

Review #80 : *The Accursed Kings* (1972)

Hélène Duc, Monique Lejeune, José-Maria Flotats



TRAILER (2005)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CO_CubDMc0



Great story, good acting — too bad about the production

This 1972 French television production of **Maurice Druon's** famous hexalogy has a great deal to recommend it : most pleasurably, for those accustomed (or resigned) to the megalomaniac meddlings of Hollywood, it is **EXTREMELY faithful to the original books**, right down to the dialogue. It is also, by and large, **well executed**, although **Jean Piat**, who plays Robert d'Artois, has a tendency to overact – possibly because of Maurice Druon's repeated characterisations of him as '*larger than life*'.

Unfortunately, this version has one large strike against it :

- **The entire thing is apparently shot in cheesy studio sets :**



Even quite modest settings like council chambers are unconvincing. I didn't expect a cast of thousands, but they can't even manage the forest scene where Philip the Fair collapses. Even more irritating than the visuals, though, are the acoustics, which never change, whatever the scene. Even when it's supposedly the streets of Paris, there are no background noises, nothing but the dialogue of the principals. Can it have been done on a shoe-string budget ? A *major* production of a famous book by an Academician (as the titles do not neglect to tell us) ? Surely not. Some critics attribute these characteristics to the age of the production (1972), but I guess even a TV film from that era could have been far more professional. I now gather that this was a deliberate *parti-pris* of *mise-en-scène*. French production can be lavish and grandiose, but Barma wanted to keep the sets and costumes **minimalist, intimate and simple** to give the audience the feel of a small theatre production and to **concentrate on the human drama**, not on the décor. It was not a matter of making a spectacle of it ; it was a matter of scrutinizing life amongst the powerful, the meek, the strong, the weak, the victor and the loser.

However, by and large, the **fine acting and the colourful characters and costumes** make it more than worthwhile — if you speak French! — to catch this **convoluted, fascinatingly true historic pageant of power, violence, love, hate, intelligence, stupidity, treachery, nobility, venality, and (of course) sex.**

There are six volumes of *The Accursed Kings* books in English, corresponding to the six episodes of the film :

- 1) [The Iron King](#)
- 2) [The Strangled Queen](#)
- 3) [The Poisoned Crown](#)
- 4) [The Royal Succession](#)
- 5) [The She-Wolf of France](#)
- 6) [The Lily and the Lion](#)



Edward III of England
Grand-father of Richard II



Indeed, this is a masterpiece. I saw this when I was 15 (while skipping some inappropriate scenes) and simply fell in love with it. I then proceed to read the books. It is by far the most intelligent way to learn about that period of **French medieval history** and although one might argue that it is not totally accurate (of course, Maurice Druon *did fantasize about the assassination* of the son of Guccio Bagglioni and Marie de Cressay, who took the place of the son of Louis le Hutin and Queen Clémence, which led to the theory that there *was* a male heir to the throne of France, meaning that the Guerre de Cent Ans wouldn't have been) but all the surroundings : **language, costumes, habits and customs**, are very accurate to the period.

I just also saw the **2005 remake** they did of it. Those who were put off by the lack of luxury will enjoy that version better. I love it too. Yet, although I admire immensely **Jeanne Moreau**, for me there will always be only **one Mahaut D'Artois : Hélène Duc**. And I still find **Jean Piat** irreplaceable as Robert D'Artois, even though **Torretton** is a fabulous actor. You don't fill those red boots that easily after all ! My favourite character was (and still is) **Philip Le Long** – equally well played by **Jose-Maria Flotats** and **Eric Ruf** respectively in 1972 and 2005. And **Queen Clémence** is very beautiful and so good-hearted ! My patron saint ☺

(* For those who are chagrined by the fact that the **DVDs are not subtitled**, you can't imagine how many **excellent series are not subtitled** (in French or in English) **when released on DVD**. I guess you just have to wait until you know the language better... and that is not such a bad thing after all !