

**Adapting History: Applying Adaptation Theory to Historical Film and Television**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues that historical films and television programmes help generate new interpretations of the past, even when they depart from a common interpretation of how history is generally understood. In order to do this a variety of films and television programmes are analysed through the lens of adaptations studies. This thesis presents an analysis of current research in adaptation studies, alongside contemporary research into historical film. Four questions concerning historical adaptation are identified through which an original contribution to existing knowledge is made. These questions are:

- a) To what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events?
- b) How can the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources, for example anachronisms, function within a historical adaptation?
- c) How can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present?
- d) How can an adaptation be used to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of history?

The ideas that emerge from a literature review are explored over the course of four separate, but interrelated, case studies. These case studies each focusing on a different aspect of historical adaptation. The results are then combined in the conclusion in order to create a cohesive, central argument about the potential benefits of historical adaptation in film and television.



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## Chapter One: Introduction

In 2013, *The New York Times* on a section of its website called ‘The Opinion Pages’ hosted a debate on the importance of historical accuracy in historical film. The five contributors were Pamela Katz (a screenwriter), Aisha Harris (a cultural writer at *Slate*), Robert B. Toplin (a professor who specialises in history on film), Paul Byrnes (a film critic at *The Sydney Morning Herald*) and Molly Haskell (a film critic and author). As part of this debate Toplin argued that:

Cinema delivers understanding by arousing a feeling for history. Through color, sound, lighting and other stimuli, movies inform us about experiences that are quite different from our own... Yet these productions excited wide-ranging discussions in America and abroad...

A discussion of Hollywood’s treatment of the facts is always welcome. It is useful, however, to recognize that cinema often excites viewers’ curiosity about the past and arouses the public’s interest in reading history (Toplin, 2013).

Within his robust defence of historical inaccuracy in cinema Toplin raises key issues about how particular films and television programmes have re-presented specific historical periods. These texts can adapt historical events in such a way that an audience could glean new insights into a historical event, even if the text’s portrayal of an event comes at the expense of being faithful to some of the historical sources. This freedom is particularly

significant for historical adaptation as the various ways in which the past is understood are constantly being negotiated, as Marnie Hughes-Warrington observes: ‘history is a discursive site where meaning is circulated, agreed or contested’ (Hughes-Warrington, 2007:55). Therefore, while this thesis considers how historical adaptations can create alternative interpretations of history, it is important to remember that the various ways in which history is interpreted by historians are similarly fluid, or as Maria Pramaggiore identifies, history is a dynamic, or even plastic medium (Pramaggiore, 2016:37). This is a view which is shared by Jerome De Groot who argues that what has been termed history ‘is something constructed in multiple places: museums, television, front rooms, clubs, locally, through the internet’ (De Groot, 2016:1). As De Groot observes, since there are several places in which people’s understanding of ‘history’ is constructed, it follows that the presence of historical content on film and television contributes towards historical understanding. A knowledge of how film and television constructs history is therefore useful in developing an understanding of the past and of how it relates to the present.

Similarly, Robert Rosenstone in his analysis of *Reds* (Beatty 1981) argues that the film should be considered a work of history, despite the inclusion of inventions and additions that directly deviate from known sources. As Rosenstone concludes:

We do not judge the contribution of works of scholarly history by the verifiability of individual data points, but rather we assess them in terms of how well the interpretation accounts for the traces of the past we do have, and how that interpretation engages with the larger discourse of history...  
*Reds* is a piece of historying – a mode of thinking that uses traces of the past

and turns them into a coherent and meaningful narrative (Rosenstone, 2016:83).

Equally, issues surrounding the use of historical sources in fictional texts remain under question, as Susan Aronstein argues in her analysis of events relating to the release of *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2003), a book which Aronstein argues blurs the lines between fiction and history. Aronstein observes that both the book itself, and the debates surrounding it, are themselves part of the history of how fact is made, and of the uncertain lines between fiction and history (Aronstein, 2015). Aronstein observes that despite the efforts of historians and theologians to correct Dan Brown's assertion (that the book of *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2003) is based on accurate historical details) in a disclaimer, it is those very same details that blur the lines between fiction and history as Brown takes verifiable details, and applies them, often inaccurately, to lend weight to the more speculative parts of his book's thesis (Aronstein, 2015).

Issues surrounding the application of historical sources to fictional films and television programmes are analysed, and developed further, as part of the argument of this thesis, which examines historical film and television through the prism of adaptation studies. The thesis focuses on the issues and benefits, for both filmmakers and audiences, which can arise when texts approach the past in diverse and creative ways, focusing on four case studies, each exploring different aspects of historical adaptation.

One of the key reasons the thesis approaches this subject through the prism of adaptation studies, a field which commonly looks at the processes of adapting a text from one medium into another (for example, book to film), is that it allows this analysis to take

advantage of the field's movement away from what Linda Hutcheon refers to as the 'morally loaded discourse of fidelity' (Hutcheon, 2013:7). By moving away from fidelity, adaptation theorists have constructed a more flexible definition of adaptation. This definition creates a possibility for adaptors to be more creative in their processes, while at the same time opening up an opportunity for more diverse ways of approaching the subjects on-screen. This thesis makes use of that opportunity, in order to present an original argument regarding the potential benefits of the various ways in which a historical film can move away from a literal interpretation of the historical sources.

In *Adaptation Revisited* Sarah Cardwell claims that there are problems in presenting historical dramatisations as adaptations, as 'it is their very basis in history that disallows their inclusion within the genre of 'adaptation'... A film is commonly understood to be an adaptation not because it adapts but because of what it adapts' (Cardwell, 2002:17). However, this view presents significant problems, especially when compared alongside Hutcheon's analysis of adaptation in relation to meme theory, particularly in the various ways in which stories 'propagate themselves when they catch on; adaptations – as both repetition and variation - are their form of replication' (Hutcheon, 2013:177). Hutcheon concludes by observing that 'in the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception' (Hutcheon, 2013:177). Hutcheon's analysis raises useful points regarding what constitutes an adaptation; if the adaptation of stories is regarded as the norm, then an analysis of whether historical film or television is an adaptation would benefit from being directed not only towards the finished text, but also towards the original source itself. Therefore, this analysis considers how an adaptation takes the disparate sources that make up a written history as it is understood and then reshapes those same sources as part of the

adaptation process. Essentially, the restriction on historical film and television gaining the status of adaptation is reliant on establishing whether the historical events are themselves stories.

Whether historical events are stories is addressed by Julie Sanders who argues that history, 'is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). Sanders' designation of historical events as stories is so thorough, that when it is considered alongside Hutcheon's argument that adaptation is the norm rather than the exception (Hutcheon, 2013), a clear case is made for granting the status of adaptation to historical film and television. That is, if history is a history of stories told by particular tellers, and if adaptation is the form of replication for stories, both in repetition and in variation, then it is clear that historical film and television can be considered within the spectrum of adaptation.

### Originality

This thesis makes an original contribution to the study of historical film and television by developing on from previous research in the fields of adaptation studies and historical film and reinterpreting it in a cross-disciplinary manner in relation to other theoretical fields – particularly film theory, medievalism, and genre theory – and other contributory factors, such as the potential benefits of anachronisms, and the differences between visual and print media. By bringing together these different strands of theory this research offers a new interpretation of historical film and television that emphasises the

impact of these various factors on how historical adaptations can help create new understandings of the past.

In this respect the analysis in this thesis builds upon previous research in the field of medievalism studies, for example, Kevin J. Harty's research in his book *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films About Medieval Europe*. In this text Harty argues that cinematic depictions of the medieval can either reflect, or be shaped by contemporary concerns, and he highlights *Landammann Stauffacher* (Lindtberg, 1941) as an example of such a film with explicit parallels. *Landammann Stauffacher* details Switzerland's struggle for independence during the Middle Ages, while being released at a time when Nazi troops had amassed along the Swiss border (Harty, 1999:5). The idea that cinematic depictions of the medieval can reflect contemporary concerns is reinforced by the work of a number of medievalist scholars, including Paul Sturtevant who argues that every historical film is reflective of the society that produced it (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 3014), and Nickolas Haydock who argues that historical films often attempt to determine their own contemporary resonances (Haydock, 2008:135). This thesis builds on that research while drawing on current analysis in the field of adaptation studies, creating an original argument which more fully considers how the process of creating a historical film or television programme can be considered as an adaptation in and of itself, while also identifying the value of considering historical adaptations in such a way.

Similarly, this thesis builds upon current research in the field of historical film theory, for example Jerome De Groot's analysis on the role of authenticity in historical drama, and how it is 'conferred either through cultural hegemony or – increasingly – within the mise-en-scène of the form' (De Groot, 2016:223). De Groot's analysis is in some

respects similar to Pam Clements' observation that the study of medievalism itself is inauthentic, as the subject is 'filtered through a variety of eras, cultures, [and] zeitgeists' (Clements, 2014:20). This analysis will build on the ideas surrounding what is or is not considered to be an authentic depiction of the past, in order to focus on the potential value of considering approaches to historical adaptation that deliberately move away from authenticity. This analysis will also consider the reasons why this could be useful as a means of generating new interpretations on a historical event, and the reasons why what is considered to be an authentic portrayal of a historical event changes over time.

Finally, this thesis builds on previous research on the role of context within the field of medievalism studies. Andrew Elliott observes that both the historian and the filmmaker face similar problems as the structure of each historical element or historical 'fact' is influenced by its specific context (Elliott, 2011, loc 524-531). If the structure of historical adaptation is limited by its context then this thesis will expand the analysis further, in order to consider not only how the people making the adaptation consider the context of these historical elements, but also how that same context can be communicated to the audience watching the historical adaptation. This thesis will consider the question of communicating the context to the audience through its analysis of how the past and the present relate to each other, not just considering how the various elements of a text's depiction of the past contribute to its construction, but also the reasons why these elements were placed within the adaptation, and for what purposes.



### Key Research Questions

This thesis argues that the discourse around historical adaptation would benefit from not focusing solely on the issue of historical accuracy. Rather, it should also consider how historically literate an adaptation is. This can be achieved by asking the following questions:

- a) To what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events?
- b) How can the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources, for example anachronisms, function within a historical adaptation?
- c) How can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present?
- d) How can an adaptation be used to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of history?

### Rationale for Chapter Identification

Before this thesis identifies its methodology, it is worth clarifying that in the writing of this project, the decision was made to refer to the individual chapters by their number, so that when they are viewed on the page, they can be referred to more succinctly. Below is a short list identifying which chapter is being referred to when a chapter number is mentioned:

- a) Chapter One: Introduction.
- b) Chapter Two: A review of research within adaptation theory.

- c) Chapter Three: Contemporary Thematic Resonance and the Illumination of the Past in Cinematic depictions of the Black Death outbreak of the mid-fourteenth century.
- d) Chapter Four: The application of a Historical Aesthetic to *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019).
- e) Chapter Five: The fluid notions of authenticity and acceptability in the representations of the life of Henry VIII in film and television.
- f) Chapter Six: The role of location in historical film and television, and how it applies to the cinematic castle.
- g) Chapter Seven: Conclusion.

### Methodology and Central Research Areas

When watching a historical film or television programme, I often notice something that runs counter to my own understanding of the historical events involved, which takes me out of the narrative and makes me question why the people making the adaptation chose to do this. It may have been for simple narrative expediency (allowing the plot to progress faster), or because that feature of the historical sources is not necessary for that specific text, therefore the representation of the event could be altered to make the narrative more exciting and engaging. However, occasionally when film or television programme makers do this it is possible to discern a more creative outcome when this divergence from historical sources occurs, one that can potentially offer viewers an alternative perspective on the events depicted and the effects of this event on people who lived at that time. When this situation arose, I may have lost focus on the narrative, but I was critiquing my own understanding of

the depicted historical events. This may not have occurred if I was completely focused on the text's narrative. The result of this was that I could finish the viewing experience with a greater understanding of both the historical events depicted in the text and of the adaptation process itself. Essentially, I was asking myself how the film or television programme's diversion from the historical sources could help to create a new understanding of the past for myself, rather than simply accepting or rejecting the adaptation's version of the depicted events based on my own knowledge. These questions influenced the focus of this thesis.

The thesis consists of a close critical analysis of a variety of historical film and television programmes. These case studies have been chosen because of the various ways in which they approach historical adaptation, particularly how they deviate from the generally accepted historical sources, while still maintaining some value as a way of understanding the past and our relationship to it. Analysis of the texts focuses on current literature within and around adaptation theory, alongside research from a variety of fields, including historical film theory, medievalism, and genre theory. This methodology has been chosen so that the thesis can engage with several gaps within the literature, as well as consider how these disparate fields relate, or can be related to, each other.

In order to make this analysis as thorough as possible, the thesis particularly focuses on texts where the benefits of and potential issues arising from an alternative approach to history can be identified. These benefits and issues are then addressed in four distinct areas within the case study chapters to ascertain how alternative methods and forms of historical adaptation can ensure a more thorough understanding of the past, and of how the past can be related to the present.

Before the thesis identifies the case studies, it is useful to clarify the reasons for structuring the thesis in this way. Firstly, some consideration needs to be given as to why the analysis focuses on historical adaptations from both film and television. Secondly, the thesis needs to justify why its analysis does not cover sources from other media, such as theatre productions, or computer games.

Regarding the first issue, it needs to be considered that there are significant differences between dramatised film and television. For example, in terms of structure, films are generally structured so that they can be watched in a single sitting, while television programmes are designed to be watched over a number of different occasions. However, there are also significant overlaps within their respective modes of representation, which allow for similarities within the analysis, for example the use of *mise-en-scène* in costume television dramas and historical feature films. Therefore, a number of the points that can be made about how one media adapts history can be applied to the other.

Film and television are particularly useful as points of analysis, because they hold pre-eminent positions in how people interpret the past. Raphael Samuel, for example, argues that television has ‘pride of place amongst the ‘un-official sources of historical knowledge’’ (Samuel, 1994:13). This is partly due to the ease with which they can be accessed, a position that has been enhanced in the years since Samuel made this claim, as in 1994 television was generally watched as a single experience on a TV Set, with the most common home-viewing device being VHS. In the twenty-first century there has been an extensive expansion of home viewing (both on DVD and online streaming) making film and television’s depictions of past events more easily accessible, provided people have either a television aerial, internet

access, or DVD player, thus making film and television even more important in the construction of how historical events are understood.

Concerning the second issue, while some of the analysis in this thesis might be applicable to adaptations of historical events into other media, these issues necessarily lie outside the scope of this thesis. This is because expanding the research area into other media could cause analyses of the key research questions to be insufficiently thorough, as they would need to consider the different issues that emerge when adapting history into those media. For example, Jaime Banks and Joe Wasserman observe the differences between the challenge gratifications that occur in the relative passivity of film and the interactivity of how audiences consume computer games (Banks and Wasserman, 2019). Therefore, while an analysis of how history is adapted into other media could be a useful source for further research, it is not the focus of this thesis.

To ensure that the key research questions in this thesis are sufficiently analysed the range of case studies is limited to a specific time period and geographical area. This enables the case studies to relate more closely to each other and prevents large shifts in content which would happen if, for example, one case study focused on Ancient Rome, another focused on nineteenth-century Japan, and a third were set in 1940s Brazil. This thesis focuses on texts which are based on late-medieval Europe as not only does that limit the focus to a specific time period, thus providing consistency, but also the sheer number of texts which adapt aspects of late-medieval Europe allows the thesis to address the key research questions from a variety of different perspectives, namely the thematic, the aesthetic, the representation of an individual, and the representation of a location.

Focusing on late-medieval Europe allows the analysis to not only maintain an internal consistency in historical location but also ensures that it considers what John Ganim terms Medieval Europe's status as a 'geographic as well as a historical distinction' (Ganim, 2000:125). Ganim identifies a number of areas where historical sources' understanding of the 'middle ages' is drawn from Medieval Europe's status in opposition to other cultures; for example, Ganim observes that Christopher Wren defended his use of 'classical' architectural styles over Gothic ones by calling Gothic styles a 'Saracen mode of building' (Ganim, 2000:125). Various contexts therefore need to be considered when analysing adaptations set in, or inspired by, a historical period (late-medieval) within a geographical region (Europe). The analysis thus necessarily narrows its focus so that it can consider these issues in sufficient depth without limiting the overall analyses of the key research questions.

The first case study focuses on two key themes within historical adaptation which emerged from preliminary analysis of the material, namely how historical adaptations can create a thematic resonance between the past and the present (i.e. how the themes and ideas present in depictions of the past can be directly related to the present, see pages 139-142 for further definition), and how historical adaptations can be used to illuminate on the past (see pages 142-144 for further definition). These areas are particularly useful as they are directly focused on the third of the key research questions i.e., how an adaptation can promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present. The first case study is also indirectly related to the first and fourth research questions, namely to what extent is the presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events and how can an adaptation be used to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of history.

The second case study focuses on how the creation of a historical aesthetic (see pages 201-206 for further definition), specifically that a historical aesthetic is an element of historical adaptation which can reject historical actuality while still using historical visuals and concepts from history, in order to help develop an audience's understanding of the past. This area is particularly useful for the overall balance of the thesis as it directly relates to the second of the four key research questions, i.e., how can the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources, for example anachronisms, function within a historical adaptation? At the same time, it directly relates to the first and fourth of the key research questions.

The third case study focuses on how the fluid notions of authenticity and acceptability can alter a historical adaptation's representation of a historical event, and how both of these concepts can be used to alter or inform an audience's understanding of the past. This section serves as a particularly useful tool for analysing the third of the key research questions, specifically how an adaptation can promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of an adaptation, as well as how those events can be related to the present. At the same time this case study is useful for considering the other three key research questions.

The fourth case study focuses on how the representation of a specific historical location can help to inform and critique an audience's understanding of the wider society of a historical period and how that can be related to the present day. This is useful for the overall analysis within the thesis, as it is directly focused on the fourth of the key research questions, in that it focuses on how an adaptation can be used to inform, critique, or aid in

an audience's understanding of history, while at the same time, like the other three case studies, this analysis weaves in a response to the other key research questions.

The texts analysed in these case studies have been chosen to provide a range of examples in order to probe the key research questions as thoroughly as possible, while also not being so distinct that they detract from the broader cohesion of the overall thesis. Chapter Three contains the first case study, on contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past. In order to explore the various ways in which these two elements are used, the chapter focuses on two films that depict the same historical event: *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, 1957) and *Black Death* (Smith, 2010), both of which are set during the Black Death outbreak of the mid-fourteenth century. These films are particularly useful as sources for analysis, because they both approach the subject in order to focus on similar themes, including the loss of faith in traditional religious structures. However, each text approaches the subject from a different perspective, with *The Seventh Seal* being greatly inspired by medieval artwork, and the film being generally categorised as a piece of high art, while *Black Death* uses the conventions of the horror genre and is consequently generally categorised as a piece of popular art. Another implicit benefit of choosing these two films for this case study is that, as they were released over fifty years apart, they also implicitly reveal whether the popular perception of the plague outbreak has changed over the latter half of the twentieth century, thus closely relating this analysis to what will be focused on in Chapter Five, specifically how the portrayal of a particular historical individual has altered over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Similarly, this chapter's central analysis of the more thematic elements of historical adaptation, namely the illumination of



the past and contemporary thematic resonance, feed into the analysis of the other three case studies with the other case studies being informed by points made in this one.

Chapter Four is the second case study and focuses on how texts adapt the visual elements from a historical period, in particular late-medieval European iconography. The late-medieval European aesthetic has been used in a wide variety of films and television programmes, for example in the film series *The Lord of The Rings* (Jackson, 2001-2003) and in the television series *Merlin* (BBC One, 2008-2012). This chapter focuses on *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019), because as several academics have already identified, the series is a text which creates a new way of understanding historical events. Carolyne Larrington, for example, in her book *Winter Is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones*, provides an in-depth analysis of the various historical sources that the book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 1996a, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2011), and their series adaptation, *Game of Thrones*, draw their inspiration from (Larrington, 2016). However, as thorough as Larrington's research is, it is focused on the correlations between the historical sources from which the novelist George R.R. Martin and the television series' creators have drawn inspiration from, and the series' own narrative and themes. This creates a gap which an analysis of the role of the historical aesthetic can address through an analysis of the series' use of mise-en-scène, iconography, and sound, in order to create an original argument on how the historical aesthetic can be useful as a method of generating a particular perception of the past.

Chapter Five is the third case study and analyses how the representation of a historical individual alters according to notions of authenticity and acceptability. The argument analyses a variety of films and television programmes, produced over a wide

period of time and focuses on an individual who has a significant presence in the public imagination: Henry VIII. Despite being an outlier in the terms of this thesis, since he is not strictly speaking a medieval monarch (although there are nuanced arguments surrounding that, see pages 40-41), Henry VIII nevertheless holds a position in the popular imagination which is so clear that G.R. Elton claims he is the only English monarch that can be identified by silhouette alone (cited in Lipscomb, 2009). This ensures that the focal point of this analysis is on someone of whom most viewers already have a pre-existing knowledge, rather than on a lesser-known figure which, in light of Elton's declaration, would include every English monarch of the medieval period. By choosing such a well-known historical individual the analysis in this chapter ties in clearly with the analysis in Chapter Three regarding the potential benefits of moving away from the historical sources, as they are commonly understood.

Chapter Six is the fourth case study and focuses on how the representation of a historical location can help broaden an understanding of the past. In order to align closely with the other chapters, this case study's focus is on a historical location which has a strong presence in medieval films and television programmes: castles. Castles are a particularly common choice of location in medieval-set films and television programmes, and also form part of the analysis of the historical aesthetic in *Game of Thrones*. Focusing on a specific historical location allows the chapter to build on the preceding analysis in Chapter Four, as well as allowing the thesis to take advantage of the castle's position both as a location on film and television, and as a location which can be visited today. This further aligns the analysis in this chapter with the broader themes of the other three case studies as it considers how both films and television programmes explore ways in which the past and the present

relate to each other. The analysis in this chapter takes an overview of different depictions of the castle, focusing on those that most clearly relate to the key research questions. This includes examining the depiction of the relationship between the past and the present in *Labyrinth* (Channel 4, 2012). Similarly, the focus of this chapter is on texts that most clearly align with the analysis in the other three case studies, for example, through exploring the differences between two adaptations of *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968 & Showtime, 2003) which build on points discussed in Chapter Five. The combination of these two methods for identifying the case studies helps to ensure that the analysis presents as thorough a consideration into the various ways in which the castle has been presented in film and television as possible, while also ensuring that the chapter's analysis aligns with the analyses in the preceding chapters.

Therefore, by considering these different elements of historical adaptation, from the more thematic focuses of Chapters Three and Five, to the more mise-en-scène focuses of Chapters Four and Six, this thesis creates an argument into how adaptations of historical events can potentially be used to generate new interpretations on the past, and of how it relates to the present. This research will be supported by combining, in a cross-disciplinary manner, an analysis of current research into the fields of medievalism and adaptation studies. Additionally, the cumulative effect of these four case studies ensures that the analysis considers a wide variety of different factors that can contribute to the construction of a historical adaptation, for example, thematic factors, visual elements, societal changes, and the portrayal of specific individuals and locations. All of these factors help to ensure that this thesis creates an original analysis into the different ways in which historical events can

be adapted into dramatised film or television, by considering as wide an amount of theoretical perspectives as is possible within the constraints of this study.

### History, Adaptation, and Medievalism

Writing about historical literature, Peter Widdowson makes the claim that ‘there are many ways in which ‘the literary’ uses history and many ends to which it is put’ (Widdowson, 1999:154). While Widdowson is referring to the ways in which literary sources use history as both a part of the creative process (‘the uses’), and as part of the engagement with the final product (‘the put’), this claim is also significant for understanding the process of adapting history into film and television. The process of moving an interpretation of historical sources into a visual medium alters the ways in which history is both used and put, ultimately creating possibilities for new forms of historical adaptation to be created. This thesis analyses the possibilities for historical adaptation which these new forms offer, looking at the various ways in which history is both ‘used and put,’ in order to create for audiences an alternative understanding of the historical events in question, even if it comes at the expense of a strictly faithful approach to history as it is generally understood.

In this respect the research in this thesis will be following the approach Rosenstone suggests when he states that ‘the historical film must be seen not in terms of how it compares to written history but as a way of recounting the past with its own rules of representation’ (Rosenstone, 1995:3). Therefore, while this thesis will be drawing from historical sources to form its arguments, the historical sources will not be analysed for the purpose of simple comparison; instead, the analysis will focus on the reasons why the past has been recounted

in these films and television programmes and why they can be considered to be valid or useful ways of interpreting the past.

This thesis will analyse the wide variety of additional benefits that the shift away from fidelity offers for the analysis of historical film and television in order to create an original argument into the value of different forms of historical adaptation. Specifically, the shift away from fidelity allows for the possibility of no longer seeing an individual text as the primary reference for an adaptation. Instead, an adaptation can be seen as made up of a variety of different influences, in the same way as different versions of the character Sherlock Holmes have been influenced and altered by previous representations. This occurs to the extent that some audiences have come to expect particular elements within a new adaptation even if they were not present in the original source text. This can be seen in the example of Sherlock Holmes' Deerstalker Hat, an item that is not mentioned once in the written texts, but which has since become associated with the detective due to its presence in a wide variety of media. This particular example goes as far back as the original illustrations by Sidney Paget, who decided to include it in his illustrations for *The Strand* magazine (figure 1.1) (Gelly, 2011).



Figure 1.1: First known illustration of Sherlock Holmes wearing the Deerstalker Hat in *The Hound of The Baskervilles* (1892) by

Sidney Paget (Gelly, 2011).

What this reveals for the purposes of this thesis is that as adaptation theory continues to shift away from focusing on the idea of an adaptation having a single primary reference point, it opens up space for the consideration of approaching the representation of historical events in a similar way. Even those adaptations which claim to base their version on a primary reference, for example *Lincoln* (Spielberg, 2012), which claims to be an adaptation of the book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (Goodwin, 2005), end up taking their reference points from a wide variety of sources. In fact, Steven Spielberg bought the rights for *Lincoln* a full four years before *Team of Rivals* was even published, and Timothy Noah has since claimed that the film actually has more in common with Michael Vorenberg's book *Final Freedom: The Civil War, The Abolition of Slavery, and The Thirteenth Amendment* (Noah, 2013), thus furthering the case for historical adaptation being taken from a variety of sources. Therefore, when creating historical adaptations, even in those cases where a primary referent is specified and credited, the people making the adaptation still have a variety of different options from which to draw inspiration and which come from sources beyond the primary referent.

By moving away from the question of fidelity in historical adaptation, a gap is created in the critical discourse that needs to be addressed. If fidelity is not the prime criterion for a successful adaptation, then what is a more successful basis for the analysis of a historical adaptation? This thesis argues that more important than the question of fidelity to historical sources, is the question of how the adaptation promotes a newer, and potentially more wide-ranging, understanding not just of the events depicted on-screen, but also of how they relate to the present. Can, therefore, a film adaptation of a major historical event be primarily concerned with adapting the past in such a way that the resultant film functions as

a critique of the present? Harty argues that Pier Paolo Pasolini did just that in the creation of his *Trilogy of Life* (*The Decameron* (Pasolini, 1971), *The Canterbury Tales* (Pasolini, 1971), and *Arabian Nights* (Pasolini, 1974)) by over the course of those three films using the medieval texts in order to ‘free cinema from contemporary ideological bias’ (Harty, 1999:23). As this thesis argues, using historical adaptation to critique the present occurs in both *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal*. This aspect of historical adaptation returns us to the wider issue of the possible value of getting things wrong.

The question of fidelity partially aligns this thesis with Defne Ersin Tutan’s claim that ‘all historical adaptations are radically adaptive and that the ways in which these alternative representations are conceived and perceived tell us more about the present than about the past they refer to’ (Tutan, 2017:577). This observation is not unique to Tutan and is supported by Pierre Sorlin who states in the conclusion of his book *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* that in the historical films he studied ‘History is no more than a useful device to speak of the present time’ (Sorlin, 1980:208). However, there are still questions that need to be addressed; namely, if these adaptations do ‘tell us more about the present than about the past’ (Tutan, 2017:577), how can these alternative representations be used in order to create an understanding of previous events. This thesis approaches the topic in relation to Thomas Greene’s categorisation of the five types of anachronism, particularly what Greene identifies as ‘creative anachronisms’ (Greene, 1986:220), which are defined as ahistorical anachronisms, but in their ahistoricity they can help to generate new insights into how these historical sources, people, or events have been generally understood. This is one of the possibilities that have emerged from the rethinking of historical adaptation; by shifting

away from the discourse of fidelity, adaptation theory has opened up space for these other areas of critical consideration.

In *Caravaggio* (Jarman, 1986), for example, a film set in sixteenth-century Italy, there is frequent use of modern-day iconography, in order to present a clear frame of reference to draw links between the past and the present. This has the effect of conveying the psychology and socio-economic status of the characters in the film. The character Ranuccio (Sean Bean), for instance, is depicted smoking modern cheap-looking cigarettes while wearing a hat made from newspaper (figure 1.2), as a form of visual shorthand for the character's working-class status.



*Figure 1.2: Ranuccio (Sean Bean) smokes a cheap-looking cigarette in Caravaggio (Jarman, 1986).*

Alternatively, the use of historical anachronisms benefits from being looked at through the prism of what William F. Woods terms ‘a realism based on decorum or fittingness’ (Woods, 2004: 47). Woods clarifies that this form of realism is not as simple as questions that occur over the minutiae of relatively small anachronisms, for example, criticising a film for including an item of clothing that was invented fifty years after the time in which the film is set. This is a detail important enough only to erode the engagement of a



very small section of the audience, through what Woods dismisses as ‘a common form of pretentiousness’ (Woods, 2004:47). Much more significant than these minute anachronisms are prominent anachronisms which can end up destroying the internal consistency of a text’s version of the past. These anachronisms are particularly significant, as the failure to create a consistently believable version of history can lead to an audience’s erosion of interest in the film. To highlight this Woods presents the example of Kevin Costner’s casual ‘surfer-boy’ American accent in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (Woods, 2004), an accent which is particularly out of place as Costner’s version of Robin Hood is presented as a twelfth-century English nobleman, with the other characters speaking in various English accents, or if their character is not English then at least in a locationally appropriate accent. It is these larger divisions that break ‘the consistency of the illusion’ (Woods, 2004: 47) that need to be critiqued and questioned, in order to ascertain whether or not these anachronisms work to the overall benefit of the text.

As a part of this analysis, the thesis considers historical adaptations as a sub-genre in its own right, located between fact-based and fictional texts. Toplin identifies and defines the texts within this sub-genre as ‘factions’ (Toplin, 2002:92). These are films which are clearly identifiable as fictional, but which are loosely based on actual events. Some real people, events and situations may be depicted, but these are mainly smaller parts of the overall piece. These factional texts ‘reference history, but do not represent it specifically’ (Toplin, 2002:92). An example of a factional text is *Dunkirk* (Nolan, 2017) a film which is based on the actual historical events surrounding the evacuation of Dunkirk between 26<sup>th</sup> May and 4<sup>th</sup> June 1940, but which does so by creating fictional characters and using them as the basis for a fictional narrative.

In addition to Toplin's research on 'factions' this thesis considers A. Bowdoin Van Riper's analysis of historical adaptation, particularly his argument that the creation of resonance towards the past for a modern audience is of greater importance than the re-creation of a specific historical time period. Van Riper believes that the role of these adaptations is not to 'simply chronicle historical events,' but rather to allow 'past and present to illuminate each other' (Van Riper, 2013:112). When making a historical adaptation it can be useful for the text's depiction of the past to relate directly to the present, in order to create a sense of resonance within the audience. This is not to say that an adaptation must focus solely on the present day, but that a sense of resonance can create an understanding of both the past and the present; in essence, the adaptors must ensure that they, as Van Riper argues, allow the 'past and present to illuminate each other' (Van Riper, 2013:112). It is this resonance that creates an opportunity for more diverse possibilities in historical adaptation, as well as providing a space for consideration of the value of historical adaptations which deliberately avoid being faithful to common interpretations of the past. The key word here is 'illuminate,' as to illuminate something creates a new perspective on an event, shining light on an aspect of the past that the audience may not have been aware of previously.

Further expanding on Van Riper's work, this thesis considers how various deviations from historical sources in historical fiction create opportunities for the past and present to illuminate each other. Similarly, this creates a space where other theories, such as genre theory, can be brought into historical adaptations, in order to facilitate this illumination between the past and the present.

The adaptation of historical events into film and television would benefit from being considered a more fluid process than the traditional source-to-text method of adaptation. The visual nature of both film and television means that even traditional literary adaptations need to take inspiration from outside sources, in order properly to depict their time periods, for example through props and costuming. The process of adapting from historical events may take the majority of its inspiration from a single source, which is then supplemented by other texts, or it may take parts from different sources, in order to present a singular viewpoint.

However, this also raises several questions that need to be addressed; namely, if the adaptation changes the understood history to suit its own objectives, what happens when the adaptors make changes to the portrayal of individual characters who are named and presented as being based on real people? This is of particular concern where the real people are not well known, and/or where they, or their immediate family members, are still alive at the time the film is made, as occurred in the film adaptation of *Zulu* (Endfield, 1964). In this film the filmmakers depicted a character, Private Henry Hook (James Booth), a real person who won the Victoria Cross as a result of The Battle of Rorke's Drift and was highly regarded as a 'model soldier' both before and after the events depicted in the film. However, in the film Henry Hook's character was altered, and he was portrayed as both drunken and lazy, reportedly causing distress to Hook's surviving daughters (Jackson, 2015), who were doubtless worried that this film would be how their father would be remembered. Of course the question of how a real person is re-presented within a historical adaptation is by no means unique to *Zulu*, but it does raise the very important issue that while there is space for historical adaptors to adjust and re-focus their adaptation according to their own interests and designs, the adaptors must be aware that such freedom also carries within it a

responsibility not to deliberately distort the portrayal of real life individuals, particularly in cases where those individuals are obscure and are unlikely to be known by the audience, as in the case of *Zulu*. On these occasions it is likely that this adaptation is how a significant section of the audience will learn about the real people depicted within the film.

In order to avert this issue, this thesis focuses its analysis on depictions of the past which are set in pre-modern society, particularly late-medieval, or early-modern adaptations. In doing so, this thesis critiques the variously fluid ways history can be adapted into film or television, without the problem of causing distress to living family members as occurred with *Zulu*.

An additional aspect of historical adaptation that this thesis considers is the various ways in which historical film and television operate, specifically how, as Rosenstone observes, any work of history inevitably looks towards both the past and the present (Rosenstone, 2016). To ensure that these issues can be analysed fully this thesis considers the following aspects in detail: firstly, how an adaptation's presentation of the past can relate and refer to the present, as a form of thematic resonance; and secondly, how an adaptation can be used to illuminate the past, in order to create new interpretations of it. This discussion will be the focus of Chapter Three.

When analysing how the past relates, and is related to, the present the thesis considers the impact of presentism. Louise D'Arcens defines presentism as

[t]he practice of representing, interpreting, and more importantly, evaluating the past according to the values, standards, ambitions, and anxieties of a later

‘present.’ It is a core concept for medievalism studies, this being because it is arguably the essence of medievalism itself, unifying the enormously varied ways the Middle Ages has been represented in its postmedieval cultural afterlife (D’Arcens, 2014, 181).

Therefore, presentism is particularly important as it is those ‘values, standards, ambitions and anxieties’ that form the basis for an overall sense of thematic resonance as is considered in greater detail in Chapter Three. It is the way those factors are interplayed between the past and the present that forms the basis for this sense of thematic resonance.

As this thesis analyses adaptations of the late-medieval period, it is necessary for sections of this research to be clearly positioned within medievalism studies. Medievalism studies is a field that differentiates itself from medieval studies by analysing how medieval culture is created in postmedieval times (Emery and Utz, 2014:8). Essentially, medievalism studies is a field in which a diverse array of postmedieval interpretations of the medieval world are studied. The sources that are analysed within medievalist studies were therefore created outside the medieval period, making them necessarily inauthentic, although their inauthenticity does not mean that they cannot be useful as a source for understanding the past. Scholars working within medievalist studies focus on this area for a variety of reasons, but this thesis will focus on how medievalism studies functions as a way of interpreting the ‘real’ history of the medieval period, as well as on the relationships between the medieval and the time in which a post-medieval text is produced.

A possible solution to the problem of using creative fictions to illuminate the past, without portraying the individuals concerned in a way that could be considered upsetting or

even defamatory to immediate family members, would be to simply remove the individuals concerned from the adaptation altogether. This can be done in a variety of ways; for example, the people creating the adaptation could create new characters to take the place of the real people involved, although this does come at the cost of removing the real people concerned from their own history. Similarly, the people making the adaptation could also create a fictitious version of a historical time period and use that as the setting for their adaptation, as a form of historical aesthetic. Creating this new setting would have the benefit of giving the film or programme makers a free rein in choosing how to present a more general event, while also divorcing the audience from their own preconceptions and knowledge. Additionally, using a historical aesthetic to create this new setting would allow the film or television programme to maintain some form of historical value; thus, allowing those people making the adaptation to have an opportunity to explore new ways of understanding the past. This ultimately creates the possibility for the audience to gain not only an understanding of the various ways in which the past is generally understood, but also potentially allows the audience to remove their own perceptions of the past from consideration, thus allowing them to further understand what it would have been like to experience similar events as those depicted on-screen.

When analysing the historical aesthetic, this thesis takes into account the historical aesthetic's status as a neomedievalism. Broadly speaking neomedievalism differentiates itself from medievalism, by generally being a vision of the past, as Amy Kaufman identifies:

The neomedieval idea of the Middle Ages is gained not through contact with the Middle Ages but through a medievalist intermediary... Neomedievalism is thus not a dream of the Middle Ages, but a dream of someone else's medievalism. It is medievalism doubled up upon itself (Kaufman, 2010:4).

More specifically, Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz define a neomedievalism as the following:

Neomedieval creations appropriate and transform elements thought to be 'medieval,' often flaunting their historicity or verisimilitude to achieve a particular aesthetic. It is perhaps more akin to the technique of 'sampling' in modern hip-hop music than to an attempt to perform medieval music in a modern context (Emery and Utz, 2014:6-7).

There is still some debate as to the applicability of neomedievalisms, and indeed, Kaufman wonders if the term itself is unnecessary as 'we already have a perfectly sound word, medievalism, that encompasses all manner of interactions with the Middle Ages' (Kaufman, 2010:1). The functions of neomedievalisms are, however, taken into account in Chapter Four when analysing the possible usefulness of the historical aesthetic as a tool for generating new interpretations of the past. Chapter Four considers why neomedievalisms

utilise a historical aesthetic, why they function in this way, and how their very ahistoricity can be used in order to promote an alternative understanding of history.

When considering how neomedievalisms can be useful in promoting an alternative understanding of the past it is important to reflect on the generally perceived necessity of ensuring that a neomedieval fantastical text appears authentic. As David Salo claims, ‘A fantasist is therefore obliged to create a credible simulacrum of a real history so consistent in itself that anomalous details can be detected and deemed *inauthentic*’ (Salo, 2004:24, emphasis in original). Similarly, when discussing J.R.R. Tolkien’s work, Salo claims: ‘If, therefore, much in Middle-earth seems realistic, familiar though foreign, it is because Tolkien has coloured his alien world with pigments drawn from history’ (Salo, 2004:35). These two claims are important because they reveal a central issue that this thesis addresses when it analyses the issues surrounding the creation of a historical aesthetic, namely the necessity of considering the overall consistency of a text’s application of the historical aesthetic. This is particularly important when analysing how effective that aesthetic is at using fiction to help generate a more thorough understanding of the past. These issues are the focus of Chapter Four.

When the definition of historical adaptation is expanded, it permits the development of a strain of historical film analysis that allows for research into how the perception of a historical event is altered, according to the culture of the society that produces it. This occurs in Van Riper’s (2013), analysis of the various adaptations of the Manhattan Project. Applying an expanded definition allows for a broadening of analyses within adaptation theory to not only judge the effectiveness of each adaptation, but to also allow for a broader



examination of the changes within the society in which the adaptation is being made, and how they affect the portrayal of the particular characters and events within that adaptation. For example, if an analysis were to be taken of the filmic representations of the reign of King Henry VIII, we would expect to see a great shift in the representation of each of Henry VIII's marriages and in the portrayal of Henry VIII as an individual. Consequently, these changes could occur so that they reflect the changing position of gender relations within western society during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, i.e., what the wider society considers to be a more authentic or acceptable depiction of the monarch's reign; while also taking into consideration the impact of prior representations of Henry VIII's life on audiences. These questions are addressed in Chapter Five.

Henry VIII may be an outlier in this analysis, as the other case studies are focused on medieval texts, however, as Sturtevant notes, there is much debate about when the medieval period ended, with some scholars claiming that in England it ended with the dissolution of the monasteries, an event that occurred during Henry VIII's rule. Other scholars claim that there is no definite end point of the medieval period, but that a series of gradual changes throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries led to the end of the medieval period (such as the Protestant Reformation, the beginning of the Renaissance, the invention of the printing press, and the voyages across the Atlantic) (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 819). This more liberal interpretation of the end of the medieval period would place Henry VIII's life and reign at the upper limits of what is considered to be the medieval world, and there is another aspect of the popular perception of his life which makes his life and reign a suitable subject for this thesis, and this relates to Paul Sturtevant's observation of Henry VIII's presence in a word association exercise, which he conducted as part of a study into

the Middle Ages in the popular imagination. In that study several participants mentioned Henry VIII, despite the fact that he is not generally regarded as a medieval monarch, a fact which led Sturtevant to observe that Henry is ‘commonly associated with absolute monarchy, opulence, and execution... Though Henry did not live in the Middle Ages, he led a ‘medieval’ life’ (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 955).

Another aspect that needs to be considered is the role of location within adaptation, and what this reveals about the culture depicted. Location can be a useful source for providing insight into a society, even to the extent that it functions as a microcosm of it, potentially revealing insights into the structures, both architectural and socio-economic, of the culture depicted within a text. Chapter Six takes into consideration the present-day perceptions, and even prejudices of the period and how that affects the way it is presented on screen. For example, Andrew Higson observes that:

The sublime architecture of the medieval castle offers a very different visitor attraction to the stately homes of more recent British history – and as, with the epic genre itself, it is a gendered space more masculine in its appeal than the more refined and domesticated spaces of later centuries (Higson, 2011:221).

Analysing the various ways in which the late-medieval castle has been presented on screen is a useful way of examining the perceptions of wider society and of how various social groups interacted and related to each other. The castle is particularly useful as a focus

for analysis in this regard due to the way that it functions as a domestic space, where the various inhabitants live and interact with each other on a daily basis, while also functioning as a locus for conflict. The use of a castle potentially allows the film or programme maker to create a text where the audience can observe how the various social groups that lived within the castle interacted with each other in times of both high intensity (war, plague, etc.) and relatively low intensity (day-to-day life more generally). This offers a wide array of representations of life within the locale, thus offering a new way of looking at, and understanding, how the various social groups that lived within the castle interacted with each other.

The castle is also a useful location for analysis because it provides a clear visual link between the past and the present. Essentially, it offers clear visual continuity throughout time, and as a consequence of this it is a location that can be used as a way of furthering thematic resonance. An example of this occurs in *Labyrinth* (Channel 4, 2012) where the narrative is divided into two separate time periods, but the specific locations provide visual continuity between the two. This aspect of historical location is particularly useful as it means that a central cinematic or televisual location can help to both further our understanding of history and help relate the events of the past more clearly to the present. These locational aspects of historical adaptation are the focus of Chapter Six.

Therefore, in order to create a more flexible and original analysis of historical film and television, this thesis focuses on four distinct areas of historical adaptation:

- 1) Contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past: how historical adaptation reflects the present while simultaneously promoting further understanding of the past.
- 2) The historical aesthetic: how the visual elements of film and television can be used to adapt history even when removed from a narrative context.
- 3) The changing nature of acceptability and authenticity: how the perception of what is a suitable representation of history changes over time.
- 4) The representation of specific historical locations: using a particular location as a tool for generating understanding of the various social dynamics of a historical society, and for creating an understanding of the links between the past and the present.

Chapters Three to Six provide a comprehensive analysis of the various elements that form the basis of historical adaptation. These chapters are then brought together in the concluding chapter of the thesis in order to form a new argument about the benefits of historical adaptation.



## **Chapter Two: A Review of Research Within Adaptation Theory**

### Introduction

Film is a powerful medium which brings historical subjects to a vast audience. It carries the tantalising possibility of making us eyewitnesses to history, the lens of the camera our window onto past events. Film flattens out the strangeness of the past, reanimates a lost world and makes us care about the fates of the long dead. Before our eyes, the past seems to come back to life (Lipscomb, 2016).

Suzannah Lipscomb argues that historical films function as a way of reigniting interest in the past, a view which Meriem Pagès supports when she observes that commercial films and television programmes have given students who are studying the medieval period a sense of connection to the medieval past (Pagès, 2017). Later Lipscomb highlights how those interpretations have altered the ways in which historical events can be understood. This is not necessarily a negative thing because reshaping history can help broaden a previous understanding, enabling new perspectives on the same event, or as Marnie Hughes-Warrington succinctly identifies ‘understanding historical film entails understanding what history is, and can be’ (Hughes-Warrington, 2009:8). With that in mind this chapter addresses a number of ideas in contemporary adaptation theory, a field of research that frequently looks at issues surrounding why an adaptation has chosen to present a particular text in a particular way. The following analysis applies aspects of adaptation theory to

historical film and television, in order to find gaps within the current research which can be addressed throughout the four case studies. Over the course of this chapter there will be a particular focus on literary adaptation theory, which seeks to define how the relationship between a novel and its adaptation are understood by the people making the adaptation and by the people viewing the adaptation. For example, an aspect of literary adaptation theory which is considered is Sarah Cardwell's analysis in *Adaptation Revisited* (2002) of the adaptations of classical novels into film and television, as part of a broader examination of what is meant and understood by the term 'adaptation.' The discussion is also augmented by an exploration of several areas of research, both inside and outside adaptation studies, which will be useful in the construction of this thesis. These are the roles of appropriation and addition within historical adaptation, the role of cultural memory within adaptation, the possible benefits of anachronism within adaptation, and the importance of considering medievalisms when making historical adaptations that are set in the medieval past.

### The potential benefits of historical fiction

In *Cultural Dementia: How the West Has Lost its History and Risks Losing Everything Else* David Andress claims that recent political events in Britain, France, and the USA were partly due to a malady he terms Cultural Dementia, which he defines as being made up of particular forms of forgetting, misremembering, and mistaking the past (Andress, 2018). Andress explains that:

Historical stories abound; but as deployed in public debate they are little better than dangerous fantasies, constantly at risk of abrupt and jarring collision with reality. Unlike Germany, for example, these countries have never undertaken the painful process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: the coming to terms with the past that ceases to treat it as a comforting inspiration, and instead wrestles with the evils it conceals (Andress, 2018:2).

Andress is overtly critical of the process of misremembering and mistaking the past and warns of the dangers of misinforming the audience, especially by omission, when working on texts that are specifically designated factual. Within his analysis of the ways in which people misremember the past Andress makes a number of intriguing points which can be applied to the process of adapting history, and as a part of that raises a particular possibility for historical fiction. Historical fiction is uniquely placed to examine the past with its various issues and problems, allowing the modern audience to observe and critique it from the relatively 'safe' distance of fiction. By depicting the problems of the past, historical fiction undertakes the process of 'wrestling with the evil it conceals' (Andress, 2018:2), thus potentially forming part of the process of coming to terms with it.

However, 'coming to terms' with the past is not the sole benefit historical fiction offers its audiences. In her analysis of historical fiction and how it can be used in children's picture books, Suzette Youngs draws on research into historical fiction and identifies five areas where historical fiction can add to an understanding of history. These areas also reveal gaps in which potential benefits of historical adaptation can emerge and be analysed further. Youngs' five areas are as follows:



- 1) Historical fiction presents readers with a vicarious experience of the past.
- 2) Historical fiction can encourage readers to think about the past while also encouraging them to feel and empathise with people.
- 3) Historical fiction can help the readers to understand human challenges and relationships.
- 4) Historical fiction can offer a way for readers to compare issues between the past and present.
- 5) Historical fiction helps readers understand that there are a variety of possible truths (Youngs, 2012).

In relation to area 1, the vicarious experience of the past presents us with the most basic benefit of historical fiction. By presenting a vision of the past that the reader can experience for themselves, historical fiction enables the reader, and in the case of film and television the audience, to begin the process of consciously critiquing their own understanding of a generally-accepted history. That their experience of the past is vicarious implies active imagining on the part of the audience, and therefore means that an author must create an experience of the past that is believable enough for the reader or viewer to accept.

Regarding area 2, encouraging readers to think about the past and empathise with people is a central benefit of historical adaptation, in that it allows the modern reader or viewer to empathise with people who lived in societies which are commonly assumed to be alien to us. Area 2 can be combined with area 3, which is aimed at helping the audience

understand human challenges and relationships, and in this way be applicable to a wide variety of fictional texts, rather than something which is specific to historical fiction. In essence, area 3 nullifies some of area 2's issues as it allows the reader or viewer to understand the various contexts of the society which is commonly assumed to be alien to a modern audience, by opening the door to sympathising and empathising with characters who are depicted as representational of past societies, we are able to more fully understand their particular human challenges and relationships.

Area 4, allowing readers to compare past and present issues, is a central concern of this thesis because analysing how issues between the past and the present can be compared remains a central reason for analysing historical fiction. While this will be analysed in greater detail as the thesis continues, it is important to clarify that this process is made up of two parts, which work together to generate meaning: firstly, how our perspectives on the past relate to the present, and secondly, how the themes, concerns, fears, and issues of the present can be related to the past, in order to further understand both past and present. These ideas are the focus of the analysis in Chapter Three.

Finally, area 5, which highlights how historical fiction helps readers to understand that there are a variety of possible truths, raises an intriguing possibility for historical fiction, as Hayden White identifies in his famous declaration that 'history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation' (White, 1976:23). White argues that actual history is only made fully understandable when analysed after the fact, when the various 'truths' of the event are analysed, and the various sources brought together. Historical fiction can be a useful tool in this process because it has the potential to adopt different perspectives on the same historical event, allowing an audience to observe and

understand how people at the time might have understood the events depicted. *La Grande Illusion* (Renoir, 1937) is an example of this in action, where the various ‘truths’ of the characters’ experiences are presented to the audience and an understanding of how class and nationality affected inter-personal communication during the First World War emerges from their various interactions.

However, Youngs’ analysis is not a conclusive listing of the potential benefits of historical fiction. Youngs’ points can be directly related to the potential benefits of historical fiction to general audiences, but there are also potential benefits that can be identified for historians. On this subject Joseph M. Alderman, observes that historians’ critique of historical fiction should not be wholly concerned with assessing the historical accuracy of a text, but instead should consider a more useful question: how it measures up to scholarly history and to what extent it actively engages with the scholarship, while still taking into account the fact that the artist and historian have a different set of obligations (Alderman, 2018). This issue will be analysed further in the thesis, as it directly relates to broader concerns over the importance of fidelity in adaptation.

Alderman’s observations directly relate to what Sturtevant observes in his analysis of a study he conducted into the Middle Ages in the popular imagination. During that study none of the participants accepted everything they saw in a film which was set during the medieval period as the literal truth, and neither did they reject everything as a complete fantasy (Sturtevant, 2018), therefore any concern that audiences will completely accept the version of the past that the text presents may be overstated (Sturtevant, 2018). Therefore, as these viewers have not accepted or rejected the text’s depiction of the past as either completely ‘true’ or completely ‘false’ they are already engaging in the process of

negotiating their own understanding of the historical events that the film depicts, of its relationship to the extant scholarship, and of how the text relates to it. However, it is worth considering that these respondents are already a particularly active audience due to their position as participants in an in-depth study, and it cannot be denied that it is possible that an audience not taking part in such a study may not have the same response to viewing a medieval film.

When analysing historical fiction it is beneficial to consider Ludmilla Jordanova's declaration about what the future should hold for the study of history: 'in both their teaching and their research, historians should, responsibly, unsettle their audiences, provoke them to think harder about the human condition' (Jordanova, 2006:200). While Jordanova is writing about the responsibilities of historians, much of what she says can be applied to historical adaptation, particularly, the desire to unsettle an audience in order to provoke them into re-evaluating their understanding of history and of how the historical events can be related to the present. This idea will be developed further in Chapter Three as part of an analysis into how the horror genre can be useful as a tool in generating new perspectives on life during particularly disruptive historical events.

In some ways the actual practice of creating historical fiction is not too dissimilar from the ways in which historians themselves operate. In his methodological book on the practice of history, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, John Lewis Gaddis claims that for historians:

The best you can do, whether with a prince, a landscape, or the past, is to *represent* reality: to smooth over the details, to look for larger patterns, to

consider how you can use what you see for your own purposes (Gaddis, 2004:7, emphasis in original).

The actual production processes of historians and of people making historical adaptations is different; after all, the historical adaptors have the freedom to make alterations and create complete inventions, a freedom which the historian lacks. In fact, as Rosenstone observes, invention is inevitable in historical drama, with adaptations necessarily having to include inventions, both of larger events and of smaller details (Rosenstone, 1996). Yet this is not necessarily a negative; as Rosenstone argues, it is a strength of narrative film because without those inventions ‘the historical world would be more sprawling and formless and far less able to make us interested in the past’ (Rosenstone, 2012:185). Therefore, the consistent feature that historical fiction and historical fact are both representations of the past, allows historical fiction to act in broadly similar ways to historical fact. Specifically, when making a representation both historians and historical adaptors have the same role: they are both enacting what Gaddis identifies as the representor’s (the person creating the representation’s) role in making ‘complexity comprehensible, first to yourself, then to others’ (Gaddis, 2004:7). Broadly agreeing with this view, Sturtevant notes that ‘film can encourage students not just to be interested in the past, but to care about it and find intense beauty in it’ (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 16661). Sturtevant notes, however, that if historical film is to be used in the classroom to help develop an understanding of the past, it requires an active teacher who can provide contextualisation and encourage critical thinking in the students, in order to prevent them from accepting as fact the parts of the film which diverge from how the historical event in question is generally understood (Sturtevant, 2018).

Nevertheless, Gaddis' observation does reveal an essential purpose of historical adaptation; when making a new historical adaptation the film or programme makers could benefit from ensuring that they present an audience with a vision of the past in which the various complexities are clear and comprehensible. A failure to do this could result in an audience becoming disengaged from the narrative, thereby preventing the adaptation from allowing sections of the audience from using the text to develop new interpretations of the past.

### Historical fiction as a form of adaptation

Before this thesis analyses wider issues surrounding adaptation and how history is represented on film and television, the reasons why historical film and television programmes can be considered forms of adaptation need to be identified. The first reason is a matter of context; as Linda Hutcheon observes, 'an adaptation, like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context – a time and a place, a society and a culture, it does not exist in a vacuum' (Hutcheon, 2013:142). Hutcheon also notes that when an adaptation occurs at a later point than the original then the context changes, particularly when the adaptors seek to find contemporary resonances for their audience. While in this instance Hutcheon is referring to more traditional forms of adaptation, these ideas also reveal the workings of contemporary thematic resonance (see pages 139-142 for further definition) and place them firmly within the adaptation process. These ideas of contemporary thematic resonance are developed during the process of creating a historical film or television programme and are not present in the raw material of history.

Resonance can be consciously read into history by someone reading historical texts, but even that can be considered to be a form of historical adaptation as the process of reading thematic resonance into the text is changing the text's meaning. However, this use of the term meaning is in itself problematic; after all, just as history is, as Marnie Hughes-Warrington observes, 'a discursive site where meaning is circulated, agreed or contested' (Hughes-Warrington, 2007:55) so, too, is historical film where meaning is constantly negotiated between film producers, promoters, and viewers. Therefore, the ways in which that meaning can be created may also be, at turns, both cohesive and conflicting.

Defne Ersin Tutan further defines these ideas surrounding resonance in her argument that 'all historical adaptations are radically adaptive and that the ways in which these alternative representations are conceived and perceived tell us more about the present than the past they refer to' (Tutan, 2017:577). Here, Tutan takes a harder line on historical adaptation, although in doing so also raises the question that if the way these versions of history are presented tells us more about the present than about the past, then why do they need to be historical adaptations at all? Why not simply address these themes in a contemporary setting? Tutan claims that 'historical representations illuminate not the past that they set out to discover, but the very present in which they are embedded' (Tutan, 2017:584). This is an idea that has significant problems; while historical adaptations are reflective of the present this does not necessarily mean that the various ways in which they use the raw material of history cannot be used to illuminate the past, even at the points of divergence from actual history.

Another useful idea for the starting point of historical adaptation analysis is put forward by Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, in their claims about the benefits of medievalisms, specifically that:

Through their various modes of meaning, medievalisms invite us both to explore and to ignore history, to create a magical Middle Ages reflective of our unique desires, building our very selves through a relationship with history that is simultaneously the past and the magical past that we wish it might have been. In making the past, we make the present, and thus remake the meanings of both (Pugh and Weisl, 2013:10).

It is this remaking of the meanings of both past and present that reveals the real benefits of historical adaptation. It does not just grant insight into the present, nor even simply understanding of the past, but also, in historical film, it offers insight into the relationship between the past and present where the meaning is generated. Here the meaning is both porous and flexible; at some points in the text it may create resonances with the present, while at other times it may illuminate the past, and while the meaning may be tilted more towards one or the other of these states, the presence of both remains consistent within the adaptation. These ideas surrounding contemporary thematic resonance, and illumination of the past will be developed further in Chapter Three.

The centrality to historical adaptation of both contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past necessitates that they are the first of the case studies in this thesis.



The chapters that follow on from this focus on how these two thematic concerns are addressed in a variety of ways across different historical adaptations:

- a) Chapter Four focuses on how they can be created purely through the stylistic elements of a film or a television programme, rather than through the narrative.
- b) Chapter Five discusses how the ways in which they are understood can shift according to the contemporary concerns of the adaptation.
- c) Chapter Six examines how a specific location can be used as a continual location between the past and the present in order to develop these ideas further.

#### The question of fidelity within historical adaptation.

When analysing the adaptation of history one of the central questions that needs to be addressed is the role of fidelity within adaptation, namely to what extent a text should be faithful to its original source. While there is a commonly held assumption regarding the primacy of fidelity, this is rejected by some adaptation theorists. Linda Hutcheon, for example, claims during an analysis of how adaptations relate to their original source, that:

The morally loaded discourse of fidelity is based on the assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the written text. Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication (Hutcheon, 2013:7).

Ultimately, Hutcheon argues, the purpose of adaptation is not simply to replicate the original text, but to adjust it, altering it for its new medium according to the specific concerns of the people making the adaptation.

