits of Jews in the Alexandria of his past, and uses their departure as a way of lamenting the passing of the cosmopolitan Alexandria he increasingly idealized.

The missing Jewish presence in *Saladin* thus requires explanation. It is possible that Chahine was aware of the delicate and simmering internal tensions in Egypt itself, and simply avoided mention of the Jews as a way of preventing unintended consequences, much in the same way that he claimed to have resorted to the stylized representation of violence in the early scenes of *Saladin* to prevent potential violence from breaking out among Christian and Muslim audiences. It may also have been that he, and the scriptwriters, wanted to focus on themes of unity and progress rather than vengeance, a theme underscored in the dialogue. One way of reading this absence is to consider displaced references to the Jews in the film. Consider, for instance, the peculiar signification of Issa, the Christian Arab commander under Saladin. Given the multitude of possible Christian rites in the Middle East, his "Christian" status is strangely generic. Is he Roman Catholic, Maronite, Chaldean, Armenian Apostolic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, or Coptic? As nearly as I can read the close-up of the cross by which Louise identifies him as Christian, he is probably one of the first two, which would suggest an identity between Issa and Chahine himself. The inclusion of Issa in the society forged by Saladin suggests the possibility of a multinational state, in which the rights of minorities would be protected, and in at least some circles, the idea of a binational Palestinian and Jewish state was still seriously entertained as a peaceful solution to what for over half a century has been referred to as the Middle East crisis. Issa's character is certainly meant to reassure more than the Christian minority of

a possible place in a future peace. And in one of the strangest scenes in the film, Saladin himself infiltrates the Crusaders' encampment to administer an antidote to Richard. In so doing, he demonstrates his humanity and his superior knowledge. He also embodies the more advanced medical and scientific knowledge of the Islamic Middle Ages. Saladin's own health was in fact seriously questionable during the actual historical events covered by the film, so his knowledge of medieval practice becomes yet another link in the chain of identities between Richard and Saladin. Yet it was widely recognized in the Islamic Middle Ages that the greatest doctors were in fact Jewish. By taking on the role of healer and physician, Saladin himself fills one of the roles of the missing Jewish presence in the film. In assuming the role of literal healer, Saladin promises, with a very generic prescription, the healing of political and religious difference.

Gender is as erratically modulated as race and religion in the film. By assuming the role of forgiving healer, Saladin both nurtures and leads, exhibiting both paternal and maternal traits. Such a portrait was in keeping with the ideals of heroism in the West in the 1950s, as reflected in the biographies written by Erik Erikson, who ascribed the charisma of leaders such as Gandhi to their ability to bring both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities to their tasks. Heroism is defined in *Saladin*, especially in its hero, as a matter of wisdom, modesty, and humility, as well as courage, and the Crusaders are, by contrast, motivated by a pride and a bombast that is farcical in Reynaud's portrayal and tragic and limiting in Richard's. Masculinity is defined according to the code of Islam, while the excessive and aggressive masculinity of the Crusaders is Othered, even caricatured. This pattern extends to the female characters. As mentioned above, Princess Virginia operates as the Lady Macbeth of the plot, falsely riling the princes of Europe with tales of helplessness and exploitation, while she herself ably and maliciously engages in court intrigue and supports the most fanatical interpretation of Christian mission. Richard's own wife, by contrast, is retiring, comforting and relatively silent. Saladin's harem, or even his principal wife, is nonexistent in the film, further emphasizing his maternal and paternal qualities, and he is advised and comforted himself by paternal or fraternal figures. The most dramatic female role is that of Louise, who begins the film as a Knight Hospitaller warrior. Louise gives up her armor and weapons and becomes the traditional nurse of war movies, engaging in intrigue and romance simultaneously. Her transition, that is, charts the spiritual path urged by the film's message, so that she becomes, especially in her return to Jerusalem and embrace of Issa, the narrative figure who most closely acts out the didactic intention of the script. Like Richard, Louise must learn the limits of a crusading religion and learn a larger and broader truth about her religious belief. Since Saladin seems already to have arrived at this higher state, Richard and Louise turn out to be the most dramatically complex characters in the film.