The key phrase in Hutcheon's statement, for this analysis, is the imposition of what she terms 'morally loaded discourse' (Hutcheon, 2013:7). The assumption is that fidelity is the correct form of adaptation, and that the people making the adaptation need to work towards being as 'faithful' to the source as possible in order for the text to be considered a successful adaptation. In doing this the adaptors privilege the original text as the 'true' version, consigning the adaptation to a permanent secondary position. This is particularly significant, since, as Glenn Jellenik notes, it is the lens through which adaptations are identified; an adaptation is only ever recognised as an adaptation when it is compared with its original source (Jellenik, 2017). So, while we can generally avoid privileging fidelity at the expense of all other considerations, it is difficult to remove fidelity completely from adaptation studies, even if its purpose is solely limited to identifying adaptations.

This critical attitude towards the primacy of fidelity is also supported by Thomas Leitch who, as part of a broad analysis of contemporary adaptation theory, identifies twelve problematic areas, or as he terms them fallacies. In his analysis Leitch argues that:

Fidelity to its source text—whether it is conceived as success in re-creating specific textual details or the effect of the whole—is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense (Leitch, 2003:162).

However, while Leitch's argument makes a number of useful points, particularly when he draws a link between the perceived primacy of fidelity and the wider critical primacy of classic over modern texts, it is still possible to be too critical towards the notion of fidelity. If fidelity were to be dismissed entirely, then there is a danger of ignoring its potential useful applications within adaptation. This is particularly clear when applying adaptation theory to historical film and television, where unlike traditional forms of adaptation, historical adaptation is not welded to a single key source text. This allows adaptors greater flexibility and grants them the freedom to choose from a wide variety of different sources. However, this also creates problems regarding the reliability of the differing perspectives and interpretations of the events depicted. This concern can leave the adaptors with a considerable degree of uncertainty regarding which source should be used as the basis for their adaptation. Therefore, it is possible that in the case of historical adaptation, fidelity to a single source text can be useful in providing a solid basis for the initial parts of the adaptation process, even if it becomes less necessary later in the process when the adaptors know which particular aspects of the events are to be the focus of the adaptation.

When making an adaptation from a historical source adding external material is frequently necessary, particularly if the filmmaker is attempting to adapt from a single text. Even the most literal of adaptations from historical sources requires a high number of inventions in order to re-create them fully, particularly if the adaptation intends to be understood by an audience with little knowledge of the historical events in question. If we take a hypothetical example of an adaptation of The Third Crusade, and base the representation on the chronicle of the event which is entitled *The Third Crusade* (This

chronicle has an unknown author, although it is believed that the author is Geoffrey de Vinsauf (Anonymous, circa 1191:16)), this chronicle claims to be an eye-witness account and as such it would make a useful primary source for the people creating an adaptation. However, in making an adaptation of the chronicle, the adaptors would need to create a number of inventions in order to convey the events to the audience. If, for example, the people creating the adaptation wanted to re-present the events of a particular section of the chronicle which describes the imprisonment of Guy De Lusignan, several problems would occur, particularly since few details exist in the text, which currently reads as follows:

Guy De Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, was released by Saladin after he had been a year in captivity, on the strict promise that he should abjure his kingdom and, as soon as possible, go into exile beyond the sea (Anonymous, circa 1191:25).

If this scene were to be depicted on film, several inventions would be necessary. Firstly, there would have to be the creation of the ‘character’ of Guy De Lusignan: What would be his personality? What would his appearance be? How did he react to imprisonment? The answers to these questions would have to either be adapted from external historical sources or wholly invented as none of those details are present in the original text; indeed, as Toplin observes, these inventions are fundamental to the genre, as they allow the filmmakers to ‘simplify detailed and complicated information and make it understandable to diverse audiences’ (Toplin, 2009:19). Therefore, invention is a necessary element when adapting these chronicles since even important figures, such as Saladin and Richard the

Lionheart are only described in the barest of details, necessitating more invention in order to present them on screen effectively. When depicting the scene of Guy De Lusignan's imprisonment, how would it be shown? The text does not provide any information on the conditions of Guy De Lusignan's incarceration, so a re-creation of this scene would require some fundamental additions. Would he be locked in chains? Or would he be guarded in sumptuous accommodation? Both could be regarded as faithful depictions of what is in the text, but both would provide very different images to the audience. This is an issue which Pierre Sorlin highlights when discussing how to identify a historical film: 'historical films are all fictional. By this I mean that even if they are based on records, they have to reconstruct in a purely imaginary way the greater part of what they show' (Sorlin, 1980:21). Therefore, in the adaptation of any historical event, even if the adaptor was attempting to be as 'faithful' to the generally accepted historical sources as possible, a large number of inventions, or at best adaptations from alternative sources, would need to occur in order adequately to convey a relatively simple section of chronicle text into a more visual form.

Perhaps when making these inventions of central importance is not whether the 'world' of the text is historically accurate, but whether the text remains consistent in its construction of the past. This was discussed in Chapter One, in the analysis of Woods' 'realism based on decorum or fittingness' (Woods, 2004:47). In his analysis Woods discusses how the American 'surfer-boy' accent of Kevin Costner's Robin Hood, in *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (Reynolds, 1991) destroyed the

consistency of illusion, eroding our emotional investment in the film. The perceptual complexity has been compromised; the sense of historical depth disappears, and we are left looking at a movie set (Woods, 2004:47).

For this thesis the key point in Woods' argument is the maintaining of the 'consistency of illusion' in historical adaptation. It is not, strictly speaking, necessary for the text to be completely faithful to interpretations of the historical sources on which it is based, just that it remains consistent to the vision of the past that it constructs. The failure of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* to create this illusion is not because Kevin Costner's portrayal of Robin Hood uses an American accent, but that it was not a clear design choice followed through by the rest of the cast, which would have created consistency within the film's construction of twelfth-century England. The British actors, Alan Rickman (The Sheriff of Nottingham) and Brian Blessed (Lord Loxley), maintain their natural English accents and the American actors, Christian Slater (Will Scarlett) and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio (Maid Marion), both make attempts to speak in English accents. This failure of *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* to maintain the illusion through the consistency of accents is made especially clear when compared to other historical films, such as *Valkyrie* (Singer, 2008), or *The Death of Stalin* (Iannucci, 2017). In both these films the actors are consistent in their deployment of accents and if someone changes their accent, it is with a clear purpose that helps maintain the consistency of the film's construction.

However, when analysing the importance of maintaining the consistency of a film or television programme's illusion it is important to remember, as Rosenstone notes, that there is no fixed formula for rendering judgement as to whether or not something breaks the

consistency of illusion, and that each example needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis (Rosenstone, 2018). The addition of any non-historically accurate element can be to the benefit or to the detriment of a historical adaptation, but that can only be ascertained when analysing the wider whole of the text's construction of the past.

This maintenance of illusion, can simply be done in order to effectively maintain an audience's engagement with the text, as occurs with *Valkyrie*. Alternatively, it can be used to highlight the themes and concepts within the text, as occurs with *The Death of Stalin*. This was made explicit by Armando Iannucci, the director of *The Death of Stalin*, when he spoke about the film's use of accents:

I knew I didn't want people to do fake Russian accents. I just wanted them to do their own. Because the Soviet Union was this great massive empire, with different... you know Stalin spoke Georgian... you know, all these accents and dialects flying around. So, I thought we've got to do it in English, but with a mix of voices (Kermode and Mayo, 2017a).

This reveals the key point of separation between *Valkyrie*'s use of accents and *The Death of Stalin*'s. In *The Death of Stalin*, the use of accents helps to highlight the scope of the Soviet Union and the differences between the backgrounds of the members of the Communist Party's Central Committee. The differences between the various types of Russian accent would not necessarily have been clear to the audience if the actors had chosen to speak in Russian accents. Even if the diversity of background was reflected in the actors' performances, the audience would still need to have an in-depth knowledge of the various

differences between Russian accents, in order to understand how these accents are being used to denote the expanse of the Soviet Union. As *The Death of Stalin* demonstrates, maintaining the consistency of illusion can be used not only as a means to sustain the audience's potential belief in the illusion that the text creates, but also to expand on the themes and ideas explored within the text. This is a concept which Toplin succinctly refers to as manipulating 'a small 'truth' in order to advance an understanding of an important larger truth' (Toplin, 2007:132). Manipulating 'a small truth' to advance an understanding of a 'larger truth' reveals how when creating a historical adaptation the rejection of fidelity to history can allow sections of the audience to potentially gain a new perspective on both the time period and the events depicted on screen. In this respect the analysis in this thesis accords with Richard Slotkin's analysis of the historical novel in which he claims that:

The truth the novel seeks is poetic rather than historiographical: it sacrifices fidelity to non-essential facts in order to create in the reader a vivid sense of what it may have been like to live among such facts (Slotkin, 2007: 225).

Here Slotkin claims that fidelity in historical fiction can be a secondary concern as long as the movement away from fidelity helps readers immerse themselves in the fiction, effectively sacrificing historical actuality for the 'feel' of history.

The overall question of the importance of fidelity within adaptation is summarised effectively by Patterson who in concluding her analysis into the role of adaptation in the making of *Lawrence of Arabia* (Lean, 1962) declares: 'More important than a 'faithful' adaptation of a text to the screen is a film text's ability to perform or produce interesting,



viable and useful readings of the preceding text' (Patterson, 2011:168). This argument raises some significant issues, particularly about what can be considered an interesting or viable reading of a text. But, Patterson's argument also raises a point of significant concern within adaptation: specifically, the question of what criteria should be used to form the basis of a successful adaptation.

Patterson raises a number of useful points, including the argument that when analysing an adaptation, the analysis would benefit from being moved away from the question of how much it is 'faithful' to a particular source. Instead, the basis for analysing the success of an adaptation should be on how it has chosen to present and alter the original text, and what potential benefits there are to this approach. In many ways this works along similar lines to the ideas of Robert Stam who, while admitting that fidelity still has a part to play in adaptation, albeit not literal fidelity (Stam, 2000:54-56), believes that more attention needs to be given to dialogical responses, which he identifies as being the readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material. Focusing on those areas creates an analysis that takes advantage of the various differences between media (Stam, 2000:76). In other words, while fidelity cannot be wholly removed from analysis in adaptation studies, its usefulness as a criterion for evaluating adaptation is less than an analysis of how the adaptation uses and changes the raw material of the text.

Imelda Hutcheon and Gary Bortolotti refer to this aspect of adaptation when they make the claim that adaptations in literature and adaptations in biology function in similar ways, as both organisms and stories evolve, i.e. they both replicate and change (Hutcheon and Bortolotti, 2007), and if biologists do not evaluate an individual species by how closely it follows its ancestors, then that should not be the criterion for judging the success of a

cultural adaptation (Hutcheon and Bortolotti, 2007). This concept of analysing adaptation as a form of cultural evolution is useful for the analysis of historical adaptation, as not only does it remove the option of judging a text based on how closely it keeps to the historical sources, but it also allows adaptation theorists to focus their analysis on the reasons why those changes have taken place. Adaptation theorists are then able to analyse those changes on their own terms, just as biologists analyse the reasons why one species has evolved into another.

A final aspect of fidelity that is significant in analysis of the adaptation of history in this thesis is Pierre Sorlin's concept of metahistory (Sorlin, 1998:206-207). Sorlin defines metahistory as a contrived but highly effective reconstruction of the past, which can result in a tendency for people (Sorlin highlights Americans in particular) to understand their own history in terms of images derived from films. Sorlin claims that understanding history in this way creates a virtually impenetrable barrier to understanding those events based on their more verifiably historical terms (Sorlin, 1998:206-207). When historical adaptations become metahistorical, an intriguing question arises about adaptations that are made after the metahistory is established, i.e., whether the adaptation should move away from the metahistory and risk being criticised by some sections of the audience whose understanding of the historical event is informed by the metahistory; or, whether the adaptation should follow the more metahistorical route, even if that means the adaptation becomes less 'faithful' to the generally accepted interpretation of the historical events it depicts.

### Altering history to further textual themes.

The questions of how and when to alter the generally understood history to illuminate the ideas of the text, remain central when making a historical adaptation. When publicising the film, *A Knight's Tale* (Helgeland, 2001), Brian Helgeland, the writer, director, and producer of the film, claimed: 'I did a ton of research, then basically took what I wanted and threw the rest away, trying not to be a slave to it' (Blackwelder, 2001). This approach proved particularly effective for *A Knight's Tale*, a playfully postmodern text which mixes various genres in order to create its version of the medieval period, thus presenting a version of the past that appears to be just as informed by modern sports and popular culture as accepted history and literature. *A Knight's Tale's* vision of the past is best exemplified by the fact that Helgeland sent a video of the wrestling introductions of Vince McMahon to Paul Bettany in order to prepare him for his role as the fourteenth-century English writer Geoffrey Chaucer (Savada, 2001). This is something that Chaucer might have approved of, as Finke and Shichtman note in their analysis of the film; *A Knight's Tale* locates 'the roots of Chaucer's poetry in the popular entertainments of the day' (Finke and Shichtman, 2001:347). Indeed in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale* there are references to these 'popular entertainments', especially as a key plot point in the story is a tournament between the characters Palamon and Arcite, and the narration makes reference to the tournament being treated by a number of people as a large social event and as a justification for festivities, for example in the couplet, 'Made every wight to been in swich plesaunce, That al that Monday justen they and daunce' (Chaucer, circa 1400:58), which Benson translates as 'made every person to be in such delight, that all that Monday they joust and dance' (Benson, 2008). By depicting the

medieval joust as analogous to modern sporting events *A Knight's Tale* efficiently communicates the social importance of jousting within its representation of the medieval period, in such a way that a modern audience could be able to relate the film to their own experiences of these kind of large social events.

Similarly, as Haydock notes, both Chaucer's text and Helgeland's film treat the act of public spectacle as the 'supreme expression of civilisation' (Haydock, 2008:101). Overall, *A Knight's Tale* serves as a prime example of the usefulness of diverging from fidelity towards alternative means of representing history. The film creates an alternative vision of the past while also, if we refer back to Patterson's analysis, presenting a useful reading of history (Patterson, 2011). By depicting jousting and other aspects of medieval life as analogous to modern culture *A Knight's Tale* allows the audience to potentially re-evaluate both how they view the medieval period, and how the medieval period can be related to today. It therefore serves as a prime example of what Marnie Hughes-Warrington believes to be common amongst all forms of historical film, namely that they all consist of a combination of elements that serve to 'convince viewers of the verisimilitude of a represented past, with those that clearly signal its artifice' (Hughes-Warrington, 2007:74).

This approach to the adaptation of history reveals that *A Knight's Tale* has discovered its own way of 'doing history,' a phrase which Rosenstone clarifies by claiming that '*if by the phrase 'doing history' we mean, rather than engaging in that traditional discourse (which films clearly cannot do), seriously attempting to make meaning of the past*' (Rosenstone, 2018:33, emphasis in original). Rosenstone argues that historical film should instead be understood through a different set of criteria which takes advantage of the various elements

that make up film, rather than relying on a strict fidelity to the various ways in which history has been understood by historians.

The question of fidelity remains important within historical adaptation, particularly as a basis for the early stages of the adaptation process. However, there is a danger in overestimating its importance, particularly as historical adaptation is a particularly fluid form of adaptation, meaning that it is necessary for a great number of inventions to be made as part of the adaptation process. Perhaps, within historical adaptation, the question would benefit from being shifted away from fidelity and reconfigured towards a wider variety of influences, for example by considering the role of memory (particularly within instances of recent history), and of an audience's perception of the historical events in question. This issue of responding to what an audience perceives to be an authentic interpretation of the past will be analysed further in Chapter Five.

#### Cartmell and Whelehan (2010) on audience responses to fidelity

These issues raise the question of authorial freedom over fidelity. If the discipline of history is itself, as Sanders terms it, a 'history of textualities' (Sanders, 2006:146), then to what extent can an adaptation be analysed with regard to the issue of fidelity to the original source? It is useful to consider this issue in relation to Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan's analysis of the role of fidelity within adaptation, specifically the problems that can occur when an adaptation is seen as overly faithful to the original text. They argue that:

Any film which prioritises transposition over interpretation is unlikely to recognise the pitfalls of aiming to bring the novel ‘to life’ and will, moreover, spectacularly fail by freezing all the action and events in an impossible simulacrum of the past made present (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010:83).

Essentially, the moment an adaptation is solely focused on re-creating what is presented in the ‘original’ source, then that adaptation is going to be seen as a pale copy of the original. While this claim contains within it a number of valid points, particularly in its implication that an overly faithful adaptation of a text can overlook the potential benefits that an adaptation from literature into visual media may offer, it still raises some issues of concern, namely the issues that can arise whenever adaptors take an overly interpretive viewpoint within their adaptation. In those situations the adaptors open themselves up to criticism, particularly from ‘purists,’ who criticise the changes made to the narrative. In their analysis, Cartmell and Whelehan highlight the perceived failures of *Harry Potter and The Philosopher’s Stone* (Columbus, 2001) as an adaptation, with the conclusion that ‘in short, it was a film that tried too hard to be the book’ (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010:73). Cartmell and Whelehan provide evidence from critics as well as excerpts from commentators on the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDB) in order to support this viewpoint. However, a different problem arises in regard to the popular view of another film from the same series: *Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban* (Cuaron, 2004). This film received a very popular critical response, indeed the online critic aggregator *Rotten Tomatoes* records that on average 90% of film critics, that they link to on their website, gave the film a positive review (*Rotten Tomatoes*, 2018). However, the film is also criticised by a number of fans of the

book for straying too far from the original source. Analysing the submitted reviews on the IMDB, while the consensus appears to be generally positive, there are still 164 reviews that gave the film less than five out of ten, out of a total of 1,517 reviews (numbers correct as of 03/11/2018), with the majority of reasons given listing the changes from the book as a source of their disapproval. Examples of this negative response to the film's alterations are reflected in some of the commentators' review titles which include: *Butchered* (review dated 8/6/04), *The Worst Book to Movie Adaptation I Have Ever Seen* (review dated 5/1/05), and *Alfonso Cuaron should be sacked for his slaughtering of HP&PoA* (review dated 5/5/05) (IMDB, 2018b). Many of these criticisms are focused on the changes made to the narrative or even total removal of popular sub-plots. For example, in the review entitled '*Butchered*' there is a claim that 'the first two movies followed the book great [sic], it was like reading every other page. This movie was like a friend reading the third book and then a year later trying to tell you what happened' (IMDB, 2018b). Even some otherwise positive reviews raise the book's lack of fidelity as a point against it, including an eight out of ten review that is titled *Wasn't able to capture the book's power, but technically remarkable Potter film* (review dated 25/12/15) (IMDB, 2018b). While this viewpoint may be a minority one, it still bears consideration. When adapting a text, even a historical one, it is possible to make too many changes that detract from what is commonly referred to as 'the spirit' of the source and in doing so there is a risk of alienating a section of the adaptation's inbuilt audience.

That is not to say that when adapting from one source into another the people making the adaptation need to focus on re-presenting the contents of the book. Following Cartmell and Whelehan's central argument, in doing so they would not only be restricting their adaptation to a very narrow viewpoint, but would also be failing to apply the adaptation to

the conventions of the new media. Essentially, adaptors who focus on re-presenting the contents of a book as closely as possible, are ‘prioritising transposition over interpretation’ (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010:73). This does not mean that a film or television adaptation has to steer completely away from the original text (although that is not necessarily a negative thing), but that an adaptation can instead work towards adding to it, in order to take advantage of the text’s new form.

This feature occurs within the adaptation of the television series *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019) which was adapted from the book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 1996a, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2011). One of the principal narrative features of the novels is that a number of characters tell the story from their particular point-of-view. This narrative device allows for varying interpretations of the numerous characters to be observed by the reader over the course of the books; for all of the Stark-narrated chapters in the first two books speak negatively of Jamie Lannister, as the Starks are broadly opposed to him. However, the Tyrion Lannister chapters contradict this interpretation, as Jamie is described as the only person who was kind to him when he was growing up. While this is an effective narrative device in the novels, having a variety of narrators describing the events on-screen from their own perspective, could be difficult to integrate directly into a television series, without disrupting the flow of the narrative. Instead, the television series moves its focus between the various factions and characters, and completely rejects the individualised viewpoints of the books. This has the advantage that when adapting the novels, the screenwriters are able to add sequences focusing on individuals whose perspectives were not the focus of individual chapters in the novels, in order to further develop them and to explore their relationships with each other.



Changing ideas in adaptation studies are similarly commented on by the film theorist and screenwriter Eric Williams when, as part of an argument that adaptation is as creative as any other screenwriting process, he claims that ‘adaptation is the process of reimagining ideas from one medium into the language of another. Adaptation is not transcription’ (Williams, 2018:3). This idea is particularly significant for this thesis, as the total rejection of adaptation as transcription is necessary for the development of thematic resonance in historical fiction. This is due to the fact that if historical adaptation were restricted only to transcription, then the only thematic resonance that could be generated would be created by the audience, rather than being a conscious creation by the adaptors.

Within historical adaptation it is of vital importance that the process remains flexible. The adaptors need to ensure that the historical adaptation is not overly concerned with representing the past in as accurate a form as possible; instead, they need to be concerned with how their representation of the past both promotes a further understanding of the historical events depicted and creates a sense of resonance with the present. In other words, the adaptors could be working along the same lines as Van Riper in his argument that the past and present should be used to illuminate each other (Van Riper, 2013:112). Similarly, flexibility must remain important within adaptation as both the audience and the adaptors could potentially benefit from being aware of the conventions of the medium into which the text is being adapted. In this respect it is beneficial to consider Cartmell and Whelehan’s argument that there should not be a prioritisation of transposition within the adaptation (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010:73), especially as this has the advantage of utilising the strengths and possibilities that the movement from textual media to visual media presents.

### The importance of flexibility within adaptation

In defining medievalism in cinema, Bettina Bildhauer makes the observation that ‘many academics have tended to judge medieval films on the basis of whether they are accurate or not’ (Bildhauer, 2016:49). Bildhauer goes on to explain that other academics:

Predominantly literary and cultural historians drawing on the sophisticated self-reflexive discipline of historiography, have spent many pages and pixels pointing out that what current historians think they know about the medieval past is not necessarily accurate or agreed upon anyway, and that film-makers can only do so much to attempt to include the latest research (Bildhauer, 2016:49).

This raises a central point of concern in historical adaptation: To what extent is it necessary for the people creating the adaptation to follow the accepted version of history? And when would it be suitable for them to diverge from that history? If what sections of the audience possibly believe about the medieval past is not completely accurate, especially because, as previously stated, history itself is a place ‘where meaning is circulated, agreed or contested’ (Hughes-Warrington, 2007:55), then it could open up possibilities for historical adaptation. Instead of focusing on what is purely ‘accurate,’ the adaptors have the freedom to provide alternative depictions of medieval life and consequently have more

opportunity to draw upon resonances with the present, while also creating alternative ways of understanding the past.

Essentially, this analysis is working along similar lines to Van Riper's observation that:

Our adaptations of past events, whether into historical narrative or history-based drama, are origin myths for the present that we inhabit. They are designed to tell what was, but also to make sense of what is: to lend meaning to the world we see around us (Van Riper, 2013: 98).

By this Van Riper means that the decisions made during the process of adapting any historical event, while ostensibly focused on presenting the historical period in question, are also fundamentally a reflection of the time in which the adaptation has been created. The use of the words 'origin myths' in Van Riper's analysis also points to an intention in adaptation to show how events depicted within these historical adaptations have led to the present. Van Riper then illustrates this point, through an analysis of six different adaptations of the events surrounding the creation of the atomic bomb, each of which takes a different ideological viewpoint depending on the filmmakers' and the general public's perception of nuclear weapons at the time the film or television programme was created. These range from a post-war parable of scientific endeavour, to a cold-war cautionary tale, ending with a docudrama focused on the sense of 'distance' afforded by the film's production in the mid-

1990s, a time after the Cold War, and when the threat of nuclear warfare was perceived as more distant.

In this respect, Van Riper's argument is an implicit rejection of any stance that takes the view that a film adaptation of a specific time period has to be wholly concerned with that particular time period. Instead, the audience and the filmmakers must be made aware of the fact that elements of the political and social culture of the adapting period will be included within a historical adaptation, and that this can work to the benefit of the finished text.

#### Potential benefits of altering generally-accepted history to create resonance

As part of his analysis into historical film, Robert Rosenstone makes the claim that filmed interpretations of history function as pieces of historying, i.e., a mode of thinking that takes elements of the past in order to turn them into a coherent and meaningful narrative (Rosenstone: 2018). By extension, filmmakers working within history are historians. However, that does not mean that filmmakers can be historians in the same way as historical writers. Rosenstone clarifies this position in *History on Film/Film on History*, where he claims that 'of necessity *the rules of engagement of their works with the stuff of the past are and must be different from those that govern written history*' (Rosenstone: 2018:7, emphasis in original). These different rules of engagement can be used to create a historical film which functions as part of the 'realm of representation or discourse, one not meant to provide literal truths about the past (as if our written history can provide literal truths) but metaphoric truths' (Rosenstone, 2018:7). Rosenstone makes a number of intriguing points in this

argument, although this then raises the question of what exactly are these ‘rules of engagement’? How can they be used to create these metaphoric truths that help to generate new interpretations of the past? And, how can the past be related to the present?



*Figure 2.1: The Gay Rights group OutRage! in Edward II (Jarman,1991).*

One of the clearest ways in which a film or television programme maker can deviate from the ‘rules of engagement’ that govern how written historians approach history, is in the various ways in which historical adaptors can filter certain themes and ideas that may or may not be present in the original sources. This filtering of themes and ideas functions so that an audience, (or even just a small section of that audience), can find elements of resonance within it: resonance that may not necessarily have been present in the original sources. This can happen in a variety of different ways. It can be a complete cultural shift in attitudes, as Van Riper (2013) identifies in his analysis of a various adaptations of the same event; however, that same principle can be expanded still further. These principles can be

used to take an aspect of the time period and re-focus its disparate elements onto a central theme; this theme may not be of overall importance to a wide audience, but it is of great importance to the people making the adaptation. An example of this occurs in *Edward II* (Jarman, 1991), when Derek Jarman expands upon the homosexual themes within Christopher Marlowe's play, and places them at the centre of his adaptation, even to the extent of casting members of the Gay Rights group *OutRage!* as members of Edward II's army (figure 2.1).

Similarly, creating resonance within historical adaptation can also be used on a smaller-scale, but one which remains an important element of the text; resonance can take a minor element of life during a historical period and alter it so that the meaning can be communicated to audiences more efficiently. For example, resonance can be created through the use of swearing in *Deadwood* (HBO, 2004-2006). *Deadwood* is a series which uses a high number of sexual swear words, which may not have been wholly 'faithful' to the time period, as Jesse Sheidlower observes: 'the evidence that we have is that they were using more religious blasphemy than the sexual insults which are popular today' (Sheidlower: 2004).

While a modern audience might know that blaspheming would have been seen as more shocking in the highly religious society depicted, the blaspheming might not necessarily be seen as such by the entirety of the audience. This may also lead to sections of the audience being confused as to why the characters were swearing with such regularity, and why it was provoking such a strong response from other characters within the series. If some sections of the audience were confused and unperturbed by the swearing then it would

have the effect of limiting *Deadwood*'s attempt to, as Jerome De Groot argues, undermine and challenge the previously sanitised versions of the American West (De Groot 2016:236). Therefore, if the series is attempting to undermine the 'previously sanitised' western, then it necessitates the deployment of swearing. In *Deadwood*, changing the focus of swearing from religious to sexual allows the programme makers to communicate the swearing's purposes more clearly to the audience than if the filmmakers had chosen to keep the swear words within their original context.

#### Re-presentation of individuals in historical adaptations

The next issue that this chapter addresses is the representation of specific historical figures. If sections of the audience has prior knowledge and access to alternative sources of information for the character that has been adapted, it would allow the adaptors greater freedom in how to present that person on the screen and would avoid the issues that were discussed in Chapter One around the portrayal of Henry Hook in *Zulu* (Endfield, 1964). In essence, it would make the adaptors less responsible for providing the audience with knowledge about the individual in question, and consequently would ensure greater freedom for the people making the adaptation by allowing them to focus on their own interpretation. For example, in the film *The King's Speech* (Hooper, 2010), Winston Churchill (Timothy Spall) is portrayed as one of the main figures behind the abdication of Edward VII (Guy Pierce), when actually Winston Churchill publicly supported Edward VII throughout the entire event (Chotiner, 2015). However, Winston Churchill and Edward VII are such well-known figures, and the events in question have been so well-documented, that there is a high

level of public knowledge. *The King's Speech* is generally not the sole source of people's knowledge of events surrounding Edward VII's abdication. This allows the adaptors greater freedom to re-present the characters in whichever way they feel would be beneficial to the adaptation, a freedom which the filmmakers of *Zulu* had more issues with due to their decision to re-present the lives of the less well-known people at the Battle of Rorke's Drift. This issue can even be applied to a small exchange in the musical *Hamilton* (Miranda, 2015). During an argument between the well-known George Washington (Christopher Jackson) and the less famous Alexander Hamilton (Lin-Manuel Miranda) over other people's slanders on Washington's reputation, the two share the following exchange.

Hamilton: Charles Lee, Thomas Conway, these men take your name and they rake it through the mud.

Washington: My name's been through a lot, I can take it.

Hamilton: Well, I don't have your name. I don't have your titles. I don't have your land. (Miranda and McCarter, 2016:104).

During the production process of the play Lin-Manuel Miranda was aware that Alexander Hamilton was the least well known of the American Founding Fathers; indeed, Ron Chernow, the historian whose book helped to inspire the musical, claims in an interview with Elinor Evans that:



When I started doing the book, most Americans – including I think Lin-Manuel Miranda [the writer of the musical] – knew two things about Alexander Hamilton: he is on the \$10 bill in the United States; and he had died in a duel with the vice president at the time, Aaron Burr. But that pretty much exhausted what most people knew (Chernow, 2018).

Therefore, that exchange between the two characters appears to be reflective of Hamilton's lesser known status, and while Miranda can negatively alter Washington's depiction, because Washington's name 'can take it,' that is not a freedom that Miranda has when creating his depiction of Hamilton.

#### Sanders and Van Riper on a more fluid system of adaptation

In his analysis of historical adaptation, Van Riper (2013) also argues for a loosening up of the definition of adaptation as simply a case of one source forming the basis for one adaptation. Instead, Van Riper argues for extending the definition of an adaptation to include any film or television programme that is based on a specific historical event, in Van Riper's case The Manhattan Project. By analysing how this event is viewed from different time periods, Van Riper presents a broader definition of adaptation, one which allows for further analysis into the relationship between a historical film, the time it depicts, and the specific time in which it is made.

This more fluid system of adaptation advocated by Van Riper is supported by Julie Sanders as part of her overall analysis of appropriation from historical sources into historical fiction, and the various motives that an author may have for appropriating these sources. As part of her analysis Sanders presents the example of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), a play that was ostensibly about the witch hunts conducted in 1692 but was also designed to draw a comparison with contemporaneous 'witch hunts' against people who were perceived to be Communists in 1950s America. Her analysis concludes with the claim that the discipline of history 'is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). This positions Sanders' argument in line with Van Riper's in that it presents historical adaptation as a tool that is used for reflecting the culture that is creating the adaptation as much as the culture depicted within the adaptation.

In essence, both Sanders and Van Riper place the focus of the adaptation away from its historical context and bring it into the contemporary period. While this is a valid route of analysis, it does raise the issue that if this is the primary concern of the people making an adaptation then why does the adaptation need to be historical at all? If the adaptors of any of Van Riper's case studies were focused solely on reflecting modern day concerns, then why not simply set the text in the present day? This would ensure that they would avoid potential criticisms that they are misrepresenting historical events in order to suit their own purposes. Therefore, when analysing a historical adaptation, while it is important that an understanding is demonstrated of how the present is reflected within the depiction of the past, it must also be understood that the film's base elements are still historical. While the film's representation of the past may lead to further understanding of the present it can also

lead to an audience gaining further understanding of the past, essentially affirming Van Riper's point that the past and the present should illuminate each other (Van Riper, 2013).

### The role of iconography in historical adaptation

In his analysis of how genre operates in Hollywood Cinema, Richard Maltby observes that the role of iconography is to:

provide a shorthand system, enabling a knowledgeable viewer to glean a great deal of information about the characters and the situation simply from the way the characters are dressed, the tools they use, and the settings in which the action takes place, and this level of meaning provides viewers with another means of gaining pleasure from a movie (Maltby, 2003:86).

Maltby's analysis of iconography in the film genre raises interesting possibilities for historical adaptation. If historical adaptation is viewed not just through the lens of adaptation studies, but also through the lens of genre studies, iconography could be useful as a tool for ensuring easy audience acclimatisation to the 'world' of the film. If, for example, a film set during the medieval period is treated as a part of the specific genre of the medieval film, then the various aspects of iconography act as a visual shorthand which the audience could use 'to glean information' (Maltby, 2003:86) quickly and efficiently. Take, for example, the role of the crossbow which, as Peter Burkholder (2015) notes, not only functions as a signifier of time (late-medieval period) and place (Europe), but also generally signifies evil

and viciousness in its users. A consequence of this is that the crossbow is more often presented in contrast to the weapons of the more heroic protagonists, who if they use a bow are generally depicted using some form of longbow. Heroic protagonists' identification with the longbow is due to its focus on manual exertion (physically pulling back the bowstring), allowing the heroes to demonstrate their superior physical ability which is then contrasted with the stored mechanical energy of the crossbow (Burkholder, 2015:25).

However, the possible usefulness of using generic iconography as a way of triggering associations for the audience goes much further than that, as Sturtevant observes as part of his previously mentioned analysis on the position of the Middle Ages in the popular imagination. During his research Sturtevant, asked his groups the question 'was there anything about [the film] that was particularly medieval' (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 1306)? The most common responses to that question were focused on the iconographic elements of the text, rather than on the text's depiction of historical figures or historical events. This leads Sturtevant to declare: 'it seems possible that if a film were to include some of these elements, some viewers would consider it medieval no matter what other anachronisms it had' (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 1306). If iconographic conventions are clearly established it opens up a space for appropriating these items of iconography and taking them from actual depictions of the medieval world in order to situate them in alternative fictions that utilise the medieval in order to create a historical aesthetic. In these instances, the iconography can allow the audience to be more easily situated into the 'world' of the text, with these previously established and generally understood signifiers helping them to begin the process of gleaning information about the characters and the situations. This can then allow the authors of the

text to spend more time exploring their version of the past and the contexts of the iconography therein, and less time explaining the significance of each individual item.

### The role of memory and authenticity in historical adaptation

When analysing the role of memory within historical adaptation it is important to consider that memory is not solely focused on personal memories of the recent past, but also refers to the audience's potential perceptions and beliefs around the historic past. These potential perceptions are implied in Vincent Ferré's definition of memory as being 'the faculty to preserve and evoke representations of past and absent things – facts or states of mind – and bring them to the present' (Ferré, 2014:133). Within historical adaptation memory refers to whatever an audience brings with them to the film or television programme, and how they process what they observe in the text. Texts that are set in the distant past present a form of memory that is gained through the audience's perception and taken from a range of different sources, therefore, the depiction needs to feel authentic to the audience. This is not to say that the adaptation necessarily needs to be authentic, just that the audience can identify some form of authenticity.

Such questions surrounding memory and authenticity are considered by Sarah Salih as part of an analysis into how the role of memory can be defined in relation to medieval cinema. Ultimately, Salih claims that it 'continually reshapes the past to answer the shifting question put to it by the present' (Salih, 2011:20). Because 'none of us knows what the Middle Ages looked like,' Salih writes, 'our perceptions of authenticity relate, both

positively and negatively, to representations of the period with which we are already familiar' (Salih, 2011: 21).

While there is value to this argument, particularly within Salih's central analysis of the use of contemporary medieval artworks in medieval film, there is still a problem regarding the implicit assumption that an audience's memory of the past constantly shifts with how that past is depicted within wider culture. If there were to be two adaptations that took radically different interpretations of the same event, which of these could an audience consider to be the more authentic? While the answer might appear to be whichever one the audience saw first, this leads to the necessity of positioning authenticity as a radically fluid state, with different sections of the audience having differing views on what they consider to be authentic following on from that. As Jerome de Groot argues, it is also possible that the concept of authenticity in historical drama is 'conferred either through cultural hegemony or – increasingly – within the *mise-en-scène* of the form' (De Groot, 2016:223). Therefore, it might be prudent to consider that while the role of memory is fluid and constantly reshaping our perception of the past, it would be beneficial for adaptors to work from a solid basis of known items or other pieces of information (Salih, 2011:22), that Salih analyses within her discussion.

While this is something that adaptors need to be aware of when constructing a historical adaptation, it does not change the fact that there are many insightful points within Salih's central argument. If the focus of authenticity was indeed shifted towards a more fluid role of memory, i.e., the personal knowledge of the filmmakers and the audience, with the understanding that this is a looser form of authenticity, then it would allow a greater freedom

for adaptors, granting them the option of pursuing alternative routes of film adaptation. Allowing the focus to shift towards the appearance of authenticity permits filmmakers to be more liberal with their additions, as long as they remain effective in creating the appearance of the historical period they are adapting. Similarly, the deliberate placing of possible historical inaccuracies could benefit the text as long as they appear to the audience as consistent parts of the film or television programme that the people making the historical adaptation have created. For example, in the film *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005), there is a commitment to creating as close a visual depiction of life in the Crusader states as possible, in order to make the film appear more authentic. However, within the narrative there are several significant additions and changes to the personalities and lives of the real people involved, in order to make them characters for the film. These changes were done so thoroughly that the end result did not accurately reflect their real-life personalities, at least as far as those personalities can be ascertained. Instead, these changes allow them to function as characters whose views and actions are designed to resonate with the audience, in order to draw strong links with the current state of affairs in the Middle East.

Similarly, as Richard Butt observes, within adaptation theory there are a number of problematic concerns surrounding the addition of historical detail to authenticate a text's vision of the past (Butt, 2014). Butt draws attention to the tendency in serialised historical dramas to utilise detail as a way of creating a 'nostalgic gaze' which can be used to help create a simplified nostalgic form of cultural heritage (Butt, 2014). This tendency is considered in this thesis in relation to the issues surrounding verisimilitude which are discussed later in this chapter. Creating a seemingly authentic interpretation of the past may allow an audience to more readily accept a historical adaptation, but this needs to be done

carefully, so as not to create an overly nostalgic interpretation of the past which could then prevent the adaptation from creating, to refer back to Patterson's analysis (2011), a particularly useful or interesting interpretation of the historical events which are depicted in the text.

There is however, a particular aspect of the use of invention within the context of historical film and television that Thomas Leitch, for example, criticises in his analysis of the use of the term 'based on a true story,' in film. A major part of his analysis is the claim that:

The point of claiming that a film is based on a true story is not to establish truth, or fidelity to the truth as a predicate of the discourse but to use the category of the true story as a master text that justifies the film's claims to certain kinds of authority ideally by placing them beyond question (Leitch, 2007:286).

Leitch claims that the use of this phrase in film is always a strategic choice which is made in order to prevent criticisms of perceived narrative problems. Leitch provides the example of the abrupt and sudden mood change at the end of *Dog Day Afternoon* (Lumet, 1975) which is covered by the film's tagline declaration of 'And it's all true' (figure 2.2). Leitch argues that in this case the film is essentially saying 'don't blame us. We didn't make this up' (Leitch, 2007:286). This is a view that presents significant issues despite the fact that this tagline may allow the filmmakers to justify the film's content by claiming that it actually happened. It is difficult to believe that its existence successfully acts as a form of



narrative cover by the filmmakers to protect them from criticisms from sections of the audience for any perceived problems that there may be within the film's structure.

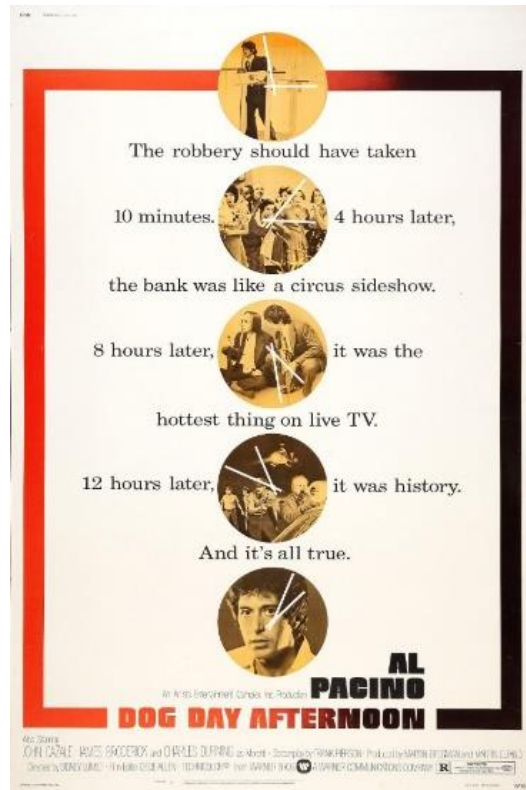


Figure 2.2: Poster of Dog Day Afternoon

In a different section of his analysis, however, Leitch does raise a number of intriguing points about how the tagline can be used to support certain revisionist aspects within the text, particularly in the example Leitch provides of *Goodfellas* (Scorsese, 1990). *Goodfellas* is a film which, despite being based on the non-fiction book *Wiseguy: Life in a Mafia Family* (Pileggi, 1986), also feels the need to use the ‘based on a true story’ tagline. Leitch argues that it did this in order to add further credence to its claim that it is a revision of the gangster genre and to strengthen its contrast with the romanticism of *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), which was based on a fictional novel. The tagline claims that this is how the mafia *really are*, and in this instance functions as an effective statement of intent by the

filmmakers. It also assists in the overall presentation of the themes and ideas which the film presents. Perhaps the most succinct argument relating to the issue of 'based on a true story' is put forward by Linda Hutcheon when she writes that its seeming simplicity is a ruse and that any historical adaptation, whether it uses that phrase or not is as complex as historiography itself (Hutcheon, 2013).

### Validity in historical adaptation

When analysing the adaptation of history into film and television, a key question that needs to be addressed is whether basing a film or television programme on historical sources counts as a form of adaptation. While there is no debate that more traditional forms of adaptation qualify for this title, for example, book to film, the question gets a little more controversial when discussing the adaptation of historical events. Some theorists argue that historical films do not meet the criteria for the category of adaptation. Sarah Cardwell reflects on this in her book *Adaptation Revisited* (Cardwell, 2002), in which the validity of historical drama as adaptation is addressed. Cardwell presents an example of the film *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998), and after analysing its various historical inaccuracies and inventions declares that:

The film uses history as a basis, as a starting point, but the unknowledgeable viewer is unable to ascertain to what extent the drama is 'historical,' and... accurately senses that the film is more a creation of Kapur's than an adaptation of 'history' (Cardwell, 2002:16-17).

There are a number of issues with this viewpoint. As part of the central argument Cardwell draws attention to the issue of an ‘unknowledgeable viewer’ of *Elizabeth* who would not know just how much the film follows the generally accepted historical sources. However, while the ‘unknowledgeable viewer’ would not be able to differentiate which parts of the film are taken from historical sources, and which are the filmmaker’s invention, this does not mean that it should form a part of an argument which denies a text the status of adaptation. The same person who watches an adaptation from a piece of literature, without any prior knowledge of the book would similarly be unable to distinguish between what parts of the adaptation are original and which are invented by the people creating the adaptation.

This problem is further heightened when a text has been adapted multiple times, as the authors of the later adaptation can be influenced or inspired by previous versions when making their own production of the original novel. For example, in the 1995 television adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC One, 1995) there is a famous scene in which Mr Darcy (Colin Firth) emerges from a lake with his shirt soaked through. This is a scene that has been referenced in subsequent adaptations, both implicitly in the more traditional adaptation *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright, 2005), as well as explicitly in the postmodern adaptation *Lost in Austen* (ITV, 2008). In *Lost in Austen* the protagonist, Amanda Price, (Jemima Rooper), lives in present day London and has been sent into the book, and at one point asks Mr Darcy (Elliot Cowan) to walk out of the lake in reference to Firth in the 1995 version. However, this scene does not exist in the original text; it comes from a previous adaptation of the book, and as such the ‘unknowledgeable viewer’ would be unable to

discern whether or not this scene is faithful to the original text. Therefore, if a viewer of the later versions of *Pride and Prejudice* who has not read the book, would be unable to ascertain which parts of the texts were based on Austen's novel and which parts were the invention of people adapting the book, there is no reason why the 'unknowledgeable viewers' status should factor into whether or not something can be considered to be an adaptation. An 'unknowledgeable viewer' of *Elizabeth* would be unable to differentiate between the historical facts and the fictional elements within the film, and just as with *Pride and Prejudice* that does not necessarily prevent the film from being considered an adaptation.

When focusing on the adaptors' inventions and deviations from history, Cardwell argues that no indication is given, in *Elizabeth*, as to which sources the filmmakers used in the construction of the film, thus resulting in dialogue that was invented and expressed in a modern form. *Elizabeth* emphasises Elizabeth I's emotional state and the relationships surrounding her, with Cardwell arguing that:

The film leaves one feeling that one knows and understands much more about the people on whom it is based than the historical and political events that occur between and around them (Cardwell, 2002:16-17).

While it is certainly valid to view the film as being more concerned with the personal life of Elizabeth I, rather than the political, social, and cultural changes of Elizabethan England, this argument raises a number of issues. This is particularly the case with the view that the dialogue was invented and expressed in a modern form. To deny the film the status of adaptation on the basis of invented language would lead to an almost wholesale rejection

of a wide variety of forms of literary adaptation, since this is something which occurs in many examples of adaptation from literature. There have been many adaptations of the work of popular writers where the dialogue has been invented, particularly if the adaptation has changed the story into a new culture, or time period. Examples where the adaptation has altered the culture of the source include Akira Kurosawa's reinterpretations of William Shakespeare's plays for his films *Ran* (Kurosawa, 1985), which relocates *King Lear* (Shakespeare, 1605-1606) to sixteenth-century Japan, and *Throne of Blood* (Kurosawa, 1957), a film based on *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, circa 1606) and which Peter Grilli claims 'attracted the admiration even of Shakespearean purists and is considered one of the most successful film adaptations of Shakespeare' (Grilli, 2008:126), despite not including any of Shakespeare's original dialogue. These types of invention even occur within a number of literary adaptations from Hollywood, including the adaptation of Pierre Choderlos De Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782) into *Cruel Intentions* (Kumble, 1999), which relocates the original story from late-eighteenth century France into a modern American upper-class boarding school. Such works have made fundamental changes to the context, meaning and even dialogue of the original sources in the process of adaptation, yet these pieces would still be unproblematically categorised as adaptations by the filmmakers themselves, and by the general audience.

The existence of these forms of adaptation also counterweighs Cardwell's argument that since *Elizabeth* uses 'history as a basis, as a starting point' it is a reason to remove the film, and by extension all historical films, from the status of adaptation. If the example is taken of the Hollywood adaptations of Shakespeare's plays which relocate them into American High Schools, namely the films *10 Things I Hate About You*, (Junger, 1999), *O*

(Blake Nelson, 2001), and *She's the Man* (Fickman, 2006), then we can see that the filmmakers present these films to the audience as adaptations of Shakespeare's plays *The Taming of The Shrew* (Shakespeare, circa 1592b), *Othello* (Shakespeare, circa 1603), and *Twelfth Night* (Shakespeare, circa 1601-1602) respectively. This is despite each of them using entirely new characters, setting, dialogue, and in some cases even whole plots. It could be argued that some of these adaptations change the source material so completely that they could be seen by someone with some knowledge of the original play, but no knowledge of the film's status as an adaptation and they would not recognise the film to be an adaptation.

This is particularly true in the case of *She's the Man* where the most obvious surviving elements of the original play appear to be: the character Viola (who in the film is renamed Olivia) dressing up as her brother Sebastian, her falling in love with the local prince (in this film the captain of the football team), and one short speech from the play (which is spoken in a completely different context). These many changes do not prevent the film from being considered an adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, even though the process of adaptation allows it to significantly deviate from the original text to such a great extent that its form of adaptation is a particularly loose one.

It can be argued that since a clear source for these adaptations is identified, then these texts are more easily granted the status of adaptation, and that this clears up any possible confusion and allows for an easy frame of reference for the audience to judge the success of the adaptation. This criterion can also be extended to include specific historical adaptations which clearly state a singular source. For example, when *Team of Rivals* (Goodwin, 2005) was credited as the source for *Lincoln* (Spielberg, 2012), it gave the audience a specific reference point, and those who had read the book would have been able to judge the

effectiveness of the adaptation. However, crediting a singular source is still not generally the case for films which have been adapted from historical events. This might mean that historical adaptations which do not claim a singular source are a looser form of adaptation than the more standard cases of one text being regarded as the primary referent.

Developing this idea further, there is an argument that even a particularly loose form of adaptation can still be considered useful within the wider discourse of adaptation studies. This refers back to the ideas of changing a historical adaptation in order to reflect modern cultural concerns. Laurie E. Osborne comments, as part of her analysis into adaptations which function as modern reconstructions of an original source, that:

Specifically, by bringing Early Modern dramatic and social expectations together with contemporary cinematic and social expectations, teen Shakespearean *Twelfth Nights* foreground the evolving, as well as recurrent, operations of social status and gender expectations (Osborne, 2008:11).

Thus, if a film is considered to be a loose adaptation of the original text, then it allows the film or programme makers to make their desired changes in order for the adaptation to reflect their different beliefs, ideas, and the changes in the general culture that have occurred since the source was written. This is particularly clear in the case of *10 Things I Hate About You*, which reflects the changes in gender roles with regard to the role of women since Shakespeare's day. Where the original plot of *The Taming of The Shrew* deals with forcibly changing an individual who the play depicts as a rebellious and undesirable woman, Katherina (Kate) Minola, into one who would be considered more acceptable by society

during Shakespeare's time. *10 Things I Hate About You* chooses to remove this element, while keeping a less intense form of the play's character development in the portrayal Katarina (Kat) Stratford (Julia Stiles), in order to create a more typical modern-day romantic comedy.

In the creation of these Shakespearean adaptations which move the setting to an American high school, the filmmakers take liberties and create fabrications from an original text as a natural part of the adaptation process. While these films make fundamental changes to character, dialogue, and plot, this does not mean that these films are no longer regarded as adaptations. This is a point which can then be extended to the analysis of historical films; the fact that a filmmaker takes liberties with the accepted version of historical events does not mean that the film should be discounted from being an adaptation of the historical events in question. Rather, it can be treated as an adaptation which is not primarily concerned with depicting the generally accepted historical sources, even when it is only using history as a basis and as a starting point.

Ultimately, this comes down to an argument as to whether or not the existence of a high number of inventions precludes a film or television programme from the status of historical adaptation. Any adaptation makes changes to the source material in order to present its particular version of events, and any unknowledgeable viewer would have difficulties ascertaining what those changes are. It could therefore be argued that even though a film such as *Elizabeth* takes liberties with the historical sources, it still remains an adaptation. It still uses as its source the events, people, and places of the Elizabethan period, and no matter how much the filmmakers have deviated from the original sources during the



making of that film they are still adapting their knowledge of the historical events in order to tell their particular story.

### The primary referent in historical adaptation

Another issue that emerges from Cardwell's analysis concerns the use of the term 'primary referent' in adaptation and Cardwell's assertion that, even if a historical film has taken as its basis a single historical text, it would still be perceived as:

Being a historical drama not an adaptation; despite the use of a singular written source text, the film's primary referent would be perceived as being history itself, and not the history book which so inspired the filmmaker (Cardwell, 2002:17).

This is a view that raises a number of issues particularly when considering that in recent years a number of films have been adapted from non-fiction books. These films make it very clear that their production is an adaptation of the historical events that were presented in these books. For example, in the films *The Social Network* (Fincher, 2010), *127 Hours* (Boyle, 2010), and *Lincoln* (Spielberg, 2012) the author of each original book is credited as the primary referent, and the scripts that were written from that book were considered to be adapted screenplays. When all three were nominated for Academy Awards, the screenplays were designated under *Best Adapted Screenplay*, rather than *Best Original Screenplay* (IMDB, 2018a, IMDB 2018c, and IMDB, 2018d). This is further reflected in the fact that

all three of the examples cited were nominated for Academy Awards under that designation. Similarly, the films' status as adaptations was referenced by a number of critics in their reviews of those films. The issue of *Sight and Sound* magazine that reviewed *Lincoln*, for example, referenced the original book in its second line (Pinkerton, 2013). Similarly, the *Rolling Stone* review noted that the movie 'adapt[ed] just a small part of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*, the 2005 bestseller about Lincoln and his Cabinet...' (Travers, 2012). This line not only reveals an awareness that the film is an adaptation, but implicitly reveals an understanding that a text taken from a non-fiction book can be considered to be an adaptation. By referring to the original texts these critics were deliberately citing the books as, what Cardwell terms, the film's primary referents, as well as implying that while the films are historical dramatisations of the events, this does not mean that a historical dramatisation must be denied the status of adaptation.

If both film critics and awarding bodies are treating these films as historical adaptations, then this also raises issues with another section of Cardwell's argument. Cardwell states that even though films such as these are adapted from single written source texts they are perceived as 'historical drama not an adaptation' (2002:17). However, in the production of *Lincoln*, there was a clear intent on the part of the filmmakers to adapt the book as part of the production process. Doris Kearns Goodwin, the author of *Team of Rivals*, has claimed that she was kept aware of how they were adapting her book throughout pre-production even to the extent of being shown several early drafts of the script and of helping Daniel Day-Lewis with his own research on how to play Abraham Lincoln (Spanberg, 2013). By working closely with the author of the original source during the production of the film, the filmmakers ensured that the finished film serves as an adaptation of *Team of*

*Rivals* and deliberately used the author's work as the 'primary referent' in the production of the film and as a fundamental part of their filmmaking process.

During the production of *Lincoln* the filmmakers were not only adapting the book but were also adapting the historical events that were the film's focus. The filmmakers utilised elements from outside the 'primary referent' of the book in order to create their historical adaptation. Essentially, when making *Lincoln* Stephen Spielberg was simultaneously adapting the book *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (Goodwin, 2005), and adapting the elements of the generally-accepted history that were not included within the book.

The problem in claiming that an adaptation has to use the original text as its primary referent, is heightened when the visual nature of film and television is taken into account. Unless the author has been very descriptive of every room and every piece of clothing, the filmmaker has to introduce visual elements that would not have been mentioned in the source material. Therefore, in order visually to represent every scene on screen the filmmakers have to adapt from other sources to find out what people of the time would have used and worn. If we take the example of *Pride and Prejudice* (Wright, 2005), if it was compared to the original novel (Austen, 1813), it would quickly become apparent that even if the adaptors wanted to keep as faithfully to the source as possible, a number of additions would still have to be introduced in order to bring the book to the screen. Jane Austen does not describe every part of every room in great detail, nor every item of clothing. This means that the people creating the adaptation need to bring in additions which are taken from outside the film's 'primary referent.' This process was reflected upon by the film's costume designer Jacqueline Durran when she said that during the process of adapting the book they

discovered that while the book was published in 1813, it was actually written in 1796; this led to them designing the film's costumes to better reflect the contemporary fashions of the late-eighteenth century (Robey, 2006), with all of their references to clothing styles coming from sources outside of the novel.

When making decisions such as these the filmmakers were not using the original novel as 'the film's primary referent,' but were using their own interpretation of history to inform their stylistic decisions. From this we can learn that even the traditional book-to-film adaptation has to look outside of its original text; it cannot take the text as its primary referent for all of the decisions that are taken. This process does not prevent the film from being seen as an adaptation, nor should this process be used to deny a film that same distinction if it is based on historical events.

However, at the heart of Cardwell's analysis is an attempt to create a distinction between the act of invention (which Cardwell argues historical film and television falls into), and the clearer forms of adaptation such as book to film. This reasoning raises several useful arguments and while, as has been analysed, there are a number of potential problems with the assertion that historical fiction should be denied the status of adaptation, this does not mean that there are not potential benefits to making this distinction.

When placing historical fiction within adaptation studies it is important that a clear process is identified wherein the text can be seen to be based on historical sources. This is not a question of whether or not the film is faithful to the source, rather it is a question of whether or not the audience can compare it with the source and the adaptors can identify and be clearly identified as using it for a specific purpose. For example, when making the films *Becket* (Glenville, 1964), and *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968), the adaptors chose which

elements of the life of Henry II would be necessary for their interpretation. It is not necessary, or even feasible within a typical film run time, for the adaptors to adapt everything, nor is it necessary to stick solely to what is known; it is just necessary for the source to be easily identifiable. In the case of those films the source is the reign of Henry II. In creating both adaptations, the adaptors have greatly altered the characters and events, and their impact on the story is heightened or lessened, in order to be applied to the adaptation that the filmmakers are attempting to make. For example, both *Becket* and *The Lion in Winter* depict the married life of Henry II (Peter O'Toole in both films) and Eleanor of Aquitaine (Pamela Brown in *Becket* and Katherine Hepburn in *The Lion in Winter*) as dysfunctional. In *Becket* this is a minor element within the film which focuses instead on the relationship between Henry II and Thomas Becket (Richard Burton), but in *The Lion in Winter*, Henry and Eleanor's marriage is placed at the forefront of the narrative. In the process of making these films the filmmakers signpost their intention to adapt and alter the reign of King Henry II in order to suit their narratives, and in doing so they place both films within the category of historical adaptation.

### The purposes and benefits of anachronisms

In a historical adaptation, it is tempting to ensure that the various elements within the film are kept concurrent with the time period depicted. However, there is an argument that the use of deliberate anachronisms can be useful in further highlighting the themes and ideas of the filmmakers, possibly even to the extent of highlighting the film's artifice, as discussed in Chapter One regarding the use of anachronisms in *Caravaggio* (Jarman, 1986).

In a model he uses in analysing the role of anachronisms within the relationship between Renaissance writers and their classical predecessors, Thomas Greene identifies five types of anachronism:

- a) Naïve anachronisms, which contain no pretence of historical accuracy.
- b) Abusive anachronisms, which are used crudely, without tact or attention to their context.
- c) Serendipitous anachronisms, which create a beneficial reading of the past, despite the presence of historical errors.
- d) Creative anachronisms, which utilise the past in order to comment on the contemporary times of the adapted artwork.
- e) Tragic anachronisms, which engage with a decline of the artwork's status in the present in relation to the past (Greene, 1986).

While this model was developed to analyse the work of Renaissance writers, Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl utilise it in their research into medieval film. Their analysis repositions the role of anachronism away from simply including present-day elements in the past, and place anachronism in the category of what they refer to as 'the re-emergence of otherwise antiquated entities from the past into the present' (Pugh and Weisl, 2013:84). Their argument is illustrated through an analysis of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam and Jones, 1975), which focuses on how the film reinterprets the original chivalric romance themes and motifs, while simultaneously using anachronisms to parody the sense of pretence that usually accompanies the filming of them. For example, in *Monty Python*

*and the Holy Grail*, a film which is set in a recognisable interpretation of a medieval society, there are a variety of clear anachronisms including a grenade called ‘The Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch,’ as well as an incursion by modern police into the narrative who in the finale arrest Arthur (Graham Chapman) and his Knights for the murder of a historian, who was recounting the events of the film as part of a documentary. Pugh and Weisl conclude their analysis by declaring that:

Anachronism, in this instance almost becomes an oxymoron, for these tropes, in their play as purposeful mistakes, enlighten the film’s very knowledgeable humour; in all its anachronism, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* may be the most accurately medieval film ever made (Pugh and Weisl, 2013:93).

The five distinctions of anachronism that Thomas Greene proposes may form a useful part of an analysis into historical adaptation (and indeed this thesis will consider the usefulness of creative anachronisms), but adaptors might benefit from being careful in how they employ anachronisms. It is perhaps easier for *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* to avoid criticism for utilising deliberate anachronisms due to the film’s clear status as a parody. Even in the case of Derek Jarman’s *Caravaggio* where anachronism is used to make a very clear point, no one watching the film would believe that Jarman had mistakenly used motorcycles and typewriters in a Renaissance Italy setting, and any argument that Jarman is trying to trick his audience into believing that these items existed in Renaissance Italy, would be difficult to maintain. In the case of more subtle forms of anachronism, however, it may be

too easy to judge them as deliberate errors on the part of the filmmakers which might possibly lead to an audience rejecting the overall historical vision within the film.

Yet just because the application of creative anachronisms creates a risk that an audience might reject a historical adaptation's interpretation of the past, that does not mean that they should be avoided, as Nickolas Haydock observes:

Contrary to what is widely supposed, mainstream movie medievalism's failures typically stem not from its infidelity to history, literature, or legend, but rather from the lack of any thorough-going commitment by directors, screenwriters, and cinematographers to provocative anachronism and compelling idiosyncrasy (Haydock, 2009a, loc 763).

An example of a film which avoids the issues described by Haydock is *Caravaggio* (Jarman, 1986) where, as previously identified, the use of 'provocative anachronisms' helps to underline the themes that Derek Jarman chose to address, while ensuring that said anachronisms are explicit. Like Jarman, future historical adaptors could benefit from creating anachronisms which are explicitly provocative or creative, allowing the viewer to query the reasons why the anachronisms are present in the text, thus potentially enriching the historical adaptation by creating new perspectives on the past. The deployment of creative anachronisms ensures that the majority of the audience do not leave the film or television programme believing that the anachronisms are what the filmmakers are claiming to have physically existed in that past, i.e., what Greene identifies as either a naïve anachronism or at worst an abusive anachronism (Greene, 1986). If adaptors are going to



use deliberate anachronisms then they need to ensure that the anachronisms are deployed creatively and with such a clear intent that the viewer could be ‘provoked’ into considering the reasons why the anachronism has been used.

### Adaptation and addition

A historical adaptation is not a direct literary adaptation, but this does not mean that it cannot use elements from contemporary literature as a source of inspiration. Adaptors can utilise various elements of a novel, by applying its representation of society and culture as a source of first-hand evidence of contemporaneous attitudes or by simply utilising the themes of the novel in an original context.

Ken Gelder comments on this aspect of adaptation theory in his analysis of the limitations of literary cinema. Gelder claims that ‘Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* (1993), poses some interesting problems in terms of the relationship between literature and cinema’ and that the criticism written about the film ‘worked to designate it as ‘literary’ even though it was not actually an adaptation’ (Gelder, 2006:157). Gelder details how the literary qualities of the film are clear to the audience, despite the film not being adapted from a book. In so doing he distinguishes *The Piano* (Campion, 1993), as a literary film, despite not being an adaptation from a single piece of literature. This creates an alternative reading of the film that raises some useful questions within the broader scope of historical adaptation, particularly with regard to *The Piano*’s literary genealogy in relation to *Wuthering Heights* (Brontë, 1847). Campion’s own statements support this interpretation as she feels that there is a ‘kinship between the kind of romance that Emily Brontë portrays in *Wuthering Heights*

and this film' (Gelder, 2006:157). Gelder highlights the similarity in the narratives of these works and in their use of location, claiming that, 'the west coast beaches around Auckland and New Plymouth.... [Are] a kind of colonial equivalent to Emily Brontë's moors' (Gelder, 2006:158).

This view that a historical film can utilise contemporaneous literary traditions as part of the film's divergence from the strict historical text, raises some important questions. Gelder's analysis allows the film a greater freedom to explore the culture and society involved without having to focus on re-creating the narrative or any of the other elements that we would normally associate with an adaptation of such a well-known novel. In this way it allows *Campion* to shift her focus to a set of particular interests and expand the themes to other areas that are not present in the novel but are important to the film's location. For example, the film's post-colonial views of the relationship between the English settlers and the Maori of New Zealand. In *The Piano*, the Maori are present in the film but are frequently placed in ambiguous poses and presented fleetingly; in a reflection of the colonisation that led to the English settlers taking the best land for farming, they are pushed to the edges of the film (Reid, 2000:112). This side-lining of the Maori works as a critique of the euro-centralism of nineteenth-century English literature and culture.

The addition of these elements to *The Piano* is a strong example of the process of adapting the literature of a specific historical time-period. By utilising the thematic elements from within the original novels, without adapting the narrative, the people making the adaptation are freed from the problem of fidelity but remain informed about the ideology and culture of the society that is a part of the novel. This can be a useful tool in the creation of a historical adaptation.

Analysing the relationship between film and history, Gelder shows that *The Piano*'s status as a literature-inspired historical adaptation allows it to sacrifice the traditional version of historical and/or literary accuracy, for the sake of the film. The film seems to occupy an unusual ground between historical adaptation, (its setting of colonial New Zealand), literary adaptation (its inspiration), and Campion's own invention (its plot and characters). In essence, the film is both historical and literary with both elements informing and reinforcing the other.

### Verisimilitude

Some of the issues surrounding verisimilitude that this thesis considers have been identified by Helen Young as part of her analysis into the online debates within fan communities regarding race in the *Dragon Age: Origins* (EA: 2009) computer game. Young believes that what these fans claim to want is a sense of verisimilitude (Young, 2013), a term which Shiloh Carroll, building on Young's research, defines as 'a feeling of authenticity but not necessarily true realism' (Carroll, 2018:16). Significantly, what Young and Carroll both identify is that this leads to sections of the audience creating an idealised form of authenticity that relies on their own pre-conceived notions of what is authentic. This reveals a central issue in the question of authenticity in historical adaptation; if sections of the audience rely too much on verisimilitude to inform their opinion of the text's approach to adapting history, then it can come at the expense of not allowing them to develop their own understanding of the medieval period, even into an understanding which may be more reflective of what recent scholarship believes the medieval period to be.

The second issue surrounding verisimilitude that this thesis considers has similarly been identified by both Young (2013) and Carroll (2018) and that is the tendency to use verisimilitude as an excuse either for failing to include a more diverse range of ethnicities in an entirely fictional setting (Young, 2013), or as a defence for including taboo subjects in the adaptors' depiction of that era, such as violence against women, rape, child marriage, inequality and war which may upset some sections of the audience (Carroll, 2018). As Carroll observes, both these factors are based on a:

'Barbaric Age' medievalism and do not take into account medieval laws, class systems, religious edicts, or gender roles – or again the vast differences in these between countries and spans of time within the 1,000 years covered by the term 'Middle Ages' (Carroll, 2018:15).

Yet although there are significant issues with relying on verisimilitude to inform a setting, creating a sense of verisimilitude can still prove useful as a tool for quickly situating the audience within the setting of the text. However, this tool would benefit from being applied carefully and critically, so that it is not overly reliant on generating this feeling of authenticity solely by relying on people's pre-conceived notions of what a particular time period is.

## The question of appropriation

When analysing adaptation, it is important to explore the role that appropriation has in informing the adaptation process. This is of greater importance in regard to historical adaptation, because unless a source text has been clearly identified as the film's primary referent, the adaptors have to take fragments from a variety of different sources in the creation of the new text. Appropriation looks at how texts can be used, changed, and referenced in order to generate meaning within a new text, or as Jean Marsden argues, 'appropriation is neither dispassionate nor disinterested; it has connotations of usurpation, of seizure for one's own uses' (Marsden, 1991:1). Within this context it is easy to view appropriation from one media to the next as a form of literary theft, however, on closer examination it presents a much more complex and complicated question. This becomes particularly evident when analysed alongside Pomeroy's argument that within appropriation 'the objective material that is appropriated is both retained and simultaneously transformed' (Pomeroy, 2004:49). In other words, the act of appropriation is not simply an act of theft, but also one of adjustment, changing an original work into something that can benefit another media, and altering the original form for the new production while still leaving it unchanged in its original state.

This subject of appropriation as an alternative to adaptation forms a part of Robert Mayer's analysis of the relationship between film and literature in the first two of Patrick Keiller's *Robinson* films; *London* (Keiller, 1994) and *Robinson in Space* (Keiller, 1997). Mayer claims that there are a number of films which are inspired by literary texts and that consequently they should be 'seen not as adaptations but rather as collections of elements

drawn from a wide variety of verbal and visual texts' (Mayer, 2004:825). Essentially what Mayer is referring to is Keiller's tendency to appropriate a wide variety of elements, in order to help form the structure of his films.

This appropriation of a collection of elements can be applied to what Desmet and Lyengar comment on in their analysis of the various ways in which Shakespeare's plays have been understood in recent years. In their article 'Adaptation, Appropriation or What You Will', they claim that 'the field variously called Shakespearean adaptation or appropriation is in fact a hybrid whose motives and context shift as surely as night follows day' (Desmet & Lyengar, 2015:18). This creation of a hybridisation between appropriation and adaptation is particularly clear in the case of Shakespearean adaptations, which benefit from the fact that, unlike many other authors', Shakespeare's works are very well known to the public. Shakespeare's plays have been presented in such a wide variety of ways that it is almost expected for the adaptors to bring something new to the production in order for the adaptation to justify its existence.

This is apparent in the previously discussed *10 Things I Hate About You*, but also exists in a number of recent productions by the *Royal Shakespeare Company*. These productions keep Shakespeare's language but often appropriate the visual elements of the play from a different time period solely through the set design and the costuming, in order to present a new interpretation of the text. An example of this occurs in the double bill of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Love's Labour's Won, Or Much Ado About Nothing* (Luscombe, 2014). Both productions use early twentieth-century costumes and set design with the male characters changing into World War One style uniforms near the end of the first play. This adds resonance to the characters who leave the first play going off to war and, while the cast

plays entirely new characters, they begin the second play in the same uniforms signifying themselves as veterans of that war. These productions have appropriated imagery from one time period into their adaptation of the plays, in order to create a resonance for the viewer that exists outside of the original text.

Combining Mayer's analysis of appropriation with that of Desmet and Lyengar opens up a strong argument in favour of the use of appropriation within historical adaptation. If adaptations which are taken from literary texts into film and television are indeed a hybrid of a collection of elements that have been appropriated and adapted, then it follows that the same applies to adaptation within historical film. The central adaptation provides the core narrative with various elements being appropriated from other sources in order to support it.

#### Munslow's (2012) interpretative and adaptive approaches to history

If historical film and television can be best understood through the prism of adaptation, it raises the question of how best to analyse and delineate between factual and fictional representations of historical documents. This issue is examined by Alun Munslow (2012), who argues that there are two contrasting approaches to the construction of historical narrative.

Firstly, there is the interpretative approach which is focused primarily on establishing the veracity and accuracy of the evidence. This is then interpreted by historians. Essentially, the interpretive historian works with the evidence to take what is considered to be the most likely meaning from it.

Secondly, there is the adaptive approach, which is less concerned with veracity and accuracy and thus more likely to create imaginative approaches, however, these run the risk of being dismissed as inaccurate by the professional historian (Munslow, 2012).

This distinction between interpretive and adaptive approaches to history appears relatively straightforward in delineating between interpretive historians and fictional adaptors, but it raises a number of issues. Defne Ersin Tutan and Laurence Raw observe that Munslow's distinction 'does not allow for the fact that the meanings of 'interpretation,' 'adaptation,' 'truth,' and 'fiction' are culturally and historically determined' (Tutan and Raw, 2013:8-10). They further argue that all interpretations of the past should be welcomed as adaptations in Darwinian terms, that is as a 'process of making sense of the world around us,' which results in valuing individuals as 'creative talents.' This then moves the question beyond historical accuracy, and towards narrative presentation (Tutan and Raw, 2013:8-10).

While there are issues with Tutan and Raw's critique of Munslow's delineation between the interpretative and adaptive approaches to history, namely the usefulness of delineating between clearly fictional and clearly factual interpretations of historical events, it does raise arguments which are useful for historical adaptation. Historical analysis would benefit from moving away from questions of acceptable historicity to allow for a more thorough consideration of the more creative, albeit anachronistic versions of the past. This would greatly benefit the critical discourse surrounding historical fiction, as the overly narrow confines of the arguments regarding accuracy can result in a rejection of the more creative interpretations of history, particularly interpretations that are concerned with developing an understanding of different aspects of the past and of how they relate to the present.



### Blending fact and fiction within historical adaptation

As noted in Chapter One, Toplin identifies some forms of historical adaptation as ‘factions,’ texts that are a blend of both fact and fiction and which reference history without representing it specifically (Toplin, 2002). By taking various elements from the generally understood history, for example people, events, and stories then blending them together with fictional characters and plots in order to create an original narrative, these texts avoid the general criticisms that emerge when other texts diverge from the past. Factional texts offer real potential for historical adaptation by allow audiences and critics to move away from strictly judging the historical accuracy of a text’s construction towards a wide-ranging analysis which focuses more on the overall effectiveness of a film or television series’ construction of the past. This more wide-ranging analysis highlights how the text uses history in order to create a new interpretation of either the historical events depicted in the adaptation, or how those historical events can be related to the present. Factional texts grant adaptors a greater number of options on how to approach their projects. By adopting a factional approach to adaptation, film and programme makers can re-present real history in different ways, potentially creating a space for new perspectives on their chosen historical period to be developed, while at the same time avoiding the *Zulu* problem of causing upset to the living relatives of the characters on screen.

One of the clearest examples of the benefits of a factional approach to historical adaptation occurs with the television series *Call the Midwife* (BBC One, 2012-present). Its first series is a relatively straightforward adaptation of Jennifer Worth’s trilogy of memoirs,

with the first book sharing its name with the series (Worth, 2002). However, as the programme makers were not expecting to be commissioned for more than one series, Heidi Thomas, the head writer, decided to use what she considered to be the best stories from all three books for the first series. Therefore, when the programme was re-commissioned for a second series the writers needed to move away from the commonly understood history in order to create an engaging narrative. Thomas reflects on this problem in an interview where she recalls: ‘we had to source more original material, and one way of doing that was to look at social history and GP medicine in those days’ (Thomas, 2017). This led to the series taking a more diverse approach to its depiction of London in the late 1950s and early 1960s, opening up the narrative to focus on areas which were not, or could not be, included in Worth’s memoirs. In that same interview, the interviewer points out that the then latest series (series six), includes the following topics as subject matter: domestic violence, the working conditions of dock workers, parenting as a disabled person, and female genital mutilation (*Radio Times*, 2017).

*Call the Midwife* begins as a relatively straightforward adaptation of Worth’s memoirs, telling dramatised versions of real events. However, as the series progresses the writers invent new plotlines, taking elements from historical sources and transposing them into the narrative, essentially going from fact-based dramatisation to fictional text. This movement to fictional text has allowed the series to continue and widened the scope of the series’ portrayal of working-class London life. It has given the programme makers greater freedom to present a more thorough portrait of 1950s and 1960s London, while also allowing them to depict subject matter which was not included in the original books.

## On medievalism

*Call the Midwife* highlights the potential benefits of historical adaptation as it pertains to recent history. However, as three of the four case studies for this thesis are primarily focused on texts that adapt the late-medieval period, and even the fourth focuses on a period of time in the initial stages of the early-modern period, it is important that this analysis considers current research into depictions of medieval life, through the field of medievalism studies. Richard Utz defines medievalism as ‘the ongoing and broad cultural phenomenon of reinventing, remembering, recreating and reenacting the Middle Ages’ (Utz, 2017a:81), or as Shiloh Carroll observes ‘medievalism is based on the historically medieval, but is not, itself, medieval’ (Carroll, 2018:9). While Utz’s definition of medievalism covers a wide variety of areas, it can be broken down to the central idea that medievalism is fundamentally concerned with the ways in which the Middle Ages are used and understood today, which, as Haydock observes, means that medievalism creates a perception of continuity between the medieval period and the present day (Haydock, 2008).

Therefore, there is a differentiation between medievalism and medieval studies, specifically, as Utz observes, medieval studies is more concerned with establishing a ‘real’ Middle Ages, and therefore while it is an essential element of medievalism it is just one contributor to it (Utz, 2017a). Of course the ‘real’ Middle Ages are in themselves a construct, and, as previously stated, debate continues about what exactly the dates of the medieval period are. As David Matthews observes, even the term itself is a post-medieval construction (Matthews, 2014). Utz’s definition of medievalism is applicable to analysis of adaptations of the life of Henry VIII, as these adaptations are constantly engaging in acts of ‘reinventing,

remembering, recreating and reenacting' (Utz, 2017a:81) Henry VIII's reign, despite it falling outside what is generally believed to be the medieval period.

Medievalism remains close to medieval studies just as other historical adaptations remain close to history. Utz observes that:

Medievalism and medieval studies have a mutually beneficial relationship, and a thorough understanding of the broader cultural phenomenon of medievalism enhances academic medievalists' tool kits by increasing their theoretical sophistication, critical self-awareness, and social impact (Utz, 2017a:85-86).

This raises the possible benefits of applying some of the successes of medievalism to the analysis of historical adaptation, particularly in regard to questions of social impact. A number of medievalism scholars have observed how the influence of popular fictions that use aspects of the medieval are one of the most common ways in which people first gain an interest in studying the medieval period. In fact, in the edited collection *Medieval Afterlives in Contemporary Culture* (Ashton, 2017), Gail Ashton and Meriem Pagès each reference the tendency for medievalisms to serve as the inspiration for either themselves (as in Ashton's case) or their students (as Pagès observed) to study the Middle Ages. It would be useful if historians were to think about historical adaptations as being part of their 'tool kit,' so that these adaptations can be used in looking at the wider perceptions of history that are fed into a historical adaptation. This may create new ways of understanding both the

historical events behind an adaptation and the various ways in which those events are used within it.

A study that considers medievalism should make reference on some level to questions of authenticity. As they are produced in a post-medieval world, all medievalisms are, as Clements observes, ‘necessarily inauthentic’ and ‘filtered through a variety of eras, cultures, zeitgeists’ (Clements, 2014:20). Clements means that any attempts to be authentic when using medievalisms in a text will be hampered by the author’s distance from history; effectively, the ‘present’ gets in the way of the ‘past.’ Tison Pugh develops this point surrounding authenticity further as part of his analysis into the use of dirt in medieval film. He writes that during the making of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam, to the mystification of John Cleese, wanted the visual depiction to focus on dirt and filth. Noting that this streamlining of the mise-en-scène to focus on dirt creates an inauthentic visual landscape, Pugh argues that by focusing on dirt Jones and Gilliam are merely showing the audience what they want to see in the past, and as such it reveals the past to always be a re-creation (Pugh, 2017). This viewpoint is implicitly supported by Utz’s definition of medievalism, as medievalism focuses on the various ways in which the past has been reinvented, remembered, recreated, and reenacted (Utz, 2017a). Any text then, which utilises medievalism, is by extension inauthentic. Therefore, as Kaufman observes, ‘authenticity is, in fact, where medieval records and medievalism diverge’ (Kaufman, 2014:205).

As part of her analysis of the term ‘authenticity’ in medievalism (Clements, 2014), Clements argues that the very notion of what we consider to be authentically medieval has

undergone several changes over the years. She identifies four areas which directly pertain to authenticity in medievalism which she lists as follows:

1. Authenticity as historically accurate.
2. Authenticity as a search for cultural origins i.e. the search for the raw material of history.
3. Authenticity as the authorised version of a medieval text or narrative.
4. Authenticity as believability or verisimilitude (Clements, 2014:19).

This leads Clements to declare that ‘for medievalism the quest for medieval authenticity is always the search for a chimera’ (Clements, 2014:26). Clements’ comparison between the medievalist search for authenticity and the chimera is particularly evocative as it serves two distinct purposes. On the one hand a simple reading of it means that authenticity in medievalism is impossible, as no matter how hard we try we can never find a chimera as it remains a fictional creature; in the same way an authentic depiction of the medieval period will always be to some degree fictional. On the other hand, while the chimera is fictional, it is also a creature that is made up of different parts, most famously in Greek mythology the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent. Applying this idea of the chimera to our understanding of authenticity creates a clearer image of an authentic medievalist vision of the past: not as one thing, but as a combination of shifting ideas of what can be considered authentic. This aligns the research in this thesis with Marcia Landy’s analysis of medievalism in which she observes that:

Medievalism on film is not unitary and stable: it inevitably changes during different moments in the social history of the twentieth century and in the corresponding history of narrative styles, language and modes of interpretation (Landy, 2011:112).

Landy raises a number of useful points for this thesis in her argument, especially as she identifies one of the key issues surrounding the instability of what is assumed to be authentic in a historical adaptation according to the wider social contexts, an idea which will be one of the key focuses of Chapter Five. Additionally, this instability of authenticity is not solely limited to depictions of the medieval past but could potentially exist in representations of other historical periods, as this thesis will argue through its analysis of Henry VIII. Henry VIII is a monarch who is generally not regarded as a medieval monarch, even if he, as Sturtevant stated, could be argued to have ‘led a ‘medieval’ life’ (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 955).

Additionally, Landy argues that historians may regard the presence of anachronisms as a violation of a text’s claim to historicity, yet these anachronisms, particularly on a material level (costume, architecture, etc) are an inescapable part of cinema (Landy, 2011:113). This point is particularly persuasive, especially when considering the role of architecture. When creating a period drama that is set in a real historical location the historical adaptors may be tempted to film parts of their production on the site where the historical events occurred, as with the filming of *Anne of the Thousand Days* (Jarrott, 1969), sections of which were filmed at Hever Castle, which was Anne Boleyn’s home before she married Henry VIII (Kent Film Office, 2020). However, even in these situations the portrayal of the site is necessarily inauthentic, as even though the film may be set in the

same place as the historical events that are portrayed on-screen, the people making the adaptations would find it difficult to completely match their portrayal of the site to how it looked at the time. Especially if the historical event depicted in the adaptation occurred before the invention of the camera. A real historical site which is used for filming a historical adaptation could have been altered or restored in the time after the event took place, leading to specific material changes in how the site looks today. Additionally, the adaptors would likely have to alter the location's appearance in order to more accurately represent the historical period in the *mise-en-scène*, whether that be through physical props, or through computer-generated imagery (CGI). The issues surrounding how to portray a specific historical site will be considered further in Chapter Six.

The fluid state of authenticity in medievalism studies is enhanced by the subject's status, as what David Matthews terms an 'undiscipline' (Matthews, 2017:178). This is because medievalism remains consistently uncertain about its disciplinary boundaries, and often needs to flow between several fields including, but not limited to: medieval history, art history, media studies, and literary criticism, while also flowing between the boundaries of academia and the wider world.

A possible solution to medievalism's need to flow between fields, is put forward by Jonathan Hsy who coins the term co-disciplinarity (Hsy, 2014) to describe the various ways in which medievalism functions. Co-disciplinarity creates an opportunity for re-engagement with history by engaging with the past without simply re-entrenching academic disciplines as we currently understand them (Hsy, 2014). Hsy summarises this idea by stating that:



A truly *co-disciplinary* approach to medievalism is a mode of being *with* disciplines that allows for disciplinary orientations to *flow into and through* one another. It is also a mode that queers relations within academic departments and institutional structures. Such a queering process renders more porous the disciplinary and professional communities that take shape within the academy, as well as what lies outside of or adjacent to it (Hsy, 2014:47, emphasis in original).

This idea of the co-disciplinarity of medievalism is a central part of this thesis, even when it moves beyond medievalist texts. In making its argument this thesis moves between different fields, including adaptation studies, medievalism, and history, while also moving porously into other fields when necessary, as occurs, for example, in the analysis of genre studies and horror in Chapter Three.

As Matthews identifies, medievalism studies' status as an 'undiscipline' (Matthews, 2017:178) means that it flows between academia and the wider world, and this thesis also therefore considers how the medieval is understood within popular culture. In this regard it is worth considering what Matthews (2017) observes to be the tendency in popular culture of dividing the view of the medievalist world into two distinct viewpoints:

- 1) The Gothic, or grotesque view, in which there is an assumption that the medieval will necessarily contain subject matter which is consistently threatening and violent. This view is generally bound up in notions of barbarity, crudity, and cruelty, with the assumption being that human civilisation has moved on from

such times. Whenever someone refers to something violent as ‘medieval’ they are invoking this view of the period.



Figure 2.3: *The Knight Errant* (1870) by John Everett

Millais, Taken from: Tate Online, 2018.

- 2) The romantic view, which although, admitting that such ideas of violence existed during the late-medieval period, generally mitigates the sense of threat, and undermines the sense of danger. The romantic view does this by including more idealistic elements that fight against, and eventually triumph over, barbarity, crudity, and cruelty. Matthews points to the example of John Everett Millais' painting *The Knight Errant* (figure 2.3), where a bound and naked woman is released from captivity by a Knight in shining armour. Those viewing the painting are presented with a clear example of the romantic view of the Middle

Ages, and while there is still the threat of cruelty, the threat is undermined by the more positive actions of the 'hero' (Matthews, 2017).

While the Gothic and romantic views have similarities, most notably both maintain threats of violence, but the differing ways in which they are deployed reveals two distinctive ideological positions. A person or group which deploys a Gothic, or grotesque, medievalism in order to describe another section of society, essentially positions themselves as more advanced, whether that be technologically or morally, than those they deem medieval. Therefore, as Pugh observes, if the past is regarded as barbaric and crude, a medievalism can quarantine it in the past in order to promote modernity as the ideal (Pugh, 2012).

The representation of the medieval past as Gothic or grotesque can even occur when the negative item which has been designated 'Gothic' has no basis in the medieval period, such as when Cathy Newman in an article for *The Telegraph* claims that, 'forcing women to wear high heels at work is medieval - and no better than calling us witches' (Newman, 2016). Here Newman is not saying that in the medieval period women were forced to wear high heels, but that the intent behind such actions belongs to an earlier, more primitive, time.

Conversely, modern groups can use medievalism to deploy what Andrew Elliott defines as a banal medievalism, one which is 'shrouded in medievalism, used in an unthinking capacity without direct reference to the Middle Ages' (Elliott, 2017:17). These banal medievalisms can be used to support a wide range of ideological positions, and indeed Elliott points to their use by such right-wing groups as the English Defence League, or by terrorists such as Anders Breivik, both of whom appropriated the identity and visual imagery of the Crusaders to support their own agendas. Amy Kaufman identifies that when such

groups ‘imagine the medieval era as a pristine space in which whiteness and masculinity assume a prevalence naturalised by the soft focus of medievalism’s pseudo-historical lens’ (Kaufman, 2014:199).

Newman uses the term medieval to present our society as more advanced than that of the past, and by extension forcing women to wear high heels is a regression. The way right-wing groups deploy banal medievalisms means that they are often deployed ‘in support of a modern cause, in which case the banal symbol is once again made overtly and conspicuously meaningful not as history but as a means to point to the present’ (Elliott, 2017:18). In these cases, the banal medievalism is used in a threefold process, firstly the medievalism is divorced from its historical context, secondly it is repeated in order to forge a link between the medievalism and the group or individual’s public identity, and thirdly the dehistoricised medievalism is then given a modern ideological meaning (Elliott, 2017).

However, a person deploying a contemporary romanticist medievalism often does this in order to display an affinity for the medieval period, even to the extent of being a piece of tourism. This is a viewpoint which Matthews efficiently summarises as the Middle Ages being understood as a ‘perpetual carnival’ (Matthews, 2015: 33). Matthews highlights the two key points concerning the romantic viewpoint of medievalism; the medieval is a place to escape to where opportunities for wonder and excitement abound, but it is also pre-industrial and almost anti-technological.

This is the central conflict in the two visions of medievalism: The Gothic where the medieval functions as a place whose brutality we are fortunate to have advanced ourselves from, and the romantic whose medievalism we are somewhat unfortunate in having left behind. Therefore, as Elliott observes, the romantic aspect of medievalism can be used as an

‘ideological weapon’ (Elliott, 2017:30), where people deploying a romantic medievalism are ‘peering into the medievalist mirror and picking out those elements which best serv[e] their purposes’ (Elliott, 2017:30). This central conflict is explored further as part of the analysis of the historical aesthetic in Chapter Four.

When considering the romantic or grotesque visions of the medieval period, it is worth considering John Aberth’s observation that ‘neither extreme can hardly begin to communicate the experiences of what it was like to live during the Middle Ages’ (Aberth, 2003:vii-viii). Instead, Aberth argues that a representation of the medieval on film would benefit from understanding the ‘medieval mentality’ (Aberth, 2003:viii), which operates on a different set of assumptions than those of the modern viewer. The ‘medieval mentality’ is dominated by the Catholic Church, society is more rigidly divided, and the population live in a very intimate relationship with their natural surroundings and each other within their communities (Aberth, 2003). When it is deployed this can be a particularly useful feature for a historical adaptation. By creating a version of the past which understands this ‘medieval mentality,’ a text is more able effectively to communicate to the audience the reasons why the characters are responding to the events which occur on screen, even if those reasons are different from how a modern audience could respond to those events. Therefore, attempting to present the perceived ‘medieval mentality’ allows the people creating medieval historical adaptations to potentially offer their audience new perspectives on the past (as it has commonly been interpreted), perspectives that might offer an insight the reasons why people in the past may have responded to events in the ways that historical sources claim that they did. Analysis of the medieval mentality in historical adaptation will be developed further in Chapter Three.

To conclude this introductory analysis of medievalisms it is important briefly to relate it back to adaptation theory, as this thesis demonstrates that medievalism studies has a clear role to play within the analysis of historical adaptations of the medieval world. Medievalism studies' focus on the various ways in which the past has been reinvented, remembered, recreated and reenacted (Utz, 2017a) provides new insights into the historical adaptation process, as well as opportunities for developing new ways of analysing the various ways in which even non-medieval time periods have been depicted on film. While sections of medievalism studies, for example the distinction between romantic and Gothic medievalisms, remain particular to the medieval period, other ideas, such as medievalism's co-disciplinarity and its fluid state of authenticity, can be useful in providing insight into how other time periods have been depicted within various media.

### On presentism and pastism

Another aspect of historical adaptation that needs to be considered in this chapter is presentism, an idea which Louise D'Arcens defines as being 'the practice of representing, interpreting, and, more importantly, evaluating the past according to the values, standards, ambitions, and anxieties of a later present' (D'Arcens, 2014:181). D'Arcens explains that this principle makes it a core concept for medievalism studies, and in fact she argues that essentially medievalism acts as a unifier of the various ways in which the medieval period has been represented in its post-medieval cultural afterlife (D'Arcens, 2014). Presentism is ultimately a progressivist attitude, whereby the past is judged against the standards of the present and found wanting (D'Arcens, 2014). This evaluation of the past according to

present-day values may be contentious within wider medieval studies, and by extension other fields of historical study, where there is a struggle between presentism and pastism.

Kathleen Biddick defines pastism as being:

A position that argues for radical historical difference between the Middle Ages and the present. Pastism regards the past and the present as bounded temporal objects that cannot come into contact for fear of scholarly contamination (Biddick, 1998:83).

Biddick and D’Arcens both concede that there are more neutral models being developed for viewing history that take into account both pastism and presentism and that there is a central conflict between the two ideological positions that remains unresolved.

The conflict between presentism and pastism remains a point of concern within historical adaptation and raises some questions about the degree to which presentism and pastism should be involved in the construction of a historical adaptation. If the characters in a medieval adaptation were presented as following a modern-day values system, then it is possible that it might be easier to get the audience to empathise and identify with the protagonists than if the characters’ value systems were portrayed as comparatively alien. Therefore, this approach could help to maintain an audience’s engagement with the production even if it comes at the expense of historical actuality. However, this does come with certain problems. Presenting characters in this way could reduce the potential for the audience to gain an understanding of what it would have been like to live through that period, thus reducing a text’s potential to illuminate the past. An example of a text that attempts to

navigate these difficulties is the Computer Game *Kingdom Come: Deliverance* (Warhorse Studios, 2018), a first-person Role-Playing Game set in Bohemia in 1403. During the game's production the developers hired Joanna Nowak a research historian with a background in art, history, and architecture preservation, and consulted her on how to make their visual construction of the period as historically accurate as possible (Webster, 2018). This level of engagement with historical researchers is by no means unusual and is a constant feature of historical adaptation, even, as George F. Custen identifies, occurring during the early years of the Hollywood Studio System. At that time all the major studios created fully staffed research departments whose job it was to provide relevant historical information which could then be sent to the workers on the film set and costume designers wanted visual information on period details, and actors needed information on the person they were playing in order to assist with their characterisations and make-up (Custen, 1992).

*Kingdom Come: Deliverance's* visual re-creation of the past is undermined by the structural weaknesses of its construction of the characters' attitudes in the game which at various points seems to flit between pastist and presentist representations almost at the creator's whim. The game uses a pastist portrayal of characters' racism and misogyny and makes no attempt to align with modern sensibilities. However, this approach is contrasted with presentist freedoms granted to the player character, who is a blacksmith's son, in his interactions with the nobility. In *Kingdom Come: Deliverance*, the failure to be consistent in its pastist or presentist representation ultimately undermines the games' construction of the past as the player is left uncertain whether the game is commenting negatively on historical attitudes towards race, class, and gender, or is merely representing these using the cover of claiming to represent historical actuality.



### The position of this thesis within adaptation theory

In *Adaptation Revisited* Sarah Cardwell claims that when analysing historical dramatisations:

It is their very basis in history that disallows their inclusion within the genre of 'adaptation'... A film is commonly understood to be an adaptation not because it adapts but because of what it adapts (Cardwell, 2002:17).

However, this view presents significant problems, especially when comparing it to Hutcheon's analysis of adaptation in relation to meme theory. Hutcheon writes of the various ways in which different stories 'propagate themselves when they catch on; adaptations – as both repetition and variation - are their form of replication... in the workings of the human imagination, adaptation is the norm, not the exception' (Hutcheon, 2013: 177). Hutcheon's analysis raises useful points regarding what constitutes adaptation. If the adaptation of stories is regarded as the norm rather than as the exception, then the question of whether or not historical film or television is an adaptation would benefit from being directed away from the finished text, and towards the source. The restriction for historical film and television gaining the status of adaptation is reliant on establishing whether the historical events are stories in and of themselves.

This question of whether or not historical events are in fact stories is addressed by Julie Sanders who argues that the discipline of history 'is in truth a history of textualities, of

stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). Sanders clearly designates historical events as stories, to such an extent that when Sanders' research is analysed alongside Hutcheon's view that adaptation is the norm rather than the exception (Hutcheon, 2013: 177), a clear argument is created for granting the status of adaptation to historical film and television. That is, if history is a history of stories told by particular tellers, and if adaptation is the form of replication of stories, both in repetition and in variation, then two things become clear. Firstly, historical film and television can be placed within the genre of adaptation and secondly, if history itself is a history of stories told by particular tellers, then the accepted definition of what constitutes an accurate representation of history is not fixed and is subject to change.

Therefore, this thesis argues that accuracy should not be the sole concern of the critical discourse surrounding historical adaptation. Rather, the focus should be on how historically literate the adaptation is. This will be discussed with reference to the previously highlighted key research questions:

- a) To what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events?
- b) How can the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources, for example anachronisms, function within a historical adaptation?
- c) How can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present?
- d) How can an adaptation be used to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of history?

These four questions will be woven into the analysis in Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six, in order to create a more fluid understanding of the various ways in which historical film can adapt history in order to create new perspectives on the past, even if those perspectives diverge from what has been normally interpreted from the historical sources..

### Conclusion

In relation to adapting historical events into film and television, both Linda Hutcheon and Thomas Leitch raise useful arguments concerning how to accommodate the process of applying adaptation theory to historical film and television. After analysing the relevant literature in this chapter, it becomes clear that adaptation would benefit from being loosened away from what Hutcheon refers to as the ‘morally loaded discourse of fidelity’ (Hutcheon, 2013:7). Through doing this a more flexible approach towards adaptation will be created, moving away from a single primary referent and towards adaptations that are taken from multiple sources.

By moving away from the question of fidelity in historical adaptation, a gap is created in the critical discourse that needs to be addressed. If fidelity is not one of the prime criteria for a successful adaptation, then what is a more successful basis for the analysis of a historical adaptation? This thesis will argue that more important than the question of fidelity to historical sources, are the questions of how a historical adaptation promotes a new understanding, not just of the events depicted in the text, but also of how those events relate to the present. While also considering the questions surrounding whether a film adaptation

of a major historical event should be primarily concerned with adapting for its own sake? Or can it use the past in order to relate on a more fundamental level with the present?

When the definition of historical adaptation is expanded, it permits the development of a strain of film analysis that allows for research into how the perception of a historical event is altered, according to the culture of the society that produces it. This occurs in Van Riper's (2013), analysis of the various adaptations of the Manhattan Project. Applying an expanded definition also allows for broader analyses within adaptation theory that not only judge the effectiveness of each adaptation, but also examine the changes within a society that are an inevitable outcome of the decisions made within the adaptation. For example, Chapter Five's analysis of the filmic and televisual representations of the reign of King Henry VIII, reveals a number of changes in the representation of each of Henry VIII's marriages, thus reflecting the changing position of gender relations within western society during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The adaptation of historical events into film and television benefits from being considered as a more a fluid process than the traditional source-to-text method of adaptation. The visual nature of film and television illustrates that even traditional literary adaptations need to take inspiration from outside sources in order to more properly represent their time periods, for example in props and costuming. The process of adapting from historical events may take the majority of its inspiration from a single source, which can then be supplemented from other texts, or it may take parts from different sources in order to form a singular viewpoint.

In order to create a more flexible analysis of historical film and television, this thesis uses the following case studies in order to focus on four distinct areas of historical adaptation:

- 1) Contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past: how historical adaptation reflects the present while simultaneously promoting further understanding of the past.
- 2) The historical aesthetic: how the visual elements of film and television can be used to adapt history even when removed from a narrative context.
- 3) The changing nature of acceptability and authenticity: how the perception of what is a suitable representation of history changes over time.
- 4) The representation of a specific geographical location: its usefulness as a way of linking the past and the present and as a tool for helping to create an understanding of the internal dynamics of communities in the past.

These four case studies provide a comprehensive analysis of the various elements that form the basis of historical adaptation. They will then be brought together in the final chapter of the thesis in order to form a new argument about the usefulness of historical adaptation as a tool for understanding both the present and our relationship to the past.

# **Chapter Three: Contemporary Thematic Resonance and the Illumination of the Past in Cinematic Depictions of the Black Death Outbreak of the Mid-Fourteenth Century**

## Introduction

This gets us close to what historians do – or at least to echo Machiavelli, should have the odour of doing: it is to interpret the past for the purposes of the present with a view to managing the future, but to do so without suspending the capacity to assess the particular circumstances in which one might have to act, or the relevance of past actions to them (Gaddis, 2004: 10-11).

In this quote Gaddis identifies the two chief functions of factual history: to interpret the past in the present and to do so in order to help us manage the future. Essentially Gaddis is echoing George Santayana's claim that 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it' (Santayana, 1905-1906). (Although Santayana was originally not referring to a society's understanding of past events, but of the problems that individuals face if they fail to learn from their own life experiences). While this thesis does not focus on the idea that an understanding of history helps a modern audience to manage the future, Gaddis' statement strongly correlates with the two features that are central to this chapter and which help form an argument about the historical literacy of adaptations. These features

are the creation of a contemporary thematic resonance with the past, in order to better understand the present, (referred to in this thesis as contemporary thematic resonance) and an illumination of the past which aims to create a more thorough understanding of history (referred to in this thesis as the illumination of the past), essentially serving as an illustrative example of the multiple ways in which making the past remakes the meanings of both the past and the present (Pugh and Weisl, 2013). Both features present clear examples of the ways in which, as Rosenstone observes, any work of history inevitably looks towards both the past and the present (Rosenstone, 2016), and as such both of these features are central in ascertaining the historical literacy of a given adaptation. This allows this chapter to help form an original argument concerning the benefits of an alternative approach towards fidelity in historical adaptation, while also directly relating the analysis to all four of the key research questions, namely:

- a) To what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events?
- b) How can the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources, for example anachronisms, function within a historical adaptation?
- c) How can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present?
- d) How can an adaptation be used to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of history?

This analysis will be supported by examples from two films that have adapted the same historical event: the mid-fourteenth-century outbreak of the Black Death. These films are *The Seventh Seal* (Bergman, 1957) and *Black Death* (Smith, 2010). Although there has been other adaptations of the events surrounding this plague outbreak, particularly the various adaptations of Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (Boccaccio, 1353) including *The Decameron* (Pasolini, 1971), *Virgin Territory* (Leland, 2017), and *The Little Hours* (Baena, 2017). However, this thesis focuses on *The Seventh Seal* and *Black Death* because in both films the plague is a constant presence in their narratives, whereas in adaptations of *The Decameron* the plague is either omitted from the narrative, as in *The Decameron* and *The Little Hours*, or placed into the background with little impact on the narrative, as in *Virgin Territory*.

Additionally, *The Seventh Seal* and *Black Death* have been chosen as the focus for this chapter because of several similarities within the themes and ideas that are explored within the films, despite them being from different genres and possessing different cultural prestige. *The Seventh Seal* is generally held in high regard for its perceived artistic content, a position which the advertising for the film alludes to with the DVD release from Tartan. Tartan's DVD of *The Seventh Seal* (figure 3.1) emphasises the film's position within the cinema canon by including a quote from *The Time Out Film Guide*, declaring that the film 'contains some of the most extraordinary images ever committed to celluloid' (Pym (ed.), 2004:1168).

Conversely, *Black Death* is a film that approaches the plague outbreak from the generally less well-regarded genre of horror cinema with the film being deliberately marketed towards horror aficionados. Again this is made clear in the cover for the DVD



(figure 3.2) which is designed to prime the audience to expect a horror film, not only by carrying a horror-inspired headline which invites the audience to ‘Journey into Hell,’ but also by mentioning the director’s previous work on the horror films *Creep* (Smith, 2004) and *Severance* (Smith, 2006) in an attempt to draw in fans of both films who are now primed to expect a similar experience.

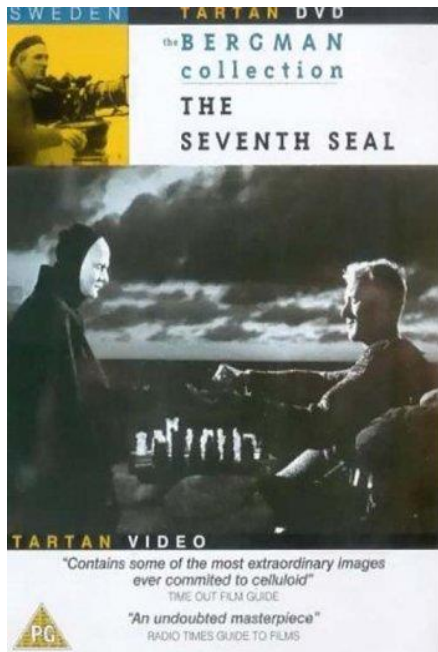


Figure 3.1: DVD Cover for *The Seventh Seal*, rerelease from Tartan DVD, 2001.



Figure 3.2: *Black Death* DVD Cover (*Black Death*, 2010)

Before analysing the various ways in which these films adapt history, it is helpful to provide short plot descriptions.

*The Seventh Seal* offers a relatively straightforward narrative. Antonius Block (Max Von Sydow) is a knight who is travelling home from the Crusades. During his journey he gets caught in a shipwreck and meets Death (Bengt Ekerot) on a beach. In order to delay his death Block challenges Death to a game of chess. As the game continues Block and his

squire Jöns (Gunnar Björnstrand), proceed through the countryside on the way to Block's castle, where they meet and interact with various people, some of whom join them in their journey and all of whom react in different ways to the plague outbreak. The film ends when, after Block loses his chess game, the group arrives at Block's castle and Death comes for all of them.

*Black Death* offers a similarly straightforward narrative. Osmund (Eddie Redmayne) is a monk who is in love with Averill (Kimberley Nixon). They make plans for Osmund to leave his monastery to escape the plague, but, before he can join her, Osmund is ordered to join a group of mercenaries led by Ulric (Sean Bean). These mercenaries have orders from the local Bishop to investigate an isolated village that has been hitherto untouched by the plague. As the group journeys through the landscape they meet various people who have responded to the plague in different ways, and eventually discover that the village has converted to a pagan religion led by a woman called Langvia (Carice Van Houten). The mercenaries and the villagers fight each other, with the mercenaries eventually winning, but with Langvia escaping, after tricking Osmund into killing Averill. The film ends with Osmund becoming a witch hunter and burning other women at the stake in revenge for Langvia's actions.

The mid-fourteenth century's outbreak of plague was called the Black Death due to a mistranslation of the Latin expression *atra mors*, with *mors* meaning death and *atra* translating to either terrible or black (Benedictow, 2006:1). It would be more accurate to call it the Terrible Death, a name which would be well earned as it is generally regarded as one of the most cataclysmic events in the history of Western Europe. This outbreak left vast swathes of the population dead. Despite the enormity of this epidemic, even today it is still

virtually impossible accurately to detail the total number of people in the population who died as a result, with estimates ranging from one quarter to half of the entire Western European population dead by the end of 1350 (Gottfried, 1985:2). So widespread and thorough was the Black Death that John Aberth claims that it was defining event of the late-medieval period (Aberth, 2003).



*Figure 3.3: Taby Chapel painting by Albertus Pictor,*

*Photograph by Caroline Levisse, 2013*

Such an important event has resulted in the Black Death being adapted into various forms of media. It was even frequently depicted within contemporaneous medieval religious artwork, for example, in the Taby chapel, where the artwork featured the chess with Death imagery (figure 3.3) appropriated by Ingmar Bergman for *The Seventh Seal*. More recently, the plague and the artworks that portray it have served as inspiration for filmmakers and

have been presented on cinema screens for modern audiences in a variety of different ways in order to approach different themes and ideas.

There are many different definitions of the term resonance, however, the most significant for the study of historical adaptation comes from the *Oxford English Dictionary* which defines the term to mean a ‘corresponding or sympathetic response’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2018). This corresponding response is one of the two focuses for this chapter, particularly in relation to how a fictional historical text can be useful as a tool for identifying and critiquing modern day themes from the relative distance of history. To make discussing this term simpler, this analysis will refer to this function by the title of contemporary thematic resonance.

When researching for *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005), his film about the Crusades, Ridley Scott observed that ‘There is no escaping the parallels with our time... Since our subject is the clash of these two civilisations, and we are now living in the post 9/11 world, *Kingdom of Heaven* will invariably be looked at from that perspective’ (Scott, 2005:8). This is undeniably true for *Kingdom of Heaven*, and indeed Nickolas Haydock identifies cultural critics from both Christian (Jonathan Riley-Smith) and Islamic (Abou el Fadl) scholarship who critique the film and its treatment of the Crusades before they had a chance to even view it (Haydock, 2009b). However, this is not unique to the reception of that film; indeed, Finke and Shichtman make the observation that *Kingdom of Heaven* functions as a companion piece to one of Scott’s previous films, *Black Hawk Down* (Scott, 2001), as they claim both films glorify American exceptionalism even as they both show the failures in securing a lasting peace in either the twelfth or twenty-first centuries (Finke and Shichtman, 2010:231).

However, while both films do show the failures of securing a lasting peace, it is worth remembering that while *Black Hawk Down* is focused on depicting the American Military, that is not the case for *Kingdom of Heaven*, which is set over 600 years before the United States of America was founded. While there are resonances that can be applied between *Kingdom of Heaven*'s representation of the Crusader States, and America's activities in the Middle East in the late-20<sup>th</sup> and early-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, it would be a mistake to describe this as a purely American exceptionalism. Especially since the Crusader States were created by crusaders and colonists from Europe, in this regard perhaps a more precise description of both films would be that they are focused on a Europa-American exceptionalism, perhaps best shortened to western exceptionalism. *Kingdom of Heaven*'s status as a film that depicts western exceptionalism is supported by the fact that the film, both begins and ends with European people leaving their homes in order to either conquer or consolidate territory in the Holy Land, as well as featuring a number of European actors in leading roles, most notably the English Orlando Bloom and the French Eva Green as Balian of Ibalin, and Sibylla respectively.

Andrew Elliott argues that the search for metaphors that applies to the present is in fact a common feature of the historical epic as these films are needed to serve 'as a convenient source of metaphors to critique the present' (Elliott, 2015a, loc 415). This chapter argues that a form of contemporary thematic resonance is consistent amongst historical texts. Similarly, the creation of contemporary thematic resonance within historical adaptation is a useful and important aspect of promoting an understanding of the past through parallels and similarities with the present.

In this respect, both *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal* function as clear, albeit very different examples, of what Rosenstone is referring to when he describes the history film as being concerned with ‘metaphorical truths’ (Rosenstone: 2018:7). These films offer up interesting contrasts when analysed alongside each other, as both films attempt to create contemporary thematic resonance. There are, however, crucial differences between the films: *Black Death* aims specifically to relate the events of the Black Death in order to reflect on the present, while *The Seventh Seal* has a much more universal focus. Its presentation is designed to reflect life in every civilisation, not merely one that is living under the Black Death, or as it is known in Sweden the ‘Great Death’ (Digerdöden), the only European country to call it this (Myrdal, 2006:141-142).

It could be argued that thematic resonance is a consistent constituent of all medieval adaptations. As Tom Shippey notes, ‘in even the most determined medieval pastiche, modernity will always enter, directly or indirectly, openly or concealed’ (Shippey, 2014:155). Shippey raises a number of intriguing points in his claim that it is impossible for the modern viewer to fully divorce modernity from a text which utilises medievalism, particularly as there are many gaps in our knowledge of the medieval period, gaps which would need to be filled by a modern author. Even the designation medieval is a relatively modern invention, with its first known usage occurring in 1817 (Bildhauer, 2017).

Contemporary thematic resonance remains a common feature of historical adaptation, and consequently it is a constant concern within medievalism studies. Nils Holger Peterson comments on this in his analysis of the role of resonance in modern performances of medieval music or medieval ritual, wherein he declares that they ‘can only be meaningful if they also resonate in some way with a modern experience’ (Peterson,

2014:221-222). While Peterson is referring specifically to how resonance can function within the fields of medieval music and ritual, these ideas remain relevant when applied to other media. Peterson essentially posits that resonance is a necessity for medievalism to have meaning, and while resonance remains important, there is also another function that medievalism can have in order to make it meaningful for a modern audience: the use of medievalism to illuminate on the past.

Defne Ersin Tutan, as has been previously discussed in the literature review, claims that ‘historical representations illuminate not the past they set out to discover, but the very present in which they are embedded’ (Tutan, 2017:584). However, although it is difficult to deny that historical adaptations contain thematic elements which can be related directly to the present, this is not necessarily their sole purpose; historical adaptations can illuminate the past even at the point of divergence from historical actuality. This is a view which Rosenstone supports when he reveals one of the key issues surrounding how historical films are viewed:

we approach history films and history books in an oddly unparallel way, reading the first for knowledge about the past, watching the second for insights into the present. Yet, as people interested in history, we should treat both in the same way: looking for what they say both about the past they describe and about the present in which that past has been created (Rosenstone, 2016:73).

Building on Rosenstone's analysis, the ways in which historical adaptations are viewed and understood would benefit from being readjusted, perhaps even to the extent of changing the terminology used for how we view a successful interpretation of historical events in a historical adaptation. When viewing a historical adaptation one of the more frequent comments is based on how a film 'depicts' the past, and while that is important, 'depiction' is not necessarily the sole goal of a historical film. The filmmaker often has a number of different purposes that they want to consider when making their historical adaptation, reasons which they may regard as more important than depicting the past.

Generally, the use of the word 'depiction' implies that a film is a reflection of what the person viewing the film expects to find in the presented time period. If, for example, a film was set during the Black Death an audience member might expect to see plague buboes on plague victims, especially if they were previously aware that this was one of the common symptoms of the pestilence. Therefore, presenting someone with plague buboes would qualify as part of a successful depiction. However, what is more important is the concept of illumination: essentially, how can what is presented within the text help to further an audience's understanding. For example, how does the individual with the plague sores react when they realise they have them? and how do the people around them react? Both these questions potentially allow the audience a greater insight into the character's psychology and allow them a greater understanding of what it would be like to live in such times. The question of illumination is focused on how it promotes a further understanding of the depicted period.

The purpose of historical adaptation would benefit from being positioned away from the creation of a faithful version of history, and towards the use of history as a starting point,



as discussed in the literature review. This would create what Patterson refers to as a ‘useful, interesting or viable reading’ of the text (Patterson, 2011:168). While Patterson’s argument raises some problems, specifically how to quantify whether or not a reading of history is interesting or viable, it still raises an important concern within the areas of contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past, namely that a strict focus on fidelity is less useful than the creation of a more distinctive interpretation of the historical sources.

If the popular discourse surrounding historical adaptation is shifted away from depiction and towards illumination, then it would create greater freedom for the people creating a historical adaptation. This chapter argues that the concept of illumination ensures a more effective form of historical adaptation, and that the purpose of historical adaptation is not to perfectly re-create a time period, but to further understanding of it.

If the purpose of a historical adaptation is not perfectly to re-create a time or a place, then it creates an opportunity for the popular discourse surrounding historical adaptation to consider not just how a film presents a time period, but how it reflects on contemporary socio-political concerns. Essentially, how does the film’s depiction of the past resonate with the present? This is what is meant by contemporary thematic resonance, and to analyse a film’s depiction of the past, the critical discourse would benefit from understanding what the film is saying about the present.

Before analysing films that are set in the late-medieval period, we must ascertain what kind of medieval period we are analysing. After all, as Tom Vercruysse points out ‘the meaning of the Middle Ages is more often than not based on cultural-historical traditions and codes rather than a meticulous reconstruction of the present’ (Vercruysse, 2013:59). Therefore, when analysing the representation of the medieval period we need to ensure that

we consider how these cultural-historical traditions and codes operate, in order fully to ascertain how effective a text is at both illuminating the past and creating a thematic resonance with the present.

Both contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past fit within the central argument of this thesis as they are both working to move the analysis of historical film away from the relatively simple question of historical accuracy, and re-position the argument towards historical literacy. To ask if a text is historically literate is to ask whether its presentation of the past is aware of the context of the depicted historical events, whether it demonstrates an understanding of how history is constructed, and how it relates that information to a modern audience.

#### Contemporary thematic resonance

In 2018, while promoting his latest film *BlacKkKlansman* (Lee, 2018), Spike Lee gave an interview to Anderson Cooper in which Cooper asked the following question ‘you know when I thought of it as a period piece, I thought it was a look back, but it’s just so, there’s just such relevance, to today’ (Lee, 2018). Lee responded by claiming that:

I think that’s what, like I say, I think that’s what people responded to, that it’s not just a history lesson, that even though it takes place in the seventies, it’s also the world we live in, the topsy-turvy, crazy, insane, world we live in today (Lee, 2018).

While Spike Lee, is speaking about the specificity of his film to current American politics, a specificity that is underlined in the film's trailer when a gathering of KKK members make a toast to 'America First,' a clear reference to a repeated refrain during the Presidential election campaign of Donald Trump in 2016. However, while Lee is referring to the specificity of his film, this chapter argues that cultivating these links between the past and present is a common feature throughout historical adaptation, and is in fact one of the key benefits that historical adaptations can present: the ability to use the past to directly relate to the present through the creation of a contemporary thematic resonance.

In this respect Spike Lee's approach to historical adaptation is similar to that of Margaret Atwood, who in 1996 delivered a lecture on historical fiction, declaring that:

The past no longer belongs only to those who once lived in it; the past belongs to those who claim it, and are willing to explore it, and to infuse it with meaning for those alive today. The past belongs to us, because we are the ones who need it (Atwood, 1998).

This infusion of modern meaning into historical adaptation creates a possibility for the creation of a contemporary thematic resonance, whereby the themes and ideas present in depictions of the past can relate to the present and those of the present can be related to the past. Indeed, as Paul Sturtevant claims, 'the Middle Ages have often been used in film to promote, and invent historical precedent for, the political, religious, or cultural ideals of the people who produce and consume them' (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 1936). This is actually a common feature within historical adaptation and there are many examples of propaganda

films which use historical events in order to push a government's agenda, and this is by no means limited to medieval films. A particularly clear example of this occurred in Britain during World War Two where, as Marcia Landy observes, the films the country produced either directly or indirectly addressed the perceived inevitability, and various challenges, of war (Landy, 1991).

Over the course of World War Two in order to build public support for the war a number of historical films were produced in order to create an image of the allied nations, including Britain, as countries that had fought against tyranny throughout history. Examples of this include the medieval-set film *Henry V* (Olivier, 1944) which promotes the idea of Henry V (Laurence Olivier) as an unambiguous war hero, and which notably cut scenes that were critical of him from the original play, such as Henry's threat to let his soldiers' rape, pillage, and burn the town of Honfleur.

This also occurs in another film which starred Laurence Olivier, *That Hamilton Woman* (Korda, 1941), a film which was set during the Napoleonic wars, but was aimed at an American audience with the intention to persuade Americans to enter World War Two. *That Hamilton Woman* included in its narrative a sub-plot focusing on attempts to persuade Naples to join the war against Napoleon, who the film portrays as a Hitler analogue. Indeed, as Dennis Bingham observes, the Hollywood biopics of the Second World War shared a common theme of depicting these historical figures as the creators of the 'progressive, capitalist, liberal-humanist modern world that the spectator was having the good fortune to inhabit' (Bingham, 2010:32). Intriguingly, Kevin J. Harty argues that it was for a very similar reason that the fascist Spanish dictator General Franco supported the production of the Hollywood Epic *El Cid* (Mann, 1961). Harty argues that Franco saw himself as a

modern-day El Cid who would unite Spain and defend it against threats both external and internal (Harty, 2009: loc 2542) Both Harty and Bingham's arguments would appear to indicate that biopics can function as a useful tool for governments, both dictatorial and democratic, who wish to steer their populous in a particular direction. The portrayal of these historical figures as 'great people' (see pages 276-277 for definition of this term), can result in depicting them as people to emulate, in order to build support for military actions or to provide more general support for the actions and policies of a particular government.