In contrast to the Middle Ages of Hollywood film, which sets historical costume dramas in a more or less interchangeable past, Chahine's *Saladin* not only presents an Arab view of the Crusades, it presents a cosmopolitan and humane Middle Ages that can stand as a model for the present. It takes care to frame its own vision as utopian, and it is sufficiently aware of the provisional and temporary nature of apparent historical triumph, so that the film seems almost prescient in its sense of fragile hope. In his important book *The Myth of Nations*, Patrick Geary takes to task nationalisms from the nineteenth century to the present day for tracing their origins to medieval beginnings that turn out to be entirely imaginary, and that ignore or belie the historical record.[7] Geary suggests that even benign internationalist ideologies that turn to the Middle Ages as inspiration or justification are, if less sinister, equally fictionalizing. If *Saladin* escapes from that accusation, it is on the basis of its own acute awareness of representation, and its deployment of representations of the Middle Ages, and particularly of the conflict between East and West as symbolized by the Crusades, alongside its apparent recreation of a moment in history. If the West has framed the East as a region in which time becomes place, in which the "medieval" has never ended, *Saladin* answers by imagining a Middle Ages to which we can return to retrace and reinvent modernity itself.

Notes

1. Yusuf Shahin, *Al-Nasir Salad al-Din/Saladin* (San Francisco, CA: August Light Productions, 1997). I have spelled Chahine's name in the most commonly accepted English spelling. Citations to his films appear as "Shahin" according to international transcriptions of Arabic used by most libraries.
2. David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989).
3. The most widely available study of Chahine in English is Ibrahim Fawal, *Youssef Chahine*, World Directors Series (London: British Film Institute, 2001). Most writing about Chahine in Arabic, as with films in the West, appears in newspapers and magazines. For examples of some untranslated books, see Walid Shamit, *Yusuf Shahin: Hayah Lil-Sinima* (Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2001); Ahmad Jum ah, *Sinima al-Tahawwulat Ru Yah Fi Sinima Yusuf Shahin* (Kuwait: Sharikat al-Rubay an, 1986). Muhammad Sawi, *Sinima Yusuf Shahin Rihlah Aydiyulujiyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Matbu at al-Jadidah Dar Azal, 1990). For an extraordinary series of articles on Middle Eastern and Egyptian film in general, often focusing on Chahine, see the issue of *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 15 (1995), a bilingual journal in English and Arabic, entitled "Arab Cinematics: Toward the New and the Alternative,"

especially Raymond Baker, "Combative Cultural Politics: Film Art and Political Spaces in Egypt," pp. 6–38; Walter Armbrust, "New Cinema, Commercial Cinema, and the Modernist Tradition in Egypt," pp. 81–129; Susannah Downs, "Egyptian Earth between the Pen and the Camera: Youssef Chahine's Adaptation of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's *al-Ard*," pp. 153–77; and Nouri Bouzid, "New Realism in Arab Cinema: The Defeat-Conscious Cinema," pp. 242–50.

4. See Naomi Schor, "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray." *Differences* 1.3 (1989): 38–58.
5. See Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990).
6. See the excellent discussion of the Suez background of the film in John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 103–05.
7. Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 4

SAMURAI ON SHIFTING GROUND: NEGOTIATING THE MEDIEVAL AND THE MODERN IN *SEVEN SAMURAI* AND *YOJIMBO*

Randy P. Schiff

Just as revisionist historians criticize the romanticized view of the medieval knight in Hollywood depictions of the Western Middle Ages, so too critics take to task the idealized image of the samurai in films set in premodern Japan.[1] Thomas D. Conlan, for example, undermines the popular myth of the samurai by exhaustively detailing the realities of warfare in feudal Japan, demonstrating that the filmic emphases on unswerving loyalty, sword worship, and rigidly ethical behavior all fly in the face of historical evidence.[2] Within his own works in the samurai film genre (the *jidai-geki*,[3] [period drama]), the director Akira Kurosawa makes his own use of such revisionist energies, deploying cinematic samurai to present a premodern Japan marked by a fundamental social instability.[4] Eschewing the static social model of the majority of samurai films, in which the class origins of the individual transcend the fluctuations of a modernizing world, Kurosawa sets his wily warriors upon a shifting socioeconomic stage that keeps questions of identity continuously in play.

I would like here to explore the ways in which Kurosawa deploys the socioeconomic liminality of two samurai figures (each played by Toshirô Mifune) in the films *Seven Samurai* and *Yojimbo* to appropriate the romanticized image of the elite warrior for a revisionist view of the cultural history of Japan.[5] These films are set in very different periods: *Seven Samurai* takes place in the chaotic *Sengoku* period (roughly corresponding to the sixteenth century), while the world of *Yojimbo* is set in the 1860s, in the twilight of