However, it is worth considering that just because 'great person' biopics tend to be a useful tool for governments, this by no means applies to all films of this genre, especially if individual creators create these biopics in order to criticise the government of the time. An example of this occurs with *Malcolm X* (Lee, 1992), where Spike Lee claims that his film is explicitly critical of the United States of America's current treatment of African-Americans, stating that:

What Malcolm X talked about back then, 30 years ago, is still with us today. Black folks in this country are still second-class citizens. And that is why we began the film with the American flag burning down to an X with the Rodney King footage, to show that not much progress has happened. And please, don't think of this film as just a fossil, a dinosaur, a historical document. The stuff that Malcolm X was talking about is still relevant today. And the biggest example of it is this videotape that the whole world saw. The whole world saw. And yet, justice was not done (Terry, 1992).

As *El Cid*, *Malcolm X*, and *That Hamilton Woman* clearly demonstrate the portrayal of historical figures in the 'great person' biopic is as informed by the wider context of the film's production as it is by the life of the figure depicted, whether that be the broader social issues, or in the specifics of the film's production process. The reasons why these protagonists are portrayed in their biopic as a 'great person' can be so diverse that any study into these 'great person' biopics would benefit from not only considering how the film portrays its protagonist, but also the particular reasons why the film portrays them in that particular way.

However, while the appropriation of historical figures for contemporaneous political purposes could be considered to be a common feature of propaganda cinema, although there is more nuance in the case of *El Cid* than in *That Hamilton Woman*, with Harty arguing that there are a number of clashing agendas that made up the production of *El Cid*, rather than the more straightforwardly propagandistic *That Hamilton Woman*.

The propagandistic intentions of the World War Two historical films were directly referred to by the then Hollywood Screenwriter Aeneas Mackenzie, who wrote about a memo he received when preparing an adaptation of the life of George Armstrong Custer, at a time when America was moving closer to intervention in World War Two. The inter-office memo explains that:

I need not mention that this picture will be released at the moment when thousands of youths are being trained for commissions, when hundreds of new and tradition-less units are being formed. If we can inspire these to some

appreciation of a great officer and a great regiment in their own service, we shall have accomplished our mission (cited in Toplin, 2002:42).

These films provide strong evidence of how historical films can evolve in order deliberately to create contemporary thematic resonance, to such an extent that it is possible to argue that contemporary thematic resonance is the main reason that these particular propaganda films were made in the first place. However, as Marnie Hughes-Warrington observes, just because a film was intended to be propagandistic, does not mean that it will necessarily be received as the filmmakers intended, as occurred with the release of the film *The Battle of the Somme* (Malins and McDowell, 1916). Hughes-Warrington highlights that while David Lloyd George, then the British Minister for War, hoped that the film would lead to an increase in support for World War One. This was not what occurred; for a number of people who went to see the film it had a very different effect as they used their experience of watching the film to work through their loss of friends and family during the conflict (Hughes-Warrington, 2007). So thorough was this failure in building support for the war, that Pierre Sorlin believes that rather than building support the experience led to many cases where screenings of the film became for a number of people ‘ways of mourning collectively’ (Sorlin, 2006:141), and the film ended up forming the basis of a representation of the war which has been ‘endlessly reused to the present’ (Sorlin, 2006:141).

However, although contemporary thematic resonance is a common tool for propaganda in historical films, it does not necessarily mean that all uses of contemporary thematic resonance are propagandistic by nature. In fact, Grant Rodwell argues that, ‘the values underpinning the narrative are always imbedded in those contemporary socio-cultural

values in which the narrative is written' (Rodwell, 2010:18). In essence, this means that all works of historical fiction, both in literature and in film are at least somewhat resonant with the present. Even if the author is intending to write from the perspective of people who lived in the past, some elements of modern cultural values will inevitably emerge, even if this only occurs unconsciously.

Although the analysis in this chapter focuses on deliberate examples of contemporary thematic resonance, it is important to consider the possibility of coincidental thematic resonance: the reflection of an aspect of wider society which gives the film a different symbolic meaning than the filmmakers had intended. James Chapman highlights this when writing about *Chariots of Fire* (Hudson, 1981) and *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998), both of which gained cultural significance from events that were coincidental to the films, but which had a major bearing on the ways in which those films were understood: The Falklands War, for *Chariots of Fire* and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales for *Elizabeth* (Chapman, 2005:322). A more recent example of coincidental thematic resonance is highlighted by Simon Mayo when during an interview with Gillian Anderson about the film *Viceroy's House* (Chadha, 2017), suggested that:

I wonder if a lot of people feel it's remarkably contemporary, really, that there are lots of references to the Brits getting out, and that the timetable for getting out isn't wrong, and then there's the refugee crisis, and border issues, even though it's 1947, and is a story in its own right, it feels quite 2017 as well (Anderson, 2017).



Mayo's references to the timetable of 'the Brits getting out,' would appear to draw a clear resonance between the events of 1947, which are depicted in the film, and the aftermath of the 2016 Referendum on Britain leaving the European Union. Gillian Anderson agreed that the film's story is 'ultimately about the politics of division and fear' (Kermode and Mayo, 2017b). Particularly with regard to the film's depiction of immigration, a topic that was in the public consciousness with Oxford's Migration Observatory estimating that by the end of 2014, the average number of newspaper articles per month which contained the words 'immigration' or 'migration' was a particularly high 787.25 (Allen, 2016).

Therefore, an argument can be made, as Gillian Anderson made in the interview, that the film reflects and critiques contemporary questions about immigration. However, that does not change the fact that resonance with the 2016 Referendum on Britain's exit from the European Union, was present in the film, just that the resonance was coincidental, particularly as *Viceroy's House* had actually been filmed during the summer and autumn of 2015 (Mitchell, 2015), almost a full year before the 2016 referendum. Whether the resonance was deliberate or coincidental does not detract from the fact that the resonance was felt; it just means that when it comes to analysing historical films and television programmes it is useful to delineate between deliberate thematic resonance and coincidental thematic resonance. This can be done through consultation with interviews with the film or programme makers themselves, or through analysis of contemporary media texts.

This leads to one of the key benefits of using medievalist texts to create some form of thematic resonance: specifically, what Lesley Coote identifies as a kind of 'third space' (Coote, 2017:103), whereby the distant past offers us a space in which we can deal with themes and ideas that might be considered inappropriate in more contemporary film worlds.

This space could be located in some form of fantasy medievalism, as occurs in *The Seventh Seal*, or in a more realistic milieu, as in *Black Death*. Either way, this ‘third space’ allows us to critique ideas from our relatively ‘safe’ position in the distant present.

This section argues that contemporary thematic resonance is a regular feature of historical adaptation. In this respect *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal*, are particularly useful as case studies, as both films, despite the fact that they are adapting the same period, focus on different themes and ideas. While there is some overlap, especially as both films are overtly critical of the Church’s actions during this period, ultimately, they both aim to resonate with the audience in different ways.

When publicising *Black Death*, Christopher Smith, the film’s director, claimed that one of the main purposes of this film was to ensure that someone watching the film ‘can see how things have not changed in 600 years’ (Smith: 2011a). This statement reveals the filmmakers’ intentions directly to relate the film’s depiction of the Black Death to the present, thus rejecting the possibility that the thematic resonance that Smith created in this film was coincidental. In fact, his comment actually came in response to the interviewer stating: ‘you can relate it (*Black Death*) to what happens in our world today’ (Smith: 2011a). Perhaps, in showing how ‘things have not changed in 600 years’, *Black Death* is most similar to texts that depict history encroaching on the present, such as the modern-set television series *Whitechapel* (ITV, 2009-2013), about which Williams observes:

Here, history seems doomed to repeat itself in vicious cycles of murder and violence, and information about what has occurred before does not

necessarily lead to the prevention of further crimes or to a conclusive resolution of the narrative (Williams 2014:83).

*Black Death*'s attempts to show the 'vicious cycles of murder and violence,' becomes particularly clear in the film's epilogue when, due to the various traumas inflicted on the liberal monk Osmund (Eddie Redmayne), his views become much more reactionary and his treatment of people accused of witchcraft grows considerably more punitive. Osmund's perspective and world view have changed to the extent that while at the beginning of the film he was a relatively liberal priest, willing to question and critique the church's stance towards the plague outbreak, the trauma that has been inflicted on him has turned him into a radical inquisitorial priest, and the final sequence shows him burning several women at the stake as a form of revenge against Langvia (Carice Van Houten).

If the film's intentions were to create resonance with contemporary society, then the question would benefit from being addressed again, but from a different perspective. Instead of asking to what extent should the depiction of the past be focused on creating resonance with the present, it might be beneficial to ask whether the creation of thematic resonance justifies the addition of anachronisms and deviations from the historical sources?

When answering this question, it is useful to consider contemporary thematic resonance alongside Thomas Greene's classification of anachronisms. As outlined in Chapter Two, Greene identifies five different types of anachronism (naïve, abusive, serendipitous, creative, and tragic) and defines how they are used within adaptation (Greene, 1986:220-222). The definition of creative anachronism, as a deliberate utilisation of the past in order to comment on the contemporary time of the artwork, stands as a useful basis for

the analysis of contemporary resonance yet could usefully be expanded further, to encompass not just anachronism, but also the role of invention. This can be seen in *Black Death*, which includes a number of inventions from outside the historical sources in order to create a sense of contemporary thematic resonance. This enables the film to more effectively draw parallels between the past and the present. In *Black Death*, the filmmaker's intention was not to provide a hyper-realistic depiction of life in this catastrophic time period, but instead to capture a more nebulous chaotic atmosphere that seeks to create confusion and doubt within the audience. The use of creative inventions in *Black Death* potentially allows modern audiences to understand more clearly how certain groups or individuals can use similar events in order to assert power over other groups. This shows that creative anachronisms can be used both to further our understanding of the past and to draw links between the past and the present.

These elements of invention within the narrative are used by the filmmakers for several reasons; one of the key reasons is to present how people's ignorance in the face of such an event can be manipulated. By focusing the narrative on a fictional event within the real historical event a sense of unease could be created in sections of the audience; this unease ultimately prevents them from falling back onto their own knowledge of the event. This might put the viewer in the same position as the film's protagonists who are in a similar state of confusion and demonstrate a similar lack of certainty. Throughout the film the characters, and potentially by extension the audience, are left wondering if Langvia's claims of control over the plague are true. While the narrative eventually unveils her as a fraud, who uses people's ignorance for her own ends, this narrative device allows the audience to

possibly generate some level of understanding as to what it must have felt like to live in such a confusing time and to be manipulated with false hope.

The invented narrative in *Black Death* has the potential of placing the audience in a state of confusion and anxiety, in order to better understand the confusion and anxiety that would have been felt by people of that period. In so doing the film allows the audience to possibly develop some understanding of how people reacted to such a chaotic event.

While *Black Death* attempts to evoke what life would have been like during this epidemic and allows the audience to potentially draw parallels with the modern day, it does not take away from the fact that on a surface level the film contains historical inaccuracies within the central plot. Most importantly, the film's depiction of the Black Death leading to an outbreak of witch hunting across Europe is entirely invented. However, it is worth considering that even this is a relatively common feature of Black Death narratives, with it also appearing in texts such as *World Without End* (Channel 4, 2010), and *Season of the Witch* (Sena, 2011). This narrative device is so common that it serves as an example of Sorlin's designation of 'metahistory' (Sorlin, 1998:206-207), which was analysed in Chapter Two. Although there is a tenuous argument which could be made that there is a link between another plague outbreak and witch-hunting, that outbreak was in the mid-seventeenth century, not the outbreak of 1347-1351.

There is, however, a similarity between the methods used in accusing so-called 'plague spreaders', and those that were later used in accusations of witchcraft. Yet this does not alter the fact that the film's attempt to depict the Black Death as leading to a witch-hunting craze across England is a work of total invention. Even when blame for the plague was directed at people, the accused were generally of a different religious or social group to

Europe's Christian majority. As Joseph Byrne points out, there are records of groups as diverse as Gypsies, Muslims, nobles, lepers, beggars, and foreigners being accused of 'plague spreading' (Byrne, 2012:194).

By far the most common group to be blamed for the plague were the Jewish communities. The chronicler Jacob von Konigshofen reported, albeit one generation after the event, that during this time the Jewish population was burnt 'in many cities,' and while from other cities they were expelled, even then they could be, 'caught by the peasants and stabbed to death or drowned' (cited in Cohn, 2007: 17-18). These concerns relate to the issues concerning the potential benefits of approaches to history which deliberately avoid being faithful towards the history as it is commonly understood. As such, this aspect of contemporary thematic resonance directly relates to the second of the key research questions, namely how the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources can function within historical adaptation. *Black Death's* approach to the depiction of persecution takes the approach offered by Toplin by presenting a smaller 'truth' in order to advance an understanding of an important 'larger' truth (Toplin, 2007). The film reveals that in order to create contemporary thematic resonance within historical adaptation, there does not necessarily have to be a focus on fidelity to the historical sources. It is possible that a suitably creative alternative to fidelity can create a more succinct form of adaptation, in which the central themes of the text can move away from the historical sources, in order to create a stronger sense of contemporary thematic resonance.

By rejecting fidelity, *Black Death* is able to alter its focus, and shift towards a looser form of historical adaptation, focusing on the re-creation of what is perceived to be the mentality of people living in this period. In this respect the rejection of fidelity within the

contemporary thematic resonance, positions *Black Death* closer to the role of memory in medieval film. Sarah Salih observes that memory's relationship to medieval cinema is common in popular culture and that it 'continually reshapes the past to answer the shifting question put to it by the present' (Salih, 2011:20). In this respect, *Black Death* is a film whose usefulness as a historical adaptation rests on how it reshapes the past, in order to draw out thematic resonances with the present.

Perhaps the most efficient way of thinking about *Black Death*'s relationship to history is by treating it as an example of what Toplin terms a 'faction,' i.e. a text that while set in the past takes a variety of different elements from the generally understood history, and then blends them together with a number of completely fictional elements, in order to create a wholly original narrative (Toplin, 2002). For *Black Death*, the historical elements of how the plague operated and how the arrival of it was viewed by people, is combined with the film's overtly fictional plot and characters. By taking a factional approach to the narrative Christopher Smith gives himself a greater space to reject fidelity to history, with even those elements that are not a part of historical actuality helping to generate a new understanding of the historical events depicted. By creating a fictional narrative and populating it with fictional characters, Smith is able to place the audience into a state of narrative uncertainty. This narrative uncertainty ensures that the audience does not have the relative safety of their prior knowledge of history as a way of ascertaining the fate of the characters they are watching on screen, something that would occur if Smith chose to follow the narrative of history. If Smith had chosen to make *Black Death* absolutely faithful to the historical sources, then the audience might be more comfortable, thus allowing their own

knowledge of the event to undermine any tension that they feel towards the events depicted on screen.

The opportunity to reject fidelity to the historical sources that emerges when historical adaptations are treated as fictions, serves to further highlight the central argument that a film's adaptation of a historical event cannot necessarily be discounted if it does not follow the historical events as they are generally accepted. For example, the film depicts in its central narrative, a village turning away from Christianity, as an attempt to protect itself from the Black Death. This fictional narrative is actually more useful in creating a sense of contemporary thematic resonance than if it had taken a similar plot device directly from historical sources. The freedom granted by choosing an original narrative within the historical adaptation allows the filmmakers to explore contemporary themes and ideas from a historical perspective, without being restricted into following the historical events as they are generally understood. In this respect fictional texts serve as excellent examples of the potential benefits of alternative approaches towards history within a historical adaptation.

Moving away from *Black Death*, it quickly becomes apparent that *The Seventh Seal* approaches the subject of contemporary thematic resonance in a much more overt way. Indeed, John Aberth observes that the film functions almost as a cinematic lesson in the connections which can be made between the cultural attitudes and preoccupations of both the medieval world and of the present day (Aberth, 2003). This is made particularly clear when the film's status as a modern version of a medieval morality play is taken into consideration. This status was highlighted by a film critic in *The Guardian* (*The Guardian*, 1958) on *The Seventh Seal's* initial release, and was more recently mentioned by David Gritten in *The Telegraph* (Gritten, 2007). By positioning *The Seventh Seal* as a modern



adaptation of the medieval morality play, Bergman creates a contemporary thematic resonance with the generally accepted purposes of those plays. In so doing Bergman creates a new approach to the medieval morality play, potentially helping the audience to understand how such texts were used and understood at the time, while also shifting their meanings in order to convey his chosen themes and concepts.

The purposes of the medieval morality play are reasonably straightforward. As Pamela King identifies they:

Offer their audiences moral instruction through dramatic action that is broadly allegorical. Hence, they are set in no time, or outside historical time, though their lack of historical specificity is generally exploited by strategically collapsing the eternal with the contemporary (King, 2008:235).



*Figure 3.4: Antonius Block lies on the beach in The Seventh Seal (Bergman, 1957).*

This lack of historical specificity is shown throughout the various anachronisms in *The Seventh Seal* and is communicated to the audience most clearly from the outset of the film with the information that Antonius Block is returning from the Crusades. The film's mise-en-scène continually reminds the audience of Block's status as a returning Crusader, through the inclusion of The Cross of Malta, the symbol of The Order of the Knights Hospitaller, on his costume (figure 3.4). This is despite the fact that in historical actuality the main period of the Crusades had occurred over a century prior to the Black Death outbreak of the mid-fourteenth century. This use of anachronism to create ahistoricity (along with similar anachronisms throughout the film), allows Bergman to position *The Seventh Seal* within the tradition of the medieval morality play. Therefore, the use of anachronisms helps to put the audience in a similar position to the medieval audiences that watched the original mortality plays. While the themes and ideas that Bergman is addressing are different, the re-creation of the medium of the medieval morality play allows the audience to possibly view the text in a similar way to the medieval audience, creating a form of thematic resonance between the medieval and the modern audiences.

This thematic resonance between *The Seventh Seal* and the medieval morality play is a consistent feature throughout the structure of the film. In many ways as Finke and Shichtman note, *The Seventh Seal's* narrative is structured around the visual representation of a number of different performances and public displays, (e.g. plays, processions, etc) which are observed by Block and Jöns (Finke and Shichtman, 2010:311). This status is reinforced by the presence of the acting troupe who join Antonius Block on his journey home. However, in *The Seventh Seal* Bergman presents his version of the medieval morality play as being mutually exclusive between 'laughter and doctrine'. However, in a number of

the medieval morality plays that survive from this period there was a mixture between the two (Finke and Shichtman, 2010:312). This portrayal of the humorous and serious parts of the medieval morality play would appear to indicate that while Bergman, has successfully adapted elements of these performances into his films, they are not meant to be taken as literal portrayals of the form. Instead the portrayal of medieval morality plays could be viewed as a guide to either develop insights into the period or could possibly be read as symbolic of the broader ways that people of the time could have attempted to understand the catastrophic events of the plague outbreak.

This aspect of the performances in *The Seventh Seal* is particularly significant as Medieval morality plays are perhaps most accurately described as allegorical texts, whereby various attributes are personified in order to interact with the protagonist. For example, in *Mankind* (Anonymous, circa 1464-1471), the protagonist is a stand-in for all of humanity, and as such is called Mankind. Throughout the play Mankind has a series of interactions with characters who are clear stand-ins for various aspects of the human experience some of whom are presented as positive, for example Mercy who claims to be humanity's defendant should it repent its sins, while others are presented as negative, such as Mischief, Nowadays, and Nought who try to tempt Mankind towards sloth. While, the characters in *The Seventh Seal* are generally more individual than the protagonists in medieval morality plays, this allegorical personification is still present in the film with the character Death. Death had previously been depicted in another medieval morality play, *Everyman* (Anonymous, circa 1520, but could be from as early as the late fifteenth century). In *Everyman* Death is a servant of God, and is ordered to prepare Everyman for his death, so Death visits Everyman. This use of allegorical personification allows *The Seventh Seal* to utilise the conventions of the

medieval morality play in order to re-present them, thus making them more closely fit with the themes Bergman wanted to address, while also presenting a modern audience with the opportunity to observe how those features functioned in their original form.

In the analysis of contemporary thematic resonance in *The Seventh Seal*, it is important to remember that the film places the threat of the Black Death into the background, turning the plague into an unseen force that permeates the characters' decisions and sets the tone for the film. This ensures that the audience is only presented with the reality of the plague when the protagonists' encounter a plague-stricken man, towards the end of the film. By focusing on an unseen threat, *The Seventh Seal* universalises the threat of the plague and emphasises one of the central themes of the film, the inevitable universality of death, therefore ensuring that the resonance is ongoing. It is not just for audiences at the time of release, but also for modern audiences watching it over sixty years later.

When analysing the role of thematic resonance within historical adaptation, it must be made clear that elements of contemporary thematic resonance are by no means unique to film adaptations but are in fact a common element of historical adaptation across all forms of media. This is made particularly clear when analysing how the medieval has been depicted in art since the nineteenth-century. For example, the 'Age of Chivalry' depiction of the medieval period was a focus of, and ultimately shaped by, the nineteenth-century Romantics who used medieval imagery drawn from Arthurian legends, in order to reflect what they saw as a more utopian, natural, and holistic time. These artists were, as Andrew Elliott observes:

Broadly united in their medievalism by a background of anti-Catholicism, the celebration of the individual, the sentimental over the Rational and mechanical and a eulogising of Nature as a pre-Industrial idyll inherently superior to the lumbering, inhuman and unnatural chimneys and factories of the Industrial Revolution (Elliott, 2017:29).



Figure 3.5: *The Lady of Shalott* by John William Waterhouse (Tate, 2017).

An example of their work is *The Lady of Shalott* by John William Waterhouse (figure 3.5). This romantic attitude towards the medieval would eventually make its way into cinema with Hollywood's depiction of the King Arthur and Robin Hood myths in films such as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Curtiz and Keighley, 1938) and *Excalibur* (Boorman, 1981).

In their rejection of the generally accepted historical sources, both *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal*, allow themselves to pursue their own agendas, while at the same time providing evidence of one of the purposes of historical adaptation. Specifically, historical

adaptation does not have to be solely focused on the total re-creation of a historical period but can also work on re-configuring it. The people making these historical adaptations alter their depictions of the past in order more effectively to relate their themes to a modern audience. This re-configuration has the effect of functioning in a similar way to Hollywood's adaptations and alterations of Shakespeare's plays in what Osborne refers to as 'Teen Shakespearean Twelfth Nights' (Osborne, 2008:11). These changes were made for a variety of reasons, but most significantly for this analysis, they occur in order to reflect the changes in society since the plays were first performed, thus highlighting another advantage in choosing an alternative approach to the original source. Both *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal* take the basic historical events and re-configure them, keeping the basic elements, but altering how they depict those events in order to relate more strongly with contemporary society. Essentially, when Scott declared that there was 'no escaping the parallels with our time' (Scott, 2005:8), he was not just speaking for his film *Kingdom of Heaven*, but for all historical adaptations.

### The illumination of the past

The second element of historical adaptation which this chapter focuses on, is the illumination of the past. This is not a simple depiction of the past but a deliberate attempt to create a further understanding of history, even if it requires rejecting fidelity. This subject was identified in the literature review when it referred to Richard Slotkin's analysis of historical fiction in literature which claims that:

The truth the novel seeks is poetic rather than historiographical: it sacrifices fidelity to non-essential facts in order to create in the reader a vivid sense of what it may have been like to live among such facts (Slotkin, 2007: 225).

While Slotkin was referring specifically to literature, the argument that historical fiction seeks to move beyond a strict focus on fidelity and depiction and instead focus on a further understanding of the past, can be extended to other historical adaptations. Depicting the past is merely presenting what the audience and the filmmaker ‘knows’ and accepts to be true, while illumination requires a more critical examination of the period by the filmmakers, in order to provide a more thorough representation of life at that time.

In 2012 Alex Von Tunzelmann wrote an article for her Reel Cinema column in *The Guardian* entitled ‘Black Death Should be Burnt at the Stake’ (Von Tunzelmann, 2012a). In this column Von Tunzelmann criticises the film’s representation of witch hunting, claiming that overall the film is, ‘...plagued by historical inaccuracies’ (Von Tunzelmann, 2012a). Von Tunzelmann is correct in claiming that the film does not follow the generally accepted historical sources, a status underlined by the fact that the first recorded sentencing of someone for sorcery in England did not occur until 1396, fifty years after the plague outbreak (Jones and Zell, 2005:46). However, this does not necessarily mean that the film is a failure of historical adaptation, especially as *Black Death* is not choosing to focus its adaptation on fidelity to the historical sources. Instead of creating a literal adaptation of the historical events the filmmakers opt for a historically literate approach, adjusting their focus towards re-creating the atmosphere of the time period, in order to help generate an understanding of what Aberth terms the ‘medieval mentality’ (Aberth, 2003:viii). The film

is focused on how the filmmakers believed people of the time would have reacted to such an event happening, thus creating an alternative understanding of history, which avoids fidelity in order to illuminate the past.

*Black Death* presents to the audience the fear and confusion that would have been a part of daily life during this calamitous event. This intent is reflected on by the film's director, Christopher Smith, during an interview in which he claimed: '[what] I am most proud of is that it feels as though the characters have medieval thinking and are behaving in a medieval way' (Smith, 2011b). The use of the phrase 'I am most proud' is especially revealing of Smith's intent for *Black Death*, as it implies that this aspect of the film is one that he believes to be particularly important to communicate to the audience. In the production of *Black Death* the focus was not merely on re-creating the period in as close a detail as possible, but was also focused on presenting the mentality of people living at this time, in order to help create a new understanding of the possible reasons why people reacted to the event in the ways in which they did.

In this respect *Black Death* in its attempts to illuminate the past is revealing just how useful it is to move away from what Linda Hutcheon refers to as 'the morally loaded discourse of fidelity' (Hutcheon, 2013:7). This means that when making an adaptation, the adaptors should not necessarily be confined by the generally accepted historical sources. Instead, the adaptors can be granted the freedom to deviate from the history sources, in order to focus on those thematic elements the people making the adaptation believe to be the most useful in illuminating the past. In the example of *Black Death*, Christopher Smith clearly believes that attempting to depict the state of mind of people during these calamitous events



was of primary importance, even if it came at the expense of the traditional notions of fidelity.

In making *Black Death* the filmmakers decided to shift the focus of the adaptation away from fidelity and towards a re-creation of the chaotic atmosphere and way of life for people during this epidemic. This attempt to re-create the 'medieval mentality' (Aberth, 2003:viii) is made clear to the audience in the opening scenes. The film begins with a voiceover from the character Wolfstan (John Lynch), who speaks to the audience about the plague. During this voiceover Wolfstan emphasises late-medieval people's lack of knowledge about the plague's source by including in his narration the lines 'Where did it come from, what carried its journey,' before continuing with, 'the priests told us it was God's punishment, for what sin? What commandment must we break that would earn this? No, we knew the truth; it was not God's work but devilry, witchcraft.' These two lines of dialogue reveal to the audience the filmmaker's intent on focusing their adaptation on two specific features of the Black Death: Firstly, the film will present to the audience the confusion and horror of living through this event without any knowledge as to the plague's origins or of why people were facing it. Secondly, these lines reveal that the film will depict how people's own beliefs about the world affected their reactions to the disaster.



Figure 3.6: A plague rat scurries along the floor in *Black Death* (Smith, 2010).

This second point is highlighted further when at the moment the narrator says, ‘We knew the truth.’ The camera cuts to a rat running along the floor of the house (figure 3.6). This cut serves the purpose of referencing the then commonly held belief as to how the plague was spread (Devilry) with what modern audiences now generally believe to be the truth i.e. that rats carrying fleas were infected with *Yersinia Pestis*, the bacterium that at the time the film was made, was believed to be responsible for the plague (Carmichael, 2014:157). Additionally, by giving the audience this information at the beginning of the film, the audience is informed that the film’s characters are going to be unreliable as sources of knowledge about the outbreak. In essence, the filmmakers are taking an opening voiceover, a framing device which, as Woods observes, is typically used in medieval film as a trustworthy source of information that helps to establish the authenticity of the setting (Woods, 2014), and turning it into a source of clearly false information. This has the effect of positioning Wolfstan as an unreliable narrator, although not as a liar, while still establishing the authenticity of the film’s setting by portraying his views as representative of the time. Doing this helps to remind the viewer that what characters are going to say

during this film is not necessarily the truth, but could in fact be rumour, hearsay, and superstition. The film shows us the image of the rat in order to underline how far from reality these characters' beliefs are, while also keeping that information away from the film's characters.

Similarly, the filmmakers' decision to place emphasis on the fear and confusion that was caused by the plague creates what is believed to be a reflection of common attitudes from that time period. The filmmakers are re-presenting these attitudes in the film in order to promote an understanding in the audience as to the reasons why people of the time reacted to the event in the ways in which they did. When analysing a number of chronicles from the time period, it is possible to find references to a then contemporary belief that the plague was God's punishment. For example, the medieval chronicler Knighton included in his writings his belief that the Black Death was an attack on what he saw as the licentiousness of the population that 'God, in this matter, as in all others, brought marvellous remedy' (cited in Ziegler: 1969:21). This belief that God's punishment is the reason for the plague is reflected in the film by having it supported by some of the protagonists, who are a group of mercenaries working for a local bishop, as well as by minor characters whom these mercenaries meet on their journey.

*Black Death* portrays these characters as people whose attitudes are emblematic of their time and posits the view that ordinary people might not have considered the possibility that the plague could have come from a more mundane source. By so thoroughly portraying what is perceived to be the plague's effects on the mentality of people living in this period, the film presents a vital element of the illumination of the past within historical fiction. In essence, by showing how people's responses to an event are a reflection of the general,

social, cultural, and political concerns of the period the filmmakers allow for the audience to further their own understanding of how people lived during the depicted event.

This general focus on rumour and misinformation as a response to living during the events of the Black Death is returned to throughout the film and allows the text to focus on creating a thorough representation of what everyday life would have been like during the chaos of this period. On several occasions, the film depicts groups of people discussing rumours about the plague and trading nightmarish stories about how other villages are responding to the outbreak. *Black Death* particularly emphasises this during the final sequences with the reveal that Langvia, who the protagonists had accused of leading a village into paganism, was using the village's isolation and people's general lack of knowledge about the epidemic, to convince the villagers that she was keeping the plague away from them. While this plot is a work of invention, it does not prevent *Black Death* from being an effective adaptation of the historical period. The film does not aim to be faithful to historical sources, but instead focuses its adaptation on re-creating the chaotic atmosphere of the time. *Black Death* ultimately regards the question of fidelity as a secondary concern, preferring instead to allow a number of historical inaccuracies into the film's narrative, in order to better reflect the fear and confusion that were a common feature of life under the threat of the Black Death, but not to the extent that these additions, as Woods describes, 'destroy the consistency of the illusion, eroding our emotional investment in the film' (Woods, 2004:47).

An example of a film where the consistency of illusion is eroded is *Virgin Territory* (Leland, 2007), another film about the Black Death, which in one sequence features the anachronistic inclusion of a 'stripper pole' which has the effect of destroying the film's

consistency of illusion. Ensuring that the consistency of the illusion is maintained throughout the text remains an important point of concern for historical adaptation, in order to make the production's evocation of the past feel 'authentic.' While authenticity is a relatively fluid state within texts which utilise medievalisms, it is important that, if nothing else, it follows Pam Clements' fourth distinction of the authentic, namely 'authenticity as believability or verisimilitude' (Clements, 2014:23). In historical adaptation the illusion benefits from being made consistent, so that all of the visual elements of a text can be accepted by the film or television programme's audience. For example, in *The Seventh Seal*, the fantastical character Death is consistent with the world that Ingmar Bergman created, and as such did not break the consistency of illusion in the way that it could have done in *Black Death*, whose narrative revolves around the repudiation of the supernatural.

Similarly, in *The Seventh Seal*, rumour is constantly depicted as the main source of information about the Black Death. Throughout the film the audience is presented with people talking about the imminent arrival of the plague, and its effects both on the average person and on the population as a whole. As the film progresses this fear is referred to in increasingly apocalyptic terms, thus serving as an example of Harty's observation that European people living through the medieval period did not regard themselves as living in 'middle times'; instead, they felt that they were living during the end times (Harty, 1999). In fact, this fear was justified as the film was set in Sweden, and it has been estimated that in the Nordic countries about half the population died during the period 1348-1374 (Myrdal 2006:161). Throughout *The Seventh Seal* the Black Death is spoken of more than it is actually seen, and it is only towards the end of the film that the travellers finally meet someone stricken by the plague. Therefore, the source of the majority of information about

the pestilence within the film comes from second-hand sources, a feature which is reminiscent of *Black Death* and its depiction of the impact of rumours on the population.

One of the significant similarities between *The Seventh Seal* and *Black Death* is that both films depict the failure of religion adequately to prepare people for the outbreak, as well as the church's failure to protect people during the epidemic. Throughout both films the audience are presented with religious figures who are depicted as failing in their duties to look after their parishioners, whether it is the monks who are heckled by the general populace and accused of leaving the townspeople to die in *Black Death*, or the failed priest in *The Seventh Seal*, who before the events of the film had sent Antonius off on his crusade, but during the outbreak has become both a rapist and a thief. These films highlight a commonly held belief that the church had failed its people, a belief that Ziegler comments upon in his history of the plague outbreak when he claims that 'fairly or unfairly, medieval man felt that his church had let him down' (Ziegler, 1970: 268-269). Ziegler goes on to claim that priests were seen as:

Not to have risen to the level of their responsibilities, to have run away in fear or in search of gain, to have put their own skins first and the souls of their parishioners a deep second (Ziegler, 1970:268-269).

In each of these films while the specific actions by individual characters are fictitious, they operate as symbolic representations of then contemporary changing attitudes towards the church, and as such use fictitious responses so that these texts can convincingly create their characters' medieval mentality (Aberth, 2003:viii) to more thoroughly illuminate

the reasons why people of the medieval period reacted to the plague outbreak in the ways in which they did.



Figure 3.7: A parade of flagellants in *Black Death* (Smith, 2010).

When attempting to illuminate the past in film, anachronisms when used creatively can be of great benefit in synthesising filmmakers' ideas. This occurs in *Black Death* which anachronistically depicts flagellants engaging in their rituals in England (figure 3.7). This is despite the fact that the movement never gained a foothold in England even though there was a pilgrimage to London in 1348; instead, flagellants were based in what is now modern-day Germany, with smaller groups existing further west in what is now modern-day France and Italy (Cohn, 1993). However, the flagellants serve another purpose within the film, in that they illustrate one of the film's chief themes: the rise of religious extremism in the periods during, and after, the Black Death, most importantly a strain of religion that is separate from the church. The protagonists in the film are representatives of the local religious authorities whether that be the Monastery or the Bishop, and when they come across a group of flagellants, who are acting outside the church's authority, the protagonists

are depicted as completely separate from the flagellants. *Black Death* presents the flagellants as uniform, ominous, and imposing, thus clearly reflecting the uncertain future of religion as people begin to look outside the church for their religious needs. Similarly, this sequence is reflective of an earlier sequence in the film in which Osmond (Eddie Redmayne) is subjected to a series of verbal attacks from some townspeople who saw the church as weak and failing the people of the community.

While the film's representation of a flagellant presence in England is not historically accurate, the film uses it to highlight the very real concerns of people looking outside the traditional church for religion. In presenting the flagellants and the general population attacking the priesthood in this manner, *Black Death* reflects a growing belief amongst people of the time that the church had failed adequately to prepare and protect them from the plague. After the outbreak this necessitated a significant restructuring of the church in England, in order to regain its influence on the people, as well as forcing the church to be made aware of what Christopher Harper-Bill refers to as 'the anxiety of literate elements of the laity to participate in the widening of personal religious experience' (Harper-Bill, 2003:123).

*The Seventh Seal* also focuses its depiction of life during the Black Death fundamentally on people's search for religious meaning outside of the church. Both films are focused on characters who believe that the church has failed adequately to respond to the crisis of the plague outbreak. However, unlike the religious mercenaries and monks who are certain of their beliefs in *Black Death* and remain observers of other people's crises of faith, the protagonists, in *The Seventh Seal* are searching for the answers themselves. It is significant that the first place Antonius Block visits during his journey is the church, and



when he fails to find answers inside the building, he sets off to find them elsewhere, even near the end asking to see the Devil in a condemned witch's eyes, in order to find some proof of a metaphysical realm beyond death.

However, Antonius Block is by no means unique within *The Seventh Seal* in his search for a religious meaning to the Black Death. A number of characters he encounters over the course of his journey are representative of the belief that while there is a traditionally theistic reason for the calamity, it is not one that can be found within the



*Figure 3.8: A Villager reacts to a parade of flagellants in The Seventh Seal (Bergman, 1957).*

confines of traditional church doctrine. This is particularly noticeable in *The Seventh Seal's* scene with the flagellants. Before the flagellants' arrival the entire village is enjoying a travelling show, but from the second that the flagellant procession arrives this religious group has the villagers' attention. The villagers immediately go down on their knees before the new arrivals in a gesture of reverence, with some villagers clearly seen crying (figure 3.8). This sequence in *The Seventh Seal* fundamentally reflects a strong belief among

sections of the population that while the church has failed them, they still accept traditional theistic values as long as they exist outside of the church's structure. Both *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal* fundamentally place the search for religious meaning in the face of this calamity as a central feature of their attempts to illuminate the past, which is not altogether surprising considering just how important the church was in people's daily life during the late-medieval period.

Another way in which *The Seventh Seal* helps to illuminate the past is by appropriating the iconography of the late-medieval period. This occurs throughout the film, indeed as Aberth observes, 'Bergman completely surrenders his film to a late-medieval artistic milieu' (Aberth, 2003:219). Specifically, Bergman creates a late-medieval artistic milieu which draws inspiration from both medieval art and literature. This is particularly clear with *The Seventh Seal's* use of the Grim Reaper. During the mid-fourteenth century the generally recognised depiction of the Grim Reaper as a skeleton with a scythe became more common in religious art, although it has its roots in mythological figures from much earlier. In fact, Cohen writes that these pre-1350 depictions of the skeleton as the personification of Death were generally not seen as a pitiless enemy, but that 'the skeleton was nothing more than a symbol of the will of the pitiless Gods' (Cohen, 1982:37). During the years after the epidemic, the depiction of Death as a 'Grim Reaper' figure, (as seen earlier in the Taby Chapel painting, figure 3.3) was greatly increased as a response to the sheer loss of life resulting from the Black Death, with these depictions often showing the Reaper's scythe symbolically cutting down large groups of people. However, *The Seventh Seal* takes the classic image of the Grim Reaper but humanises it, moving it away from the traditional depiction of a skeleton, and literally giving it a human face. This is not the traditional figure

of an implacable metaphysical being but a more human character who, while possessing unknown powers, can be reasoned and even bargained with, if only to extend time enough to play a game of chess.

The *Seventh Seal* reflects pre-plague depictions of Death as a ‘symbol of will’ throughout the film, creating a Grim Reaper that jokes, manipulates, and can even be fooled. Giving Death a human face makes him a more mundane figure and fits in with the film’s themes of an absence of the metaphysical. This is a stark contrast to the traditional depiction of an implacable figure from a greater power. While *The Seventh Seal* successfully alters its depiction of the Grim Reaper to fit within its themes and ideas, this depiction is still illustrative of the common depictions of the Grim Reaper from this time. It was relatively common in late-medieval culture to depict the Grim Reaper in more recreational settings; these recreational depictions are perhaps illuminative of the period, or even of a particularly dark sense of humour, showing him engaging in common pastimes, for example playing chess as in the Taby Chapel painting, or more commonly in the *Danse Macabres* (dances with death) where the depiction of the Grim Reaper dancing greatly increased during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These *Danse Macabres* depicted death as both universal and inevitable (Cohen, 1982:36). This is reflected in the final shot of *The Seventh Seal*, as the Grim Reaper leads Antonius’ travelling group away in a *Danse Macabre*, which was even parodied in *Love and Death* (Allen, 1975) which concludes with a more jovial *Danse Macabre*, set to the jaunty *Troika* melody from Prokofiev’s *Lieutenant Kijé* (Prokofiev, 1933-1934).

*The Seventh Seal*’s appropriation of medieval iconography and artwork provides an example of how the addition of then contemporary thematic elements can inform a historical

adaptation in its attempts to illuminate the past. Therefore, the film functions in a similar way to that Gelder (2006) addresses in his analysis of the influence of *Wuthering Heights* (Brontë, 1847) on *The Piano* (Campion, 1993). Just as occurs there, this addition of elements from literature into films that are not based on literary sources, is used in *The Seventh Seal* to provide a solid basis for a historical adaptation that utilises an original narrative. *The Seventh Seal* uses late-medieval iconography in order to reflect on then contemporaneous culture, in essence informing the thematic elements as a form of indirect adaptation and illuminating how the artwork is reflective of that society. This intention is clearly signposted by Ingmar Bergman in his claim in a note to the film that ‘my intention has been to paint in the same way as the medieval church painter’ (Holland, 1959:266). Given this intention it is perhaps not surprising that Bergman drew direct inspiration from a church painting he observed in his youth.

Historical adaptation would benefit from placing the illumination of the past into a central position within the popular critical engagement of individual texts so that when analysing an individual film, the question is not focused on how this adaptation depicts the past; instead, it focuses on how this interpretation of history attempts to further an understanding of the past.

#### How horror and other genres can be used to illuminate the past

There is another way that the surface level historical inaccuracies of *Black Death* can be used to illuminate the past and that is through the prism of genre, namely the horror genre. In his analysis of the horror genre, Xavier Reyes writes that ‘in all cases horror affords an

extreme experience: it constitutes a thought exercise, requiring projection into the situations of characters and enabling visceral impressions' (Reyes, 2016:13). If we consider *Black Death* to operate along those lines, that visceral impression of characters' situations directly relates to the third of the key research questions, namely how it can help promote a new interpretation of the events of the time period in question, as well as create a more thorough representation of the possible impact of such events on the psyche of people living through said event.

Before discussing how *Black Death* uses horror, it is important to identify clearly how exactly the film primes its audience to expect Black Death to be a horror film rather than a more 'standard' form of historical adaptation. The clearest evidence that the audience were made to expect a horror film is the cover of the DVD release (previously seen in figure 3.2). By highlighting the director's experience in horror as a marketing technique, the filmmakers place the audience in a position where they are expecting a horror film and the generic conventions and tropes that exist within the genre. In other words, while the audience may know that the Black Death was not spread by malevolent witches, the film's position as a horror film allows them to work with this historical inaccuracy as the presence of witches is acceptable within the generic framework of the horror film. This has the effect of potentially placing the audience into a state of 'unknowingness' where they are more likely to accept the possibility of both resurrection and witchcraft, within the narrative of the film. This is not the case with texts that exist outside the horror genre, such as when *World Without End* deals with the subject of witchcraft. When watching that series' reconstruction of the late-medieval period, the audience could already be primed to reject the characters'

accusation of witchcraft due to the modern audience's potential knowledge that historically such accusations were without merit.

When the same accusations are levelled at a horror film, however, the audience is potentially more likely to accept the possibility of witchcraft, due to the fact that this is a common convention within the horror genre. If the audience is more likely to accept the possibility of witchcraft then it could have the effect of aligning the audience more closely to the characters on screen, characters who are themselves seeking to find the meaning of the plague and are falling back on their own superstitions in an attempt to understand the horror that is surrounding them.

When horror films deal with history, they often do so through the prism of rejecting the literal interpretations of the past in favour of what Rosenstone terms 'metaphorical truths' (Rosenstone, 2018:7). More specifically, this is frequently depicted as the past impacting on the present; for example, it can be shown as the crimes of the ancestors coming back to affect their descendants in a kind of 'sins of the father' scenario. An example of this scenario is in the film *Death Line* (Sherman, 1972), which depicts a society of cannibals living in the London Underground. These cannibals are descended from a group of men and women who were trapped during a cave-in during the construction of the London Underground in the nineteenth century with their employers refusing to dig them out. The modern capitalist commuters who are being feasted on in the present are essentially being punished for the crimes of their capitalistic forebears. Alternatively, as Hills discusses, Horror, particularly, Gothic Horror, often utilises the monster as a way of creating a 'programmed anachronism,' thus dismissing the monster, and thus the horror itself, as dated

(Hills, 2005:122-123). This positions the horror in *Death Line* as a remnant of our past, and crucially a past which, the audience is constantly reminded society has moved away from.

However, neither of these aspects are present in horror films that are set in the past. Historical horror films are neither about how the crimes of the past come back to the present, nor are they a way of dismissing the tropes of horror as just a remnant of our past. Instead historical horror films offer an opportunity for filmmakers to create new perspectives on the past by re-presenting a form of the past through the lens of these recognisable tropes and conventions. This has the effect of allowing the audience to potentially have a more thorough understanding of the reasons why people of the time were willing to accept a superstitious rationale for events. Perhaps the value of historical horror lies not in its ability to create its depiction of the late-medieval period, but instead in its ability to put the audience in a position to further understand the traumas of the time. In this way horror cinema is particularly suited to following Ludmilla Jordanova's suggestion that historians should 'unsettle their audiences, provoke them to think harder about the human condition' (Jordanova, 2006:200). This unsettling in order to provoke the audience to think harder about the human condition is a fundamental function of horror, making it ideally positioned to potentially help create within audiences a new understanding of the negative impact of these historical events on peoples' psyche.

If historical horror films are analysed in this way it is useful consider why horror can be used as a means of viewing and understanding real-life historical catastrophes. In the case of historical fiction, horror offers an opportunity to examine social fears and concerns, but of far greater importance is its ability to offer an opportunity to respond to them. Reyes notes that horror allows us to question how we should respond to and process social fears, and that

while horror can be either conservative or reactionary, it also opens up a space in which the limits of what is considered socially acceptable can be interrogated (Reyes, 2016). Horror's ability to process and interrogate social fears is further heightened when placed in the context of history. When horror moves into the historical not only can the socially acceptable of today be interrogated, but it can also help the audience to interrogate what is believed to have been socially acceptable in the past. Marcia Landy argues that this creates a form of counter-history, as texts which interrogate what is socially acceptable undo:

The emphasis on the community as an intermediary in conflict, the positive moral force of the hero as agent and the reconstitution of a community. Instead this form of historicising relies on weak links among the people, a community with no moral anchoring, and on affects, involving rage, hysteria and violent actions, that are inherent in conspiratorial and dispersive situations (Landy, 2015:33).

Thus, *Black Death* not only helps to create a new perspective on people's responses to the plague outbreak of the mid-fourteenth century, but also reveals itself to be a strong example of how horror can be used in order to help the viewer develop an insight into the possible psychological effects that these traumatic historical events had on the people who lived through them. In this respect *Black Death* reveals a full awareness of the context of the events of the plague outbreak, as well as of the generic conventions of the horror film, an understanding which the film uses as the basis for creating what Reyes terms a 'visceral impression' (Reyes, 2016:13). This visceral impression is particularly useful for developing



an understanding of the effect of living through that kind of traumatic event even if it comes at the expense of historical actuality.

Horror's ability to allow people in the present to critique and understand people's responses to social calamity creates an opportunity for the audience to gain an insight into the effects of trauma, through the 'safe' distancing effects of both history itself, and of the generic conventions of the horror film. Linnie Blake observes that 'traumatic events are man-made historical phenomena such as genocide or war that may be theorised retrospectively in the conceptual vocabulary of disciplines such as sociology or psychology' (Blake, 2008:2). Although the Black Death was not a man-made phenomenon, the brutality of people's responses to it most certainly was, for example in directing the blame for the plague towards certain groups and individuals. Similarly, Blake writes that due to its generic conventions horror cinema is uniquely placed to address these traumas which are present in horror's sub-genres, especially as they create an opportunity:

For a re-creation, re-visitation or re-conceptualisation of traumatic memories that lie deep within the national psyche; memories themselves so outrageous that their very actuality as past events appears a logical impossibility (Blake, 2008:187).

In this statement Blake is analysing the effectiveness of horror as a way of addressing the aftermath of relatively recent traumas, but the statement remains just as valid as an insight into understanding and addressing the hidden traumas of the distant past. The historical horror film allows the audience to potentially more closely adopt the perspective

of someone living through such a traumatic event, as well as the impact of the event on their psychological state. At the same time, historical horror creates an opportunity for the film or programme makers to address how those same concerns relate to the present.

It is important to remember that the illumination of the past which is created through generic hybridity is not solely limited to horror, although horror's easily codified rules make it clearer here than in most other genres. Horror is, after all, a genre which includes a variety of different types of rules, whether it be the various 'rules' of the Vampire movie, or the narrative rules of the Slasher film. In fact, it is those same constraints which are parodied and made explicit to wider audiences over the course of *Scream* (Craven, 1996). However, these same ideas surrounding the usefulness of genre in historical adaptations to illuminate the past can be observed in other genres.

An example of this occurs in the comedy film *The Death of Stalin* (Iannucci, 2017). When the film was released, the historian Richard Overy wrote in *The Guardian* that 'The film is littered with historical errors, the result of trying to make a black comedy out of rather unpromising material,' before going on to claim that '*The Death of Stalin* suggests that in the end Soviet politics under Stalin can be treated as *opera buffa*' (Overy, 2017). This is a view which was shared by the *Mail on Sunday* columnist Peter Hitchens who claims that it was a 'disgraceful film' and that:

The only question you need to ask is whether anyone would think the final days of Hitler, the other great European mass-killer, torturer and tyrant, would make a good comedy, with Goebbels, Himmler and the rest of the Nazi elite played for laughs. No, of course not. (Hitchens, 2017).

Hitchens' statement is quite inaccurate in its claim that Nazi Germany is not a subject for comedy; after all, it is worth pointing out that film and television have produced many satirical depictions of the Nazi elite generally, and of Hitler in particular. A list of such productions includes, but is not limited to, works from the following: Mel Brooks, Ernst Lubitsch, Charlie Chaplin, Quentin Tarantino, Russ Meyer, Seth Rogen, Monty Python, David Wnendt, Seth McFarlane, Adam Sandler, and Taika Waititi. What both Overy and Hitchens have failed to consider is the usefulness of Satire as a way of demystifying history, and of demystifying the people involved in it, a process that can be useful in furthering an understanding of the past, even if it comes at the expense of strict fidelity to historical actuality. This process of departing from fidelity in historical comedies is particularly useful due to the fact that, like horror, comedy functions as an example of what Landy identifies as a particularly useful tool to counter-history, and these films thrive on their ability to expose the more conventional and sanctimonious forms of historical interpretation (Landy, 2015).

#### Positioning a particular event within historical adaptation

In this analysis of adaptations of the Black Death in cinema it is clear that the Black Death has been depicted in a number of different ways, and, as expected, the representation of the event varies based on the intention of the filmmakers. However, in each of these films the actual pestilence of the Black Death is placed in the background. Out of the five films which were identified in Chapter One, only *Black Death* took the decision to place the events of the Black Death in the forefront of the narrative, and even then the focus is on how certain

groups and individuals react to the plague, rather than on the plague itself. The other four films place The Black Death in the background of the narrative with varying degrees of focus, ranging from the total removal of it in *The Decameron* and *The Little Hours*, to using the event as little more than a backdrop in *Virgin Territory*, and finally as a figure of constant, distant threat, where it only eventually appears near the end of the narrative in *The Seventh Seal*. This reveals something intriguing for the analysis of historical adaptations; if an event as wide-ranging and cataclysmic as the Black Death produces varying reactions in the population, then that will similarly affect its representation within film and television.

Whether to show the plague to its fullest extent is ultimately at the discretion of the film or television maker. If the person creating a historical adaptation wants to analyse people's specific responses to the chaos of the plague, then the event will be central to the narrative, as occurs in *Black Death*. If the filmmaker wants to ask more general questions about society in the face of a more universal catastrophe, then the threat of it would be sufficient as a source of imposing dread, as occurs in *The Seventh Seal*. For Bergman it was not necessary to focus on the event itself due to the film's restructuring of the late-medieval morality play, which places the focus on people's reactions to the threat and their fears of it.

#### Using both the illumination of the past and contemporary thematic resonance to create a historical adaptation

So far this chapter's analysis has strictly focused on analysing thematic resonance and the illumination of the past separately. However, this section focuses on how these elements can work in fusion, with each aspect informing the other.

While creating a sense of thematic resonance, *Black Death* also focuses on illuminating what people living at the time knew about disease. The film attempts to show that although people in the mid-fourteenth century did not know the causes or even reasons for the pestilence; the characters only refer to it coming from some vaguely defined ‘East.’ They do, however, have some limited understanding of how the plague was transmitted and how to use that to their advantage. This is made especially clear when, while being executed, Ulric (Sean Bean) has his shirt ripped revealing that he is carrying the plague. He has kept that knowledge quiet in order to allow the villagers to get close to him, so that he could infect them. This action further highlights that while people of the period were unsure of the nature of the pestilence, they were not completely ignorant of the ways in which it worked. This action within the film is reminiscent of the way late-medieval armies flung disease-ridden corpses into cities and castles during sieges, in order to spread disease amongst the defenders (Wheelis, 2002).

*Black Death*'s narrative invention of specific characters functions as an effective example of how both the elements of contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past can work in fusion. By creating this fusion *Black Death* relates to the third of the key research questions, specifically where both the illumination of the past and the creation of a contemporary thematic resonance are useful in helping to promote new interpretations of both the past and of how it relates to the present. For Example, *Black Death* does this by making the protagonists a group of mercenaries and a monk who are sent to investigate a village by a local Bishop. By creating these characters the filmmakers are identifying how various groups, including the church, were using the Black Death in pursuit of their own agendas (illumination of the past), while at the same time the filmmakers are deliberately

drawing parallels with religious fundamentalism in the present (contemporary thematic resonance). This attitude is made particularly clear to the audience when the monk Osmond (Eddie Redmayne), says ‘Hunting necromancers and demons serves men more than it serves God.’ Thus, the film draws clear links between religious extremism in the late-medieval period, and in the present.

By illuminating the past while simultaneously creating resonance with the present, *Black Death* provides a strong example of what Van Riper claims is the benefit of historical drama: it allows the past and the present to reflect on each other (Van Riper, 2013:112). Critiques of historical adaptation benefit from being positioned away from how a text depicts the past and instead focusing on how it allows for a further understanding of the past and the present, with both elements reinforcing the other.

#### Constructing illumination of the past and contemporary thematic resonance

The final point of analysis in this chapter is on how contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past are created within individual adaptations. Three elements lead into both these aspects of historical adaptation:

Firstly, there is the basic narrative. This can be wholly invented as occurs in both *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal*, or it can be a more direct adaptation which closely follows elements of a major event, for example, *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998). What unites these approaches is that each takes the overarching event as a starting point. They use their narrative to adapt the period but are not restricted by it, as the lack of a single source text grants greater freedom to the adaptors, although this freedom is slightly more restricted by

historical adaptations which are taken from other sources, for example *The Decameron* (Pasolini, 1971), which is based on the book by Boccaccio. In historical adaptation the narrative will ideally be re-configured away from focusing on the events themselves, and onto the question of how it engages the audience into understanding the past and questioning how the narrative relates to the present.

Secondly, films can use a series of visual elements which not only fit the accepted historical sources, but also conforms to what sections of the audience expect the historical period to have looked like. Essentially, this refers back to the idea that a film does not have to be authentic to history as it is generally understood, just that it appears recognisably historical. More important than historical authenticity is that the film feels authentic to the audience, although even that is flexible if the anachronisms are sufficiently creative. For example, Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986) is a film where the visual elements work alongside the narrative in order to create an interpretation of the historical period which can then be used to illuminate the past.

Finally, historical adaptations can insert present day cultural and political concerns into the film not only to draw parallels with the present, but also to create a greater understanding of the past. This aspect requires careful consideration by filmmakers, as an overly modern perspective inserted into a film can cause the audience to dismiss the film's historicism, and as with the visual elements, the film needs to feel authentic to the audience in order to illuminate the historical period in question.

## Conclusion

This chapter has identified two specific benefits of applying adaptation theory to historical film and television, namely contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past. While both these benefits are clearly distinct, they often relate to each other, with both helping to develop an audience's interpretation of the historical event in question, and of how the events depicted within the film can be related to the present.

The illumination of the past is an aim for historical adaptation to 'illuminate' the past. Instead of merely depicting it, the act of illuminating seeks to understand the various contexts of the historical sources from which the adaptation is drawing its depiction of the past, and to promote a greater understanding of their wider context. This also has the effect of moving the question of the effectiveness of an adaptation away from historical fidelity, and allows for the consideration of a greater variety of ways in which the past can be viewed. For example, if there are anachronisms, or other non-faithful elements within the text, how can these be utilised in a more purposeful and creative manner, in order more effectively to communicate historical meaning to the audience? Or similarly, how can the tools of cinema or television, such as the role of genre, be used in order to further an audience's interpretation of the depicted historical events as they are generally understood. The illumination of the past allows historical adaptation to move away from the question of how the text presents historical events, and instead moves it towards asking why a text has chosen to present that event in this way.

Contemporary thematic resonance, the other major strand in this analysis, reveals to us that not only is there a large variation in the ways in which an individual historical event



can be depicted on film and television (after all, the events of the 1347-1351 plague outbreak have inspired *Black Death*, a horror film; *The Seventh Seal*, a modern day version of a medieval morality play; and *Virgin Territory*, a sex comedy). Yet each of these interpretations is focused on creating an understanding of the present and of how the events of the past can be used to relate to the present. Contemporary thematic resonance can be both explicit or implicit, but ultimately it functions as a means to create new interpretations on historical events, and in doing so creates the potential for developing an understanding of how the present's understanding of the past was formed. In this respect contemporary thematic resonance functions along similar lines to what Van Riper identifies when he claims that dramas which were based on historical events are origin myths for present day society (Van Riper, 2013).

Both the illumination of the past and contemporary thematic resonance confirm what has been argued earlier in this thesis: that ultimately a film adaptation of a major historical event is not necessarily primarily concerned with adapting a major historical event on its own terms. Instead, both contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past can be used to create new interpretations of the past, and of the ways in which history operates, in order to allow an audience to relate these events on a more fundamental level with the present. Therefore, these elements of historical adaptation can be useful in helping to identify the various contexts of the historical events depicted within a film or television programme, and as such they are directly related to all four of the key research questions. These ideas are central to historical adaptation and consequently will also flow through the other case studies in this thesis, even as those case studies go on to analyse other aspects of historical adaptation.

This chapter has focused its analysis on how contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past can be created within a historical adaptation, but it is also important to consider how the understanding of the past that these ideas create can arise even in a text whose narrative is removed from actual historical events. The next chapter considers how an understanding of history can be created by a text which is set in a wholly fictionalised world, through analysing the historical aesthetic and how it functions in *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019).



## Chapter Four: Application of a Historical Aesthetic to *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019)

### Introduction

Unlike the similarly gritty anti-Disney series *The Last Kingdom* (BBC Two, 2015) or *Vikings* (History, 2013), which fictionalize identifiable historical persons, eras, events and regions, [*Game of Thrones*] is completely devoid of such authenticating anchors. Instead, it offers a world that is self-contained, with its own geography, languages, cultures and distinct nonhistorical temporality - a place entirely ‘neo,’ so to speak. Rather than creating traditional kinds of historical authenticity and authority, it engages in a myriad of cultural references that have a vaguely medieval feel (Utz, 2017b).

In the quotation above Utz refers to the ‘self-containedness’ of *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-2019) and to how *Game of Thrones* uses cultural references as a way of creating a unique setting that utilises the iconography of the medieval period. This chapter will argue, however, that even though *Game of Thrones*’ creation of a medieval-like world is not formed by the ‘traditional kinds of historical authenticity and authority,’ that does not mean that this series is without value as tools for generating an understanding of the past. Indeed, Utz makes this clear in the rest of his article, although the benefits he refers to are different than the ones which will be focused on in this chapter. This chapter argues that the creation of a

historical aesthetic can be used to further an understanding of history, even when the text is set in a wholly invented setting.

When publicising his film *Gangs of New York* (Scorsese, 2002), Martin Scorsese in an interview with the historical magazine *American Heritage* describes the film's approach to history thus: 'As one of our guys put it, it's the truth wrapped in a package of lies' (Scorsese, 2001). Using this idea in their analysis of *Gangs of New York*, Daniel Nathan, Peter Berg, and Erin Klemyk note the 'film's ability to fire historical imaginations' (Nathan et al, 2007:91), even at the point of divergence from historical actuality. A text's potential to fire historical imaginations (Nathan et al, 2007) raises possibilities for historical adaptation to generate further interest in the past. Meriem Pagès highlights one of these possibilities in her analysis of popular medievalisms by observing that classes relating to medieval literature and history continue to attract students whose appreciation for the subject originated from reading George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels (Pagès, 2017).

The historical aesthetic can function as a way of helping to develop a new perspective of the past in ways in which texts that are direct adaptations of historical events (such as the previously analysed *Black Death* and *The Seventh Seal*) cannot. This perspective can emerge when the historical aesthetic is used to create a historically literate milieu, even if that milieu uses a wholly fictionalised setting. The various ways in which the historical aesthetic can be useful as a tool to help generate new perspectives on the past is the focus of this analysis, and therefore this chapter is particularly focused on the second of the key research questions, namely the possible benefits of approaches to historical adaptation which deliberately avoid fidelity.

Divergence from historical events as they are generally understood creates possibilities for original and alternative understandings of the past, because when the narrative diverts from the historical sources, the audiences' knowledge of how the narrative of the text relates to those sources may become uncertain. When viewing historical fiction, the audience may be aware of the text's position within history, and as a consequence could have the tension lessened by their possible existing knowledge of how the events actually played out. For example, when watching a production of *Richard III* (Shakespeare, circa 1592a), the tension of seeing a character who could be portrayed as unrepentantly villainous in the position of King of England, might be somewhat lessened if the audience were already aware that Henry Tudor would eventually be victorious, and that Richard III would lose the throne. This issue might not occur when using a historical aesthetic to address similar themes in a wholly invented setting. However, it is worth considering that some of the films and television series which utilise a historical aesthetic are literary adaptations, and if a viewer had read the original source they would have some sense of narrative certainty, as long as they believed that the narrative of the adaptation was following the narrative of the source materials. For this reason *Game of Thrones* is a particularly useful case study, as in the later series the adaptation has overtaken the books, thus putting both readers of the books and people who only watch the series into the same position of narrative uncertainty.

This chapter analyses the television series *Game of Thrones* and argues that even though it is set in a wholly fictitious setting, it can still be considered a form of historical adaptation. This form of historical adaptation is achieved through the re-creation of the visual iconography of the late-medieval period. This chapter examines how *Game of*

*Thrones* utilises real world history in the creation of its non-historical narrative, and how this process can affect an audience's perspective on how the past is generally understood.

*Game of Thrones* is a fantasy television series set in the fictional location of Westeros. The series' narrative focuses on a civil war that breaks out after the unexpected early death of Westeros' King, Robert Baratheon (Mark Addy), with the plot being driven by the struggles of various Lords and Ladies of the realm, as they proceed to scheme and fight amongst themselves in order to elevate their social status amidst the chaos of the period.

Before the central analysis in this chapter begins it is important to raise the question of why this analysis of the historical aesthetic is focused on the reconstruction of the late-medieval time period, or put more simply, why neomedievalism? Why are so many settings which utilise a historical aesthetic choosing this period of history? Lesley Coote identifies the reasons for this as part of her analysis of neomedieval settings, in which states:

The far-past is a kind of 'third-space' in which we can ask questions and offer opinions, which might be considered inappropriate in other, more, contemporary film worlds. In this culturally recognised setting we can interact with fantastic or miraculous characters and events, regardless of whether we think that these things could have been possible in the Middle Ages (Coote, 2017:103).

In other words, the utilisation of the medieval allows for the creation of a separate space in which the author and the audience are invited to critique aspects of society with greater freedom, both narratively and thematically. Coote's designation of the third space is

particularly useful for this analysis as it allows the series to avoid the issues around authenticity and the ‘nostalgic gaze’ (Butt, 2014) discussed in Chapter Two. This aspect of the neomedieval gains further significance when we take into account the medieval period’s status as a ‘culturally recognised setting,’ thereby potentially making the significance of the various iconography clear to the audience.

*A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 1996a, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2011), the book series on which *Game of Thrones* is based, has been previously analysed in relation to late-medieval European history. The Wars of the Roses in particular has been identified as a source of inspiration, and this has since been confirmed by the books’ author, George R.R. Martin (Martin, 2013a). However, that position does not account for the fact that the series is known to adapt historical societies as diverse as the Ancient Romans, The Celts, and The Mongols within its fantasy setting, in order to create a new interpretation of the past which as Larrington claims, alters history by transmuting it into something that is richer, stranger, and more archetypal (Larrington, 2016). This approach can be, as Helen Young identifies, a more nebulous approach to medievalism (Young, 2010), and as Jerome De Groot argues, this approach is not strictly speaking ‘historical’ but does form part of the historio-entertainment discourse (De Groot, 2016). This chapter does not solely focus on the thematic or narrative elements of the adaptation but also considers how the changes from word-based literature to image-based television have resulted in the creation of another element within historical adaptation: a historical aesthetic. So thorough is *Game of Thrones* in its critiquing of history that in Jason Jacobs’ list of series that use generic conventions to blend narratives based on history, sex, and violence, he places it ahead of *Marco Polo* (Netflix, 2014-2016), *The Borgias* (HBO, 2011-2013) *Wolf Hall* (BBC Two, 2015) and



*Spartacus* (Starz, 2010-2013) (Jacobs, 2015). This status is significant as the other four series are adaptations of actual historical events, while *Game of Thrones* is a blend of history, fiction, and fantasy. It is this blend that opens up a possibility for an alternative understanding of how history is generally understood, one that is unencumbered by the need to follow the accepted narrative.

In this respect, *Game of Thrones*, along with other texts which utilise a historical aesthetic, is functioning as a form of neomedievalism, in that it is a simulacrum of a medieval world. As Jean Baudrillard defines it, a simulacrum is a copy without an original (Baudrillard, 1984). Lauryn Mayer writes that a world which utilises neomedievalisms works within the parameters of the simulacrum as it functions as a copy that invokes the ‘medieval’ as part of a conscious creation of an alternative universe (Mayer, 2017:229), which, as Amy Kaufman identifies, occurs within a series of anachronisms, distortions, and fragmentations (Kaufman, 2010). It is important to remember this definition of a simulacrum when creating a historical aesthetic, as a simulacrum is a representation of an imagined late-medieval period, and the lack of an original ensures that historical accuracy is not of primary importance. Therefore, a simulacrum which utilises neomedievalisms, creates a space where approaches towards history which diverge from the ways in which history is commonly understood, can be used effectively in order to help further an understanding of the present while at the same time helping to create an alternative understanding of the past. At the same time, however, the authors of the text need to ensure that the ‘invocation of the medieval’ is internally consistent, otherwise they risk piercing the illusion of the simulacrum and losing the interest of the audience. These ideas are developed further in this chapter.

## Defining the historical aesthetic

Before analysing the historical aesthetic, it is important to clarify what exactly is meant by that term, and in order to do this the phrase needs to be broken down. The use of the term ‘historical’ is reasonably clear: about, of, or pertaining to events from the recorded past. Similarly, the ‘aesthetic’ section of the phrase means a specific set of principles that are the basis of a particular visual style or artistic movement. Therefore, the term historical aesthetic is used here to describe a re-creation of a specific historical time period, without attempting to re-create the actual period of history. In essence, when creating a historical aesthetic verisimilitude can be a useful tool, although as highlighted in Chapter Two issues emerge when a text is over reliant on creating verisimilitude, especially when the text relies on preconceived notions as to what is, and is not, authentically medieval. In the case of *Game of Thrones*, the aesthetic reflects the late-medieval period, adapting the visual elements and iconography of the time without actually adapting the events themselves. In this way the historical aesthetic functions as another example of the ways in which cultural adaptations replicate and change what came before (Hutcheon and Bortolotti, 2007). A variety of existing pieces of medieval iconography have been adapted into the setting of *Game of Thrones*, but their meanings and contexts have been altered according to the assorted necessities of the narrative.

This adaptation of iconography is particularly significant in the case of medieval films and television programmes because, as Woods states, ‘our prior knowledge of the medieval, built up from watching films and from other sources, allows for a range of specificity in the unique image’ (Woods, 2014, loc 619). What Woods refers to here is that

as there are a wide range of different physical appearances which may be applied to any single piece of medieval iconography, the viewer is possibly willing to accept a version of them in a medieval adaptation's construction, as long as their appearance does not break with what the viewer may believe to be authentic. This belief concerning what may or may not be authentic could have been developed by the viewer based on their experiences of viewing other visual representations of the medieval period. When developing Woods' ideas further in order to apply them to the historical aesthetic, it is worth considering that while there are many different descriptive features that can apply to a specific piece of medieval iconography, for example a suit of medieval armour, each piece of iconography does not need to include every feature in order to be identifiably medieval. It only requires that the various elements that make up a suit of armour do not clearly 'violate' that character. For example, a suit of armour does not need to include a visor in the helmet to be identifiably medieval, but the introduction of sunglasses would contradict the viewer's prior knowledge and thus damage the authenticity. Woods' arguments particularly relate to this study of the historical aesthetic as they clearly identify the space that the historical aesthetic needs to operate within to help situate an audience into a setting, revealing where they might be able to accept the text's visual construction, as well as where they might find it more difficult to fully engage with the visual landscape of the text. Indeed, as Paul Sturtevant notes in analysing medieval cinema, in some cases 'the accuracy of the details are less important than the impression given by them: that they exist within a fully realised world' (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 5969). It is the creation of this 'fully realised world' which is a key point of concern for the historical aesthetic, especially as texts which utilise the historical aesthetic need to present a fictionalised version of the past in such a way that the audience might be able to

both accept the plausibility of the setting, identify the consistencies within the text's visual landscape and discern the various historical elements that the text has adapted into its visual landscape.

In this sense the historical aesthetic could be seen to be functioning in a similar way to what was discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Maltby's explanation of how iconography works within a genre, namely, as a system of recurring visual motifs that provide a shorthand system that enables a knowledgeable viewer to glean information about characters and situations (Maltby, 2003). Historical iconography can therefore be used within a historical aesthetic, as a form of associative iconography. Associative iconography draws associations in order quickly to orientate the audience into the 'world' of the text, while at the same time allowing the authors of the text to begin the process of relating the events which are taking place in this fictional 'world' to our own history. This approach aligns the historical aesthetic with Toplin's factional approach to history (Toplin, 2002), as the historical aesthetic combines the fictitious narrative of the text's story with the more historically-based iconography of the *mise-en-scène*.

In analysing how the creation of a historical aesthetic helps to generate an understanding of the past, it is worth considering Susan Feagin and Patrick Maynard's suggestion that one relevant idea for aesthetics emerges from the 'psychology of perception,' wherein the creation of a perception is 'cognitively informed.' This means that it is created by an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and experiences (Feagin and Maynard, 1997:3). This is ultimately a two-way perception and therefore needs to be viewed, interpreted, and understood as such by both the creators of the text and the audience in order for the creation of it to be successful, and for an alternative understanding of the past to be formed.

Carolyn Korsmeyer claims that a philosophy of aesthetics has to follow three elements in order to quantify whether or not something is an aesthetic:

First, aestheticians try to describe the nature of a certain kind of perceptual experience, so that in response readers can recognise and classify their own experiences as such. Second, they clarify a concept, ‘aesthetic,’ such that it can be related systematically to other notions such as ‘art’ in a larger theoretical framework. Finally, they often derive both descriptive and normative claims regarding how one looks or should look at art in order best to discern its peculiarly valuable qualities (Korsmeyer, 1977: 46).

In applying the first element to the use of the historical aesthetic in *Game of Thrones* it is important to clarify that, while the audience do not have personal experience of the late-medieval world, they do have knowledge and expectations of that time period that have been taken from outside sources, for example, literature, television, film, etc. If the audience has a certain perception of the late-medieval period, then a re-creation could be the beginning of a perceived experience by the audience and could thus be used as a foundation for a late-medieval aesthetic.

When applying Korsmeyer’s second element it is important to remember that the medieval aesthetic is related on a fundamental level to two specific notions. Firstly, the aesthetic is always present in a specific version of art — in the case of *Game of Thrones* televisual art — but that is not by any means its only form; the aesthetic is also present in films, radio programmes, and paintings. Secondly, a historical aesthetic is not an exact re-

creation of a historical period but is instead a creation which reflects a perceived version of history. A historical aesthetic needs to be understood as taking its inspiration from a particular historical perspective, which may, or may not, be completely formed by historical actuality.

When considering the third element in what constitutes an aesthetic, it is important to remember that the presence of a historical aesthetic creates artwork which is viewed in relation to specific attitudes towards historical accuracy. The audience of a fantasy programme is not expecting a historically accurate depiction of events during a historical period, and as such is not concerned with accuracy on a purely narrative level. Their response to, and judgement of, the aesthetic is instead focused on their perception of what they believe that particular time period looked like, and therefore the text would benefit from including the iconography and imagery that the audience believes to be present within that time period.

This third element works on similar terms to J.R.R. Tolkien's belief that when making a fantastical narrative internal consistency is key, i.e. that the details within the text accord 'with the laws of that world' (Tolkien, 1947:132). Tolkien clarifies this idea further by explaining that 'the moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed' (Tolkien, 1947:132). This highlights an important criterion for the historical aesthetic; while the aesthetic would benefit from taking into account an audience's perception of a specific time period, it needs to ensure that within the 'world building' a sense of internal consistency is maintained. If there is not this sense of internal consistency then the historical aesthetic would risk losing a section of the audience's interest, thus preventing them from fully engaging with the text and blocking the possibility for that

section of the audience to be able to use the historical aesthetic to develop a new interpretation of the past.

This raises the question whether the creation of a specific aesthetic constitutes a form of adaptation. Sarah Cardwell writes that there are many occasions when adaptations are not recognised as being adaptations, 'or when adaptation can be seen to have occurred without the end-product being named as an adaptation' (Cardwell, 2002:15). These instances are varied and can exist in many forms, for example, as acts of expansion, where a story is continued into sequels and prequels. These instances do not preclude the text from being what Hutcheon identifies as a hybrid form of adaptation. Hutcheon presents the example of the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2001 and UPN, 2001-2003) which, although it was initially presented as an expansion of the film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Kuzui, 1992), its first series is actually an adaptation of parts of that film involving changing the characters and the visual style but keeping the same story elements (Hutcheon, 2013:171-172). Taking Hutcheon's example of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, it can be seen that the process of adaptation does not necessarily have to encompass every single aspect of a text's construction. This can then grant the people making the adaptation the freedom to adapt elements of the original source into the new text, without taking the source as the adaptation's primary referent for every aspect of production. Instead, the adaptors can adapt or appropriate from a variety of alternative sources. In essence, a single element of a text can function as a separate form of adaptation, even if the rest of the piece is not an adaptation or is an adaptation from an alternative source.

## Issues that arise with the historical aesthetic when adapting books to television

The narrative and the characters in *Game of Thrones* in many ways function within a traditional form of adaptation in that they are taken directly from the books and changed for the television series. Other aspects of the series have been completely invented or altered in order to function more effectively within the medium of television. This may have been out of necessity, as with the invention of languages in the television series; the books of *A Song of Ice and Fire* contained all previously written words in the Dothraki language, in total fifty-six words, of which twenty-four are proper names (Peterson, 2015). In a book a line of dialogue can be written in English which the book can claim is spoken in a fictional language. However, the transfer to television makes it necessary for the language actually to be created so that the characters on screen can be seen speaking it, and perhaps more significantly, so that other characters can be seen either not understanding or misunderstanding it. In order to create the Dothraki language, the makers of *Game of Thrones* hired David Peterson, who was given instructions to incorporate the original words while expanding the lexicon in as naturalistic a way possible. The importance of creating an actual language is made clear by the actor Jason Momoa who played the character Khal Drogo, and who had to speak the vast majority of his lines in Dothraki. Momoa would later write in a blurb for Peterson's book, *The Art of Language Invention*, that 'George R.R Martin created Khal Drogo, and David Benioff and Dan Weiss believed in me, but David Peterson gave me life' (Momoa, 2015:i).

Alternatively, alterations from a book's depiction of a fantasy setting can be made in order to present a deliberately different vision of a late-medieval society. This can be done



in order to emphasise or de-emphasise different aspects of the series' construction. When making *Game of Thrones* the programme makers could have adapted the 'traditional fantasy' iconography which is present within the original novels: for example, exaggerated armour, weaponry, and castles. Instead of choosing to re-create these more ostentatious and overly fantastical elements, the television series focuses its mise-en-scène on a more 'realistic' milieu, adapting a closer representation of the iconography of the late-medieval period into a purely fictional setting.



*Figure 4.1: 'The Iron Throne' by Marc Simonetti*

*(Martin, 2013b).*

This adoption of a more 'realistic' milieu is made particularly clear when comparing the series' depiction of The Iron Throne and the Marc Simonetti illustration *The Iron Throne*, which presents the Iron Throne as it is described in the books (figure 4.1). This artistic rendering of the throne is so similar to what George R.R. Martin imagines the throne to look

like, that Martin claims it is closer to how he pictures it than any other artist who has attempted to draw it (Martin, 2013b). In order to appear more realistic, the throne in the series is smaller (figure 4.2), and not as overtly imposing as the more clearly fantastical one in the books. The series refers to this in ‘The Climb’ when Littlefinger (Aiden Gillen) says of The Iron Throne – a prop which had hitherto been spoken of as being made up of one thousand swords – that ‘there aren’t a thousand blades, there aren’t even two hundred, I’ve counted’ (series 3, episode 6). This is an allusion to the difference between ‘the fantasy’ of what the characters say and the less impressive, but more believable, *mise-en-scène* of the series.



Figure 4.2: The Iron Throne in ‘The Laws of Gods and Men’ (series 4, episode 6 ).

In this respect the series’ approach to adapting the overtly fantastical elements of the book into its *mise-en-scène*, accords with Andrew Elliott’s observation on the use of special effects in Hollywood cinema: ‘where history remains unclear... the special effects can be seen to enhance narrative *plausibility*, and not historical veracity’ (Elliott, 2015b, loc 3394, emphasis his). By creating a plausible, or believable, visual interpretation of the material, whether that be historical sources or the original books, *Game of Thrones* creates a *mise-en-*

scène that while not being completely accurate to historical sources, can be viewed as historically plausible enough for an audience to accept the ‘world’ that the programme makers have created.

This concept of believable reality leads to one of the key benefits of using a historical aesthetic in order to generate new interpretations of the past, thus avoiding some of the ways that traditional historical adaptations have been criticised for diverging from the historical sources. For example, Elizabeth Karlsgodt identifies in her analysis of *The Monuments Men* (Clooney, 2014). Karlsgodt criticises the film’s many digressions and claims that ‘there is a wide gap between Clooney’s pretension to have created an ‘80% accurate’ film and the fictionalised final product’ (Karlsgodt, 2015:403). Karlsgodt also points towards an even more troubling aspect of these diversions from the generally understood history of the event. *The Monuments Men* is a film about the allied attempts to rescue artwork from the Nazis, while never mentioning that the reason why the Nazis had such an expansive collection is that most of it had been stolen from the Jewish population of Nazi-controlled Europe. Instead, the film only makes vague references to the destruction of a generation and its culture, which ultimately creates a more universalist message (Karlsgodt, 2015).

The relative failings of *The Monuments Men* to put the events of its narrative into a wider context reveal a potential danger of traditional historical adaptation. Clooney’s adaptation does have the benefit of bringing the audience’s attention to the events surrounding the real-life exploits of the members of the *Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives* section (MFAA) of the Allied Forces in World War Two, something which Sony Pictures tried to exploit by curating a *Monuments Men*-style curriculum for middle and high school students in America (Karlsgodt, 2015). The fact that the film itself glosses over the wider

reasons for the Nazi's actions can lead to the audience leaving the cinema without understanding the full context of the events on-screen. This is not an issue that appears when using a historical aesthetic as the text's removal from historical actuality gives the film or programme makers a wider narrative freedom. This narrative freedom has the effect of granting them the opportunity to be more selective in their application of historical detail, in order to follow the themes and ideas they want to address within their chosen narrative.

### Relating the historical aesthetic to fantasy

In analysing *Game of Thrones* and its creation of a late-medieval aesthetic, it must be remembered that while *Game of Thrones* uses, adapts, or appropriates history, it is designed to reflect not an actual society but a purely fantastical one. This is, after all, a series featuring dragons, witches, and walking corpses, albeit in lower numbers than in a traditional fantasy series. Even the addition of these fantastical elements, however, helps to support the series' creation of a late-medieval aesthetic. This is particularly important when considering the series' depiction of the reanimated dead, especially as it relates to Bildhauer's explanation that 'medieval film often shows the dead - especially, but not exclusively, the medieval dead – as reanimated and approaching in various ways' (Bildhauer, 2011:73). This concept of the approaching dead clearly visualises medieval film's concerns regarding the inevitability of a character's death rather than their potential escape from it (Bildhauer, 2011). This constant concern with approaching death is generally presented in these texts as a reflection of the turbulent times.

Applying Bildhauer's arguments about the encroaching dead in medieval films to *Game of Thrones*' depiction of the reanimated dead, it becomes clear that there are in fact two forms of reanimation shown, neither of which are portrayed as beneficial to the characters or to the world around them. Firstly, there are the wights, a form of walking corpse, who are a direct symbol of encroaching death, and the unknowable danger that it represents.



*Figure 4.3: Beric Dondarrion is killed in 'Kissed by Fire' (series 3, episode 5).*



*Figure 4.4: Beric Dondarrion being brought back to life in 'Kissed by Fire' (series 3, episode 5).*

Secondly, there is a more insidious form of reanimation which is first seen in ‘Kissed by Fire’ (series 3, episode 5), being performed by an outsider to the continent of Westeros (the primary setting in the series). In this case a priest, Thoros of Myr (Paul Kaye) uses a ritual to bring his friend Beric Dondarrion (Richard Dormer) back to life, leaving only a scar at the site of the death blow. Despite the fact that both characters are portrayed sympathetically, the reanimation is not portrayed to the audience as a wholly positive event. The lighting is kept at a low-key, with the only light source appearing to be the fire behind Beric, a character who is presented as a source of threat within the frame. The cumulative effect of presenting the sequence in this way is reflected in the visible anxiety and fear in the observing Sandor Clegane (Rory McCann) as he is presented with something that appears to be beyond his understanding. Additionally, the lighting makes it hard for the audience to make out Beric’s expression (figure 4.4) and the music is very high minor chords with long rests, creating a sinister atmosphere within the scene. Although within the narrative this reanimation is not presented as a malign act, it creates uncertainty and unease in the audience who might, like Sandor Clegane, struggle to identify the positive or negative ramifications of what they have just watched.

As *Game of Thrones* demonstrates, even within fantastical sequences there is space for a further understanding of the late-medieval period. The portrayal of superstitions as ‘real’ and as things to be feared helps to clarify the various contexts of superstition in the medieval world. The series therefore helps to visualise to the audience the potential reasons why people living in the medieval period would have regarded those same superstitions as things to be feared. This has the effect of de-emphasising the ‘nostalgic gaze’ (Butt, 2014) which can occur when fantastical tropes are removed from the specific contexts which *Game*

*of Thrones* creates within its setting. This relates directly to the first of the key research questions, which specifies that a historical adaptation is aware of the broader contexts of the historical events the adaptation is depicting, just as the series reveals itself to be aware of the context of superstition in medieval society, thus revealing a potential usefulness of using a historical aesthetic in order to help develop an audience's understanding of the past.

The use of the music in this sequence is particularly significant when we take into account Timothy Scheurer's observation that 'many of the myths that have driven the narratives in historical romance are suspect and are being demythologised and re-evaluated these days' (Scheurer, 2007:108). Scheurer further clarifies this by claiming:

This, of course means changes in the music. Those musical topics associated with 'other' cultures, and which previously connoted evil, will either give way to new topics or gestures (Scheurer, 2007:109).

A more culturally sensitive depiction of real-world cultures is a definite positive for film and television, but it does leave a significant gap that settings which utilise a historical aesthetic are uniquely able to address by showing how people at the time could have reacted, when presented with cultures which were previously unknown to them. Traditional historical fiction has difficulty putting us into a character's perspective for two reasons. Firstly, the modern audience might have real world knowledge of this culture and are therefore unlikely to feel the same 'impact' as the character on screen when presented with something which they do not understand. Secondly, it is very difficult to present the unknown in traditional historical fiction without portraying the culture which is being

introduced as an ‘other’ (i.e. treating a real-world group as fundamentally different from yourself), with all the negative cultural connotations that the term implies.

Neither of these concerns are issues that texts which utilise a historical aesthetic necessarily encounter. In *Game of Thrones*, Sandor Clegane is faced with something he has no knowledge of, with his fear and uncertainty reflected in the music. The audience shares his lack of knowledge and thus they are more closely aligned with his concerns, and can begin to understand why he has them, in ways that would be more difficult if Sandor were faced with a civilisation that was new to him but was well known to the audience. Therefore, the historical aesthetic opens up a space whereby the audience can begin to understand the impact of facing the unknown on people living in the time, without ‘othering’ a real-world culture and civilisation. Essentially, while *Game of Thrones* uses, adapts, and appropriates historical events, it is still useful as a tool for understanding historical contexts, even when it remains outside of it.

This gains further significance in regard to settings which utilise a historical aesthetic in texts where there is a close relationship between the dangers that the setting contains and the pleasures that the location provides for its audience. The pleasures make the world enticing as a place for a modern audience to visit, almost as a form of tourism. It is this perspective of the medieval period that propagates the fantasy genre, and which appears to be relatively consistent among those settings which base their historical aesthetic on the medieval period. The world is presented as a beautiful and desirable place for an audience to visit, making them invested in seeing the eradication of the encroaching threat to it. An example of this occurs in the advertising for the popular fantasy role-playing game *Dragon Age: Inquisition* where the launch trailer was titled *A Wonderful World* (EA, 2014). This



trailer features a variety of short sequences designed to show the various regions that the players will be able to visit in the game and, hopefully from the publisher's point of view, become emotionally invested in protecting from oncoming threats.

### Using a historical aesthetic to critique interpretations of history

*Game of Thrones* is in some ways typical of traditional fantasy series as it is fundamentally concerned with the romantic notion of the past, in a way that is similar to the Norse legends that inspired *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy (Tolkien, 1954, 1954, and 1955) and the Arthurian legends that were the more-direct inspiration for *The Once and Future King* (White, 1958). *Game of Thrones*, however, is also partially inspired by people's romantic responses to the past, namely the streams within romantic thought which are fundamentally concerned with a yearning towards a mythological English past. Carroll lists these streams as emerging with the writers and artists of the Victorian era, such as the pre-Raphaelites, and then continuing through the twentieth century, particularly with the ongoing influence of Disney (Carroll, 2018). This influence of the Victorian romantics has led, as Helen Young observes, to a number of modern fantasy series having 'ideas about the Middle Ages that demonstrably have more to do with the medievalism of, for example, the Victorian era, than they do with medieval realities, texts, or facts' (Young, 2010:165).

What separates *Game of Thrones*' portrayal of the past from that of other modern fantasy texts is that the series remains fundamentally concerned with the ways in which history has been constructed, whether it agrees with such interpretations or not. Therefore, an analysis of how *Game of Thrones* uses history can help the audience critique their own

understanding of real-world history. This aspect of the series relates to the fourth of the key research questions, as it allows the adaptation to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of how history is generally understood. Throughout the series, a small but significant number of characters are depicted as looking backwards into an idealised past. This attitude is clearly reflected in the characters of King Robert Baratheon (Mark Addy) and Viserys Targaryen (Harry Lloyd), both of whom are portrayed as constantly looking back at what they see as better times. Robert looks back on his earlier life, when he led a successful rebellion against the Targaryen family, and Viserys romanticises the times when his family ruled all of Westeros. Romanticising the past is a common feature of fantasy, and George R.R. Martin claims that 'there is something old and true in fantasy that speaks to something deep within us' (Martin, 1996b).

However, *Game of Thrones* is also concerned with the problems that emerge when the past is over-romanticised. This occurs throughout the series and is particularly explicit in the scene where the King's brother, Renly Baratheon (Gethin Anthony), after hearing Robert Baratheon say, 'those were the days,' too many times responds with:

Which days exactly? The ones where half of Westeros fought the other half and millions died? Or before that when The Mad King slaughtered women and babies because the voices in his head told him they deserved it? Or before that when Dragons burned whole cities to the ground? ('A Golden Crown', series 1, episode 6).

When Robert Baratheon reminds him that he is talking to his king, he continues to criticise this romantic view by saying that:

I suppose it was all rather heroic if you were drunk enough and had some poor Riverlands whore, to shove your prick inside and make the eight ('A Golden Crown', series 1, episode 6).

*Game of Thrones* further highlights this critical view of the romanticisation of the past through the character Viserys, whose romantic belief that he is the rightful King leads him to constantly shout 'I am the Dragon.' Viserys does this in a feeble attempt to style himself after his ancestors, the conquering Targaryens, who used a dragon symbol and were referred to as dragons by the other noble houses. This idea is taken to its conclusion when in a later series the character Tyrion Lannister (Peter Dinklage), talks about an event from his past when as a child he was obsessed with his cousin Orson, who is described as 'simple' as a result of an accident as a baby. Tyrion describes this unseen character as spending his days in the garden smashing beetles with a rock, while saying 'chun, chun, chun.' Tyrion then describes himself getting obsessed with finding out the reason for it, recalling:

When I wasn't watching him, I was thinking about him. Father droned on about the family legacy, and I thought about Orson's beetles... And I still couldn't figure out why he was doing it, because, it was horrible, that all of these beetles should be dying for no reason (series 4, episode 8: 'The Mountain and The Viper').

In this monologue Tyrion reveals the extent to which *Game of Thrones* is concerned with using a historical aesthetic to critique the romanticisation of the past. Tyrion is being taught by his father about the important events of his own family's history, in order to ensure that he can effectively further his family legacy, in a way similar to that in which late-medieval families used lineage as a cherished part of their identity. This occurred in areas that not only had practical value, for example the reconstruction of genealogies to make claims to land (Carpenter, 2003), but also occurred in areas which were more symbolic and personal. Christine Carpenter highlights this feature of late-medieval genealogies in her analysis of the English gentry after 1066, where she highlights a tendency for a family to maintain close connections with the same religious houses over multiple generations, such as the Warennes with Lewes Priory (Carpenter, 2003:271). However, Tyrion's failure fully to focus on his own family's romanticisation of the past inadvertently draws the audience's attention to the contradictions within those romanticised stories. This is made clearer further on in the sequence when Tyrion says of the beetles 'thousand piles of them, years and years of them, how many countless living crawling things? Smashed and dried out and returned to the dirt' (series 4, episode 8: 'The Mountain and The Viper'). This sequence acts as a culmination of *Game of Thrones*' critique of the romanticisation of the past. Acting as an audience surrogate, Tyrion is presented with a scenario where a romanticised vision of Westeros' history is described, but instead of focusing on an idealised version of his history, he instead chooses to focus on the seemingly pointless deaths that were a part of creating that same history, rejecting the romanticisation in order to focus on the destructive results of that history. This critiquing of the romanticisation of the past ensures that the audience is

placed in a position of uncertainty as to the actuality of *Game of Thrones*' internal history. This allows the audience to question the veracity of what they are told on screen, potentially creating an opportunity for them to begin to consider the various ways in which real-world history is constructed.

This critique of romanticisation is an important aspect of *Game of Thrones*' approach to the past. There is a clear tendency in the fantasy genre to be somewhat concerned with romanticising some form of the past. After all, even the space fantasy of *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977) opens by telling the audience that the film is set 'A long time ago.' However, this romanticisation can lead to people having a different, or even misleading, idea of what the late-medieval period was like. Essentially, in critiquing fiction's tendency to romanticise the past, *Game of Thrones* through its use of a historical aesthetic carries the potential for the audience to begin to critique their own possible romanticisation of the past. The series takes an ahistorical setting but alters it in order to put the series within a form of historical context, albeit one that does not follow a historical narrative.

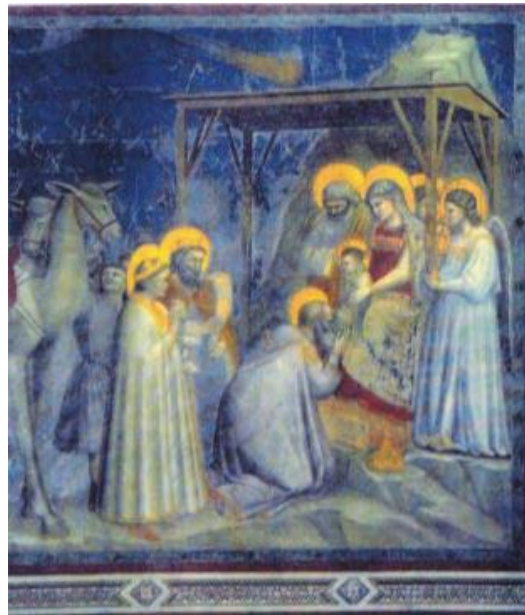
#### Using a historical aesthetic to further understanding of superstition

*Game of Thrones* also takes inspiration from, and reflects contemporary attitudes towards, medieval superstition. In the episode 'The North Remembers' (series 2, episode 1) a comet is seen in the sky throughout the duration of the episode, and several different characters take it as an omen of change, but with each character taking a different interpretation from it. In one scene Bran Stark (Isaac Hempstead-Wright) claims that he overheard people saying that the comet means that his brother will win an upcoming battle, while Osha (Natalie Tena) reads it as a sign of the return of dragons. At various points

throughout history comets have been believed to be a sign of change, either within the royal family or even of a whole governmental system. For example, in 1066 a comet that we now know to have been Halley's Comet was spotted in the sky and was taken as a 'sign' of the changes that would dominate England throughout the year (Bartlett, 2010).



*Figure 4.5: Halley's Comet as it appears in the Bayeux Tapestry (Knight, 2018).*



*Figure 4.6: Halley's Comet as it appears in The Adoration of the Magi by Giotto Di Bondone (Olson and Pasachoff, 2002:1577).*

The sighting of the comet was subsequently presented as legitimising William the Conqueror's claim on Britain, and was included in an important position within *The Bayeux Tapestry*, namely at the coronation of Harold Godwinson (figure 4.5). This belief in the prophetic nature of comets was not limited to England and was common across Europe during the late-medieval period. For example, the Italian painter Giotto Di Bondone included Halley's comet in his painting of the nativity, with the comet replacing The Star of Bethlehem as a symbol of the new King on earth (Olson and Pasachoff, 2002) (figure 4.6). In the Americas the Spanish reported that the Aztec Emperor Montezuma was so frightened by the appearance of a comet that, on the advice of his astronomers, he refused to act while it was in the sky (Olson, 1984).

By placing the characters' superstitions within the context of real-world superstition, *Game of Thrones* presents a critique of how such symbols are read and misread according to individual personal prejudices. The series reinforces this viewpoint when Osha disregards Bran's hopes that the Comet represents victory for Bran's brother Robb (Richard Madden) by saying:

I heard some other fools saying its Lannister red means the Lannister's will rule all seven kingdoms before long. Heard a stable boy say it's the colour of blood to mark the death of your father. The stars don't fall for men, boy (series 2, episode 1: 'The North Remembers').

It is perhaps significant that it is Osha, an outsider – one of the Wildlings from North of Westeros – who makes this statement. She has no real stake in the war between the Starks

and the Lannisters and instead believes that the comet can only be a sign of dragons: a viewpoint tacitly supported by the series, as immediately after she says this the camera cuts to a scene showing Daenerys Targaryen (Emilia Clarke), who in the previous episode had hatched three dragons. By presenting Osha's statement as the correct one the series shows the audience how unreliable using symbols for fortune-telling is, and how ultimately it serves as a reflection of what the individual desires. By extension the series offers a critique of how such events were viewed in the real late-medieval world, claiming that the meaning of superstitions are defined by people, both at the time and after the event. Essentially, while William the Conqueror was able to claim that the sighting of Halley's Comet in 1066 was a sign of Harold illegitimate place on the English Throne if Harold Godwinson had won the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Halley's Comet could have been treated as a sign of Harold's new reign in England.

By presenting these superstitions as unreliable, *Game of Thrones* puts the audience into a position of uncertainty. In some ways superstitions and prophecies within the fantasy genre have the effect of mirroring how generally understood history operates within historical fiction. Superstitions and prophecies in fantasy can have the effect of presenting to characters within the text, and by extension to the audience, the idea that the narrative is laid out according to some kind of diegetic plan, just as the audience who consumes historical fiction generally have an understanding of how the historical events occurred. By presenting these superstitions as uncertain, *Game of Thrones* takes away the audience's certainty about the broad scope of the narrative and the significance of individual events within it.



The series uses its historical aesthetic in order to create a space in which the audience is willing to accept the possibility of such superstitions being plausible, only to critique those same attitudes towards superstition within the text. This could potentially help to generate a new perspective on how in the late-medieval period similar superstitions could have been read, interpreted, and even misunderstood.

#### Utilising the historical aesthetic through the mise-en-scène: heraldry

Perhaps the most significant way in which the historical aesthetic can be used to develop a new interpretation of the present's relationship to the past, is through the mise-en-scène, particularly the various ways in which the mise-en-scène can be used to create a sense of verisimilitude for the audience. This section focuses on the possible benefits of *Game of Thrones*' appropriation of medieval iconography and in doing so discusses the issues identified in the second key research question: specifically, the potential benefits of approaches to history which deliberately move away from fidelity in order to generate new interpretations of the past.

In *Game of Thrones*, one of the most immediately obvious ways in which this occurs is through the conflation of an animal with their sigil (banner symbol). This is a fundamental part of the series' adaptation of medieval and early-modern heraldry to create a historical aesthetic. Indeed, as Caroline Larrington observes, the series' use of heraldry fulfils the same basic function as medieval heraldry, especially as heraldic symbols are particularly useful for recognition in a largely preliterate society (Larrington, 2016).

Referring to someone by their sigil is a common element within *Game of Thrones*. Characters are frequently referred to by their house animal as if it were actually a part of who they are rather than merely a symbol. This act of identification features within some historical sources from the medieval period. Although referring to someone as an animal was not necessarily common practice in the medieval period, it was not unheard of. For example, a popular rhyme which was recorded during the reign of King Richard III in *The Great Chronicle of London* presents the King and three of his nobles as: ‘The cat, the rat and Lovell our dog, rulen all England under an hog’ (Lander, 1990:188). The cat and the rat in this rhyme are simply shortened versions of the full names of Richard III’s advisers, Sir William Catesby and Sir Richard Ratclyff respectively, and the reference to the dog is an insult directed towards Lord Lovell. The important thing is the depiction in this rhyme of the then King as a ‘hog,’ after his own emblem of a white boar. The rhyme names a person after the creature in their banner, thus deliberately conflating the individual with that animal.

In *Game of Thrones* each house has its own unique banner, which is flown from castles and raised during battles. In doing this, *Game of Thrones*, like similar texts which utilise a historical aesthetic, is following the main rule of heraldry as a form of personal identification. That is not its only purpose within the diegesis of the text, as the series also uses heraldry in a similar manner to how it functioned in the mid-twelfth century, which as Margaret Lillich states was as a ‘code’ which carried ‘important messages about ownership, patronage, or, at the least, general political or social affiliation’ (Lillich, 1991:41). It is this use of heraldry as a ‘code’ which is particularly significant here, as *Game of Thrones* uses heraldry not just as a form of personal identification, but also as a code with rules and symbols that carry significance both within the diegesis of the series and separately for the

audience at home. These codes are often adapted, or at the very least have taken inspiration, from a variety of late-medieval sources. This use of coding within *Game of Thrones* comes in two distinct forms.



Figure 4.7: The White Rose of York, as it appears in the *Chronicle of the History of the World from Creation to Woden, with a Genealogy of Edward IV* (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2018).

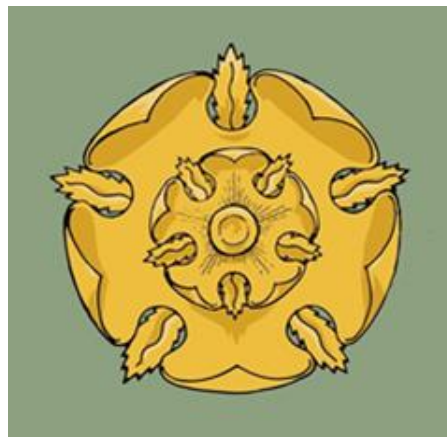


Figure 4.8: The Tyrell Rose as shown in the *HBO Viewer's Guide* (HBO, 2014).



Figure 4.9: the Sigil of House Baratheon in King's Landing as shown in the *HBO Viewer's Guide* (HBO, 2014).

Firstly, there is direct visual inspiration, as shown in the symbol of House Tyrell whose rose sigil was directly inspired by The Rose of Rouen, more commonly known as The White Rose of York, (figure 4.7). The Tyrell Rose (figure 4.8) is also an almost exact reproduction of the Yorkist Rose; it follows the same basic design, except with the colours changed to yellow. This functions as a reference to the fact that *Game of Thrones* is heavily inspired by The Wars of the Roses between the Houses of York and Lancaster, while also helping to highlight their status as a separate, even 'newer' form of nobility, when compared with the animal sigils of the other houses.

Secondly, *Game of Thrones* uses heraldry to create a historical aesthetic which uses the rules of medieval heraldry to present a series of underlying visual cues that highlight the

nature of the relationships between family groups. This element is particularly clear in King Joffrey's (Jack Gleeson's) sigil (figure 4.9), Joffrey is a King who is presented to the other characters in the series as a member of the Royal House Baratheon, but who in fact is controlled by House Lannister. This is reflected in his new banner, which at first glance shows the Baratheon stag and the Lannister lion on an equal field, but actually shows the Lannister lion's paw and tail invading the Baratheon side of the flag. While the stag's antlers are also creeping onto the Lannister half of the sigil, even in that position the Lannister lion is in a position of dominance, with its tail almost looping above the antlers. This invasion into the Baratheon section of the flag serves as a visual indicator of the control that House Lannister has over the ostensibly Baratheon royal family. This image is designed to be reminiscent of the Heraldic rule of Impalement, showing a marriage and alliance of two houses, but by invading the Baratheon half of the field the layout of the banner is actually underlining the Lannister control of the family. Ultimately, *Game of Thrones'* approach to heraldry is beneficial in creating an iconographic framework, which utilises the modern audience's understanding of what these images mean today, while simultaneously revealing to the audience the various ways in which heraldry was used, and understood, by people of the time.

#### Utilising the historical aesthetic through the mise-en-scène: costume

One of the most significant aspects of the mise-en-scène which *Game of Thrones* uses to create its historical aesthetic of the late-medieval period is costuming. Costuming is particularly significant for historical film and television because, as Marnie Hughes-

Warrington notes, one of the primary features that helps to identify a historical film is the use of costuming., The efforts of costume designers are an amalgamation of various decisions which can be made in order to help serve the other elements of the film or television programme such as plot and editing (Hughes-Warrington, 2007). However, that is not costuming's sole function, and in addition to helping inform the plot, costuming can also be used to provide clear visual signifiers for social groups and individual characters. In an interview with *The Los Angeles Times* the series' costume designer, Michelle Clapton, explains that each character's and group's clothing was inspired by real-world styles of clothing. Clapton claims that:

We made all the costumes for [characters from] the North from skins. For research, we looked at the Inuit and at Tibetan tribes — we try and look at peoples in different times in history to see how they would have dressed in that environment (Clapton, 2012).



Figure 4.10: Jon Snow (far right) adopting the uniform of the Wildlings in 'Dark Winds, Dark Words' (series 3, episode 2).



*Figure 4.11: An unknown Sami Man from the mid-nineteenth century (Selmer, circa 1862-1866).*

This can be seen throughout the series, for example in the above image from ‘Dark Wings Dark Words’ (series 3, Episode 2, figure 4.10) which shows the character Jon Snow (Kit Harrington, far right) wearing the same fur uniform as the ‘wildling’ people who are also present in this image (Rose Leslie, Kristofer Hivju, Mackenzie Crook, and Ciaran Hinds). These ‘wildlings’ live in the perpetually snowy lands to the north of Westeros, and their heavy fur clothing is an almost identical copy of the traditional outdoor clothing worn by the Sami people in Marcus Selmer’s nineteenth-century photographs, (figure 4.11) (Selmer, circa 1862-1866). The person in figure 4.11 would have lived in either Northern Scandinavia or Northern Finland, and would have experienced a similarly wild and wintery climate to the one faced by Jon Snow and the ‘wildlings’ in the television series.

Associative iconography is another way in which *Game of Thrones* utilises the historical aesthetic through costuming. This is not limited to real-world history as the series also utilises iconography that has previously appeared in other examples from historical fiction. This is done in a variety of ways; for example, in the images above (figures 4.12 and 4.13) it serves as a shorthand for entire groups of characters. A comparison between these images reveals a similarity between the Lannister soldiers' helmets and the helmets of the Teutonic infantrymen from *Alexander Nevsky* (Eisenstein, 1938). As figure 4.12 shows, the design of the Lannister helmets anonymises the soldiers, making them appear as implacable statues, as well as a source of threat, as the helmets do in *Alexander Nevsky*. The success of this design choice is borne out by the fact that the only soldier who can be clearly identified in figure 4.12, is also the only one who has lost their face covering.



Figure 4.12: A Line of Lannister Soldiers in 'The Spoils of War' (series 7 episode 4).



*Figure 4.13: Teutonic Knights in Alexander Nevsky (Eisenstein, 1938).*

Faceless armour is a constant motif within medievalist fiction which presents challenges for the medievalist film or programme maker. These challenges are due to the fact that, as Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman note, armour functions ‘as an iconographic representation of the medieval’ which ‘provides filmmakers with a challenge because it tends to interfere with the typical Hollywood iconography of the hero’ (Finke and Shichtman, 2010:49). Essentially, it is difficult for the protagonists to be distinguishable for the audience if they are wearing the same armour and have their faces covered.

Associative iconography as a form of visual shorthand can be used by film or programme makers in various ways: firstly, as a quick way to highlight specific character traits or to stimulate particular emotions in the audience. Essentially this is done by appropriating what has been done effectively in a previous production in order to convey necessary information as efficiently as possible into their own new production. Secondly, at its most basic, associative iconography can serve as a trigger for discussion among the



sections of the audience that ‘get’ the reference to another source, potentially helping further their engagement with the text.

There is also a third use of associative iconography, which remains consistent throughout the use of costuming in *Game of Thrones*, and that is through, what Clements refers to, as the use of key ‘signposts or signifiers’ (Clements, 2014:23). In her analysis of authenticity in medievalist texts, Pam Clements claims that:

There are certain tropes (a ‘register’ as Wood has it) in works of contemporary medievalism. These are not exactly symbols, but signposts or signifiers of ‘the medieval’, sufficient to create enough of a sense of verisimilitude for audiences to accept a work as ‘medieval’... Region and date matter less than that these signifiers of medievalism point to familiar images and tropes (Clements, 2014: 23-24).

This sense of the medieval is generated through associative iconography and is a key part of allowing the audience to potentially accept the series’ application of the iconography of the late-medieval world. Essentially, it is not important that the historical aesthetic is a complete reconstruction of the late-medieval period, but that for the audience it is ‘real enough,’ to convey a sense of the medieval through key signifiers. These signifiers can be used to impart information to the audience as quickly and efficiently as possible, in order to help further the audience’s own understanding of the past.

The use of associative iconography as a source of meaning through ‘signposts or signifiers’ (Clements, 2014:23) contributes to the series’ historical aesthetic. By using small

visual signifiers in order to draw parallels between real world societies and cultures the historical aesthetic makes it possible for the audience to draw their own parallels and conjectures about characters within the text.



Figure 4.14: Ned Stark outside Winterfell in 'Winter is Coming' (series 1, episode 1).

This technique of adapting the visual iconography of the past to create associations for the audience is not just used for groups. It can also extend to individual characters as can be seen in 'Winter is Coming' (series 1, episode 1) where the character Eddard Stark (Sean Bean) dresses in the warm furs that are typical for Northern characters within the series, but is also shown wearing a Japanese Samurai style skirt (figure 4.14). By dressing Eddard Stark in this way, the series not only creates a visual signifier that highlights his unyielding obsession with his own sense of honour and conviction, but also presents him as visually distinct from the nobility who come from other parts of Westeros and who adopt a more traditionally European-inspired dress. In this way *Game of Thrones* follows what Pamela Church Gibson and Tamar Jeffers McDonald suggest in their analysis of the role of

costuming in the adaptive process. Gibson and McDonald argue that costuming functions as part of the schematic framework of personality, and therefore costuming can be useful as a way of revealing character traits as well as character development over time (Gibson and McDonald, 2014).

The use of costuming in *Game of Thrones* helps to create a cohesive world. It provides contextual information about society and individuals, and in so doing highlights another potential benefit of creating a historical aesthetic. Within the historical aesthetic the various aspects of iconography are not just useful as pieces of ‘world-building,’ but can also potentially generate a further understanding of what it was like to live in similar cultures, and of how those same cultures have historically been viewed by outsiders.

#### Utilising the historical aesthetic through the mise-en-scène: architecture

Another significant way in which *Game of Thrones* creates a historical aesthetic is through architecture. Throughout the series a variety of architectural styles are presented, some of which are heavily inspired by the artwork of the Romantics in focusing on formerly grand structures in a state of partial ruin: for example, the expansive remains of the castle of Harrenhall. Other locations are more directly drawn from distinct architectural styles, including the Romanesque, Gothic, and Mudejar styles. Romanesque styles form the inspiration for Westeros’ Capital City King’s Landing, and Gothic styles are used in less populous areas, particularly in the castle of Winterfell. Mudejar styles, which are a fusion of Romanesque and Islamic architecture, are used for The Water Gardens sequences in Dorne.



*Figure 4.15: Part of a Romanesque Abacus or fragment of Window Moulding, on display at Bruniquel Castle in France, photograph by author, 2018.*

The Romanesque style is a significant part of the production design for the city of King's Landing, particularly within the castle of The Red Keep. One of the main features of the Romanesque style during the late-medieval period is the use of intricate decorative patterns in the forms of leaves and branches, an example of which can be seen in the image above (figure 4.15), which shows a piece of an abacus or fragment of window moulding, with vines going around three of its sides (Lapidary Room, Chateau de *Bruniquel*, 2018). The use of decorative vines in Romanesque architecture can be seen in the throne room of series one, where it threaded throughout the building (figure 4.16). However, in 'The North Remembers,' (series 2, episode 1), this use of the Romanesque style is redesigned into a more foreboding Gothic style by the new King Joffrey Baratheon, who declares that he wants his throne room to be fit for a conqueror. Here we can see the perceptions of Gothic styles as harsher and more brutal than the Romanesque style.



Figure 4.16: Embossed vines on the pillars of the throne room in 'Lord Snow' (series 1, episode 3).

This sequence also reflects the ways in which the term Romanesque has been used. Romanesque is not a term that existed when the buildings that followed its styles were originally constructed. The term was coined in the nineteenth century to define the similar architectural styles that emerged in countries such as modern-day France and Italy in the early eleventh century, and it is these Romanesque styles which were eventually superseded by Gothic architecture (Fossi, 2008). This sequence in 'The North Remembers' visualises attitudes towards the Gothic and the Romanesque by reflecting historical attitudes towards these architectural styles, namely that the movement from Romanesque to Gothic was viewed by people in the Renaissance as a significant break from tradition in favour of a more 'brutish' style. *Game of Thrones* reflects this negative viewpoint on the Gothic through the character King Joffrey who desires to use the Gothic in order to create a more 'brutish' image for his throne room.

The use of Gothic architectural styles in this series is in many ways a reflection of certain negative attitudes that have been directed towards Gothic style. Indeed, the term itself was coined by the sixteenth-century writer Giorgio Vasari (Chapuis, 2002) who used it in

his book *The Lives of the Artists* as a synonym for what is considered to be unrefined, monstrous, and barbarian in reference to the tribes that overran Ancient Rome (Vasari, 1568). In literary terms the word Gothic is part of a literary heritage which started in 1764 when Horace Walpole used it in the subtitle of his novel *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole, 1764), as it was understood to mean both ‘barbarous’ and ‘derived from the Middle Ages’ (Mullen, 2014). Even today the term ‘Gothic’ is used in common parlance to denote something dark and sinister.

However, that is not the only connotation of the historical aesthetic’s use of the Gothic. As Murphy and Reilly observe, the term itself has ‘been characterised by its apparent elasticity’ (Murphy and Reilly, 2017:87). That the term Gothic can:

be applied equally to buildings that evidenced pre-modern construction techniques and spirituality and to soaring monuments to modern capitalism and engineering processes further underlines how elastic a term it has been (Murphy and Reilly, 2017:95).

After all, the music of Black Sabbath and The Cure is frequently characterised as ‘Goth Rock.’ Therefore, while Gothic architecture can simply be understood to be ‘barbarous’ (Mullen, 2014), that does not have to be its sole function within the text. If a text which utilises a historical aesthetic were to take advantage of the elasticity of the term, then it has the potential to present these architectural locations in alternative ways.



Figure 4.17: The Castle of Winterfell in 'Winter is Coming' (series 1, episode 1).

This is especially clear in *Game of Thrones* with the depiction of the castle of Winterfell (figure 4.17). Winterfell, with its overly imposing appearance, is in many ways a typical representation of a Gothic-style castle. However, its use in the series is a lot more elastic than that, and its portrayal shifts throughout the narrative. Winterfell begins the series as the home for the Starks, the series' main protagonists, with whom the audience is encouraged to identify. In the first episode there are a number of short sequences which emphasises the Starks' comfort and contentment within the place. These include Eddard and Catelyn (Michelle Fairley) resting in bed together, Arya (Maisie Williams) showing off her archery skills, Bran climbing the castle walls, and Sansa (Sophie Turner) being praised for her needlework. All of these sequences are designed to emphasise to the audience that despite its outwardly imposing appearance the Gothic castle of Winterfell is the Starks' home, a home which all of them feel comfort in, and by extension the audience is encouraged to feel affection towards, even when later in the series the Starks are separated from it. This repositions the Gothic architecture away from 'barbarous' connotations, and towards a place



of belonging, thus potentially offering the audience new insights into how then-contemporary medieval people would have viewed these Gothic locations.



*Figure 4.18: The Patio de las Doncellas in the fourteenth century (A. Almagro, C. Rodriguez, M. Gonzalez, and I. Zuniga, 2006:7)*



*Figure 4.19: The Sand Snakes at the Water Gardens in 'Unbowed, Unbent, Unbroken' (series 5, episode 6).*



Mudejar architecture is a term used to refer to the fusion of the Christian, Romanesque architectural styles of Spain with the various Islamic, Moorish styles used by Islamic artists, craftsmen, and architects who remained in the region after the Spanish Christians' 'reconquest' of parts of the Iberian Peninsula. In fact, as Alejandro Lapunzina notes, the word Mudejar comes from the Arabic word, 'mudayyan,' meaning 'permitted to remain' (Lapunzina, 2005:37). *Game of Thrones* makes use of this style during scenes at the residential palace of The Water Gardens, in series five and six. For these sequences, scenes are shot in one of the more well-known examples of Mudejar architecture: the Alcazar of Seville, (figures 4.18 and 4.19). Figure 4.18 presents a re-creation of how the Alcazar would have looked during the mid-fourteenth century, a time in which its opulence was at its height. Indeed as Almagro et al note, this was the period in which it 'became for that age the most sumptuous mansion that could be conceived by a Christian King' (Almagro et al, 2006:1). Similarly, figure 4.19 shows how the Alcazar of Seville looks within the series.

*Game of Thrones* utilises Mudejar architectural styles in this way in order subtly to reinforce the perception that Dorne is a place that stands separate from the other six Kingdoms of Westeros. The series portrays Dorne as a place which was never conquered, but instead was assimilated through treaty, and because of this it retains an entirely different culture and identity. This culture, like the Mudejar style in Spain, is a fusion of Westerosi culture with Dorne's own customs. This is particularly important as it highlights one of the key issues surrounding the creation of a historical aesthetic and of creating a series with an internal consistency within its iconography, namely Paul Sturtevant's observation noted above that 'the accuracy of the details are less important than the impression given by them: that they exist within a fully realised world' (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 5969).

As *Game of Thrones* demonstrates, different architectural styles can be used in a variety of ways to help in the creation of a historical aesthetic, particularly when these architectural styles operate as a series of visual signifiers which allow for easy audience identification. This identification can then be related to their own knowledge of real-world structures, with these visual signifiers also being used as a way of enhancing that knowledge. When the audience observes how the various architectural styles are used within the series, potential for a new perspective on how these distinct styles relate to each other is offered. While the addition of these architectural styles into the fictional setting of *Game of Thrones* acts as a point of divergence from the past, it allows the audience to begin the process of newly considering the reasons why these structures were created in that way, how they were viewed by people at the time, and how those same structures altered the ways in which people interacted with their environment.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the historical aesthetic which the use of architecture in *Game of Thrones* reveals is not the fact that architecture functions as a recreation of the iconography of the late-medieval period, but that it is consistent in reflecting the past by using fictional elements as a tool for prompting further understanding. This use of iconography functions in a similar way to Jonathan Rosenbaum's observation that what is important in historical drama is not that the details are authentic, but that they look authentic to the audience (quoted in Driver, 1999). The late-medieval aesthetic requires a clear appearance of authenticity in order to function effectively, with the aesthetic operating as a clear visual shorthand to quickly acquaint the audience with the various differences between the people and cultures shown on screen. In order to do this, the shorthand needs to appear suitably authentic, with a clear internal consistency. In essence, the architectural

styles of Dorne and Winterfell need to be presented with clear reasons for their contrasts in order to ensure that the audience are able to believe that the ‘world’ created within the series is suitably authentic.

### How music solidifies the historical aesthetic

The final element of the historical aesthetic which will be analysed in this chapter is different from the other elements, in that it is not part of the visual diegesis, but instead forms part of the series’ soundscape. This element is the use of music, both diegetic and non-diegetic.

The diegetic music does not completely follow the forms and conventions of music in the late-medieval period, but it can be useful as a tool to create potential resonances for modern audiences. Music within a historical aesthetic can create resonance by operating for a similar purpose within a text as it did for people living in the late-medieval period. In *Game of Thrones* this occurs in a variety of forms from bawdy ‘tavern’ songs as in *The Bear and the Maiden Fair* to political satires as in *The Rains of Castamere*, or even hymns, such as *Gentle Mother*. Each style of music has a different function within the text, and each is important to the creation of a late-medieval aesthetic, even to the extent of helping develop an understanding of music’s role in people’s daily life. In this respect the following analysis relates closely to Nicolas Bell’s observation that:

[Music's] position was quite different from that which music was held in later times, and in many respects was more integrated into the ways of life which developed in the Medieval period (Bell, 2001:5).

This integration of music into daily life permeates *Game of Thrones*, forming a fundamental part of the series' diegesis, even when the music is simply placed in the background as part of a larger tableau. An example of this occurs with a group of minstrels, who are minor members of a theatre troupe that are introduced in series six. These minstrels are placed in the background and are only brought into the forefront when the tone of a sequence shifts.

Perhaps the clearest examples of this occurring within *Game of Thrones* is with the recurring renditions of *The Bear and The Maiden Fair*, a jubilant song which the series presents as being popular at parties and other social events within the world of Westeros. Consequently, its renditions are often placed in the background as another part of creating a cohesive 'world' for the narrative. In these instances, music is effectively functioning as an example of what Graham Coatman refers to as 'setting context, local colour and the symbolic representation of the text or music' (Coatman, 2017:141). Essentially, music provides content which can be easily interpreted and understood by the expected audience.

The majority of *The Bear and The Maiden Fair's* renditions are placed into the background, and this makes it more significant when the song is brought to the audience's attention. This is particularly the case in its repeated use in series three where different versions of it are played over the course of the series. This function is made most explicit in the episode where it is first introduced to the audience, 'Walk of Punishment' (series 3,

episode 3). The song is introduced being sung by marching soldiers, but this rendition ends up being ignored by the camera as it moves past the singing soldiers to instead focus upon their prisoner, Jamie Lannister, and his anguish at being captured. Here the song is functioning as a piece of world building and is simply another part of the sequence's tableaux; as a result, during the first rendition the song appears to be almost contrapuntal and to a certain degree innocuous. During its second rendition the song is reprised, loudly, and non-diegetically over the end credits in the form of a rock song by the New York-based band The Hold Steady (2013), the audience having just been shown Jamie Lannister suddenly getting his hand cut off by one of his captors. In this second rendition it is loud, sudden, and very difficult to ignore. The song's first use created a connection between song and character, which while loud was ignored by the character, and by extension could be ignored by the audience. However, the second use is much louder and cannot be so easily ignored. The shock of the sudden burst of rock music over the end credits, a music genre that had hitherto not appeared in the series, has the effect of mirroring Jamie Lannister's shock, and by extension the audience's own possible shock. In both sequences the use of music creates a connection between the song and the character which helps to emphasise Jamie's trauma at his situation, and it is the cumulative effect of both sequences which might have an effect on the audience.

*Game of Thrones'* use of music is particularly significant when considering Kathleen Higgins' analysis of what she terms the 'open-ended sociability of music' wherein music serves as a reminder of our 'common human makeup,' as it 'locates us first within the human community, and only second and in some cases within our particular society' (Higgins, 1997:148). While Higgins is discussing different styles of music in different cultures in

present-day society, her analysis is applicable to the ways in which music is used within the series, in that it can be used to draw similarities between the past and the present. This is particularly the case when considering the series' use of music performance as a way of presenting people in various states of relaxation. This might be through attending a public performance, for example when the band Sigur Ros appear in the episode 'The Lion and The Rose' (series 4, episode 2) in which they perform a version of *The Rains of Castamere*. Equally it might be when characters adapt songs in different ways to make their own versions of them, for example as part of a drinking game when a minor character burps out a version of *The Bear and the Maiden Fair* ('The Watchers on The Wall': series 4, episode 9). This use of music has the effect of creating a more cohesive representation of the series' interpretation of the late-medieval world, thereby revealing a particular benefit of avoiding fidelity in adapting history. By depicting the 'open-ended sociability of music' (Higgins, 1997:148), the series presents its characters' responses to music in ways that might be recognisable to a modern audience, creating resonance with the various ways in which music is enjoyed today.

The use of music in *Game of Thrones* directly relates to the first of the key research questions, namely, to what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events? as it helps to visualise the various contexts of music during the medieval period. Music in this series functions in a similar way to that discussed in the previous analysis in Chapter Two, which showed that the imposition of modern popular culture into medieval life in *A Knight's Tale* (Helgeland, 2001) allows the audience to potentially re-evaluate how they view the medieval period, and how the medieval period can be related to today. The similarity between the two is further underlined with the

announcement that Brian Helgeland, the writer and director of *A Knight's Tale*, is in the process of creating a spin-off *Game of Thrones* series for HBO (*The Indo-Asian News Service*, 2018).

## Conclusion

The creation of a historical aesthetic, in this case the late-medieval aesthetic in *Game of Thrones*, reveals a variety of benefits regarding approaches to history which deliberately avoid fidelity including creating possibilities for a greater understanding of the past and of how it relates to the present. This understanding can be divided into two distinct categories.

The first is a basic re-creation of the iconography and imagery of the medieval period. This is depicted mainly in the form of *mise-en-scène* but is also present within the sound and the music, in order to create the appearance of the medieval period, allowing the audience to accept, on some level, the programmes' depiction of a fictional medieval world.

This aspect creates opportunities for the audience to develop their understanding of the daily life of people living in the late-medieval period. The application of a wholly fictitious setting might remove the audience from their preconceptions and lingering political affiliations, which are based on their understandings of history and geography. For example, a text based on the Crusades could have difficulty extricating the audience from biases towards either Christianity or Islam. However, similar religious conflicts between fictional religions and societies occurring within a fictionalised version of the late-medieval period would not face those same issues.

In this way the late-medieval aesthetic effectively functions in similar ways to those Maltby identifies when he discusses the functions of iconography within genre, namely as a series of tools for the knowledgeable viewer to glean information about character and situation (Maltby, 2003). If when viewing a text's interpretation of the past we were to consider the various elements of 'world-building' in this way, then we can use the iconography as an effective shorthand, using recognisable images with their associated meanings still attached and transposed into the text. This sort of associative iconography can then be used clearly and quickly to situate the audience within the 'world' of the narrative.

As the creation of a historical aesthetic removes the audience's preconceptions and lingering political affiliations, so too does it remove the audience's sense of narrative certainty, and in so doing potentially allow the audience to further their own understanding of the effect of these cataclysmic events on the individuals concerned. This understanding is created when the certainty that a knowledge of history provides is removed, thus avoiding one of the problems which Bernard Cornwell faced in writing the historical novel *Sharpe's Waterloo*. When writing the novel, his interpretation of the battle was that 'Wellington would not have fought at Waterloo unless he believed the Prussians to be marching to his aid,' and that the Prussians 'would not have marched unless they believed Wellington intended to make a stand' (Cornwell, 1991:375). However, while the characters within the text are uncertain about whether Wellington will fight at Waterloo and whether the Prussians will march to their aid, this uncertainty is not shared by the reader. Unless readers have absolutely no knowledge of the Battle of Waterloo, they will feel comfortable in their own knowledge that Napoleon will be defeated, thus separating the reader from the chaos and confusion of the events on the battlefield. By creating a historical aesthetic and by re-



creating the image of the late-medieval period, the makers of *Game of Thrones* avoid this sense of narrative certainty, unless the viewer has also read the novels on which it is based, although even that level of narrative certainty was removed when the series overtook the novels at the end of series five.

When the series wanted to put the audience in the position of someone in the middle of a chaotic battle, the removal of narrative certainty allowed for a clearer correlation between the emotions felt by the characters on screen and those of the audience watching it. An example of this occurs in ‘The Battle of The Bastards’ (series 6, episode 9) where this correlation between the characters and the audience was deliberately focused on by the programme makers in a way that it was not in previous ‘battle episodes’ which were made when book readers still had narrative certainty. Miguel Sapochnik, the director of the episode, makes this concern clear when he discusses the decisions that he made during filming. Sapochnik claims that the type of aerial shots which are often used in battle scenes are designed to show the great expanse of the armies, but they have the effect of distancing the audience from the events on screen:

That is to say, you experience this moment as an objective observer in all its glory with no sense of danger from the inevitable impact of hundreds of these huge stampeding animals. I was interested in what it must feel like to be on the ground when that sh-- happens. Absolute terror? A moment of clarity? What goes through your head when you are in the thick of it (Sapochnik, 2016)?



*Figure 4.20: Jon Snow being charged at by horses in 'The Battle of the Bastards' (series 6, episode 9).*

In this particular case the series offers a complete rejection of narrative certainty in order to potentially allow the audience to more fully understand what it would have been like to be in the middle of such a situation. 'The Battle of the Bastards' avoids depicting the battlefield as a location of great scale, where individual identities are rendered anonymous within the vast armies. Instead, the episode focuses on the emotional impact that the battlefield has on the individual combatant. Rather than positioning the audience as what Sapochnik terms an 'objective observer' (Sapochnik, 2016), it directly positions viewers to take the perspective of the person on the ground. This occurs most clearly in the above image (figure 4.20), which is located at the beginning of the battle sequence, with the camera directly positioned behind the protagonist Jon Snow in order most clearly to visualise the horror of an individual being charged by cavalry.

The second category of how a historical aesthetic can create a greater understanding of the past is a more thematic element, namely the creation of a modern perspective within

a medieval iconographic framework. This position might allow the audience to relate to the various themes within the narrative, particularly those that reflect contemporary issues and concerns, in ways that may be similar to the ways in which they relate to other more typical forms of historical adaptation, specifically adaptations which are taken from actual historical events. However, there is one key difference between the two. Texts which are set in what is presented as actual history offer the audience the possibility of understanding similarities between society in the medieval period and the world today, along with how the events of the past have shaped the present. Texts that are set in wholly fictionalised settings, however, while still offering the audience the possibility of understanding similarities between the past and the present, also create the possibility of developing these resonances further. This is due to the narrative freedom that is created by the text's removal from historical sources. In other words, while other texts could find themselves criticised by some sections of the audience for presenting their narratives in ways that go against historical sources, this is not an accusation that can be levelled at texts which utilise a historical aesthetic that is based on a specific time period. Ultimately, the creation of the wholly fictional setting of Westeros creates a greater space for narrative freedom, where there is more possibility for variance within the historical resonance than can be enjoyed by other forms of historical adaptation.

This chapter earlier referred to Rosenbaum's observation that in historical drama it is not necessarily important that the details are authentic, but that they look authentic to the audience (quoted in Driver, 1999). This issue raises the following questions: firstly, if it is more important that a text might feel authentic to the audience, what exactly makes a text feel authentic? And secondly, whether this sense of authenticity is common to all audiences, or whether it is a fluid state that changes according to the various contexts of the audiences

observing the text in question. These issues are the focus of the following chapter alongside an analysis of how the notion of acceptability shifts according to the various contexts in which a historical adaptation is made.



# **Chapter Five: Fluid Notions of Authenticity and Acceptability in Re-presentations of the Life of Henry VIII in Film and Television**

## Introduction

You might well be wondering if there can be anything new left to say about any of Henry VIII's six wives. But the truth is that each new generation reads the old sources in new ways (Worsley, 2016).

There is a popular story that Alexander Korda was inspired to make *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933) soon after his arrival in England, when he heard a cabbie singing the popular music hall song 'I'm Henry The Eighth, I am,' a song which was made famous by the singer Harry Chapman (Chapman, 1911). Korda believed the song to be about King Henry VIII, not knowing that it was actually about the eighth husband of a widow (Chapman, 2005). The truth of this story is difficult to ascertain, and indeed there are differing accounts as to the source of Korda's inspiration for this production. Nevertheless, the jovial, upbeat tone of the song does reveal something about the contradictory ways in which the life of Henry VIII has been represented on screen, even though he is widely considered by modern historians and historical writers to have been a tyrant. This view is so widely held that when in 2015 the Historical Writers Association held an internal survey on who their members believed to be the worst monarch in the history of the world, Henry VIII

was voted the overall winner with 20% of the vote. The low-regard in which this group held him was reflected in individual respondents describing the former English King as ‘obsessive,’ ‘syphilitic,’ and a ‘self-indulgent wife murderer and tyrant.’ One writer called him ‘a gross man-child, wilfully and capriciously dangerous to everything around him including the country’ (Flood, 2015).

This image of Henry VIII as a tyrannical figure is by no means a recent phenomenon and has long been embraced by both historians and writers. Indeed, during his own lifetime he was referred to by Phillip Melanchthon as an ‘English Nero’ (Schofield, 2016:145). This view continued into the nineteenth century to such an extent that in 1863, in his review of Louise Mühlbach’s romantic novel *Henry VIII and his Court*, Charles Mackay declares that Henry VIII was such a reprehensible figure that any attempt to revise his image into a more romantic form were completely misguided. Mackay even goes so far as to classify him with Richard III, Emperor Domitian, and Judas Iscariot as ‘Characters hitherto branded by the universal execrations of mankind’ (Mackay, 1863:100).

While the depiction of Henry VIII as a tyrant remains popular, this is not the only way that he has been represented in fiction. This is particularly clear in a number of texts within popular culture where Henry VIII is portrayed as an overgrown, cheeky ‘school-boyish’ figure, the most famous examples of which are *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and *Carry on Henry* (Thomas, 1971). There have also been several texts which go so far as to portray Henry as a romantic figure, including Mühlbach’s book which presents the King’s marriage to Katherine Parr as an idyllic love story. This depiction of the King was the source of Charles Mackay’s criticism.

Discussing her book series on the life of Thomas Cromwell in an interview with Susan Bordo, Hilary Mantel makes the claim that her versions of Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Moore ‘shake hands’ with their previous depictions (Mantel, 2017). By this she means that her interpretations of both figures are informed by their past depictions and either act as a supportive or a corrective to those previous portrayals. Indeed, in the same interview Mantel implies that one of her main aims in the novels was to dispel the image that was created in *A Man for All Seasons* (Zinnemann, 1966) of Thomas Moore as a kind of 1960s liberal. As Bordo (2017) rightly extrapolates from Mantel’s comments, that shaking of hands between depictions can just as easily be applied to all historical representations. This chapter further expands on Mantel’s comments concerning how historical adaptations ‘shake hands’ in order to create an original argument on how the portrayal of historical figures is altered according to two related, yet fluid and distinct, notions:

- a) By what is generally considered to be an authentic portrayal of a historical figure, i.e., how the presentation uses the assumed knowledge of an audience to inform the production.
- b) By what is generally considered to be an acceptable portrayal of the same historical figure, i.e., how the portrayal is altered according to wider social attitudes, beliefs, and concerns.

This chapter takes a historically literate approach in order to create an original analysis of these notions, and of how they function within historical adaptation, by focusing, on how they have altered the ways in which Henry VIII has been depicted on screen.



However, before this chapter begins its main analysis it needs to focus on how the decisions that are made in the adaptation process change over time, particularly how this occurs according to the fluid states of authenticity and acceptability. In many ways this necessitates reconsidering Sanders' definition of the discipline of history as being 'in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). This chapter takes Sanders' central idea and analyses how adaptors have altered their depiction of Henry VIII, the reasons why they chose to do so, and how that can be related to the present. This approach ensures that the analysis in this chapter is directly related to the third of the key research questions i.e. how can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present? especially, as it is only when the changes in how Henry VIII's life has been interpreted over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been identified that this analysis will be able to begin to identify the reasons why those changes occurred.

In some respects, this approach places this chapter alongside the previously discussed research into medievalism studies, specifically Richard Utz's definition of medievalism as 'the ongoing and broad cultural phenomenon of reinventing, remembering, recreating and reenacting the Middle Ages' (Utz, 2017a:81). It must be remembered, however, that Henry VIII is a post-medieval monarch, although as previously stated that status is nuanced because, as Paul Sturtevant argues, 'though Henry did not live in the Middle Ages, he led a 'medieval' life' (Sturtevant, 2018, loc 955). Either way, the diverse ways in which his life has been reinvented, remembered, and recreated throughout many adaptations provides insights into wider changes in contemporary society. In this respect,

the chapter directly relates to the analysis of Van Riper's ideas in the literature review. As Van Riper argues:

Our adaptations of past events, whether into historical narrative or history-based drama, are origin myths for the present that we inhabit. They are designed to tell what was, but also to make sense of what is: to lend meaning to the world we see around us (Van Riper, 2013:98).

This chapter focuses on how the depiction of Henry VIII has changed throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, in order to determine how previous representations of Henry VIII's life have affected an audience's perception of authenticity. Although the influence of previous representations of Henry VIII's life on latter interpretations is by no means limited to cinematic depictions of Henry VIII's life; in fact, as Kevin J. Harty notes as part of an analysis into medieval cinema: 'whenever later filmmakers return to a medieval plot, they at least unconsciously reflect upon the previous films in the cinematic tradition they wish to continue' (Harty, 1999:7).

In order to analyse these notions of authenticity, it is worth referring back to Pam Clements' four definitions of authenticity, which are directly related to medievalism (Clements, 2014). As previously listed in the literature review, these definitions are:

1. Authenticity as historically accurate.
2. Authenticity as a search for cultural origins i.e. the search for the raw material of history.

3. Authenticity as the authorised version of a medieval text or narrative.
4. Authenticity as believability or verisimilitude (Clements, 2014).

While Clements is referring specifically to medievalisms, these definitions are just as applicable to the early-modernisms which make up representations of the life of Henry VIII. Although the first three definitions are important for wider scholarship, it is the fourth definition that is focused on in this chapter, i.e., how believable is the depiction of Henry VIII's life, and by extension how does it align with what the audience might perceive a portrayal of Henry VIII to be? Building on these questions this analysis will critique the attributes of this perceived authenticity, and the reasons why perceptions of authenticity can change. Therefore, this analysis will relate back to what was previously discussed in the literature review regarding the necessity of positioning authenticity as a fluid state, particularly in this case a state that is informed by the audience's potential memory of Henry VIII from both fiction and non-fiction sources.

In order to address these issues this chapter needs to consider Sanders' declaration that history is itself another form of representation (Sanders, 2006), as it is this which helps place the issue of authenticity into a fluid state. For example, G.R. Elton believes Thomas Cromwell to be 'the most remarkable revolutionary in English history' (Elton, 1991:127). After all, this is the man responsible for the modernisation of the Tudor government in the 1530s. However, this interpretation of Cromwell as a revolutionary is not solid, and has been critiqued by other historians, leaving the debate open, causing Phillip Edwards to declare that 'whether Cromwell was a conscious constitutionalist and theoretical reformer or simply

used whatever means he could to bolster the power of the King remains controversial' (Edwards, 2001:115). While it is generally agreed that Cromwell presided over a series of constitutional reforms during the 1530s, the reasons why these reforms occurred is subject to debate. This demonstrates that on some level history can be viewed as simply another form of representation, and as such is subject to change as alternative viewpoints interpret it.

Therefore, when analysing the impact of an audience's perception of authenticity towards the various adaptations of Henry VIII's life, this analysis needs to cover three key points.

- a) Firstly, how previous representations could have influenced sections of the audience's expectations of the later adaptations. For example, how the international success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, might have created an image in audience's minds of what Henry VIII was like.
- b) Secondly, the extent to which film or programme makers need to consider these perceived expectations when creating later representations, and whether to reinforce those expectations or to subvert them.
- c) Thirdly, the ways in which the wider socio-political context has altered the ways in which the audience could expect the narrative to be presented. For example, the impact of Second Wave feminism on how Henry VIII's relationships with his wives have been presented on film.

Analysing all three of these areas helps to reveal not just the reasons why an audience could perceive a particular adaptation to be authentic, but also just how fluid the perception of authenticity could be for that audience.

In order fully to analyse an audience's expectations of a particular depiction of Henry VIII, this chapter first clarifies how notions of authenticity have been analysed through reception theory. Reception theory is a field which argues that the notions of authenticity within a form of representation are partly created by an audience's expectations, which help to define the form within a narrative (Elliott: 2011, loc 3246). These expectations are created by sections of the audience, from previous texts that they have read, and the new text can either follow or completely alter these expectations (Jauss, 1982). Such expectations could allow the audience to accept the 'world' of the text more quickly. Consequently, as Elliott observes, this means that 'audiences and filmmakers both come to play a role in the construction of an authentic medieval past' (Elliott: 2011, loc 3251) — in the case of the adaptations of Henry VIII an authentic early-modern past — and that 'by repetition, the audience comes to expect it; through a process of accretion, ironically *the inaccurate thus becomes authentic*' (Elliott: 2011, loc 3272, emphasis in original).

Similarly, it is worth remembering that because these notions of authenticity are constantly negotiated, audience expectations are not necessarily homogenous, and different sections of the audience may have different expectations based on their own knowledge, or on their differing exposure to previous interpretations of Henry VIII's life. This inevitably alters their perception of what is, or is not, an authentic depiction of Henry VIII's life. This is why *The Private Life of Henry VIII* is particularly useful as a case study; due to the enormity of its success, specific elements of the film are still being referred to today.

Therefore, these elements could be considered to be authentic even by those sections of the audience who have not seen the film in question but have through other means become aware of its reputation (for example for the chicken-leg throwing as detailed later in this chapter). This means that while there are broad sections of the audience that will have their expectations of an authentic representation of Henry VIII's life set by previous depictions, it is important to remember that what is considered to be authentic is by no means universal and with that in mind it is important to consider Paul Sturtevant's observation that 'there is not one 'audience' but many. Every film must position itself to engage with different audiences in different ways' (Sturtevant, 2015, loc 2777). This creates a difficult 'balancing act' for those people who wish to create an 'authentic' depiction of the past when making their historical adaptation, as it requires them to create an interpretation which balances between these various expectations.

To fully understand the effect of previous representations of Henry VIII's life, this analysis needs to consider how the thematic influences of other representations of Henry VIII from outside film and television have assisted in the development of the later adaptations of Henry's reign. In this respect this analysis relates to the previous discussion in Chapter Two of how Hutcheon and Bortolotti consider cultural adaptations to evolve, i.e., they both replicate, and change from, what came before (Hutcheon and Bortolotti, 2007). On that note, this chapter considers the effect of alternate sources on an audience's perception of the authenticity of representations of Henry VIII's life; these sources can be as wide-ranging as literature, popular history and portraiture.

In order to engage with the highlighted issues this chapter will focus its analysis on a number of different adaptations of the life of Henry VIII, analysing a range of sources

from both film and television, as well as applying supplementary evidence from relevant resources. These sources will be used to further understand why film and programme makers have presented this English monarch in these various ways. Similarly, in considering the audience's shifting perceptions of authenticity this section also explores the ways in which more recent adaptors have utilised certain aspects of previous portrayals of Henry VIII's life. This discussion not only covers the reasons why filmmakers have chosen to utilise certain aspects of the previous versions of Henry VIII, but also why they have decided to move away from those previous representations.

The broader aims of this chapter sit alongside the work of previous chapters which look at the validity of non-traditional forms of historical adaptation. However, instead of focusing on how these non-traditional approaches can help further an understanding of the past and of how the past relates to the present, this chapter focuses on the changes in the various ways that the past is depicted and how they both reflect on the present and on previous depictions. In this respect the analysis in this chapter relates most significantly to the factors surrounding historical adaptation which were identified in the first and fourth key research questions, i.e., the issues around the various contexts of an adaptation's approach towards history, and how an adaptation could be useful in informing and critiquing the audience's understanding of the historical events depicted.

In order to create this analysis, this chapter builds on Dennis Bingham's observation that 'the biopic has evolved and gone through life-cycle changes and continues to do so, from the studio era to the present; these phases have themselves become sub-genres' (Bingham, 2010:10). While Bingham's approach is more expansive as his research takes in the history of the biopic in Hollywood, there is value in utilising that technique in the specific

analysis of Henry VIII biopics. This chapter focuses on three specific time periods, with the various changes between them effectively making these phases function as their own sub-genres within the broader grouping of Henry VIII adaptations. These time periods will be presented in a linear fashion, the first taking place in the 1920s and 1930s, the second focusing on the 1960s and 1970s, and the third being the 2000s and 2010s. The purpose in grouping the analysis into these three periods is so that it can show how the depiction of Henry VIII in film and television has been altered according to the wider cultural, social, and political contexts, and to make more explicit the influence of representations from prior decades. Additionally, this linear progression throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries allows the analysis to reflect on how the previous adaptations of Henry VIII's rule have potentially altered the audience's perception of the authenticity of later depictions. These sections are divided as follows:

The first section focuses on the representation of Henry VIII in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War. It focuses primarily on the well-received and well-known *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. This film, as Peter Walker argues, 'brought British film-making to the attention of the world,' and turned Alexander Korda's production company, London Film Productions, into 'the one British production company thought capable of competing with the giant American studios in the global marketplace' (Walker, 2003:3-4).

*The Private Life of Henry VIII* is significant within the broader history of the British Film Industry, but more important for this analysis are the reasons why the filmmakers decided to depict Henry VIII, a monarch who made several significant changes to English



society, not as some kind of grand statesman, but as a comedic caricature, who as Geoffrey MacNab describes, the film portrays as:

an explosive buffoon, a monarch of gargantuan appetite and infantile temperament, who bellowed, chewed, and had his various wives executed, looking all the while like an enormous bearded baby (MacNab, 2000:63).

The portrayal of Henry VIII in this way is particularly significant when considering the financial success of the film domestically and internationally. In an article about the film's status as an outlier in the wider, struggling, British Film Industry, the Australian Newspaper *The Barrier Miner* estimated its international gross to be 750,000 by 1936 (*The Barrier Miner*, 1936). Therefore, when audiences saw this representation of Henry VIII on screen it is possible that it would have helped form their ideas of what King Henry VIII was like, particularly as this performance received acclaim in the form of an Academy Award for Best Actor for Charles Laughton, helping to ensure that in the mid-1930s the actor was considered an exemplar of great film acting (Bingham, 2010). The popular perception of this version of the King as 'authentic' gained further support when Laughton reprised the role of Henry VIII in *Young Bess* (Sidney, 1953), thus potentially solidifying his interpretation in the minds of audiences.

The second section focuses on how this representation changed in the 1960s and 1970s. In this period the problems that occurred with the popular comedic depictions of Henry VIII were becoming increasingly noticeable. While this type of portrayal still existed within popular culture, most notably as part of the long-running *Carry on Series* in *Carry*

on Henry (Thomas, 1971), the more troubling aspects of the ‘schoolboyish’ portrayal of a man who ordered the death of two of his wives was becoming increasingly clear, particularly, when placed alongside the growing trend for more critical depictions of Henry VIII's life and reign. This occurs most famously with the film *A Man for All Seasons*, which positions Thomas Moore as a ‘hero’ of non-violent protest and portrays Henry as still personally affable, but more villainous than depicted in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*.

Analysis of the changes in the portrayal of Henry VIII during the 1960s and 1970s needs to consider how the emergence of Second Wave feminism altered how Henry VIII was viewed on screen. Second Wave feminism is a movement which has often been described as emerging with:

The publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, the founding of the National Organisation for Women in 1966 and the emergence of women's consciousness raising (CR) groups in the late 1960s (Thomson, 2002:338).

This analysis considers the impact of Second Wave feminism on how Henry VIII has been perceived, and perhaps more importantly, examines how changing attitudes towards women in society have altered the ways in which Henry VIII's wives have been depicted. This is most notable in the case of Anne Boleyn in *Anne of the Thousand Days* (Jarrot, 1969) and the portrayal of the wives in the television miniseries *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* (BBC One, 1970).

The third section focuses on the early twenty-first century interpretations of Henry VIII, and how these representations of his life have altered since the year 2000. This section analyses how modern film and television makers have approached the topic of Henry VIII's life, analysing whether these portrayals have changed in order to reflect a modern audience's perception of authenticity, and if so, to what extent.

A key focus for this section is the two-part television miniseries *Henry VIII* (ITV, 2003), which cast Ray Winstone, an actor best known for playing London gangsters in films such as *Sexy Beast* (Glazer, 2000), as the titular monarch. The series did this as part of an intention to create what Andy Harries (the then controller of Granada Television) refers to as the 'idea of the gangster King' (Harries, Hopkinson, and Morgan, 2003). This section contrasts that representation with the depiction of Henry VIII in the television drama series *The Tudors* (Showtime, 2007-2010).

### The centrality of Holbein to the perception of Henry VIII

In an analysis of how the role of memory in historical adaptation relates to medieval cinema, Sarah Salih observes that:

None of us knows what the Middle Ages looked like: our perceptions of authenticity relate, both positively and negatively, to representations of the period with which we are already familiar (Salih, 2011: 21).

Salih is referring to medieval cinema, but these observations also apply to fictional representations of the early-modern period (as well as representations of the pre-medieval world). Therefore, any analysis of the popular perception of Henry VIII needs to consider the impact of prior interpretations, although this is by no means unique to the Henry VIII biopic. Indeed, as Helen Young observes, the various meanings of the term medieval in both fantasy and science-fiction are constructed, and these meanings shift according to the conventions of the genre. These shifting conventions also bring about their own changes as both authors and audiences engage with prior versions (Young, 2016). In this regard, one of the key areas of engagement with what has gone before is the sources that helped inspire the popular image of Henry VIII's appearance. Henry's physical appearance is one of the most well-known things about him, so much so that G.R. Elton can comfortably claim that Henry VIII is the only English monarch that people can identify from silhouette alone (cited in Lipscomb, 2009).

So well-known is the iconography surrounding Henry VIII, and by extension the numerous adaptations of Henry VIII's life, that it reveals an intriguing feature of the Henry VIII biopic, and by extension other sub-genres of the biopic genre. This is that while Steve Neale makes a valid point when he identifies the biopic as generally lacking a specific iconography (Neale, 2000), this is not an issue with the biopic's own sub-genres, as the iconography of a specific historical period is the iconography of a sub-genre. If the biopics of Henry VIII are considered a sub-genre in-and-of themselves, then there is a precise iconographic framework from which an adaptation can draw its *mise-en-scène*, one that is informed by a variety of sources including prior interpretations of Henry VIII's life, whether that be in film, television, or even portraiture.

Out of all influences on the public representation of Henry VIII, perhaps the most significant influence on the perception of his appearance is Hans Holbein the Younger's depiction in his paintings of the King as a man of immense size dressed in particularly extravagant and ornate cloth-work, which is combined with overly bulky furs. One of the more famous examples of this can be seen in the image below (Henry VIII on left, figure 5.1).



*Figure 5.1: King Henry VIII; King Henry VII by Hans Holbein The Younger in The National Portrait Gallery (2018).*

This image of Henry VIII is used repeatedly as a way of identifying him, indeed Thomas Freeman observes that:

Virtually every cinema actor who has played Henry from Emil Jennings, to Sid James has struck the accustomed pose of the Holbein portrait, often several times in the same scene. The costume in Holbein's painting has been equally ubiquitous; every cinema Henry has worn the flat hat with plumes, the medallion and the dagger, although not even Sid James has dared to wear the codpiece (Freeman, 2009:30).



*Figure 5.2: The first shot of Henry VIII in The Private Life of Henry VIII (Korda, 1933).*

The ubiquity of this image is such that *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, re-creates it in order to introduce Charles Laughton's portrayal to the audience (figure 5.2). This depiction of Henry VIII is so thorough in its re-creation of Holbein's Henry portraits that he is even standing in the exact same pose. Laughton is wearing a re-creation of Henry's clothes as his costume and is standing with his legs wide apart, with his feet planted firmly on the

ground taking up as much space as possible, all of which are designed to make him look like a strong and commanding figure.

Using the Holbein portraits as a guide for informing a portrayal of Henry VIII is particularly important for this chapter, as it provides a clear example of what Salih identifies as a historical ‘fragment’ (Salih, 2011:22). These fragments are a useful starting point for historical adaptation, with the Holbein portraits being particularly useful as they can be utilised in various ways according to the desires of the people making the historical adaptation. This can be done to support a representation of Henry VIII as a strong and commanding ruler, as in *A Man for All Seasons*, or to undermine this depiction of authority for comedic effect, as in *Carry on Henry* (Thomas, 1971).

The significance of the re-creation of the Holbein portraits to this analysis is important as these portraits, including figure 5.1, generally depict Henry VIII during his later years. The Holbein portraits’ dominance over the perception of Henry’s appearance is so thorough that the film *When Knighthood was in Flower* (Vignola, 1922), despite being set around the year 1515, depicts Henry as he appears in the portraits rather than as he would have looked twenty years earlier when he was in much better physical shape. It was only in his later years, when his health began to deteriorate and his weight dramatically increased, that Henry looked as he does in the Holbein portraits. While the estimates of Henry’s weight do vary, one estimate based on analysis of his armour and portraits, claims that in the later years of his life his Body Mass Index expanded from around 25.6 Kg/m<sup>2</sup> in his early twenties, to 47.7 kg/m<sup>2</sup> at the time of his death (Ashrafian, 2012: 218-219). At the time in which *When Knighthood was in Flower* is set, Henry VIII was widely regarded as a very

handsome man. This is made clear in the dispatches of Sebastiano Giustiniani, the Venetian ambassador to the court, which make the following claims about Henry VIII's appearance:

His majesty is the handsomest potentate I have ever set eyes on; above the usual height, with an extremely fine calf to the leg, his complexion very fair and bright, with hair combed straight and short, in the French fashion, and a round face so very beautiful, that it would become a pretty woman, his throat being rather long and thick (Giustiniani, 1515-1519:86).

This reveals that the Holbein depiction of Henry VIII remains vital in shaping the public perception of what he should look like. This occurs to such an extent that when creating a portrayal of Henry VIII, it is this image that might feel authentic to the audience even when it is not accurate. The overweight image of Henry VIII might be so firm in the audience's perception of what he is supposed to look like that it could supplant a more accurate representation. This is particularly challenging when creating representations of Henry VIII's early life; indeed, when *The Private Life of Henry VIII* was released in the USA, Mordaunt Hall, *The New York Times*' film critic, praised what he perceived to be the accuracy of the portrayal claiming that Laughton 'sometimes looks as if he stepped from the frame of the Holbein painting' (Hall, 1933). In some respects, this is similar to how Henry VIII is portrayed in *Anna Boleyn* (Lubitsch, 1920), where Emil Janning's performance of the Tudor monarch utilises the Holbein pose, but only to undermine it with the character's emotional state which Walker describes as 'childlike' (Walker, 2003:26). Indeed, so similar are Janning's and Laughton's performances that Walker speculates that Laughton was



inspired by Janning's performance, especially as Janning creates several comic touches that Laughton would re-create in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Walker, 2003).

The importance of the Holbein portraits in creating almost the default image of Henry VIII is clear, underlining how our perception of history is fluid and, referring back to Sanders (2006), on some level just another form of representation. A number of people have conjectured that Holbein had astigmatism, resulting in him portraying people as broader than they really were (Weir, 2008:270). If that were the case, and if the Holbein images remain our primary referent to Henry's appearance, and to that of other members of Henry's court, then it could be that our image of these people at any stage of their lives is fundamentally flawed. It is worth remembering, however, that near the end of Henry's life the primary evidence is very clear that he was overweight; Henry's *Armour for Field and Tournament (1540)*, which is on display at the Royal Armouries in Leeds, reveals Henry to have a 51-inch waist in armour during the final years of his life (Royal Armouries, 2018).

Analysis of the ongoing influence of Holbein's paintings on the public perception of Henry VIII ties in closely with the previous discussions on authenticity in Chapter Two. Specifically, that it is not necessary for an adaptation to be authentic if it feels authentic to the audience, or at least authentic enough for some sense of verisimilitude to be created. This brings the analysis back to the first of the key research questions, about the importance of recognising the context of a historical adaptation. While people making a historical adaptation have free rein to utilise the Holbeinesque image of Henry as they see fit, they could benefit from considering the context of the interpretations of Henry that these paintings produce, and of how they have impacted prior portrayals of Henry's life.

The influence of and influences on *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933).

It is difficult to overemphasise the importance that *The Private Life of Henry VIII* had to the British film industry. The film's popularity was so great that Korda had initially planned to make a sequel titled *The Field of Cloth and Gold*, focusing on a particularly extravagant summit between Henry VIII and King Francis I of France. Despite the fact that the sequel was never completed, Korda still managed to turn *The Private Life of Henry VIII* success into a template for a number of biopics that he either directed himself or produced. This template helped form the basis for a series of films which Custen identifies as being more of a tabloid-inspired view of history (Custen, 1992). Films using this template took inspiration from *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, as well as its less-successful predecessor *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (Korda, 1927), in order to focus their narratives on the private lives of important historical figures beginning with *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (Czinner, 1934) and ending with *That Hamilton Woman* (Korda, 1941). It is due to the success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* that Alexander Korda was able to establish himself as a 'filmmaker of international stature – something his earlier Hollywood productions had not done' (Slide, 1985:10).

However, while *The Private Life of Henry VIII* was very successful for Korda, the popularity of representations of Henry VIII's life was by no means unprecedented. Indeed, as Steve Neale observes, the biopics that were made before the Second World War tended to be dominated by figures associated with royalty, government, and politics (Neale, 2000). Korda would have been aware of the popular appeal of earlier representations of Henry VIII's life, particularly that of the previously mentioned film adaptation of Charles Major's

book *When Knighthood Was in Flower*. Although made over a decade previously, this film was remembered for being a significant financial success, and according to Tom Milne provided the first box office success for Marion Davies and ‘finally establish[ed] her as a star’ (Milne, 1968), just as *The Private Life of Henry VIII* would go on to make Charles Laughton an international star.



Figure 5.3: Henry VIII gets ready to confront Mary Tudor in

*When Knighthood was in Flower* (Vignola, 1922).

Henry VIII is a significant figure in *When Knighthood was in Flower*, but he is not the film’s focus. The film instead focuses on the love affair and eventual marriage of Henry’s younger sister Mary Tudor (Marion Davies) to Charles Brandon (Forrest Stanley). What is most significant for this analysis is not how Henry functions within the narrative, but how he is presented visually as can be seen in figure 5.3. This version of Henry VIII (Lyn Harding) is standing in a pose and dressed in a costume which are very similar to those in the previously discussed Holbein portraits (see figure 5.1). These portraits depict Henry VIII as a man of immense size dressed in particularly extravagant and ornate cloth-work combined with overly bulky furs.



*Figure 5.4: Same shot as introduction, but after Henry has walked forward. In *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933)*

However, the idea of Henry VIII as a strong and imposing monarch is consistently undermined in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. While the pose is used as the introduction to Charles Laughton's portrayal, (see figure 5.2), it is then subverted as Henry overhears women of the court gossiping about him. When Henry starts to talk to the women he walks forward, causing him to assert his dominance on both them and the audience, as can be seen in figure 5.4. Henry uses his size to appear imposing as he gestures to one of the women, who is later revealed to be Katherine Howard, to come over and asks, 'look at me, what did you call me?' She responds with 'I should call you, your majesty. A man.' This causes Henry VIII to laugh and exclaim 'So I am, and glad of it.' Henry proceeds to drop his imperious tone for the rest of the scene and indeed for the rest of the film, as the focus moves away from depicting him as a tyrannical monarch towards portraying him as a childish buffoon. This sequence is significant as it reveals the centrality of the Holbein depiction of Henry VIII to his public persona. When Korda needed to present Henry VIII as a King, the shot of Henry standing in that pose creates that image, only for it to be discarded as Korda focuses

the rest of the film on Henry VIII's personal life, or as Katherine Howard outrightly states, on Henry VIII primarily as 'a man.'

The film is primarily focused on portraying Henry's personal life, but there is one sequence which focuses on Henry's political achievements, and it is this area that reveals how the notions of acceptability are influenced by the wider social concerns of the time. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, Korda was not averse to altering history when making his biographical films, in order to clearly relate them to contemporary political issues. A key example of this occurs when Korda took the decision in making *That Hamilton Woman* (Korda, 1941) to include a subplot where Nelson (Laurence Olivier) attempts to persuade Naples to join the fight against Napoleon. The wider context of this was a clear attempt to persuade Americans who were advocating neutrality to join the fight against Hitler in World War Two. This is made particularly clear in the film when Nelson declares:

Gentlemen, you will never make peace with Napoleon. Napoleon cannot be master of the world until he has smashed us up, and believe me, gentlemen, he means to be master of the world. You cannot make peace with dictators. You have to destroy them, wipe them out (Korda, 1941).

*That Hamilton Woman* functions as a representative example of what has been termed the 'great man biopic,' a type of film which Preeti Kumar identifies as a film which deploys:

The passions of patriotism by the chronicling of heroic deeds, sacrifices, and lofty moral virtues, and by fabricating, rediscovering, or authenticating the

myths of celebrated men. Presentations of particular versions of historical lives privilege specific ideologies and naturalise an imagery of the nation in the popular psyche (Kumar, 2014: 40).

Before continuing to focus the rest of this analysis on Henry VIII it is worth considering that the term ‘great man biopic’ is potentially restrictive and runs the risk of ignoring those biopics that are not focused on men, but who would otherwise fit this definition. For example, *Elizabeth* (Kapur, 1998) or *Ekaterina: The Rise of Catherine the Great* (Russia-1, 2014-2019) both of whom are biopics that are focused on women. Perhaps a more precise way of referring to these texts would be ‘great person’ biopics, as this would avoid certain texts from being disqualified from consideration as a part of this sub-genre based on the gender identity of their subject. This change has the effect of potentially creating a space whereby future research into this sub-genre would be able to consider a number of different questions within the broader analysis of this subject, for example the differences between how male protagonists are depicted in the ‘great person biopic’ and how female protagonists are depicted in the ‘great person biopic’.

However, on the subject of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, as the film is focused on Henry’s personal life, and therefore his political struggles are generally not featured throughout the film. This places the film away from the ‘great person biopic’ status which can be more readily applied to *That Hamilton Woman*. However, there are still some attempts to use elements of the ‘great person biopic’ to create some form of contemporary thematic resonance in order to shift the audience into supporting the preparations for war, most notably in the only sequence where Henry is engaging in any form of statecraft. In this

sequence he talks about preparing for a possible war saying: ‘This little island of three million souls is no match for all of Europe,’ and ‘what I can do is build ships, ships and then more ships,’ leaving Cromwell to ask if he should double the fleet to which Henry responds with ‘triple it, fortify Dover, rule the sea.’ When Cromwell says that it would cost them money Henry finishes the discussion by saying ‘to leave it undone would cost us England.’

This sequence is the only overt reference to the political concerns that Henry VIII faced during his time as King; the film does not even feature the split from Rome, as the narrative begins during the build up to Anne Boleyn’s execution. Walker (2003) points out that in the film Henry’s desire to build ships is reflective of the personal concerns that Korda had about the growing militarisation of Germany, and of what Korda believed would be the best way for Britain to plan against it. This is a theme that Korda would return to in a number of films he produced throughout the 1930s, notably *The Conquest of the Air* (Esway, Korda, Saunders, Shaw, and Taylor, 1936), a docudrama which is primarily focused on telling a history of the development of flight, but is also designed to prepare its audience for the upcoming war. The film does this either by extolling the virtues of the British air forces, or by dramatising the warnings of Francesco Lana, a seventeenth-century Jesuit priest and aeronautical pioneer, who warned of the damage that flying devices could inflict on entire cities.

*The Conquest of the Air*’s representation of Francesco Lana’s fears about flight functions as a clear forewarning of the kind of damage that The Blitz would inflict on the UK during World War Two. Korda returned to these themes in both *Fire Over England* (Howard, 1937), and *The Lion Has Wings* (Brunel, Hurst, and Powell, 1939). Essentially, Alexander Korda’s approach to historical drama directly relates to the second of the key

research questions, as not only does a close study of Korda's historical films reveal an awareness of the historical events themselves, but these films also function as a clear reflection of the wider political contexts of 1930s Europe and the USA, directly relating the past to the present for propagandistic purposes.



*Figure 5.5: Henry VIII gets silenced by his former nurse in The Private Life of Henry VIII (Korda, 1933).*

In *The Private Life of Henry VIII* these wider political concerns are not the key focus of the narrative; instead the film's focus is on the King's political pressures and character flaws. *The Private Life of Henry VIII* remains a comedic treatment of the King, with the viewer encouraged to laugh as Henry attempts alternately to find wives and then get rid of them. The result of this approach means that he appears more like an overgrown schoolboy than a serious monarch. This aspect is further underlined by the decision to invent some scenes with him and his former nurse, who still treats him like a child; she even at one point raises a finger while saying 'shhh' when he makes too much noise, causing him immediately to stop in his tracks (figure 5.5). This depiction extends to the treatment of the wives, all of whom have their personalities altered by the filmmakers in order to make Henry appear more



likeable, more sympathetic, and by extension, more humorous. These portrayals are as follows:

- a) Anne Boleyn (Merle Oberon) is generally treated somewhat sympathetically, although the film focuses mainly on her appearance. As Bordo (2017) notes, the majority of her scenes seem designed to highlight her beauty on parity to her worries about the execution. Any sympathetic portrayal is undermined when the camera cuts away from her, and instead the audience is presented with a number of comic vignettes which are almost Pythonesque in their absurdity. For example, during the build up to Boleyn's execution Korda focuses on the crowd who have assembled to watch her beheading and depicts one woman in the crowd saying, in a very upper-class English accent, 'Oh poor Anne Boleyn, I do feel so sorry for her.' The film then immediately undercuts those sympathies with another unnamed character at the execution asking the woman: 'excuse me madam do you mind taking off your hat, we can't see the block.'
- b) Jane Seymour (Wendy Barrie) is presented as vain and silly, with Henry at one point referring to her as 'a stupid girl,' and she has very few scenes in the film.
- c) Anne of Cleves (Elsa Lanchester) is presented entirely as a humorous character, whom Henry finds completely unattractive, and at the moment when he is supposed to go to bed with her to consummate the marriage, he mutters to his court 'the things I've done for England.' In order to further the humour of the situation Korda cast Laughton's wife, Elsa Lanchester, who adopts a comedic Dutch accent. However, she is also presented as clever, and she successfully

manipulates Henry by beating him in a game of cards to win two manor houses, £4000 a year, and a divorce.

- d) Katherine Howard (Binnie Barnes) is depicted as being older than the approximately 15-to-17-year-old girl that she was during her marriage to Henry (Weir, 2008). She is even presented as being a major presence at court during the execution of Anne Boleyn when the historical sources estimate that she would have only been 11 years old at the time. Binnie Barnes is significantly older than this, being 30 at the time of the film's release. The film also does not show Howard's actual execution, just a crowd waiting for it. The camera instead cuts away and the audience is presented with a short sequence of two high-angle shots showing Henry wandering around the palace. One of those high-angle shots is a long shot showing him dwarfed by the palace's columns followed by a close up of him looking mournful and murmuring 'mea culpa mea culpa, mea maxima culpa' to himself, (figures 5.6, and 5.7). Jonathan Bignell observes that 'dramatized biographies focus on inner, emotional life, made visually engaging by the use of close-up' (Bignell, 2019). In *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, the close-up is granted to Henry VIII not Katherine Howard, and thus the focus on the inner, emotional life, is moved away from Katherine and onto Henry. By showing Henry weeping over the death of Katherine Howard, but not showing the execution itself, the film is attempting to make the audience feel sympathetic towards the King, at the expense of the young woman he just had executed.

- e) Katherine Parr (Everley Gregg) is depicted as a scold, who harangues Henry about his diet and then proceeds to tuck him into his chair telling him it is ‘time for a nap.’



Figure 5.6: High-angle shot of Henry VIII after the execution of Katherine Howard in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933).



Figure 5.7: Close up of Henry VIII after the execution of Katherine Howard in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933).

Perhaps the most revealing insight into the film’s representation of Henry’s wives is the non-portrayal of Catherine of Aragon. The filmmakers made the deliberate decision not to include Catherine of Aragon in the film and then sought to justify that decision by opening the film with a title card that says ‘Henry VIII had Six Wives. Catherine of Aragon was the first; but her story is of no particular interest – she was a respectable woman. So, Henry divorced her.’ This title card is particularly significant when considering the prime position that Henry’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon and subsequent marriage to Anne Boleyn holds in later adaptations of Henry’s life. These events would later be adapted into half of the running time of *Henry VIII*, and the entirety of the first two series of *The Tudors*, despite

the fact that, like *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, both later texts aim to depict Henry's marriages to all six of his wives. This removal of Catherine of Aragon from the film for reasons of propriety has the effect of further highlighting the misogyny of the film's portrayal of the other women. By stating that 'she was a respectable woman' and is therefore not a suitable subject for the film, the filmmakers are implying that their comedic portrayals of Henry's other wives are perfectly acceptable as to them they are not 'respectable women.'

Overall, while the content of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* is important for understanding how this particular image of Henry VIII was formed, it is not the content of the film itself, but the impact that it has had on the future depictions of Henry VIII that is of primary importance for this analysis. While the film is undeniably influenced by previous silent depictions of Henry VIII, the film's extraordinary success, and in particular Charles Laughton's performance, helped to solidify an image in popular culture as to what a portrayal of Henry VIII 'should' look like, a view that is further enhanced by Charles Laughton's reprisal of the role in *Young Bess* (Sidney, 1953).

#### *Young Bess* (Sidney, 1953) as bridge text

As Freeman (2009) observes, the period after the Second World War led to a dramatic reduction in cinematic depictions of Henry VIII's life. Apart from the releases of *Young Bess* and a Disney-produced adaptation of *When Knighthood was in Flower* called *The Sword and The Rose* (Annakin, 1953), versions of Henry VIII's life were generally left off cinema screens until the 1960s. Freeman (2009) claims that the growing conservatism of the British film industry in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and which continued in the

immediate post-war period, made Henry a difficult subject for adapting onto screen for two reasons in particular.

Firstly, the difficulty of depicting royal marital scandal after the abdication of Edward VIII in 1936, made it particularly challenging to depict Henry VIII on screen, and considering how the historical sources are generally understood it would be very difficult to make an adaptation of Henry VIII that does not feature royal marital scandal.

Secondly, the great success of *The Private Life of Henry VIII* solidified a comic aura around Henry VIII, which prevented the man who is credited with founding the Royal Navy from being depicted as a heroic figure, unlike seemingly less controversial historical figures such as Henry V and Horatio Nelson (Freeman, 2009).

Of the two adaptations that were released in 1953 *Young Bess* has the more intriguing position in the history of adaptations of the life of Henry VIII. As its title indicates, its plot focuses on the young Princess Elizabeth, with the film finishing just before she becomes Queen of England. Therefore, as the film is focused on Elizabeth I, Charles Laughton's reprisal of the role of Henry VIII is reduced to a supporting performance, albeit as a piece of intertextuality that helps to, as Custen identifies, 'assert the validity of past film triumphs' (Custen, 1992:59). This might lead to the audience's perspective on the character shifting as they begin to view him from the point of view of Elizabeth. *Young Bess* portrays Henry VIII as a much less sympathetic figure. While Laughton continues to play a broad caricature of Henry VIII, the tone of these sequences presents him much more as a figure of 'threat,' and although he does get a sympathetic deathbed scene, for the majority of his time on screen he is presented as far more overtly tyrannical.

While Custen criticises Laughton's performance in the film, which he regards as an over-made-up version of his earlier role (Custen, 1992), the changes that Laughton brings to the character do help to inform this more tyrannical version of the king. In *Young Bess*, Laughton's portrayal of Henry adopts a new habit of running his hand on the necks of women who have displeased him, and the film shows him doing it three times, once to Anne Boleyn, once to Katherine Howard, i.e., the two wives who he had executed, and a third time to Katherine Parr. Henry does this to Katherine Parr while aboard his flagship, after he discovers her attempts to translate the Bible into English, although Katherine Parr is spared from execution when Elizabeth quickly points out to sea, pretending to see French ships. This sequence has the effect of highlighting the social changes that Katherine Parr desired to bring to England, most notably her work in reforming the church, an interest that led to her book *Prayers or Meditations* (1545) becoming the first book written by a woman in the English language to be published under her own name (Kujawa-Holbrooke, 2003). This portrayal of Katherine Parr, combined with Elizabeth's own declaration to Henry that she will reshape the world according to her own desires, reflects a shift in sympathies in order to reflect the 'new woman' of the USA and of Western Europe during the post-Second World War years. For example, in America there was a slow but steady growth of women entrants into traditionally 'white collar' managerial positions throughout the 1940s and 1950s. This led to what Andriana Bellou and Emanuela Cardia regard as an overall 'upgrading' in social and economic standing for the next generation of female workers as a consequence of World War Two (Bellou and Cardia, 2013).

Of course it is worth pointing out that this alteration of historical figures in order to reflect the changes within 1950s society is by no means unique to *Young Bess*. Indeed, Kevin

J. Harty has made similar observations about changes in the portrayal of Maid Marion in the Disney film *The Story of Robin Hood and his Merrie Men* (Annakin, 1952), where Marion is given greater agency and a more central role in the narrative than in previous interpretations of the Robin Hood story (Harty, 2012). This indicates that both films are part of a broader trend in the representation of women in historical film during the 1950s. However, so thoroughly does *Young Bess* create a proto-feminist interpretation of Elizabeth and Henry that emphasises her successes as eclipsing his, that the film acts as a subversion of what Bingham identifies as the more common tendency in women's biography to displace the female protagonist's achievements and ambitions onto the male figures in their lives (Bingham, 2010:214).

Perhaps no clearer insight into this change of sensibilities comes from the changes in response from the film critics in *Variety Magazine*. When *The Private Life of Henry VIII* was released their critic (author unknown), while admitting that the film is 'more generous to the character of Henry VIII than most of his biographers,' nonetheless describes the portrayal in sympathetic terms, describing Henry as 'a jolly old soul' who is adept at 'belching' (Anonymous, 1932). However, when it came time to review Laughton's reprised portrayal in *Young Bess* the magazine describes him as both 'gross' and 'pompous' (Anonymous, 1952). The complete change in critical response to the character, with behaviour that was previously viewed affectionately now being considered 'gross,' shows the change in what the magazine believes to be acceptable, with the previously playful 'belching' now being viewed as grotesque. In this respect *Young Bess* is in many ways a forerunner to the versions of Henry VIII that would emerge in the 1960s and 1970s.

### Henry VIII in the 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a shift in how adaptations of Henry VIII depict the English monarch, partly as a result of the popularity of two plays that were written between 1945 and 1960: *Anne of The Thousand Days* (Anderson, 1948) and *A Man for All Seasons* (Bolt, 1960). These plays separate themselves from previous depictions, by focusing their representation of the King onto questions of totalitarianism and resistance towards it. These two plays were eventually adapted into the films *Anne of The Thousand Days* and *A Man for All Seasons*. There has been plenty written about the thematic resonance that was felt by members of the American Civil Rights Movement towards the non-violent resistance that Thomas Moore displayed in *A Man for All Seasons*, so much so that Joanne Paul declared that the play ‘spoke to the spirit of the age’ (Paul, 2016). However, the fact that Henry VIII remains a supporting character in that film, as well as a predominantly off-stage presence in the play, whose last appearance occurs mid-way through the first act, makes *Anne of the Thousand Days* a clearer focal point for study in this section. The film version of *Anne of the Thousand Days* focuses on the King’s (Richard Burton) relationship with Anne Boleyn, (Geneviève Bujold) from when he was still married to Catherine of Aragon (Irene Papas) until the day of Anne’s execution. The following discussion analyses and compares depiction of Henry VIII in *Anne of the Thousand Days* and *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, a 6-part BBC series which adapts Henry’s (Keith Michell) relationship with his six wives, with each episode focused entirely on a different wife.

*Anne of the Thousand Days* presents an intriguing example of how fluid the notions of authenticity and acceptability are for the portrayal of Henry VIII, particularly since it is



an adaptation not just of the events surrounding Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn, but also of the play by Maxwell Anderson (1948). The changes from the play to the film are particularly revealing of the fluid position of acceptability, Susan Bordo regards the play as being more focused on Henry as he descends into totalitarianism, as opposed to the film which focuses more on Anne Boleyn. Bordo claims that in this respect the play functions partly as a riposte to *The Private Life of Henry VIII* which Anderson considers to present a caricature of the King (Bordo, 2013). In the play of *Anne of the Thousand Days* Henry claims at the beginning that:

There's always a temptation, when a man's in my position, that he'll think of the nation as his own little trough and get all four feet in it and eat from one end to the other. I don't want to look like that to anybody (Anderson, 1948:7).

However, in the film adaptation, this line is cut; instead, as William B. Robison notes, the adaptation keeps the focus on Anne's independence in order more clearly to position Anne's personality as analogous to Second Wave feminism as was appropriate for a film released at the movement's height. Despite not focusing on her personal faith and her political beliefs about the new English Church, the film consistently portrays Anne as both intelligent and independent (Robison, 2017), often more so than the men surrounding her. This is made explicit in an early scene with her then betrothed, Henry Percy (Terence Wilton), where they share the following exchange:

Anne: Are we to bed together? Before?

Percy: If you Like

Anne: Kiss me

They Kiss

Anne: Are you a virgin?

Percy: I'm a Man

Anne: I know, but are you a virgin? when we bed together shall I be your first?

Percy: I...

Anne: Speak out, well I'll say it frankly as they do in France, in England we make muddy mysteries of such things as if they were crimes, we don't come out of a rainbow at 17 and there's no use pretending we do, you may ask me whatever you like.

Percy: Are you a virgin?

Anne: No.

Percy: In France?

Anne: Yes, and long before, when I was little, I was playing with a boy and he pulled me down and then.

As this sequence demonstrates, Anne is shown to have a wider experience of the world, both in personal relationships and in her travels, while also having a more inquisitive personality than Percy. This sequence is particularly significant as it relates directly to the analysis in Chapter Two of the benefits of historical drama using thematic resonance as a form of presentism, in order to help create a new interpretation of a text, particularly in terms of D'Arcens' definition of presentism as 'the practice of representing, interpreting, and more importantly, evaluating the past according to the values, standards, ambitions, and anxieties of a later 'present'' (D'Arcens, 2014:181). Presentist interpretations of the past are used throughout *Anne of The Thousand Days* in order to re-present Anne Boleyn to the modern audience as a more sympathetic and more relatable individual, even to the extent that she is re-presented as a form of proto-feminist figure. Indeed, by the end of the film an implication

is made that she gets a form of revenge on Henry, as Henry pleads with her to annul the marriage and she refuses him, turning Henry's accusations of infidelity back onto him, in order to punish him for his treatment of her:

I was unfaithful to you with all of them, with half your court. With soldiers of your guard. With grooms, with stablehands. Look for the rest of your life at every man that ever knew me and wonder if I didn't find him a better man than you.



*Figure 5.8: Henry VIII before Anne Boleyn's speech in Anne of The Thousand Days (Jarrot, 1969).*



*Figure 5.9: Henry VIII in the scene immediately after Anne Boleyn's speech in Anne of the Thousand Days (Jarrot, 1969).*



*Figure 5.10: Midpoint of four-second dissolve transition from Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn in Anne of the Thousand Days (Jarrot, 1969).*

The film portrays this moment as successfully haunting Henry; in his next scene he is looking notably more haunted and withdrawn than he was just a few moments before (see figures 5.8 and 5.9). The film's editing further underlines this point; when Anne Boleyn collapses on the floor after giving her speech, the film creates a four-second dissolve as it transitions from Anne Boleyn to Henry VIII emphasising the effect of Boleyn's speech on Henry's psyche (figure 5.10). This is further emphasised as part of the sequence shown in figure 5.9 where Henry mutters to Thomas Cromwell (John Colicos) that 'she's lying. She was never unfaithful to me. Yet she could. Any woman could. No. No. She lies. If she lies. Let her die for lying.' Henry's repeated uncertainty thus confirms Anne's revenge on him. In essence this re-presentation of Anne Boleyn for the film offers an extremely clear insight into one of the key benefits of presentism, mainly what Biddick identifies as presentism's tendency to 'look into the mirror of the Middle Ages and asks it to reflect back histories of modernist or postmodernist identities' (Biddick, 1998:84). The film uses the social climate of the late 1960s to inform its portrayal of Anne Boleyn, re-positioning her as a sixteenth-

century equivalent to the activists of the 1960s. This same tendency to presentism would remain a fundamental feature of future film or television portrayals of Anne Boleyn.

This re-presentation of Anne Boleyn as a proto-feminist figure directly relates to the third of the key research questions, namely how can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present? This re-presentation is particularly significant when considered alongside Desmet and Lyengar's analysis of adaptation and appropriation wherein they claim that 'the field variously called Shakespearean adaptation or appropriation is in fact a hybrid whose motives and context shift as surely as night follows day' (Desmet and Lyengar, 2015:18). This hybridisation of adaptation and appropriation allows a historical adaptation to promote a newer understanding of the historical events it depicts. This is particularly clear in *Anne of the Thousand Days* as not only does the film adapt from two areas (the original play and the historical events themselves), but it uses that material as a basis for the film's appropriation of then contemporary social events. The film does this in order to more clearly reflect the shifting status of wider social concerns. In short, the text adapts history while at the same time appropriating the present. In this respect these ideas tie directly into what was discussed in Chapter Three about the role of contemporary thematic resonance in historical adaptation.

In comparison to the relatively narrow focus of *Anne of the Thousand Days*, the television series *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* offers an intriguing alternative for analysis into the various ways in which Henry VIII has been portrayed on screen. While Henry offers a link between each of the episodes, he is never the focus of them; each episode of the miniseries focuses on a different one of his wives. This has the effect of giving the audience

six different perspectives on Henry VIII, thus serving as an example of a biopic which, as Bingham observes of *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), seeks to inject differing subjectivities into a genre (biopic) which often seeks to maintain a unitary point of view towards its protagonist (Bingham, 1999). The use of differing subjectivities ensures that *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* creates a point-of-view for each of the wives, thus offering six different perspectives, one from each wife. By focusing on each of the wives more-or-less equally the viewer is able to draw their own conclusions on Henry VIII as an accumulation of all these points of view – providing that they watch the entire series. Therefore, the structure of these episodes allows the series to function as a biographical programme for each of Henry VIII's six wives, moving away from the male-dominated perspective that exists in the broad overview of Henry's life in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. In this respect the series offers a subversion of the typical structure of the biopic genre which, as Bingham observes, generally 'displays patriarchal culture's discomfort with the presence of women in the public realm' (Bingham, 2016:238).

The television series' subversion of patriarchal culture's discomfort with women in the public realm (Bingham, 2016), occurs throughout the programme, but perhaps most notably with the portrayal of Anne of Cleves in the fourth episode of the series. In this episode the audience is presented with a sequence where Henry meets Anne of Cleves (Elvi Hale) for the first time. Most of the surviving historical sources tell the story of the initial meeting between the two from the perspective of Henry and focus on his disappointment with her appearance, for example in Sir John Russell's deposition to the Ecclesiastical court concerning Henry's marriage to Anne of Cleves. In this deposition Russell recalls the conversation he had with the King where, after meeting Anne of Cleves for the first time

Henry left the meeting and declared ‘I see no such thing in her as has been shown me of her’ before declaring ‘I like her not’ (Strype, 1816:214). There are nine surviving depositions to the ecclesiastical court about Henry’s marriage, but in none of these is a reference made to Anne’s perspective on the meeting.



*Figure 5.11: Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves meet for the first time in ‘Anne of Cleves’ (BBC Two, 1970).*



*Figure 5.12: Anne of Cleves begins to react to Henry’s reveal in ‘Anne of Cleves’ (BBC Two, 1970).*



*Figure 5.13: Anne of Cleves reacts in horror at Henry VIII’s appearance after the zoom in, in ‘Anne of Cleves’ (BBC Two, 1970).*

This event is re-presented differently in the series. In this version Henry plans to surprise his future wife, by first coming to her disguised as a messenger. The audience is shown this sequence from the perspective of Anne of Cleves (figure 5.11) and are

encouraged to align their sympathies with her throughout the scene. This sequence shows her to be both polite to someone who she believes to be a messenger, and intelligent, as she corrects Henry about the date of the council of Lille when Henry mistakenly refers to it taking place in 1514 instead of 1513. Henry appears to be unbothered by this and continues to flirt with Anne. Once Henry takes off his cloak to reveal his identity, the focus of this sequence stays fixed on Anne, as she proceeds to gasp in horror, in evident displeasure at the revelation of her upcoming husband.

The sequence then immediately cuts to Henry's courtiers who are talking outside Anne's room, ensuring that the programme makers have denied Henry the opportunity to respond to Anne's reaction. It is only when Henry leaves Anne's bedchamber that he speaks to the court and his perspective on the events is granted to him, and it is at this point that he makes his declaration that he 'likes her not.' In this sequence *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* has taken a historical insult about a women's attractiveness and changed its meaning so that it becomes focused instead on Henry's wounded pride, therefore granting Anne of Cleve greater agency than she appears to have in Sir John Russell's court testimony.

This sequence ties directly into the first and fourth key research questions, as the series shows an awareness of the context of historical events, and of how those historical events have generally been understood. *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* has an understanding of how these historical events have been constructed and takes those interpretations of history in order to re-present them to create a new perspective on the past, albeit one that exists outside of how those events are depicted within the historical sources.

The structure of *The Six Wives of Henry VIII* offers audiences a clear insight into one of Suzette Youngs' (2012) analyses of the potential benefits of historical fiction, namely



point 5: it could allow audiences to understand that there are a variety of possible truths. The decision to present all six of Henry VIII's wives equally, giving each an entire episode to reveal their own perspective on their relationship to the King, has the effect of showing six different points of view on the time period, and on Henry himself, potentially allowing the audience to come to their own conclusions as to Henry's character. In this respect the series functions in a similar way to historical biographies; the act of reading multiple biographies of the same person allows the reader to perceive how their perspective on that person is fluid depending on what the author chooses to keep or to remove from their representation. This has the effect of further underlining Sanders' declaration that the discipline of history 'is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146).

#### *Carry on Henry* (Thomas, 1971) as an outlier?

Perhaps the clearest symbol of the change in social attitudes towards Henry VIII can be explained by the position of *Carry on Henry*. At first glance this film appears simply to be a continuation of the boisterous and 'schoolboyish' depiction of Henry VIII, and indeed Freeman is broadly correct in his assertion that it represents 'the last film incarnation of Henry as a hearty, masculine rogue' (Freeman, 2009:43). This depiction of Henry is seemingly at odds with the changing social attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s where those societal changes 'created a climate in which bluff, philandering Henry now seemed an egregiously abusive husband and father' (Freeman, 2009:43).

There is one narrative decision that does, however inadvertent it may be, appear to be reflective of these changing social attitudes, and that is the film's non-portrayal of the wives. In *Carry on Henry* most of Henry's wives are cut from the production, only showing a brief execution of an unnamed wife at the beginning and a small appearance by Katherine Howard (Monika Dietrich) near the end. In *Carry on Henry* the narrative is entirely fictional, revolving around Henry's (Sid James), relationship with two fictitious wives: Marie of Normandy (Joan Sims) and Bettina of Windsor (Barbara Windsor). By cutting Henry's actual wives from the narrative, *Carry on Henry* ensures that when the film's humour is focused on actual historical individuals it is directed towards Henry and his male courtiers Cardinal Wolsey (Terry Scott) and Thomas Moore (Kenneth Williams). This is completely different from the portrayal of the wives in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. While both films are fundamentally comedic portrayals of the King, the almost complete excision of the wives from the plot has the effect of ensuring that the humour is not being generated at the expense of Henry's actual wives.

If *The Private Life of Henry VIII* felt that it was 'respectful' to remove Catherine of Aragon from the film's farce, but that the same respect was not necessary for the other five wives, then *Carry on Henry* is actually more 'respectful' for removing them almost completely. In this way *Carry on Henry* sidesteps the problem which occurred with the portrayal of Henry Hook in *Zulu* (Endfield, 1964), by making the portrayal of the women fictional. *Carry on Henry* ensures that no one will walk away from the film believing it to be reflective of how Henry's wives really were, a fact the film underlines with its opening declaration that the entirety of its narrative is 'cobblers from beginning to end.' This relates

to the second of the key research questions as it highlights another potential benefit of approaches to history which deliberately move away from fidelity.

The portrayal of Henry in *Carry on Henry* is particularly significant as it exists within a cycle of *Carry on* films that Colin MacCabe refers to as the ‘Bedpanorama of history’ (MacCabe, 1999). These are films that aim to puncture authority and self-importance in all of its forms, whether that be authoritative figures from history or the perceived self-importance of the historical epic films that they were parodying. In this respect the effect is heightened by these *Carry on* films routinely reusing the sets and costumes from the films that they were parodying. Sid James, for example, wore the same cloak for his role of Henry VIII that Richard Burton did in *Anne of the Thousand Days* (Carlton Visual Entertainment, 2003).

In this respect *Carry on Henry* directly relates to Defne Ersin Tutan and Lawrence Raw’s argument that historical adaptations should be welcomed as interpretative adaptations that are a part of the ‘process of making sense of the world around us’ (Ersin Tutan and Raw, 2013:8-10). An interpretative view of the *Carry on* films places their historical adaptations as sharing a continual point of view between the present-set Carry On films and the epics, generating an equivalence between the grandiose and petty posturing of the antagonists in the films set in the present day and those of the so-called ‘great men of history.’ This has the effect of undermining the authority of both, or as MacCabe puts it, the films’ satire operates on the ‘assumption that there is no difference between petty and real Hitlers (MacCabe, 1999).

Yet *Carry on Henry*’s complete focus on satirising Henry’s personal life presents a clear point of similarity with *The Private Life of Henry VIII*. Both films seek to subvert the

common function of the biopic, which as Robert A. Rosenstone identifies, either places individuals ‘at the centre of the historical process – or as worth studying as exemplars of lives, actions, and individual systems we either admire or dislike’ (Rosenstone, 2018:80). However, as Rosenstone adds, biography itself is an elusive and undefinable form, and that the genre had no easily identifiable rules other than that it is a highly interpretative act (Rosenstone, 2018:80) Nevertheless while Rosenstone’s description of the common function of the biopic may be correct when describing texts, which can be categorised as ‘great person biopics’, the existence of both *The Private Life of Henry VIII* and *Carry on Henry* confirms his other assertion that this is by no means universal across the biopic genre. Indeed, aversions of ‘the common function of the biopic’ description can be applied to biopics that are not satirical in nature and are instead focused on people who the filmmakers wish to portray in a particularly negative light, as occurs with the Hammer horror film *Rasputin: The Mad Monk* (Sharp, 1966). *Rasputin: The Mad Monk* is a film whose description on the Hammer website uses the word ‘evil’ to describe him twice in a short 83 word paragraph, as well as using the words ‘satanic’, ‘havoc’, and ‘debauched’ to present him as a figure who is particularly suited to appear in their Hammer Horror series (Hammer Films, 2020). This description of *Rasputin: The Mad Monk* allows Hammer to categorise their film’s portrayal of Rasputin as an individual who if there was any aspect of their life ‘worth studying’ it would only be through a particularly negative lens, similar to the studios’ portrayal of the fictional characters Dracula or Dr Frankenstein which receive similar treatment in the studio’s filmography.

In *Carry on Henry*, *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, and *Rasputin: the Mad Monk*, the biopic does not portray their protagonists as figures worth studying as exemplars, instead

these films are structured in such a way that the audience are encouraged to either laugh at the comical depiction of the historical individual (as in *Carry on Henry* and *The Private Life of Henry VIII*) or to feel afraid of them (as in *Rasputin: the Mad Monk*). While biopics can be used to support the ‘great person’ view of history, that is not their sole function, and its forms and conventions can be used for a variety of different ways, and for a variety of different purposes.

*The Private Life of Henry VIII* and *Carry on Henry* both focus on Henry VIII’s personal life to such an extent that his political achievements are completely excised from the narrative, subverting the more typical process of using the biopic to portray an ‘exemplar,’ in order to present another example of counter-histories, which as Landy identifies, present ‘an active and irreverent position for the reader and viewer in relation to the disciplines of history and popular culture in their predilection for memorialising in terms of the past’ (Landy, 2015:x). Their very irreverence to history allows both *Carry on Henry* and *The Private Life of Henry VIII* to present this counter-history, creating the potential for both films’ audiences to re-evaluate their own interpretation of the Tudor monarch by divorcing him from his political context and placing him into a more personal one.

### Henry VIII since 2000

Since 2000 there have been several different screen adaptations of Henry VIII’s life, including two adaptations of *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Gregory, 2001). However, this section analyses three television interpretations of Henry’s reign: *Henry VIII*, *The Tudors*, and *Wolf Hall*, each of which takes a different approach towards its interpretation of Henry VIII.

In an interview with Chris Beachum, the actor Damien Lewis stated that when he was preparing for the part of Henry VIII in *Wolf Hall*, he chose to avoid the more schoolboyish interpretation of the King in order to create a more docudrama-like portrayal for his version of the monarch. In this interview Lewis claims:

Once we had got together with Peter Kosminsky, who shoots in a verité kind of a way, a sort of docudrama kind of way. I knew there would be less of the, you know, grabbing the girls' bums and throwing chicken legs over my shoulder, kind of Henry VIII. I knew it was going to be a more political, and nuanced Henry, that's what I hoped anyway (Lewis, 2015).

This comment reveals that the depiction of Henry VIII as 'throwing chicken legs' is regarded as so well known to the audience that its success functions as an excellent example of Sorlin's concept of 'metahistory' (Sorlin, 1998:206). While Lewis is making a reference to a famous sequence in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, that does not mean that it is one that Lewis believes to be the right choice for this particular adaptation, nor is it an approach that he appears to be particularly interested in pursuing for his performance as he seeks instead to correct this 'metahistory.' Lewis' references to both docudrama and cinema verité, make it clear that the intention for this production is for a more nuanced representation of Henry VIII, an approach that could be perceived as a more authentic choice by the television series' target audience.

However, this quote also raises the question of what exactly Damien Lewis is basing his assumptions about a more 'political and nuanced' Henry on? Lewis raises some valid

points regarding the inauthenticity of the ‘chicken-leg-throwing’ representation of Henry VIII, but this does raise the problem as to what sources should be used to construct a more ‘nuanced’ portrayal of Henry. This is a problem that even occurs when going back to the historical resources, with different biographies of Henry VIII offering different viewpoints. Alison Weir observes in *Henry VIII: King and Court* (2008) that as times have changed so, too, have historians’ verdicts on Henry’s reign. Weir identifies that in 1547, the year of Henry’s death, William Thomas, while conceding that Henry did ‘many evil things,’ nevertheless wrote favourably of his reign, claiming that he had not ‘read one King equal to him’ (Weir, 2008:504). However, in subsequent years this view has shifted and deteriorated into what Weir regards as people’s perception of Henry turning into a ‘caricature of his former self, with the real man submerged beneath the popular image of the bloated, self-willed monster’ (Weir, 2008:505).

This pursuit of a more nuanced approach to portraying Henry is particularly difficult when *Wolf Hall*’s status as a source twice removed from the historical sources is taken into account. *Wolf Hall* is not only an adaptation of historical events but is also an adaptation from a popular novel, one which has already been criticised by a number of critics for the way it deviates from the generally accepted historical sources. Even in a generally supportive analysis by Stephen Greenblatt, which highlights that what matters to a text is the ‘illusion of reality,’ there is still a criticism of Mantel’s interpretation, with Greenblatt observing that ‘scrutiny of Cromwell’s surviving letters suggest that he probably did not sound very much like Mantel’s hero’ (Greenblatt, 2009). In order to make *Wolf Hall*, the people making the adaptation needed to decide which sources would be pre-eminent in their portrayal. Their version of Cromwell could be created from consultation with the historical sources, for

example Cromwell's letters, potentially creating an interpretation of Cromwell which is closer to how his personality is generally understood. Such an approach does come at the cost of placing the source novel as a secondary referent and thus potentially risks alienating sections of the audience who have read Mantel's book. Alternatively, the adaptors could grant pre-eminence to the Cromwell that Mantel created, even if it leads to criticisms from people who have interpreted the life of Thomas Cromwell differently. Ultimately the latter approach was chosen by the programme makers, leading to Rebecca Rist, an Associate Professor in Religious History, claiming that 'historically-speaking it is a travesty of a highly complex and nuanced period' (Rist, 2015).

Both *Wolf Hall* and *The Tudors* attempt to move away from the tendency to imagine Henry VIII solely as he appeared in the later stages of his life. This tendency is so strong that even when modern representations of Henry VIII try to avert this, they could be criticised for failing to represent what some sections of the audience imagine when they picture Henry VIII. This occurred during the release of *The Tudors*, when a number of critics criticised the production for not presenting the traditional overweight image of Henry VIII. For example, a television critic in *The Mirror* highlights this issue in a review of the first episode of series four when claiming that 'everyone knows what Henry VIII looked like: portly, pig-faced, ginger... Rhys Meyers is none of these things. He looks more like Robbie Williams' less smug younger brother' (*The Mirror*, 2011). While the writer of this review is referring to the fourth series, which covers the last two marriages of Henry's life when his physical health was very much in decline, the implication of the quote is that Henry VIII looked both portly and pig-faced for the majority of his reign. It is this image cultivated in texts such as *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, which is believed to be the faithful interpretation



of the historical sources, and the series' deviation from that interpretation is not what large sections of the audience might believe to be authentic, thus providing an example of Sorlin's concept of the metahistory (Sorlin 1998). *The Tudors* did keep Henry VIII looking young and handsome for much longer than he was in real life, with a very rapid descent into the Holbeinesque image of Henry occurring late in the final series.

*The Tudors'* makes its general rejection of the Holbeinesque image of Henry VIII explicit during its opening credits, as Basil Glynn notes when he claims that:

*The Tudors* flaunts the fact that it does not offer the expected depiction of Henry. When Holbein's portrait of the old, overweight King appears in the credits, it is immediately followed by the young, thin and handsome Johnathan Rhys Meyers smirking and widening his eyes directly into the camera as if to say 'that's right, I look nothing like him' (Glynn, 2012:162).

As Glynn identifies, this moment in the opening credits makes explicit the series' attempts to move away from the pre-established views of Henry VIII, by placing Holbein's portrait in the credits only to have it almost mocked by the actor playing Henry. In doing so *The Tudors* is highlighting its historical revisionism, and as Jerome De Groot argues, the series offers an 'impressionistic version of the past, communicating something indefinite but certainly interrogative and irreverent' (De Groot, 2016:236). This impressionistic version of history invokes the image of the past, and by extension, the previous Holbeinesque adaptations of Henry's appearance, but only to highlight how they intend to move away from them. In *The Tudors* the traditional image of Henry VIII is cast aside in favour of a

version that is younger, more casual, and perhaps most importantly for the programme makers, is meant to be viewed as sexually appealing.

That is not to say that *The Tudors*' depiction of Henry VIII is unique in its approach to portraying Henry VIII in this way; after all, in recent years both Damien Lewis and Eric Bana have played similarly svelte versions of Henry in *Wolf Hall*, and *The Other Boleyn Girl* (Chadwick, 2008) respectively. As Ruth Ahnert notes, this portrayal of the monarch had been previously shown in *A Man for All Seasons*, even to the extent of depicting his personality in similar ways, with both versions of Henry being youthful, exuberant, infantile, insecure, and affected by genuine scruples of conscience (Ahnert, 2017:221). Therefore, while it may initially appear that the series is deliberately moving away from the previously common Holbeinesque image of Henry, on closer analysis *The Tudors* is acting as part of a growing trend. These historical adaptations offer a greater variety of possible interpretations of the monarch, all of which appear to be aware of their own position within the context of previous depictions of Henry VIII. When taken together, all of these interpretations can be directly related to the third of the key research questions in that they are potentially useful as tools for helping the audience to begin the process of critiquing their own understanding of the monarch's position within the popular imagination.

Throughout *The Tudors* there is a constant re-presentation of the generally accepted interpretation of history, and while that helps to create a sense of authenticity, that sense is fundamentally linked with notions of acceptability. When analysing the eventual fates of Henry's wives across these adaptations, generally these adaptations follow the historical sources, with the obvious exception of the invented wives in *Carry on Henry*. Therefore, any re-presentation of the more basic elements in the raw material (the historical events)

would to some degree be considered authentic, although as the rest of this chapter demonstrates, even this level of authenticity exists in a fluid state.



*Figure 5.14: Katherine Howard makes her way towards the gallows in 'Bottom of the Pot' (series 4, episode 5).*



*Figure 5.15: Point-of-view shot of Katherine Howard as she releases her bladder after watching Jane Boleyn get executed in 'Bottom of the Pot' (series 4, episode 5).*



*Figure 5.16: Katherine Howard defiantly addresses the crowd in 'Bottom of the Pot' (series 4, episode 5).*



*Figure 5.17: Katherine Howard lays her head on the block in 'Bottom of the Pot' (series 4, episode 5).*

The ways in which generally agreed facts are presented constantly shifts according to wider questions of acceptability, as can be seen, for example, in the execution of Katherine Howard. As has been previously discussed, in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* the focus of the execution sequence is on making Henry appear sympathetic, with the shots of Henry isolated in his palace chanting 'Mea Culpa' thus showing his guilt, which is granted pre-eminence over Katherine's trauma. However, in the later representations of Henry's life the depiction of this historical event is much more critical of the King. In *The Tudors*, for example, instead of cutting away from Katherine Howard's (Tamzin Merchant) execution the audience is shown the final moments of her life with the camera generally keeping her centred in a close-up within the frame (figure 5.16) or taking her direct point-of-view (figure 5.15). This continues right up until the moment of her death when the episode cuts to black. Throughout this sequence the audience is consistently reminded of her youth and is invited to feel sympathetic towards her, both by gaining an insight into her own fears – as shown in her bladder releasing after she watches Jane Boleyn, her handmaiden, get executed (figure 5.15) – and by showing her overcoming those fears as she defiantly addresses the crowd that are gathered to watch her execution (figure 5.16).

In *The Tudors* the sequence which depicts Katherine Howard's execution lasts for four minutes and features a total of thirty-two shots, twenty-five of which either feature her prominently in the frame, or adopt her direct point of view. This potentially has the effect of further aligning the audience's sympathies with her and serves as a contrast to the portrayal of Henry, who in this series is not portrayed as mourning her execution, but instead as just having attended a raucous party where he is surrounded by women.

*The Tudors* and *The Private Life of Henry VIII* reveal how fluid the notion of acceptability is when viewed over a long period of time. While *The Private Life of Henry VIII* attempts to realign the audience's sympathies for the King at the moment of Katherine Howard's death, *The Tudors* chooses to re-present Henry as both callous and self-serving. This decision is underlined by keeping the focus squarely on Katherine Howard right up until the final shot of the episode. Both these texts serve as excellent examples of what Bingham refers to as the need to break the familiar patterns of women's biopics (Bingham, 2010). *The Private Life of Henry VIII* reaffirms Henry's patriarchal perspective while *The Tudors* seeks to undermine that perspective by attempting to align the audience's sympathies with its female subject.

Both these portrayals of the death of Katherine Howard are reflective of a popular generational shift in how Katherine Howard's life has been perceived within wider culture. The result is that she is generally viewed much more sympathetically in the twenty-first century, as is made clear in an article by the popular historian Lucy Worsley for *The Telegraph*, in which she claims: 'Even highly reputable historians have described her as 'a good-time girl' and an 'empty-headed wanton.' The general consensus is that she was sexy but dim' (Worsley, 2016). Worsley goes on to explain that this view has changed dramatically in recent years and points to both Howard's youth and the sexual politics of Henry's court as possible reasons why she has often been viewed negatively. Therefore, while the raw material (the historical sources) of an event may be fixed, the way in which these events are viewed is constantly in a state of flux, and the various contexts in which an event is understood within popular culture will alter alongside newer interpretations of the individuals concerned.

The final historical adaptation of Henry VIII's life that this chapter focuses on is *Henry VIII*. This television series is by and large the most overtly critical in its interpretation of the monarch. Peter Morgan claims that when writing the series he had two rules: that the programme would not contain any chicken legs or lutes (Harries, Hopkinson, and Morgan, 2003), i.e., the programme deliberately moves away from the traditional images of Tudor period drama generally (e.g. the lutes) and of Henry VIII more specifically (e.g. the chicken legs). In doing this the programme makers were keen to stress the modernity of their adaptation, and in the same interview refer to being inspired by the recent modern gangster series *The Sopranos* (HBO 1997-2003). This attempt to relate the series to the modern day occurs to such an extent that Francis Hopkinson, one of the producers, claims to have deliberately created thematic resonance with recent events, claiming that during the making of the programme they referred to one sequence in which Henry is presented with a document that supposedly gives him power over Rome as a 'dodgy dossier' scene. This 'dodgy dossier' scene serves as a reference to contemporary controversies surrounding the reasons for the Iraq War (Harries, Hopkinson, and Morgan, 2003) thus effectively grounding the series' narrative amongst contemporary concerns.

These references to modern political concerns in *Henry VIII* not only have the effect of generating a sense of contemporary thematic resonance, but also have the effect of highlighting what Cartmell and Whelehan identify, as noted in the literature review, regarding the issues of transposition and interpretation, namely that:

Any film which prioritises transposition over interpretation is unlikely to recognise the pitfalls of aiming to bring the novel 'to life' and will, moreover,



spectacularly fail by freezing all the action and events in an impossible simulacrum of the past made present (Cartmell and Whelehan, 2010:83).



*Figure 5.18: Henry VIII drinking and singing with Robert Aske in Henry VIII (ITV, 2003).*



*Figure 5.19: Robert Aske is hung by his arms outside Clifford's Tower in Henry VIII (ITV, 2003).*

This prioritisation of interpretation over transposition is threaded throughout *Henry VIII* and, as a result, the programme contains a clear point-of-view and a distinctively



negative perspective on Henry VIII's reign. The series continues to show the King operating as some form of early-modern gangster, a fact underlined when Andrew Harries, the then controller of Granada, the programme's production company, claimed that they wanted to portray Henry as a kind of Gangster-King (Harries, Hopkinson, and Morgan, 2003). This is particularly clear during a sequence in the second episode where Robert Aske (Sean Bean), the leader of The Pilgrimage of Grace, a Tudor rebellion, meets with Henry VIII. In this sequence Henry pretends to be sympathetic to Aske's demands and in the process is shown drinking and feasting with him (figure 5.18). However, once Aske leaves, Henry immediately takes back his claims of support and orders his soldiers to ambush Aske, having him executed by being hung up by chains outside of a Castle wall. While there are historical documents which reveal that Aske met with Henry, and that Henry reneged on his terms and subsequently had Aske executed (Hoyle, 2008), this sequence is framed and shot in such a way as to re-position this historical event in order to make it reminiscent of a gangster film. This occurs to the extent of inventing a backstory for Robert Aske, making him a former soldier and friend under Henry's command, thus giving more weight to Henry's betrayal and creating further generic resonance between the series' portrayal of Henry and the gangster genre. Henry's private messages of support and the public method of Aske's execution are framed as reminiscent of the generic conventions of the gangster film. These invented elements prioritise the text's interpretation (monarch as gangster) in order directly to modernise it, allowing the programme makers to heighten the text's critique of this English monarch.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the various ways in which Henry VIII and his wives have been depicted on film and television are as much informed by contemporary notions of acceptability and authenticity as they are by historicity. None of the analysed adaptations present Henry as a completely sympathetic figure. In some respects *The Private Life of Henry VIII* comes closest to doing so, but even that comes at the cost of infantilising the King and almost completely ignoring his work as a statesman. The variety of ways in which his life has been portrayed and perceived according to wider social concerns, reveals a fluidity in how the past has been interpreted throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While sections of the accepted historical resources surrounding Henry VIII's life have broadly remained unchanged, the various ways in which those facts have been re-presented in film and television during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries serve as prime examples of how historical events are viewed and interpreted within popular culture.

The ways in which these representations of Henry VIII have changed help to illustrate Sanders' observation 'that the discipline of history is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). A broad analysis of specific representations can reveal how these 'ideologies and contexts' alter the interpretations of the text in question. Each of the studied texts focuses on the same historical individual, and when taken together they illustrate just how the various 'ideologies and contexts' lead to changes in the ways in which a historical figure is represented by people making a historical adaptation and how that

adaptation is viewed by audiences. Therefore, a broad analysis of how these representations has changed helps to develop a new interpretation, not only of the historical events themselves, but of how, and of the reasons why, they have been commonly interpreted over time.

In this respect all the texts analysed in this chapter approach history in a way similar to that in which historians operate; specifically, as Gaddis identifies, the best a historian can do is ‘*represent* reality: to smooth over the details, to look for larger patterns, to consider how you can use what you see for your own purposes’ (Gaddis, 2004:7, emphasis in original). The texts discussed in this chapter have taken the raw material, i.e., the historical sources surrounding Henry VIII’s life, and adapted them alongside the continuing influence of previous portrayals. These texts simultaneously smooth over (even ignore) the details of his life to find the larger patterns which are the focus of the adaptation. This may be to portray the King as an overgrown schoolboy as in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, as a romantic anti-hero as in *The Tudors*, or even as a ‘Gangster King’ (Harries, Hopkinson, and Morgan, 2003) as in *Henry VIII*. All these texts utilise history in order to create different representations of the life of Henry VIII, and in so doing they all present an awareness of the context of these events. It is the understanding of how the context can be related to the present that creates the variance in the adaptation and might allow the audience to begin the process of critiquing their own understanding of these historical events.

This chapter reveals that while the portrayal of Henry VIII has changed over the course of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the changes have been influenced by previous interpretations. Whether the people creating the historical adaptation support the previous view or critique it, does not change the fact that their adaptation has been

informed by portrayals that have gone before, whether those influences be cinematic, televisual, or even pictorial. The great success of Charles Laughton's performance in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* casts such a large shadow over how Henry VIII has been viewed in popular culture that even eighty years later that portrayal has been used to either criticise versions that do not follow it – as in *The Mirror's* critique of *The Tudors* – or to highlight how a new version is deliberately moving away from Laughton's portrayal – as in Damien Lewis' claim that his performance of Henry VIII in *Wolf Hall* was going to be more *vérité*.

As this chapter has illustrated, the two concepts of authenticity and acceptability are not mutually exclusive but are in fact fundamentally linked. In this respect the analysis in this chapter relates to Van Riper's claim that adaptations of past events are not solely focused on telling the audience what was, but also on making sense of what is (Van Riper, 2013). The process of historical adaptation is altered according to the wider concerns of the society in which an adaptation is made. When viewing historical adaptations it is also clear that the relationship between past and present is dynamic and the ways in which historical events are understood is constantly in flux. This leads to a constant change in how the viewer of a historical adaptation makes sense of these historical events even if the historical sources that form the basis of the adaptation are unchanged. Essentially, when it comes to analysing a historical adaptation, whether that be one that is made today or one that was made 80 years ago, it is beneficial to consider the fluid states of authenticity and acceptability.

This chapter has focused on how adaptations alter their portrayal of an individual according to various contributory concerns. However, in the same way that historical adaptations can create different perspectives on a historical individual, they can also help to generate new interpretations of both the past and the present through the portrayal of

individual locations. For its final case study this thesis considers the various ways in which the castle functions in film and television, and how a castle's presence in a historical adaptation can be useful in providing information to help realise a text's portrayal of the past, and as a means of linking the past to the present.

## **Chapter Six: The Role of Location in Historical Film and Television and How it Applies to the Cinematic Castle**

### Introduction

In the real Kerak, the gates were quite small for practical reasons, but what we're doing is more like a theatre set on film. The huge gates were meant to impress, to intimidate and evoke mood and emotion; the scene is more operatic than archaeological (Max, 2005).

This quote from Arthur Max, the production designer on *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005), helps to illustrate the general function of the castle in film or television, specifically, how at a basic level the cinematic or televisual castle can help generate specific emotions and feelings in the audience, even at the expense of historical or archaeological actuality. This chapter develops Max's description further. While Max is talking about the specific purposes of the emotional effect of his representation of Kerak, this chapter creates an argument that the purposes of the cinematic or televisual castle are not solely focused on generating emotion and operatic spectacle, but can also help heighten and emphasise the themes within a text's representation of historical events. An individual castle's status as a historical landmark which can be visited today, either as part of a text's production or by the audience after viewing the text, helps to develop an understanding of the past as well as more clearly visualising the impact of the past in the present. In this respect the castle

provides clear visual continuity between past and present and is particularly useful in assisting with what Van Riper identifies as a key function of historical adaptation, i.e., that it allows ‘the past and the present to illuminate each other’ (Van Riper 2013:112). This also helps develop what Ersin Tutan and Raw identify as historical adaptation’s ability to help as part of the ‘process of making sense of the world around us,’ thus moving the question away from historical accuracy and towards narrative representation (Ersin Tutan and Raw, 2013:8-10). These issues are focused on in this chapter as part of an original argument about the various ways in which a castle can be represented in film and television.

These issues also relate to one of the central concerns of this thesis, namely the benefits of using a historically literate approach to history rather than a strictly faithful one. Chapter One highlighted four questions for ascertaining the historical literacy of an adaptation; these issues surrounding historical literacy gain further importance when the temporal continuity of the castle within the landscape is considered. A consequence of this is that the representation of castles on film and television functions in similar ways to what Martin Lefebvre identifies in his analysis of *Ask the Dust* (Bernard, circa 1988-1992). *Ask the Dust* is Cindy Bernard’s series of photographs that return to the locations of classical Hollywood films in order to capture how they appear in the years after the film was made (figures 6.1 and 6.2). In his analysis Lefebvre identifies that these photographs have the effect of appearing like a crime scene, specifically a crime scene which is:

Haunted by the memory of those very characters, actions and events - those narrative components - that have been 'chased' from the visual field and belong to a past and, at least in part, to a world that Bernard's camera cannot capture (the world of fictional narrative) (Lefebvre, 2011:70).



*Figure 6.1: The Golden Gate Bridge after Judy jumps into the Golden Gate strait in Vertigo (Hitchcock, 1958)*



*Figure 6.2: Ask the Dust: Vertigo (1958/1990) by Cindy Bernard*



This effect is heightened within the use of landscapes and locations in historical film and television, as they are positioned both as locations for real historical events and for their re-creation. Historical locations are haunted by the events themselves and can thus potentially generate another ‘haunting’ effect for the audience visiting that location after watching the film or television programme. This haunting effect helps to generate a new perspective on the relationship between the past and the present, on people today, through the continuous presence of these structures. Thus, directly relating this ‘haunting’ effect to the third of the key research questions as it helps to promote a new interpretation of the events on screen and of how those events can be related to the present.

R. Allen Brown’s book *English Castles* (1977) is generally regarded as the most influential work on castles in England (Morris, 2012). In this book Brown states that every analysis of castles needs to clarify exactly what is meant by the term, and for his own analysis presents a critical distinction between a castle and a palace, namely that ‘a castle is basically a fortified residence, or a residential fortress’ (Brown, 1976:1). That definition has developed over recent years, indeed Marc Morris, the author of *Castle: A History of the Buildings that Shaped Modern Britain* (Morris, 2012), points out that ‘the castle was first and foremost a home to its owner and his or her own household. That, I believe, must be our starting point’ (Morris, 2012:4). These historical definitions lead into the central purpose of the cinematic and televisual castle. The castle is uniquely positioned within medieval locations because it functions as a place where groups of people lived together, both in times of conflict and in times of peace. This situation offers several possibilities for the people making historical adaptations, offering them a variety of opportunities both to create a new

interpretation of the historical role of the location, as well as to portray their characters within the same locale but within different situations and contexts.

This chapter focuses on the various ways in which specific locations are used in historical film and television by comparing a number of different texts which use the same type of location, i.e., the castle. This creates an original argument about the usefulness of studying the portrayal of a particular location in order to further understand the past itself and the various ways in which the past and the present can be linked together.

#### Hierarchical stratification in cinematic castles

One of the clearest visual elements which reveals people's socio-economic situation is hierarchical stratification, a concept which Donato Totaro identifies as occurring:

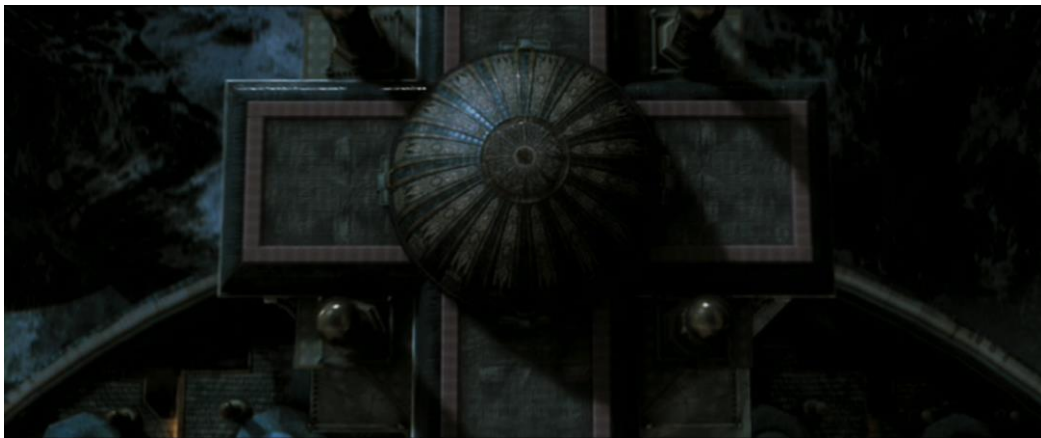
When the physical spaces represent a literal reflection of political and/or class distinction or some form of hierarchical stratification – a geo-political use of space and movement (Totaro, 2010).

Totaro argues that this is a recurring motif in science-fiction films, particularly where the physical spaces are 'cross aligned vertically' (Totaro, 2010), thus causing a visual representation of the class differences in society with the lower-classes living on the lower levels and the upper classes literally living at the topmost areas of society. Examples of this are present in films such as *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927) and *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), where the lower classes live in the sewers or at street-level while the rulers of the society live atop

giant skyscrapers, or *Elysium* (Blomkamp, 2013) where the richest live on a giant space station which is in geo-synchronous orbit around the Earth while the lower classes live on the ground.



*Figure 6.3: The camera tracks forward revealing the great tower of Stormhold Castle in Stardust (Vaughn, 2007).*



*Figure 6.4: The camera continues to track forward and cranes up before tilting down to look down on a dome on the roof of Stormhold Castle in Stardust (Vaughn, 2007).*



*Figure 6.5: The camera goes through the central window of the dome to reveal the chambers of the King of Stormhold in Stardust (Vaughn, 2007).*

This motif is not unique to science-fiction films and is in fact a common visual symbol for the various levels in society. The motif is particularly clear in the cinematic or televisual castle where frequently the poorer sections of society live on the ground floor, in an area often covered in mud, which is presented to appear as unappealing as possible. This is then contrasted with the living spaces of other social classes where the higher up in the society someone is, the higher their quarters are within the castle, with the King or Lord of the House having their chambers on the highest level. It is worth remembering, however, that hierarchical stratification was also a common feature in real castles. An example of this fictional hierarchical stratification occurs in the film *Stardust* (Vaughn, 2007) with the unnamed castle of the King of Stormhold. Here the camera introduces the audience to the castle with a wide shot revealing the castle's position in the town and surrounding countryside, before tracking into a very tall keep revealing the King's chambers on the highest floor (figures 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5). As these figures show, the King's location not only

looms above the castle and the town, but also over the wider expanse of the countryside, thus underlining his authority over all the surrounding area.

The portrayal of the castle in *Stardust* utilises clearly recognisable visual tropes and iconography in order quickly and clearly to depict the social dynamics within this particular kingdom. While this is effective, it does mean that those same social dynamics are not questioned or critiqued, making the film's portrayal of the castle an example of what Butt identifies as the 'nostalgic gaze' (Butt, 2014), and therefore this use of vertical stratification functions merely as information.



*Figure 6.6: High-angle shot showing King Arthur and his horse/servant as they plead to enter the castle in Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Gilliam and Jones, 1975)*



*Figure 6.7: Low-angle shot of the faceless guardsman as he looms over King Arthur and his horse/servant in Monty Python and the Holy Grail (Gilliam and Jones, 1975).*

Conversely, this is where the portrayal of King Arthur (Graham Chapman) in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (Gilliam and Jones, 1975) is subversive. If the King is normally shown as the central figure of authority, with his castle looming over the countryside, then this is a position which is undermined frequently throughout *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*. In this film there is a brief sequence where the audience is shown Camelot, but the King is never seen there, despite it being the centre of his power. Instead, the film's narrative follows him as he travels across England on his quest for the Holy Grail, pleading to be taken seriously by the various denizens of his kingdom who question his authority throughout. On two separate occasions King Arthur finds himself at the walls of a castle pleading to be allowed entry, only to have someone in a stereotypically lower-class accent, whether English or French, question his right to enter. As a close analysis of the first of these sequences (figures 6.6 and 6.7) shows, the camera cuts between two shots with the high-angle shot making Arthur look small and insignificant. This is then contrasted with the low-angle shot of the faceless guardsman looming over Arthur as he is denied entry into the

castle. The implication of this sequence is that the de-jure authority of King Arthur is usurped by the de-facto authority of the peasant, who is safe behind the castle walls. This idea is repeated throughout the film; Chapman's King Arthur may be cleaner than the peasants he passes, but as his position on the vertical cinematic space makes clear he is not intrinsically more powerful or superior to them. This status is further underlined by the fact that he does not have a horse, and merely pretends to ride around on one, with someone following behind him clapping coconut shells together. In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* Arthur presents himself as above the ground but in fact is just walking on it.

This subversive treatment of authority figures is a consistent feature of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*'s anarchism. Throughout the film the traditional signifiers of authority are frequently undermined in order to destabilise the understanding of what is, or is not, 'authentically medieval.' Richard Burt claims that *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* literalises the limitations of the various supplements that are used in medieval film in order to create a sense of authenticity (Burt, 2007). For example, while the makers of films such as *Kingdom of Heaven* refer to discussions with academics in their supplementary materials in order to establish the veracity of the events depicted on screen, that is not what happens in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Instead, once an academic appears on screen he is immediately killed by a passing knight (Burt, 2007), thus undermining the unnamed historian's claim to be the authority on the subject, just as the film undermines Arthur's claim to be the rightful King of the Britons.

In its appropriation of the iconography of the castle, *Monty Python and The Holy Grail* reveals an awareness of how these iconographic tropes are typically presented, and as Marcia Landy notes, the wide variety of comedic elements in the film helps to create a

familiar world, which is then made strange by undermining the more traditional forms of history making (Landy, 2015). Ultimately, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* invokes the common tropes of the cinematic castle in order to critique and subvert them, in a way that is clearly communicable to the audience, in order to present a vision of kingship where power and authority are as illusionary as Chapman's horse. In this respect the portrayal of castles in this film directly relates to the first and third of the key research questions, namely to what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events, and how can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present? When making the film the filmmakers were aware of the various contexts of how castles have been perceived, but instead of repeating those perceptions, they made the decision to re-present them, in order to potentially allow the audience to begin to develop a new perspective on how the historical sources indicate these castles could have functioned in the past.

This analysis of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* links with Sanders' previously discussed declaration that the discipline of history 'is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). Taking Sanders' analysis further, cinematic location can be useful as a tool for clearly visualising the precise ideologies and contexts of the adaptors, and even to unearth the more hidden biases in how these locations are more typically represented. This can occur on the basic level of simply communicating a character's position in the social hierarchy in a way that is easily understood, as in *Stardust*. Alternatively, it can be used to re-present



those same easily recognisable conventions in new and distinct ways in order to critique them, as occurs in *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*.

### The Romantic depiction of castles in *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005)

When making *Kingdom of Heaven*, his film about the series of events leading up to the fall of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem, Ridley Scott claims that his vision for how the film should look was inspired by the Orientalists, a group of eighteenth-century Romantic artists who visited the Middle East in the years after Napoleon's conquest of Egypt. For the purposes of this analysis, this section will focus on the Director's cut, which appears on the *Special Extended DVD Version*, the reason being that Scott states that this is his preferred version of the film (2005).

The Romantic focus of the film was reflected on by Arthur Max, the production designer, when in an interview for the DVD he speaks about The Orientalists, which is a strain of Romanticist art that focuses on the depiction of what artists of the time considered to be Eastern cultures, for example China, India, and most significantly for a film on the Crusades, the Middle East. As Haydock observes, Orientalism is an 'othering' not just of the Middle East, but of the past itself (Haydock, 2008:136). This potential 'othering' (i.e. the treatment of a group of people, a time period, or a place as an 'other' and thus fundamentally different from the group creating the 'othering') is important as it implies that if the sources which are serving as inspiration for a historical adaptation are 'othering' the time period, or the location, then this 'othering' could, if the people making the adaptation

are not aware of the specific context of that art movement, inadvertently filter into the adaptation's representation of the past. By portraying the medieval depiction of the Middle East as an 'other' it can potentially make it feel more isolated from the present and thus possibly prevent the text from fully identifying the areas of similarity between the text's depiction of events in the past and an audience watching it in the present. In the interview Max claims that:

We went back to our old friends in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the Orientalists, and took the same approach on *Kingdom of Heaven* as we did on *Gladiator*, which was not to try and create a documentary style, a museum standard, but to do one based on romantic impression and imagination (Max, 2006a).

Similarly, Max claims in another interview that this led to both he and Scott following the general layout of these castles, but like the Orientalists before them, taking licence with history in order to either intensify or 'desensify' what is actually there (Max, 2005).

This romantic view of the medieval period is present throughout *Kingdom of Heaven*, although it is worth remembering as discussed in Chapter Two, that the function of a romantic depiction of the medieval period is not that it is less cruel and violent than a Gothic depiction, but that it introduces more idealistic elements that triumph against those same

cruelties. In this respect the production design of *Kingdom of Heaven* directly relates to Stam's analysis of fidelity which is discussed in Chapter Two. Stam claims that analyses of adaptations need to consider a whole variety of sources including dialogical responses, readings, critiques, interpretations, and rewritings of prior material (Stam, 2000).

While the representation of castles in *Kingdom of Heaven* is not strictly faithful in its representation of the physical construction of the actual castles, the clear influence of prior interpretations of the Crusader castles allows the film to engage more clearly with the influences of the Crusader castles on the popular imagination. Therefore, the text potentially illuminates how those structures are understood today, and by taking inspiration from various sources which are identified in the supplementary materials, the filmmakers create an opportunity to allow the audience to potentially generate an additional understanding of how these structures have been understood through a romanticist lens since the eighteenth-century. Similarly, this process allows the filmmakers to position their adaptation within the traditions of how the Crusades have been imagined by previous artists, thus revealing the film not only to be an adaptation of the events themselves, but also an adaptation informed by the various contexts of how the Crusades have been understood over the centuries to the present day.

This romantic depiction of the medieval is threaded throughout *Kingdom of Heaven*, but it is most clear in its depiction of castles. This is particularly important with regard to the Crusader castles as when they were built they functioned as a way of maintaining control of the newly formed region of Outremer, the name given to the Christian conquests after the First Crusade. This is similar to the way in which Edward I built a series of castles across

the North Wales coast in order to maintain control of newly conquered North Wales. However, while maintaining control of conquered territories is certainly a feature of these castles, the film also uses castles to reflect on the concerns and attitudes of the families who built them, or as Max states, to ‘intensify or densify what was there’ (Max, 2005). In *Kingdom of Heaven* the audience is presented with three castles, two of which are located in Outremer: the castles of Ibelin and Kerak. The castles present the audience with different perspectives on the Crusader colonisation. The first location is Ibelin, a castle in presentation, but really functioning more like a heavily fortified home, despite the fact that the real Ibelin castle appears to have looked more like a traditional castle. While there are no archaeological remains, it is believed that the real Ibelin Castle contained four stone towers as part of a structure which was designed as a base for refuge as well as for further attacks into Muslim held Ascalon (Kennedy, 2013:31-32).



Figure 6.8: Ibelin Castle in the background and a house in Ibelin's village in the foreground, taken from *Kingdom of Heaven* (Scott, 2005).

However, in *Kingdom of Heaven* Ibelin is designed to depict a co-operative approach towards the local population and it is the home of the moderate and relatively peaceful Geoffrey (Liam Neeson) and Balian (Orlando Bloom). While it features some form of towers

(figure 6.8), they do not rise up and dominate the local landscape but are instead roughly continuous with it, not even going higher than the local palm trees. Richard Burt describes these sequences as positioning Balian as a ‘pacifistic imperialist, someone who is interested, finally, neither in war nor in occupation but who wants to help the locals help themselves’ (Burt, 2008:117).



*Figure 6.9: Clay Bricks that were used for Ibelin Castle during the production of Kingdom of Heaven (Scott, 2005), taken from Production Design Primer (de Lauzirika, 2005)*

In *Kingdom of Heaven* Ibelin is designed to function alongside the local community and is clearly built to follow a traditional mud-brick construction with Arabic style windows (figure 6.8) according to local rather than western styles. This idea is even extended to how the building was physically created for the film; in an interview for the *Production Design Primer* feature on the *Special Extended DVD*, Arthur Max (Max, 2006b) claims that the set was built alongside an old, already existing Kasbah, and was built according to traditional methods, including the use of mud bricks which were dried in the sun and mixed with straw (figure 6.9). In the portrayal of Ibelin, the location, architectural design, and the construction method all create the effect that the fortifications of Ibelin are not separate from the

landscape but are in harmony with it. Intriguingly, this attitude towards co-habitation was also present, albeit in reduced quantities, with the historical Balian who is depicted as owning Ibelin for the majority of the film. The historical Balian was granted the lands of Nablus around the year 1177 (Tyerman, 2007), and during this period the local Samaritan sect were allowed to continue their annual Passover ritual which was attended by followers from all over the region. Christopher Tyerman identifies this as ‘a tolerance of an active non-Christian religious centre unique within Christendom’ (Tyerman, 2007: 229). In this respect the portrayal of Ibelin castle relates directly to the analysis introduced in Chapter Two of Williams’ view that ‘adaptation is the process of reimagining ideas from one medium into the language of another. Adaptation is not transcription’ (Williams, 2018:3). While the portrayal of Ibelin castle in *Kingdom of Heaven* is not strictly faithful to the archaeological sources, the portrayal presents a clear visual signifier which acts as a way of reimagining the comparatively more co-operative attitudes of its Lords without transcribing them wholesale, this can then be easily contrasted with another castle in the film.

The second Crusader castle to feature in *Kingdom of Heaven* is Kerak, which is presented as more like a fortress. Designed to dominate the local area, it is in the control of Reynard De Chatillon (Brendan Gleeson). The film portrays Reynard as a man who despises the local Muslim population and is actively seeking to begin a war against them, and this is reflected in the castle’s appearance, which unlike Ibelin is not continuous with the landscape, creating a clear contrast between Ibelin and Kerak. Both these castles offer a clear representation of Scott’s desire to intensify or desensify (Scott, 2005) what is there, even if those changes come at the cost of deviating from the known architecture.



*Figure 6.10: Long Shot of Kerak Castle, showing its isolation and its domination of the surrounding landscape in Kingdom of Heaven (Scott, 2005).*



*Figure 6.11: Low-angle shot inside the walls of Kerak. The white stone is a clear contrast to the clay brickwork of Ibelin, taken from Kingdom of Heaven (Scott, 2005).*

The depiction of Kerak (figures 6.10 and 6.11) helps to illustrate what Max identifies as the ‘operatic’ interpretation of the cinematic castle (Max, 2005). This is particularly clear in the production design where Kerak’s large walls and towers are designed to appear imposing to the audience, an effect that is heightened by Scott’s decision to almost entirely shoot the castle from the ground, with a series of low-angle shots, in order to emphasise its

size and expanse. The castle of Kerak in *Kingdom of Heaven* is shot to present it as a dominant force in the landscape, and in order to further underline this Kerak is constructed according to Western styles. This has the effect of setting Kerak apart from the local architecture as it looms over an empty landscape. The impression that is generated by Kerak in *Kingdom of Heaven* is of a purely romantic view of a medieval castle that is more focused on the impression of strength and military power than on domesticity. Intriguingly, while Kerak looks more like a traditional castle, its sheer focus on the militaristic side of its construction results in Ibelin functioning as a stronger example of how such a castle functioned in actuality, as Ibelin's primary function is as a residence, thus more closely aligning it with Morris' (2012) definition that a castle is primarily a home.

This analysis of the portrayal of castles in *Kingdom of Heaven* directly relates to all four of the key research questions as the film's depiction of the castles reveals an understanding of their context. *Kingdom of Heaven* utilises an approach towards history which deliberately move away from fidelity while attempting to relate its themes to contemporary concerns as part of a broader aim to use the castles as visual representations of the beliefs and attitudes of their owner. Therefore, in this respect the analysis is applicable to Ersin Tutan and Raw's analysis of the function of historical adaptations as a 'process of making sense of the world around us,' which moves the question beyond historical accuracy towards narrative representation (Ersin Tutan and Raw, 2013:8-10). Yet why has Scott chosen to represent these castles in this particular way? Neither Kerak nor Ibelin are depicted in this film according to the archaeological evidence. Changing their representation, however, allowed Scott and his screenwriter, William Monahan, to highlight the ideas and themes they had chosen to address in this film, namely showing the Crusades at a time of



relative peace before the outbreak of the Second Crusade in the latter half of the film. As William Monahan claims:

It would have been absolutely the same had he asked me on September 10<sup>th</sup>. But as a matter of general interest, we met not long after the World Trade Centre attack... The two civilisations, arguably, being again at war, I was interested in examining a time when there was a period of, if not peace, then accommodation (Monahan, 2005:47).

Monahan further underlines that idea later in the same interview, claiming that ‘I was interested in the accommodation, the commingling of cultures. It’s cinematically compelling on every level, including the design standpoint’ (Monahan, 2005:48). As Monahan’s comments imply, the visual design of the fortified structures in *Kingdom of Heaven* clearly identifies the ideological position of the castle owners, from co-habitation (Balian and Ibelin) to conquest and domination (Reynard and Kerak). This approach to the castles’ visual design not only has the effect of helping to broaden the themes that Scott wanted to address in *Kingdom of Heaven*, but also allows the audience to view, and potentially understand, the various ways in which these locations were viewed and possibly understood by people since the eighteenth-century, despite not being specifically faithful to the buildings’ actual construction.

### The cinematic and televisual castle as a gendered space

The representation of Kerak as a site of conquest and domination in *Kingdom of Heaven* clearly reflects what Higson notes is the medieval castle's status as a gendered space which is generally more masculine than those that came after, for example palaces (Higson, 2011). Similarly, as Susan Aronstein observes in her analysis of Arthurian film, medieval films exist in a space that is already occupied by the hierarchical structures of medieval Europe where a masculine identity is constructed and maintained through violence (Aronstein, 2009). As a consequence of this tendency to identify the medieval castle as masculine, Kerak is represented as significantly more masculine than the more residential castle of Ibelin. This contrast between the representations of the two castles is emphasised in the introduction of Kerak, in a sequence which moves from the domesticity of Ibelin directly to Kerak. The audience has just been shown a series of sequences at Ibelin, where Sibylla (Eva Green) is presented as having a great deal of narrative agency. In those sequences she initiates a sexual relationship with Balian, talks about her own plans and desires, and is generally depicted as being more or less equal to Balian; a relationship dynamic that results in the castle of Ibelin becoming an idyllic locale.

Woods claims that by turning Ibelin into an idyllic locale the castle becomes a physical representation for the more idealistic visions of what the Holy Land could be, even to the extent that it almost becomes a form of Edenic myth (Woods, 2014). However, immediately after these sequences the plot transitions to Kerak, and while Sibylla is still present in the narrative, her character has been muted; she is silenced and reduced to the status of an observer. While Higson raises a valid point when he claims that the medieval

castle is generally a more masculine environment, *Kingdom of Heaven* actually provides a greater level of variance to this idea, with the overly masculine environment of Kerak contrasting with the more domestically idyllic Ibelin. This directly relates the analysis in this section to the third of the key research questions, as the differing portrayals of the Crusader castles in *Kingdom of Heaven* help to generate new interpretations of how the medieval castle can be depicted in film and television as outward representations of characters' beliefs and attitudes..

The popular view of the medieval castle as being an overtly masculine space is not limited to works which are set in the medieval period, and even extends to works that are set in the more recent past. This occurs in *Le Vieux Fusil* (Enrico, 1975), a French film whose title translates to *The Old Gun*. This film offers another example of Toplin's (2002) designation of a factional text, i.e., a text that makes use of historical events, but without referencing them specifically. *La Viuex Fusil* is set during World War Two, and the narrative follows Julien Dandieu (Phillipe Noiret), a French doctor who sends his wife and daughter away from the city to stay at his ancestral castle in the countryside, in an attempt to keep them away from the growing tensions between the Nazis and the local townspeople. When his family arrive at the castle they are attacked by a unit of Waffen-SS, who rape his wife Claire (Romy Schneider) and then murder both her and their daughter along with the rest of the village, an event that appears to be roughly analogous to Nazi atrocities such as the murder of the entire village of Oradour-Sur-Glane. After this event the narrative is mainly situated within the walls of Dandieu's castle and the nearby village, as Dandieu uses his knowledge of the castle to navigate his way around the location in order to kill the entire

unit in revenge for the murders of his wife and daughter. These sequences are then interspersed with occasional flashbacks as Dandieu remembers the time before the war.

While the unnamed castle in *Le Vieux Fusil* is presented as a family home, it fits more closely with Higson's declaration that the castle is a gendered space. In this case one where a particularly hypermasculine form of masculinity prevails and comes at the cost of female agency. In doing this, *Le Vieux Fusil* reflects Molly Martin's analysis of the castle as a gendered space in Arthurian literature, particularly her claim that:

Critics have noted several layers of significance of the castle, many of these layers specifically associated with masculinity or femininity. The castle becomes a physical and visual manifestation of military, political, and economic power (Martin, 2012:39).

This view of the castle as a visual manifestation of masculine power runs throughout *Le Vieux Fusil*. The castle is the ancestral property of Dandieu, and while it can provide a home for Claire and his daughter, the film never presents Claire as an equal partner in the ownership of it, a fact underlined by Julien's repeated reference to 'my' castle, even after they are married. By portraying the castle as his property alone the film keeps the focus of its horror on Julien himself, which comes at the expense of granting agency to his wife and daughter. This has the effect that when the Nazis take 'his' castle, their rape of his wife and murder of his wife and daughter are presented as symbolic of Julien's lack of control over

his own space, and by extension is symptomatic of the film's hypermasculine depiction of the castle. This portrayal of the castle almost becomes emblematic of the tendency in medieval fiction for the castle to, as Susan Aronstein observes, ideologically align with the mythopoetic men's movement as it looks to the medieval past as a model for the 'ideal' masculine (Aronstein, 2000), a status which Julien is depicted as reclaiming for himself by slaughtering the Nazis who have invaded his space.

In this respect, *Le Vieux Fusil* is broadly reflective of Sarah Projansky's analysis of the depiction of rape in cinema. She observes that when there are depictions of rape in films in which the women are presented as innocent, naïve, and vulnerable, the rape is presented as a result of the women lacking agency and therefore they must be rescued (Projansky, 2001). In *Le Vieux Fusil* the women are not rescued (Dandieu arrives at the castle after the event in question), but the film's revenge narrative fulfils the same function. In this film the castle is a hypermasculine space in which female agency is extinguished and which requires Dandieu to adopt a traditionally gendered masculine agency in order to act as a corrective to the brutality of the Nazis. However, this is not to say that *Le Vieux Fusil's* depiction of the castle as an overly masculine space is universal to all cinematic and televisual castles; indeed, as *Kingdom of Heaven* demonstrates, gender dynamics within the cinematic and televisual castle occupy a fluid position, with masculine and feminine agency shifting according to the various necessities of the text in question.

*Kingdom of Heaven* and *Le Vieux Fusil* reveal how fluid the representation of gender dynamics in the cinematic and televisual castle is, a position which is further confirmed by an analysis of the two adaptations of *The Lion in Winter*, a popular play which was written

by James Goldman and first performed in New York City in 1966. *The Lion in Winter* follows a more domestically focused narrative than the other films that this chapter discusses, and therefore makes an excellent contrast to the overly masculine uses of the castle in films such as *Le Vieux Fusil*. The play and its adaptations are set in the year 1183 during the latter years of King Henry II's reign. Having imprisoned his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine for 10 years, Henry decides to take his mistress Aläis up to his castle at Chinon and invites his wife and sons to attend so that they can spend Christmas together, along with his three sons Richard (the future Richard the Lionheart), Geoffrey, and John (the future King John). Henry does this ostensibly to celebrate Christmas, but also to negotiate the succession, with Henry preferring John and Eleanor preferring Richard. The play has been adapted for screen twice: once for film using the play's title, *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968), and once for television. In order to avoid confusion, when this analysis refers to the television version it will be referred to as *Lionheart* (Showtime, 2003), which is how the programme was retitled for the UK DVD release, even if it originally aired under the title *The Lion in Winter* (2003), this retitling occurs despite the fact that Richard the Lionheart (Andrew Howard) remains a minor figure in this production. Both adaptations keep the focus of their narrative primarily on Henry II (Peter O'Toole for the film and Patrick Stewart for the television version), and Eleanor of Aquitaine (Katherine Hepburn for the film and Glenn Close for the television version).

Initially, both adaptations of *The Lion in Winter* appear to support the interpretation of the castle being an overly masculine space. From the outset both adaptations make clear to the audience that the castle is both Henry's property and that Eleanor of Aquitaine is his prisoner, putting him into a clear position of power and authority over her.



*Figure 6.12: Eleanor of Aquitaine looks down from her boat at Henry II in *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968).*



*Figure 6.13: Henry II lifts Eleanor of Aquitaine off the boat in *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968).*



*Figure 6.14: Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine rest on equal ground in *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968).*

However, this attitude is subverted through the cinematography of the play's cinematic adaptation which portrays Eleanor and Henry, if not as equals, then certainly with both using their positions and abilities constantly to demonstrate their power over the other. While the play communicates Eleanor and Henry's shifting power dynamics through their argumentative dialogue, in the film adaptation the shifting position of authority is also clearly communicated through the use of *mise-en-scène*. This is particularly clear in the scene when Eleanor makes her initial appearance in the film by arriving at Chinon by boat, meeting Henry for the first time in the text's narrative. In *The Lion in Winter* a single shot is used to highlight the shifting power balances between Eleanor and Henry as she disembarks from her boat (figures 6.12, 6.13, and 6.14). In these stills we see the dynamic of their entire relationship played out in miniature. Eleanor of Aquitaine arrives and looms over the husband who has kept her imprisoned, demonstrating her continuing power over him (figure 6.12). In response, Henry attempts to redress the power imbalance by picking her up and removing her from her own boat, thus invading her personal space and reasserting his authority (figure 6.13). Henry finishes this shot by lowering her down to the ground resulting in them both being more-or-less on an equal plane (figure 6.14). This power relationship repeats throughout the film, leading to *The Lion in Winter* presenting the audience with a clear subversion of the idea that the cinematic castle is a traditionally masculine-dominated environment. Indeed, it is the castle's status as first and foremost a home (Morris, 2012), where both the King and his and Eleanor's family lived, that necessitates a more fluid positioning of the gender power dynamics and could allow the audience's understanding of the positions of gender in late-medieval society to be critiqued.



This sequence is not replicated in *Lionheart* where the first shot in which Eleanor and Henry are both clearly visible in the frame takes place after Eleanor has disembarked. In this shot the mise-en-scène runs counter to their equally argumentative dialogue as Henry is allowed to loom over her within the frame, thus underlining his power and authority (figure 6.15). This hampers the text's ability to subvert the traditional power dynamics of masculine authority, which *The Lion in Winter* achieved by positioning Eleanor looming over her husband.



Figure 6.15: Eleanor of Aquitaine and Henry II share the frame for the first time in *Lionheart* (Showtime, 2003).

The portrayal of gender dynamics within the adaptations of *The Lion in Winter* functions in a similar way to what Osborne observes in adaptations of Shakespeare's plays into American High School movies in that they depict 'the evolving, as well as recurrent, operations of social status and gender expectations' (Osborne, 2008:11). The portrayal of

castle life in film and television is not simply masculine or feminine but can in fact be supportive or reflective of the assumed positions of feminine and masculine agency. This positions the analysis in this section along similar lines to Susan Murray's observations regarding the functions of castles and women in Arthurian romance literature, particularly that:

It was entirely probable and appropriate for medieval writers to have created a discourse in which the castle, a stalwart symbol of strength and power, was associated with women to illustrate the condition of the society (Murray, 2003:36).

A modern example that functions in this way is Sibylla gaining and losing agency as the social order weakens in *Kingdom of Heaven*. If representations of both women and castles are linked to wider issues in society, then the portrayal of feminine and masculine agency in the cinematic and televisual castle exists in a more fluid state than Higson proposes. The cinematic and televisual castle offers a prime opportunity to re-examine our understanding of gender dynamics in medieval society and their place within the wider understanding of history, potentially creating a new, and more nuanced, interpretation of the ways in which these gender dynamics are believed to have operated. Overall, the portrayal of gender dynamics in the cinematic and televisual castle serves as an excellent illustrative example of one of the central areas which was highlighted in Chapter One, namely the ways in which an adaptation of a historical event can use history as a starting point in order to potentially help further an audience's understanding of the wider contexts of history.

*The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968) and the benefits of anachronism within the cinematic castle

*The Lion in Winter* is similarly a useful point of study for examining the potential benefits of the cinematic castle in that it presents the audience with a clear example of the potential benefits of approaches to history which deliberately move away from fidelity and onto what Rosenstone terms ‘metaphorical truths’ (Rosenstone, 2018:7). This aligns this analysis with the second of the key research questions: specifically, what Greene refers to as the creative anachronism (Greene, 1986), i.e., an anachronism which while being literally ahistorical is deployed in order to potentially allow the audience to develop a new interpretation of the past. For example, in *The Lion in Winter* the narrative is set at Christmas and the characters are shown celebrating Christmas in ways that could be recognisable to a modern audience but are not reflective of the twelfth century. These anachronisms are clearly deliberate and creative in intent; in the foreword to the play script Goldman notes that:

The play, finally, contains anachronisms in speech, thought, habit, custom and so on. These the author is aware of – the way for instance, Christmas is celebrated – are deliberate and not intended to outrage the historical aspects of the script (Goldman, iii:1966).



Figure 6.16: An anachronistic Christmas tree in *The Lion in Winter* (Harvey, 1968).

The use of deliberately anachronistic elements in *The Lion in Winter* helps to underline the themes which are present in both the play and its adaptations. The decision to set the text at Christmas, and as a possibly recognisable Christmas to a modern audience, allows the text to create a number of clearly identifiable visual signifiers of the fact that while the characters are arguing over issues of state, their squabbles are fundamentally familial. This is made apparent with the references to holly, as well as a particularly anachronistic Christmas tree being placed clearly on display (figure 6.16). This Christmas tree can be seen in the background of Henry's argument with his mistress and offers a visual reminder to the audience of the film's Christmas setting. The instant recognisability of the film's Christmas helps to reinforce the film's central themes and turns the meaning of the text away from issues of statecraft, i.e., the question of succession, and onto domestic disputes. Simultaneously underlining the recurring theme that the cinematic and televisual castle is primarily a home, these recognisable anachronistic flourishes present the audience with a consistent reminder that while these characters are squabbling over power, they are also a family, and therefore place the text firmly within the domestic sphere. The theatre

critic Karen Fricker comments on this during her review of a revival of the play, claiming that:

The play's gag (also evident in the film) is that the political context is archaic and the stakes almost inconceivably high, but the characters squabble and exchange one-liners as if they're in a drawing-room comedy (Fricker, 2011).

In this respect, *The Lion in Winter* uses its anachronisms to help create an approach to history which could shift the audience's understanding of these historical figures away from the political, and onto the personal. This potentially enables the audience to begin the process of critiquing their own understanding of the past as it has generally been constructed.

#### The modern repositioning of the cinematic castle in *Le Vieux Fusil* (Enrico, 1975)

Returning to *Le Vieux Fusil*, it is clear that this is a film which presents a reactionary view of the Castle specifically and a particularly Gothic, or grotesque view of medievalism more generally, despite being set in the recent history of World War Two. In this film the Nazi occupiers are presented as roughly analogous to a medieval conquering force as people who take advantage of the freedom offered as conquerors to do whatever they desire to do to the local populace. In this way the representation of castles in *Le Vieux Fusil* is reflective of Andrew Elliott's analysis of the tendency of grotesque medievalisms to use the 'medieval' as a way of presenting a group or individual as having regressed. This type of medievalism brings with it a criticism that these people have rejected modernity and returned to a more

primitive, less sophisticated, and by extension inhumane and barbarous mode of thinking (Elliott, 2017). A consequence of this is that the film creates a binary opposition of Nazi/castle/medieval as overwhelmingly negative and French/town/modern as uniformly positive. The film further highlights this with the character Dr Julien, who is portrayed as an educated man of the town, a town where the Nazis are presented as being frustrated by the local inhabitants, as opposed to the countryside where the Nazis are depicted as maintaining their dominance over the populace until Dandieu begins his revenge narrative against them. Essentially, *Le Vieux Fusil* uses popular perceptions of history in order quickly and effectively to communicate its themes, and while this method is unquestioning in its approach towards history, its usefulness as a way of transmitting these ideas ensures that these themes are both clear and coherent to the audience.

The castle in *Le Vieux Fusil* remains unnamed, despite the fact that the town nearby is specifically located as Montauban. This is made clear to the audience through the use of a subtitle on a freeze-frame of Julien and his family cycling, which reads ‘Montauban, 1944.’ This presents the audience with their first piece of information that the film is located within occupied France, and is a clear forewarning of the invasive movement from idyllic landscape to site of conflict. This movement from the specificity of the ‘town’ to the generic of the ‘castle’ has the effect of giving it a sort of every-castle quality, making the castle a stand in for any part of the French countryside.

This resonates with French concerns in the post-World War Two years, particularly those of the new French nationalists, whose policies, as Stanley Hoffmann observes, altered but did not eradicate ‘the celebrated special relationship of the French to the soil’ (Hoffmann, 1993:248). Indeed, in the 1970s when the film was made the French peasant held a central position in French national myths, often standing in for ideas of self-determination and resistance (Gerson, 2009). The central position of the French countryside within the image of French national identity is persistent throughout *Le Vieux Fusil* and is further reflected in the choice of location. While the castle in the film remains unnamed, the scenes located there were shot at Bruniquel castle and village, with the castle looking today (figure 6.17) just as it did in 1976 when *Le Vieux Fusil* was shot (figure 6.18).



Figure 6.17: View of Bruniquel Castle as it stands in 2018 (Photograph by author, 2018).





*Figure 6.18: The Unnamed castle as it first appears in *Le Vieux Fusil* (Enrico, 1975).*



*Figure 6.19: Bruniquel Castle Courtyard; Queen Brunehaut's Tower is on the far right (Photograph by author, 2018).*





Figure 6.20: Sign of The Tower of Queen Brunehaut (Photograph by author, 2018).

Bruniquel is a significant choice for a filming location as not only is it a powerful structure amid the French landscape, but it also serves as a strong link for continuation within French History. This positions the castle as another example of how the various ways in which sites can be ‘haunted’ (Lefebvre, 2011) by what has gone before, both in filmic and in historical terms, can help to develop the themes of a text and allow for a new interpretation of history to be developed. Bruniquel castle’s status within the French landscape is demonstrated by local legends as well as on the website for the *Bruniquel Office Du Tourisme* (2018), which refer to Bruniquel being founded in the early 600s by Queen Brunehaut (commonly referred to as Brunhilda) as well as being one of the possible locations of her execution. This information is so widely believed that one of the oldest buildings on the site is named after her, despite being built six centuries after her death (figures 6.19 and

6.20). By choosing a castle that has been a continuous presence in the French landscape as the location for his unnamed castle, Enrico is using the castle's seeming permanence as emblematic for the whole of France. Therefore, Julien's eradication of the Nazis from the castle is a broad metaphor for the removal of the Nazis from France itself. *Le Vieux Fusil* uses the castle's historical context as an apparently permanent feature of the French countryside in order clearly to visualise the themes of the film in such a way that it is easily communicable to its French target audience. This analysis of the cinematic castle's permanence within the landscape and how that might alter the effect the text has on the audience will be developed further in the next section of this chapter, which analyses *Labyrinth* (Channel 4, 2012).

The castle's position within the relationship between the past and the present in *Labyrinth* (Channel 4, 2012)

The presentation of defensive structures in *Labyrinth*, a two-part television series based on the book of the same name by Kate Mosse (2006), offers a clear depiction of the opportunities that the cinematic castle provides in exploring the relationship between the past and the present. So thoroughly does this series do this that the text offers a particularly clear visualisation of what Van Riper identifies as one of the key functions of historical adaptations, namely that they do not merely depict the past but also allow the past and present to illuminate each other (Van Riper, 2013). This is a feature embedded into the series' construction. The narrative follows two parallel plotlines: that of Alice Tanner (Vanessa Kirby) an English teacher visiting friends and family in Modern Day Carcassonne, and that of Alais Pelletier Du Mas (Jessica Brown Findlay), a noblewoman living within the

Cité of Carcassonne during the thirteenth century. (This section will use the French term Cité, as this is commonly used in France to denote the historical, often medieval, section of a town, as doing this helps to delineate between the modern city of Carcassonne and the area encompassed by the medieval walls). Alaïs' plotline occurs during the time of the Albigensian Crusade (1209-1229), the Catholic Crusade against the Cathars of Southern France, and generally takes a 'factional' approach (Toplin, 2002) to its narrative, inventing characters and situations but keeping the broader overall narrative of the Albigensian Crusade intact. The two characters are presented as being linked in some way, with their similarity being further underlined by the clear phonetic similarity of their names, Alaïs/Alice, and those of their romantic partners, Guilhelm (Emun Elliot)/William (Sebastian Stan). The series uses cross-cutting in order to draw links between the two time periods. This has the effect of contrasting the series' reconstruction of the medieval setting with the location as it stands in the present day, potentially allowing the audience to view how the events of the past resonate with the present.



*Figure 6.21: Alaïs in medieval Carcassonne in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*



*Figure 6.22: Cut to Alice just outside the Walls of Carcassonne as they stand today in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*





*Figure 6.23: Same shot of Alice after she has walked forward and the camera has panned right in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*



*Figure 6.24: Cut to front view Alais of further up the street in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012)*



*Figure 6.25: Cut to Back view of Alais near the well in Carcassonne in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*



*Figure 6.26: Cut to front view of Alice on the same street in Modern Carcassonne in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*



*Figure 6.27: Same shot of Alice as she stares at something off camera in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*



*Figure 6.28: "Reality" intrudes as a tourist train enters the frame on the left in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*

A particularly clear example of this occurs around an hour into the first episode, with a short sequence showing Alais hiding a book in the Basilica of Saints Nazarius and Celsus within the Cité of Carcassonne, while in the present Alice is going into the basilica to retrieve it. In this sequence a series of cuts between the two time periods highlights the continuity between the past and the present (figures 6.21 to 6.28). This sequence offers an insightful glimpse into how the past and present relate to each other and emphasises the roles that Alais and Alice have in each other's narratives. This is made explicit in the similarity of the shot composition, with either Alais or Alice central in the frame and the cuts moving continuously from a front view of one person cutting into a back view of the next, as they move forward through the Cité. This effect is enhanced by the same music flowing between the sequences.

These shots do not simply show the similarities between the two individuals – if that were the series makers' intent then shots showing the faces of the two characters would be just as effective – but also the rhythmic process of shots from front view of one person to back view of the other, as they make the same journey, highlights the continuity between the past and present and between Alais and Alice. This offers the audience a clear visual motif for how the events of the past impact upon the present. So effective is the construction of this link between past and present that the cuts between them only end in figure 6.28, which is a shot with neither of the women in it; instead, a tourist train comes into view in front of the basilica, with the music soundtrack fading away as a tour guide speaks about Carcassonne's past.

*Labyrinth's* depiction of the relationship between the past and the present ties into one of the central ideas discussed in Chapter Two, namely Van Riper's analysis of historical

adaptations being ‘Origin myths for the present that we inhabit. They are designed to tell what was, but also to help us make sense of what is’ (Van Riper, 2013:98). *Labyrinth* offers a clear visualisation of this form of thematic resonance through the continuous presence of Carcassonne. This series presents the medieval Cité as a permanent feature of the Languedoc landscape as much as the hills and the fields surrounding it, and it is this continuity that solidifies the relationship between the past and the present. While the Cité of Carcassonne is not strictly speaking a castle, although there is a castle within it, this central idea of the permanence of the Cité links to the position of castles within the popular imagination, as figures of strength whose very presence on the landscape has some assumed permanency. This assumed permanency might allow the audience clearly to visualise a location’s position as a constant link between the past and the present, both within the context of the film/television programme and within the wider world.



*Figure 6.29: Alais’ group arrives at Montsegur in Labyrinth (Channel 4, 2012).*





*Figure 6.30: The courtyard of Montsegur Castle in Labyrinth. (Channel 4, 2012).*



*Figure 6.31: The modern ruins at Montsegur Castle (Photograph by author, 2015).*



*Figure 6.32: Montsegur Castle Courtyard as it stands today (Photograph by author, 2015).*

This feature gains further credence when contrasted with the representation of Montsegur, the last Cathar stronghold. In *Labyrinth* the audience is presented with a series of short sequences set in the castle of Montsegur, both as it stood at the time of the Albigensian Crusade and as it stands today, the most significant of which occurs around one hour into the second episode. Rather than the ‘factional’ approach (Toplin, 2002) which was utilised in the Carcassonne sequence, the portrayal of Montsegur focuses on a specific historical moment, namely the burning of over 200 *Perfecti* (Cathars who had taken vows) after the siege of Montsegur in 1244 (Tyerman, 2007). Aside from a brief appearance at the beginning of episode 1 (figure 6.29), Montsegur is mainly featured in episode 2, where it is initially presented to the audience from the ground level, emphasising its strength and indomitability. This image is further emphasised by a later shot, which introduces the inside of the castle, consisting of a low-angle viewpoint looking into the courtyard (figure 6.30).



These shots reveal that despite Montsegur's strong location, the inside of the castle lacks the variety of dwellings that are viewed at Carcassonne, and so it appears to be more of a fortress and a refuge rather than a home for its inhabitants.

However, this view of the castle could be a mistake on the part of the adaptors, who appear to have based their reconstruction of the castle on the present-day ruins at Montsegur. The original Cathar Castle was torn down after the siege and a new one was built there; these are the ruins that can be seen today (Lebédel, 2011), and it is this castle that is re-created in the series (figures 6.31 and 6.32). As it stands, there is little concrete knowledge of what Montsegur looked like at the time of the Albigensian Crusade, apart from the outlines of some dwellings outside the walls (Lebédel, 2011). In this respect, the success of the film's depiction of Montsegur is reliant on creating a sense of verisimilitude in the audience, ensuring that a relatively knowledgeable viewer i.e. someone who knows a fair amount about, or has even visited, Montsegur's ruins would accept the relative authenticity of the film's castle, not because it is wholly accurate, but because it accords enough with their own knowledge of the location. This could help to solidify the audience's understanding of the importance that the physical structure of Montsegur held to the Cathars in the last years of the Albigensian Crusade. Essentially, the series uses Montsegur's recognisability to further link Alaïs to Alice, i.e., the past to the present, and thus the audience to the narrative. This might have the effect of furthering the audience's understanding of the links between the past and the present, even if it comes at the expense of historical actuality.

There are additional elements that help generate a new perspective on the relationship between past and present within the series' erroneous depiction of Montsegur during the Albigensian Crusade, especially, as by depicting the ruins in such a way that they

would look familiar to a modern viewer the series ensures that the links between the past and the present remain clear, as the continuous link is reinforced not just by the stones of the castle but by the wider context of the location. This is a status that is reinforced by Matthews who argues that ‘a major historical rupture, involving destruction and reconstruction, [does] not alt[er] the essentially historical and continuous character of a site’ (Matthews, 2017:67). Therefore, if the representation of the site is incorrect, these mistakes can still be used to allow the links between the past and the present to be solidified more clearly. By presenting an (incorrect) representation of the castle looking grey and depressive at the end of the Albigensian Crusade, the portrayal of Montsegur clearly contrasts with how the remains of the castle exist today.

In the particular case of Montsegur in *Labyrinth*, there is still a usefulness in the representation being historically inaccurate, as it helps clearly to visualise the continuity between past and present. This is made particularly apparent at the end of the series when, after finally learning the full history of the Albigensian Crusade, Alice journeys to Montsegur, as the character Audric Baillard (John Hurt) narrates: ‘The truth lies all about us, in the stones, in the rocks, in the changing pattern of the seasons, through the shared stories of our past, we will never die.’ At this moment Alice closes her eyes and hears the imagined sounds of the siege. This moment reveals the benefits of *Labyrinth’s* approach to history: revealing to the audience that the series exists as a form of remembrance for the victims of the Albigensian Crusade. Thus *Labyrinth* offers a clear example of the benefits of medievalism, particularly the various ways in which the medieval is remembered and re-created (Utz, 2017a). *Labyrinth’s* portrayal of the castle reveals a full awareness not just of

its status as a historical location, but also of how its various contexts relate, and are related, to the present.

By linking the act of remembrance to the rocks and stones of Montsegur, and by extension the Languedoc region, the programme makers position their depiction of the castle within the context of a broader ongoing movement, one which is fundamentally connected with remembering the events themselves and of how they relate to people living in the region today. This is by no means unique to film and television; as Jerome De Groot observes, recent thinking about the role of the museum has moved towards ‘thinking about the ways in which the museum should interact with communities, be part of a continuing cultural conversation rather than something unyielding and monolithic’ (De Groot 2016:294).

Therefore, this sequence at Montsegur in the present reveals the text to be an excellent example of the importance of both remembering and forgetting. This viewpoint that it is the castles themselves that stand as reminders of the events of the early-thirteenth century is supported by Matthews when he claims that:

Catharism appears in various guises all over the region, from ‘Cathar castles’ and memorials to immolated heretics, to a local drink made by a winery in the Saint-Chinian appellation, *catharoise*. The *pays cathare* is a brand (Matthews, 2017:72, emphasis in original).

Indeed, L’Aude’s *Agence de Development Touristique* have released a pass, the *Passeport des Sites Pays Cathare* (figure 6.33), which offers visitors to the Languedoc

region discounted entry to a number of historical sites, even ones that had no links to Catharism, such as the Catholic Abbeys of Fontfroide and Villelongue. So thorough is the act of remembrance to the Cathars linked to the monuments of this region that it has caused non-Cathar sites to be brought in under its banner.



Figure 6.33: 2017's *Passeport des Sites Pays Cathare*.

For the modern audience, *Labyrinth* presents another layer to what was discussed in the introduction about how filming locations are ‘haunted’ (Lefebvre, 2011), as not only is Montsegur ‘haunted’ by the memories of the text of the television series, but it is also ‘haunted’ within the text itself. This occurs both narratively and thematically, with Alaïs’ actions (representing the tragedy of the Cathars) being directly linked to Alice (representing the modern audience), thus creating a clear visual correlation, in which the audience is encouraged to participate. In *Labyrinth* the ‘haunting’ exists on multiple layers, from the Albigensian Crusade, to Alice’s visit, and finally to the audience’s potential visit themselves. In these instances, the castles themselves offer clear visual continuity between the past and

the present and allow the themes that the text is addressing in the past to bleed into the present.

Between the representations of Carcassonne and Montsegur, *Labyrinth* presents a clear demonstration of the usefulness of cinematic location for depicting the relationship between the past and the present, not simply as a way of providing spatial continuity between two highly different time periods, but also as a way of clearly visualising the links between the past and the present. *Labyrinth* does this in order to show how the past can act as an origin myth for the present (Van Riper, 2013:98), while simultaneously providing a physical space for potentially developing the audience's understanding of the past.

#### *Ironclad* (English, 2010), the siege film, and issues of fidelity within the cinematic space

As shown in the previous sections Morris' description that the medieval castle was first and foremost a home (Morris, 2012), is reflected in a variety of cinematic and televisual castles, however, it is worth remembering that that particular use is not the only function of castles in film and television, as they are also used as locations for conflict most particularly in sieges. At first glance, the narrative constraints of a siege film appear to offer the possibility of showing a society, coming together within a central location (in the cases studied within this chapter, a castle) when faced with a clear external enemy whose presence offers a persistent threat and thus presents a clear, easily communicable goal for the defending forces: namely, survival. It is perhaps for this reason that the vast majority of popular films and television programmes that depict a siege environment focus a significant amount of their narrative on the interpersonal dynamics of the besieged characters, rather

than on the besiegers. Sometimes this is taken to the extremes of *Assault on Precinct 13* (Carpenter, 1976), where there is no attempt made to even humanise the assaulters; instead, the film portrays them as an endless cavalcade of voiceless attackers from whom the defenders need to protect themselves.

On a narrative level the basic structure of the siege film appears to be consistent: a group of characters are introduced within a large defensible structure, attackers come to lay siege to the location and are then held off for an undefined amount of time, until something occurs which allows the protagonists to overcome the besiegers, either by escaping, rescue from an outside force, or by the attackers retreating. However, the intrusion into the domestic space offers the possibility of an insight into the complex relationships between the various social groups that live within the castle space.

The first thing that needs to be remembered when studying the siege film is the position of the siege within the medieval period. Joseph and Francis Gies highlight that position as part of their claim that:

Warfare in the Middle Ages centred around castles. The clumsy disorganised levies, called out for a few weeks service, rarely met in pitched battles. Their most efficient employment was in sieges, a condition that fitted neatly into the capital strategic value of the castle (Gies and Gies, 2015:186).

This offers a simple rationale for explaining why so many medieval war films focus their narratives on sieges, but the use of sieges in historical film and television programmes

also offers the audience an opportunity to observe and understand how various social groups functioned when placed alongside each other.

The *Ironclad* films are a series of two films linked by a similar basic narrative of following the events of a siege on a castle, but the only direct link between the two is the character Guy, played by Aneurin Barnard in *Ironclad* (English, 2010), and Tom Austen in *Ironclad: Battle for Blood* (English, 2014). Beyond that the two films' narratives are remarkably different: *Ironclad* is based on an actual historical event, while *Ironclad 2: Battle for Blood*'s narrative is wholly fictitious. *Ironclad* broadly follows the historical narrative of the rebellion against King John, depicting the siege of Rochester Castle in 1215 which was led by Baron William D'Albini. However, the narrative in *Ironclad* features several deviations from the historical sources, most notably the decision to end the film with Prince Louis of France arriving at the dying moments of the siege, to capture King John (Paul Giamatti) and usurp the throne. The historical sources actually reveal that Prince Louis arrived in Britain in May 1216, a full six months after the end of the siege, and the rebellion ended soon after when King John died of dysentery, meaning most of the rebels were now unable to justify their grievances (Morris, 2012). In effect, *Ironclad* turns a siege that was a victory for King John into a defeat. *Ironclad 2: Battle for Blood* avoids this issue by creating a wholly fictional siege in a fictional castle in the north of England and by inventing a narrative of a Scottish raiding party that lays siege to Guy's family home.

*Ironclad* presents an intriguing focal point for the analysis of cinematic sieges as it depicts two sieges. The first is a short sequence showing the surprise taking of Rochester Castle by the rebels, a sequence which while short is still useful for presenting a good example of how sieges work, as it was common for sieges to be won quickly by either stealth

or trickery as occurred in Conwy Castle in 1401. There the forces of Owain Glyndwr took the castle in a surprise attack by having two men pretend to be carpenters and walk straight in; they were then able to open the gates allowing the rest of Glyndwr's forces to enter the castle (Ashbee, 2015). The more significant of the film's two sieges, however, is the longer 'main' siege where the rebels are being attacked by King John (Paul Giamatti). The depiction of this siege is the focus of this analysis.

It is fair to say that *Ironclad* is not a film where historical accuracy is a prime concern, and indeed this feature was heavily criticised by a number of mainstream film critics on the film's initial release. For example, in a generally positive review for *Empire Magazine* Kim Newman notes that the film's depiction of history is 'straddled between uproarious schoolboy tosh and serious historical movie' (Newman, 2009). While it is true that historical accuracy in the narrative is not the primary concern of *Ironclad*, a fact that the film admits during one sequence where King John after suffering yet another setback in his siege, shouts at his chronicler not to include that and literally rips entire pages out of a history book. This sequence is both a nod to the audience that the film is diverting away from historical accuracy and functions as a, perhaps inadvertent, representation of the idea of history as palimpsest, a term that Maria Pramaggiore, defines as history being a:

Text that is always in the process of becoming, subject to constant erasure and rewriting... the palimpsest embodies the notion of history as a dynamic, even plastic, medium... both verbal and visual texts serve as partial, fragmentary, and, inevitably impermanent records of past events that will eventually be superseded by other texts (Pramaggiore, 2016: 37).



A particularly strong example of history as palimpsest occurs during a sequence towards the end of the film when King John orders his men to dig a tunnel underneath the castle and sends forty pigs underneath. The pigs are then set on fire and as the fire rises it destroys the props holding up the mine, the ground above, and finally a significant section of the castle. This causes the siege to break and King John's army to make it through to the keep. Writing about the film in her *Reel Cinema* column, Alex Von Tunzelmann criticises this depiction claiming that while King John did use pigs to help break the siege at Rochester, in actuality it was the fat from the pigs that was needed to grease the mine's shaft rather than whole pigs being set on fire (Tunzelmann, 2012b). However, as Marc Morris observes in a book that makes no reference to the film, 'an older generation of more imaginative historians envisaged the forty-strong herd being driven into the tunnels while still alive, burning torches tied to their tails' (Morris, 2012:88). Morris claims that this idea was eventually superseded by modern historians who believe that the pigs were slaughtered and rendered down for their fat, which was then poured into barrels and rolled into the mine (Morris, 2012). This indicates that when making *Ironclad* Jonathan English probably took his inspiration from these earlier historians and may have been unaware that their record of past events had been superseded and overwritten by newer texts.

The question of history as palimpsest directly relates to the first of the key research questions in that it is concerned with the various contexts surrounding history, specifically what Bettina Bildhauer identifies about the issues that historians face when attempting to make something faithful to history, namely that:

Predominantly literary and cultural historians drawing on the sophisticated self-reflexive discipline of historiography, have spent many pages and pixels pointing out that what current historians think they know about the medieval past is not necessarily accurate or agreed upon anyway, and that film-makers can only do so much to attempt to include the latest research (Bildhauer 2016:49).

*Ironclad* operates with these issues of historical plasticity. The film's depiction of the events of the siege of Rochester widely diverges from the historical sources. The film is more reliable as a source for furthering an understanding of history in the mise-en-scène rather than in the narrative. It is here that the film offers the audience a potential insight into what daily life could have been like during a siege, and of how it forces various social groups that would normally be separated by the internal structures of the castle to interact with each other.

This historical plasticity is important for generating a new interpretation into the day-to-day events of life during a siege, particularly because the narrative structure of the film forces various social groups who are usually separated by the internal dynamics of the castle, and late-medieval society, to interact, conflict, and co-operate with one another. This has the effect of serving as a broad critique of late-medieval society and thus creates a space in which questions of how that society operated can potentially be shared within the milieu of the text. An example of this, occurs around midway through the siege when Jedediah Coteral (Jamie Foreman), a career soldier, approaches Guy, who is depicted as having been educated according to his position as a member of a minor noble family, and asks him if he can show

him how his name looks when written down. Afterwards Guy offers to teach Jedidiah how to write, thus creating a link between the two of them that probably would not have occurred outside the siege space. While this sequence is quite short, these smaller moments within the central narrative create a space where social groups that would have been less likely to interact under more typical circumstances can begin to gain an understanding of each other. By extension, this allows the audience to potentially enhance their own understanding of the daily life of those groups.

The movement from domestic space to siege space in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Jackson, 2002).

When making his adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001-2003), Peter Jackson wanted to ensure that the mise-en-scène of the film was as rooted in history as possible, often to the extent that some of the smaller details can be hard immediately to observe. This is a situation which Peter Lyon, a swordsmith who worked on the production of a variety of the films' props, notes during an interview with Maureen Byko, that:

Unfortunately, so much of it isn't actually seen in the film, and so people would argue, why do it then? Why on earth would you go to that trouble? Because the real world has a level of subliminal detail that supports a cultural inheritance through graphic design that gives you the feeling that what you are looking at in the present is predated by a huge cultural influence that goes back hundreds, if not thousands of years (Lyon, 2002).

These ideas link to what is discussed in Chapter Four regarding the importance, when a text creates a historical aesthetic, of the production feeling authentic to the audience. Consequently, some of the ideas that are discussed in that chapter remain relevant to the presentation of castles on film as a way of broadening an understanding of the past despite the ahistoricity of a text's setting. What Lyon is specifically referring to here is the usefulness of props in assisting with *The Lord of the Rings*' attempts to give the events on screen the 'weight' of history. However, this is not necessarily their sole purpose, as these pieces of the mise-en-scène also help to visualise clearly how these items would have operated on a day-to-day basis. In no area is that clearer than in the film series' use of castles.



Figure 6.34: Expansive view of the hill fort of Edoras *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Jackson, 2002).



Figure 6.35: A closer view of Edoras' interior in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Jackson, 2002)



Figure 6.36: The fortifications of Helm's Deep in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (Jackson, 2002).

In *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, the second film in the series, the audience is presented with a human society called The Rohirrim, loosely based on various civilizations from Northern Europe. Throughout the course of the narrative the audience is also presented with two distinct representations of the Rohirrim's fortified dwellings: Edoras (Figures 6.34 and 6.35) and Helm's Deep (Figure 6.36). The locations offer differing portrayals of life within these spaces: Edoras being used for scenes of domesticity and habitation, and Helm's Deep being focused solely on war and conflict.

In *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* Edoras is presented as similar in style to the Iron Age Celtic hill forts commonly called oppida As Graham Robb describes:

A typical Celtic Oppidum occupies a flattish area of high ground which seems to have been defined by nature as a world apart. A river, a ravine or the sea almost surrounds the plateau; the remaining side is barricaded by a geometrically regular ditch and a bank of earth. Sometimes, there are heaps of tumbled stones that once formed a decorative rather than defensive wall (Robb, 2015:182).

This description easily applies to the portrayal of the hill fort of Edoras, although Alan Lee, the film's concept artist, claims that the buildings themselves are more inspired by the post-Roman period. He admits that most of the historical references he found for the architecture were based on supposition and are drawn from a variety of world sources including buildings from Norway and Japan (Lee, 2002). The key part for this analysis, however, is not the physical buildings but their location which is most 'oppida-like.' Like Edoras, the oppida were not simply forts but also functioned in similar ways to towns. They were divided into districts which were designed principally for commerce rather than defence, and were populated all year round (Robb, 2015). This positions the oppida as a precursor to the Castle, or perhaps even to castle-like towns such as Carcassonne.

This is also the case for the hill fort of Edoras; it is more than simply a fortified location, it is also a domestic space, primarily a home, a fact emphasised by the presence of clearly visible houses in the background (figure 6.34). This building is clearly a dwelling

and not designed primarily as a defensive structure. In the film when the Rohirrim, the inhabitants of Edoras, go to war their King Théoden (Bernard Hill) immediately orders the location evacuated and insists they move to Helm's Deep, a more traditionally castle-like structure (figure 6.36). Helm's Deep looks more traditionally like a fortified structure; it has high walls, fewer open dwellings, and a more solid stone construction.

The Rohirrim's move from Edoras to Helm's Deep clearly mirrors the ancient Celts' development of the oppida into more heavily fortified towns in the years after Caesar's invasion in 54 BCE, (Robb, 2015). This idea is even made explicit in the film when a Rohirrim soldier (John Leigh) announces the evacuation of Edoras, saying 'by order of the King, the city must empty, we make for the refuge of Helm's Deep.' At this moment the film is clearly delineating between Edoras' function as a city (a city being the closest equivalent to an oppidum in Pre-Roman Invasion Gaul) and Helm's Deep's function as a place of safety, but not a permanent dwelling. Essentially, while Helm's Deep looks more like an imagined image of a castle, it does not function as one; it is not a 'home' for its inhabitants merely a 'refuge,' making its closest equivalent a fortress. By designating the differences between Edoras and Helm's Deep so clearly, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* visualises the implicit distinctions in Morris' definition of a castle as first and foremost a home (Morris, 2012).

This helps to develop an understanding of the significance that similar structures have held for their inhabitants in the past. In essence, *The Lord of the Rings* films operate on broadly similar terms to *Game of Thrones* in that both texts adapt and appropriate historical iconography to create a historical aesthetic, in order to help further an

understanding of how these artefacts and locations function when divorced from the narrative of history.

This serves as a reflection of what has been previously discussed in Chapter Four, and by extension directly relates to the second of the key research questions, concerning the potential benefits of utilising a historical aesthetic to generate meaning. *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* clearly visualises the experience of architectural development. Salo already identifies how Tolkien (and by extension Jackson) uses a device of ‘alienation’ in order to invest the reader/viewer in the narrative, and how that is achieved through the language; as the narrative progresses, the recognisable names get more ancient as the audience journeys into the unfamiliar (Salo, 2004). This process uses the narrative journey as a fundamental feature of understanding an aspect of a society and is similarly featured throughout the presentation of the fortified locations in *The Lord of the Rings*. As the narrative progresses the audience is presented with three different locations, which when viewed together over the course of the films, offer a clear visualisation of various ideas about the functions of a fortified city. Oliver Creighton and Robert Higham identify the roles of urban fortifications in their observation that:

Far more than simply features of ‘military architecture’, town walls, gates and related structures are strikingly multi-functional, representing a complex blend of military pragmatism and commercial identities and social status through conspicuous building projects (Creighton and Higham, 2005:32).





Figure 6.37: Minas Tirith under siege in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Jackson, 2003).

This multi-functional blend of military pragmatism, commercial identities, and social status is clearly visualised in such a way as to potentially allow the audience a greater understanding of how such structures functioned, and this occurs throughout these films. The simple fortifications of the homes of Edoras are replaced by the fortress of Helm's Deep before being replaced once again by the more developed City fortifications of Minas Tirith. Minas Tirith, aside from being shown in a brief sequence in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, as well as being described by the character Boromir (Sean Bean), is only shown in detail in the last of the three films. Combining the homeliness of Edoras with the protective capabilities of Helm's Deep, Minas Tirith (figure 6.37) is in many ways a more typical image of town fortifications with its towers and walls in front of an empty plain, clearly resembling surviving town walls such as those at Conwy in North Wales (figure 6.38). While smaller in size, Conwy's walls are uniform in their construction and completely encircle the old town of Conwy for a total distance of 1.2 km (Ashbee, 2015). In this respect, *The Lord of The Rings* presents the audience with a triptych of imagined fortifications, the first emphasising the fortified location as foremost a home, the second as

foremost a place of defence, and the third combining these two features in order to show how such distinct purposes for construction function when placed together.



Figure 6.38: The Town Walls of Conwy, North Wales (Photograph by author, 2018).

This helps to illustrate one of the central issues surrounding historical adaptation which is identified in the fourth of the key research questions, namely how an adaptation can be used to inform, critique, or aid an audience's possible understanding of history. When making the physical mise-en-scène of *The Lord of the Rings* Peter Jackson effectively creates a mini-narrative of the development of castles and fortifications in Western Europe, in an inverse of Salo's (2004) observation that the language in Tolkien's books gets more ancient and archaic as the narrative progresses.

These questions can be tied to what is discussed in Chapter Two regarding the role of iconography in adaptation. As Maltby identifies, iconography often functions as a way for a knowledgeable audience to quickly to discern information about a text from the presence of recurring motifs (Maltby, 2003). These iconographies can be appropriate to the

time period, or can be anachronistic. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy the iconography within the architecture is constantly shifting in order to reveal the development of a society as well as its relationship to permanent dwellings, quickly heightening the contrast between the rural Rohirrim and the more city-dwelling Gondor, without any difference needing to be communicated through script and dialogue.

### Conclusion

The portrayal of castles in film and television has many different purposes, and functions in a variety of ways. However, within those variances there is the possibility of allowing the audience to develop their understanding of the past and of how it can be related to the present. The castle's dual function as a focal point for both action-orientated and domestically-orientated narratives, allows for a more fluid depiction of life during the medieval period. In this respect the castle serves as a useful tool for identifying and generating an understanding of life during the medieval period through the prism of its various medievalisms.

As a result of this, the portrayal of castles directly ties into one of the key issues identified in Chapter Two, namely the importance of sacrificing fidelity in favour of the 'feel' of history, i.e., what Slotkin identifies as 'a vivid sense of what it may have been like to live among such facts' (Slotkin, 2007: 225). The castle is particularly useful in this regard due to its seeming permanence in the landscape. The viewers of *Labyrinth*, *Ironclad*, or even a non-medieval film like *Le Vieux Fusil* can visit these places, where they can view these sites as if they were, as Lefebvre argues, 'haunted' (Lefebvre, 2011:70) by the actions that

the audience has seen on the screen and by the real history of the location, thus potentially granting the audience a further understanding of the effect of living among such facts (Slotkin, 2007: 225). Not only does this allow the viewer to gain an insight into the period from viewing the film or television programme, but also from being able to visit the scene of such events. In effect, the castle's permanence helps to create enough of a recognisable landscape that the audience might be able to begin the process of understanding both the historical events and how they relate to the present.

Another key area of usefulness which has emerged in this analysis of the cinematic and televisual castle is the portrayal of gender dynamics. While Higson raises a valid point in his claim that the castle is regarded as more masculine than its later equivalents (Higson, 2011), this does not mean that the portrayal of gender dynamics within this location is fixed in order to emphasise masculine dominance over the feminine; instead, these dynamics exist in a fluid state, shifting according to the necessities of the adaptation. The people making the historical adaptation can shift the power dynamics within the castle in whichever way they believe is appropriate to their adaptation.

These shifting power dynamics are highlighted by Susan Murray in her analysis into the Arthurian Romances of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Sir Thomas Malory, where she links their portrayal of femininity with the castle itself (Murray, 2003). This presents an intriguing possibility for historical adaptation. If we take the example of *Ironclad*, at the beginning of the film Rochester Castle is home to the character Lady Isabel (Kate Mara), who is presented as emblematic of the people of England and who is visibly chafing under the yoke of her husband Reginald D'Cornhill (Derek Jacobi), who functions as a representation of King John's tyranny. While Isabel is as surprised as the rest of the inhabitants when the rebels

take the castle, as the film progresses her sympathies transfer over to the rebels as she grows to see them as liberators from her unhappy life, and by extension, as liberators for the people of England as a whole. As *Ironclad* and the other case studies in this chapter show, the position of gender dynamics within the cinematic and televisual castle, while at first appearing to be more masculine in their appeal (Higson, 2011), on closer inspection are far more flexible and fluid.

We can extrapolate this portrayal of gender dynamics further, into the final key conclusion of this chapter. The cinematic and televisual castle offers a clear visual signifier which can be used to depict the social order, for example the use of hierarchical stratification in *Stardust*, or as a symbol for political power in *The Lion in Winter*. However, since these rules are so clearly identifiable to the audience, they allow the filmmakers to experiment with and subvert them, altering the meaning in order to focus on new themes. This can create new perspectives on medieval communities which can potentially be applied to the wider history, although this is a possibility which would require further analysis in future research. In this respect these issues align with one of the issues identified in Chapter Two, namely Patterson's analysis that 'more important than a 'faithful' adaptation of a text to the screen is a film text's ability to perform or produce interesting, viable and useful readings of the preceding text' (Patterson, 2011:168). If we were to place the actual castles under Patterson's definition of 'preceding text,' then judging a successful adaptation of medieval castle life would not be based on how accurately it re-presents the castle community, but instead could ask the question 'What understanding whether it be useful, interesting, or viable, does this location help to generate, and how can these new interpretations be related to the past and the present?'





## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Over the course of the preceding chapters this thesis has created an original argument regarding the application of adaptation theory to historical film and television, in order to ascertain any potential benefits that it can offer for generating new perspectives on historical events. In order to do this, in the introduction four key research questions were identified and then threaded throughout the thesis in order to create a thorough analysis of the various ways in which a text could utilise a historically literate approach; these research questions are:

- a) To what extent is an adaptation's presentation of the past aware of the context of the depicted historical events?
- b) How can the addition of elements which were not present within the surviving sources, for example anachronisms, function within a historical adaptation?
- c) How can an adaptation promote a new interpretation of the events which are the focus of the adaptation, as well as how those events relate to the present?
- d) How can an adaptation be used to inform, critique, or aid in an audience's understanding of history?

So that these questions could be adequately addressed throughout the course of this thesis four case studies were analysed, in which the four research questions were considered, albeit to varying degrees depending on the focus of each case study. Each case study was



analysed in a separate chapter, and each was focused on a different area of historical adaptation, as follows:

- a) The general benefits of historical adaptation in Chapter Three.
- b) The usefulness of utilising a historical aesthetic in Chapter Four.
- c) How a historical adaptation is altered according to shifting issues of authenticity and acceptability in Chapter Five.
- d) How the representation of a specific location in film and television can be useful as a tool for furthering an understanding of history in Chapter Six.

Chapter Three identified two potential thematic benefits of historical adaptation. Firstly, that the adaptation can illuminate the past, i.e., a historical adaptation can possibly help to further the audience's understanding of the depicted events, even if in the process of creating this understanding, the adaptation utilises various non-historical elements, whether they be anachronisms or generic conventions. Secondly, the adaptation can create a contemporary thematic resonance, i.e., the various ways in which a historical adaptation can utilise specific themes and ideas in order directly to relate the events of the past to the present.

While initially these two benefits appear to be clearly distinct, they broadly function in similar ways as they both seek to understand the various contexts of the past as well as to further an understanding of the effects these historical events had on the people who lived through them. It is this understanding of the various contexts of the past that helps to create a more thorough understanding of history. When both features are working within a

historical adaptation an individual text can use a historically literate approach to adaptation in order to be useful as a means of informing, critiquing, or aiding in an audience's understanding of history. Similarly, these two functions are embedded throughout all forms of historical adaptation, and an understanding of how both these features function is a key element of using historical literacy within historical adaptation. Therefore, these two benefits are consistently linked to the findings in the other chapters, albeit sometimes weighted more towards one function than the other.

Chapter Four's analysis of the historical aesthetic revealed two specific benefits that it can offer for historical adaptation generally in relation to how the historical aesthetic can be used to further an understanding of the past, and how it can be related to the present: Firstly, a text that utilises a historical aesthetic can use associative iconography to generate a re-creation of a historical period. This use of associative iconography potentially allows the audience to develop their own interpretations of a historical period, even if the text exists outside of the generally accepted historical narrative.

The historical aesthetic can then build on that understanding of associative iconography in order to create a space for the removal of narrative certainty. In so doing, the historical aesthetic can remove the issues which Bernard Cornwell identified when writing his novel *Sharpe's Waterloo*, which was set during the Battle of Waterloo (Cornwell, 1992), namely the issues concerning the audience's potential own knowledge of the battle's outcome. This has the effect of deflating the tension in the narrative. When an audience reads a text where they have their own knowledge of the actual historical events to refer back to, they can be reasonably sure of how the broad scope of the narrative will conclude. This knowledge has the effect of potentially reducing the audience's tension, thus denying

them the opportunity to understand the uncertainty which is felt by the characters in the text, and by extension the uncertainty that was felt during these historical events. The historical aesthetic removes that knowledge, potentially placing the audience into a state of narrative uncertainty, thus allowing them a greater understanding of the effects these events had on people as they lived through them. When a historical aesthetic is created, the audience's knowledge of the event is developed at the same time as that of the characters on the screen.

The second potential benefit of the historical aesthetic is that it allows for the creation of a modern perspective within the iconographic framework of history, essentially using a historically literate understanding of the various contexts of history within a new representation of the past. This has the effect of potentially allowing the audience to relate more directly to the themes within the narrative, while at the same time allowing the adaptors a greater opportunity to develop these resonances further and in more diverse ways.

In Chapter Five the analysis revealed the various ways in which the notions of authenticity and acceptability can alter the portrayal of how an event is depicted on screen, even to the extent of possibly superseding the knowledge that is drawn from historical sources. The generally accepted facts of a historical event may stay the same, only changing as new information is brought to light by historians, or existing information re-evaluated. However, the various ways in which the generally understood history is re-presented can help reveal how the interpretation of those events within popular culture changes over time. In this respect it helps to illustrate the extent to which Sanders is correct in her claim that 'the discipline of history is in truth a history of textualities, of stories told by particular tellers according to particular ideologies and contexts' (Sanders, 2006:146). Sanders' observation can even be taken further; if the 'particular ideologies and contexts' alter the understanding

of history, then a broad analysis of the various ways in which a specific historical event is depicted on screen can help to generate an understanding of the changes in the ideologies and contexts within a society over time. In this respect, Chapter Five's conclusions are heavily linked with what was revealed in Chapter Three regarding the usefulness of the concept of contemporary thematic resonance in historical adaptation.

Chapter Five also revealed that while these notions of acceptability and authenticity help to alter how a historical representation is produced, these changes are also influenced by previous interpretations, and each adaptation either supports those prior interpretations, or critiques them. This analysis revealed that a historical adaptation is informed by previous portrayals, as well as by both wider historical scholarship and shifting notions of authenticity and acceptability.

Additionally, Chapter Five revealed that if the process of historical adaptation is altered according to the wider concerns of the society in which the adaptation is produced, then when viewing historical adaptations, the relationship between the past and present constantly shifts according to these notions of authenticity and acceptability. This causes the meanings of these texts to remain fluid between adaptations, even if the raw material (the historical resources) remains consistent between them. This has the effect of altering both how the generally understood history has been interpreted by the people making the historical adaptation and how it could be understood by the audience.

In Chapter Six the analysis of the role of location in historical adaptation revealed that a specific location can have a great variety of focuses within a narrative, for example, a castle can be the centre of both action and domestically-driven narratives. The flexible purposes of these locations can be useful as a basis for helping to develop an understanding

of daily life during a specific historical period, as well as helping to further an understanding of how the events of the past can be interpreted and related to the present. This essentially helps to put the historical location into a more specific context.

A historical location can offer a sense of permanence that directly ties the viewer to the narrative of a film or television programme and helps to generate the 'feel' of history, allowing the audience to possibly begin the process of directly relating the themes of the text to the present day. In this respect historical locations in film and television are as Lefebvre deems them 'haunted' (Lefebvre, 2011:70), in that the site of a film location is haunted by the memories of the production that has since left that location. In the specific cases of historical films and television programmes these locations are doubly haunted both as the site which was filmed, and as the site of the historical events that inspired the adaptation in question.

Secondly, a specific location can be used as a means for further developing an understanding of the various social dynamics within the wider society, in this case the roles of gender and social class within the medieval castle. While on primary inspection these texts may appear to be relatively straightforward in their portrayal of social class and gender roles, the very act of placing these various sectors of society into the same space allows the people making the historical adaptation to create a historically literate interrogation into how these groups could interact. Thus, even if they are ultimately supportive of these dynamics, the very act of interrogating them allows the audience to possibly question their own understanding of how these groups interacted. In this respect these findings link strongly to what was revealed in Chapter Three, specifically the potential of historical adaptation to illuminate the past, allowing the audience to potentially help to further their understanding

of how the social structures of the time period depicted in the text operated and of the effects that they had on people who lived during the events that these texts depicted.

While the four case studies appear to focus on separate areas, there is a thread of consistency running through them. They are all primarily concerned with the various ways in which history could be understood by both the people making the historical adaptation and the audience. Consequently, all four chapters are concerned with developing an original argument in support of the benefits of approaches to historical adaptation which deliberately, and creatively, move away from fidelity. Perhaps the most significant benefits are the different approaches to historical adaptation identified in chapters four, five, and six, namely historical aesthetic, biopic, and location. Each, to various degrees, is related to the benefits of historical adaptation which were identified in Chapter Three, namely contemporary thematic resonance and the illumination of the past. These two benefits give a solid through line for studying the effectiveness of historical adaptation as they allow us to identify the historical literacy of a given text and identify the adaptors' awareness of the context of the depicted historical events. These benefits reveal the various ways in which the historical events in the adaptation can be understood, and help to inform, critique, or aid in the audience's own understanding of history and of how these historical events could be related to the present.

These findings are by no means exhaustive and indeed as the research that went into the thesis progressed, more potential areas emerged into which a more thorough consideration of the various ways in which history can be adapted into visual media can be made. That may be aspects of the *mise-en-scène* where the analysis can be developed further, for example a closer analysis of the role of costuming within historical adaptation, or it may

be entire mediums which would benefit from being considered within the framework laid out in this analysis, for example, how history has been adapted into the popular computer game series *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft, 2007-2018), a series where each game is set during a different historical time period, such as the Crusades, Ancient Egypt, or the Renaissance. These are both areas in which the application of adaptation theory could be useful in developing an understanding of how various texts adapt historical events.

Expanding this research further would also have the effect of developing some of the necessary limitations of this thesis, particularly its narrow focus on Europe during the medieval and early-modern period. There are a number of conclusions that are reached throughout this research that could potentially be applied to other areas of historical adaptation, although there would need to be greater analysis done in order to ascertain if the conclusions can be applied to historical adaptations that are set in different time periods or in locations outside Europe. For example, this thesis generally focuses on texts which depict the medieval period in Europe, thus the analysis is reflective of how some of the dominant ideas about the medieval period in 'the West' are constructed. An example of this is what John Ganim identifies as Medieval Europe's status as a 'geographic as well as a historical distinction' (Ganim, 2000:125), a distinction which ensures that:

The idea of the Middle Ages as a pure Europe (or England or France or Germany) both rests on and reacts to an uncomfortable sense of instability about origins, about what the West is and from where it came (Ganim, 2000:125).

Therefore, if there are particular contexts to the medieval period which an analysis of 'medieval-set' historical adaptations needs to consider in order to ascertain the overall effectiveness of their depictions of the past, then a consideration of the various contexts of other historical periods and locations would need to be conducted before the arguments made in this thesis can be deemed suitable to be applied to them. Similarly, there are several issues which would need to be addressed when analysing texts outside the studied periods. These issues particularly occur when considering adaptations of historical events either still existing within living memory (i.e. adaptations where there are still people alive with memories of the events depicted), or conversely, where the events are located in times or places where the primary evidence is more limited, thus necessitating further inventions on the part of those people making the historical adaptation in order to create a coherent narrative. These issues have different effects on the historical adaptation process, and would therefore benefit from being analysed further in future research.

In summation, this thesis has created an original argument regarding the benefits that occur when the understanding of historical adaptation is widened to include multiple approaches, even ones that occur at the expense of being faithful to the historical events as they are generally understood. By utilising this historically literate approach, non-traditional forms of historical adaptation can be understood and critiqued more widely, meaning that approaches which move away from fidelity can be understood within their specific contexts.

While there is a variety of ways in which historical adaptations can choose to present history, it is clear that the idea of remaining completely accurate to historical sources is not necessarily a requirement for creating a new perspective on a particular historical event, or of how said event could be related to the present. There is certainly a place for films and



television programmes which aim completely to follow historical sources, especially if accuracy to those sources is the sole focus and aim of the people creating the adaptation. However, this does not have to be the case for all historical adaptations, and it would be needlessly limiting if fidelity to historical sources was demanded of all people who are attempting to adapt historical events.

When viewing a historical adaptation, more important than the question of fidelity is the question of historical literacy. Does the adaptation reveal an awareness of how the historical events are constructed? Does it reveal an awareness of the context of the events it depicts? How can the adaptation help to critique, inform, or aid in the audience's own understanding of those events? The intention of this thesis, is to help support this critiquing of historical adaptation, thus potentially opening up new ways of developing an understanding of the validity and various benefits that non-traditional approaches offer for both the people making the historical adaptation and the audience.

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*Blade Runner* (1982) Directed by Ridley Scott [Film]. Burbank, California: Warner Brothers.

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