

UNIVERZITA KARLOVA V PRAZE – FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATU A KULTUR

The Madness of Adaptation: Analysis of Film Adaptations of Alan Bennett's
The Madness of George III and The History Boys

Početilost adaptace: rozbor filmových verzí divadelních her Alana Benneta: "The Madness of George III a The History Boys"

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):

Prof. Ondřej Pilný, PhD

Zpracoval (author):

Jaromír Moravec

Studijní obor (subject):

Anglistika a amerikanistika

Praha, December 10 2019

Declaration

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the source of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

V Praze dne

Jaromír Moravec

Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used to study purposes.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, professor Ondřej Pilný, for his guidance and insight provided to me throughout the writing of this essay. I would also like to thank my friends and family for their continuous support.

Abstract

This bachelor thesis focuses on adaptation processes present in the transfer of Alan Bennett's plays *The Madness of George III* and *The History Boys* from stage to film. The former was considered a mediocre play but its film adaptation can be found on the British Film Institute's list of the country's greatest films while the latter is a critically acclaimed play but its adaptation received mixed reviews and is generally seen as inferior to the stage version. This thesis is to determine why did the two adaptation processes bear such different results despite the same creative team being responsible for both of them. Both processes are first analysed separately, with the analysis of the changes made to *The Madness of George III* being primarily focused on separate characters and aspects of the story while the changes present in the film version of *The History Boys* are primarily examined chronologically as the play's first and second half were adapted differently for the screen. After the analysis, both processes are compared.

The analysed changes made to *The Madness of King George* contain a largely condensed and efficient opening, the King, who is cemented as an active protagonist, Capt. Greville, a minor character used by the film to highlight a theme of cold efficiency being favoured in court over empathy, the Prince, who was made far more complex and whose motivations have been altered, and the political conflict, the most condensed part of the story which was significantly simplified. In the chapter focused on *The History Boys*, the changes made to the play's first half are examined first, as they mostly consist of smaller additions which do not significantly affect the main conflict or the story's characters and mostly provide new details. The changes made to the second half are much more significant as they do affect the conflict between Hector's and Irwin's styles of teaching, create inconsistencies in characters' behaviour and, in some cases, significantly change their fate. The only part of the story which comes out of the adaptation process overall improved is the character of Rudge which is examined last. After the two separate analyses, the two adaptational processes are compared in terms of condensation of the

adapted text, with *The Madness of King George* condensing more of the adapted text but with its additions complementing the preserved parts while the added aspects of *The History Boys* create inconsistencies in combination with the preserved text, the utilisation of the visual medium to relay information and the setting, which is particularly problematic for *The History Boys* as the film's realistic setting clashes with the stylised dialogue. Both the analysis of the adaptation processes and their comparison were performed in accordance with Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* and Linda Seger's *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* and statements denoting quality of the examined plays and films are based on reviews by various critics.

Key words: adaptation, Alan Bennett, stage, film, adaptation process, *The Madness of George III*, *The History Boys*

Abstrakt

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na adaptační přenosy přítomné při převodu divadelních her Alana Bennetta *The Madness of George III* a *The History Boys* z jeviště do filmu. První jmenované dílo bylo považováno za průměrnou hru, ale jeho filmová adaptace se nachází na seznamu nejlepších filmů Britského Filmového Institutu, zatímco druhá jmenovaná hra je kriticky uznávána, ale její filmová adaptace obdržela smíšená hodnocení a je všeobecně vnímána jako slabší verze svého předchůdce. Tato práce má určit proč tyto dva adaptační procesy přinesly tak rozdílné výsledky, ačkoliv byl za oba zodpovědný stejný kreativní tým. Oba procesy jsou nejprve analyzovány samostatně, přičemž analýza změn provedených v *The Madness of George III* se primárně zaměřuje na jednotlivé postavy a aspekty příběhu, zatímco změny přítomné ve filmové verzi *The History Boys* jsou primárně zkoumány chronologicky, protože první a druhá polovina hry byly pro film adaptovány rozdílně. Po analýze jsou oba adaptační procesy porovnány.

Analyzované změny přítomné v *The Madness of King George* obsahují značně kondenzovaný a efektivní začátek, krále, který byl upevněn jako aktivní protagonista, kapitána Grevilla, vedlejší postavu použitou ke zvýraznění dvorní preference chladné výkonosti před empatií, prince, který byl učiněn komplexnějším a jehož motivace byla pozměněna, a politický konflikt, nejkondenzovanější část příběhu, která byla též značně zjednodušena. V kapitole zaměřené na *The History Boys* jsou první zkoumány změny provedené v první polovině hry, protože jde převážně o malé dodatky, které neovlivňují výrazně ústřední konflikt nebo postavy příběhu a především dodávají nové detaily. Změny provedené v druhé polovině jsou mnohem výraznější, protože ovlivňují konflikt mezi Hectorovým a Irwinovým stylem učení, vytvářejí nesrovnalosti v chování postav a v některých případech též výrazně ovlivňují jejich osudy. Jediná část příběhu, která vychází z adaptace celkově zdokonalená, je Rudge, který je analyzován jako poslední. Po obou samostatných analýzách jsou oba adaptační procesy porovnány v kritériích

kondenzace textu, přičemž *The Madness of King George* kondenzuje větší část adaptovaného textu, ale filmem nově přidané aspekty efektivně doplňují ty zachované části, zatímco nově přidané aspekty *The History Boys* vytvářejí v kombinaci se zachovaným textem nesrovnalosti, využití vizuálního média k přenosu informací, a prostředí, do kterého je děj zasazen, které obzvláště vytváří problémy pro *The History Boys*, jehož realistické prostředí koliduje se stylizovaným dialogem. Analýza obou adaptačních procesů i jejich porovnání byly provedeny v souladu s *A Theory of Adaptation* od Lindy Hutcheon a *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film* od Lindy Seger a vyjádření o kvalitě zkoumaných her a filmů jsou založena na hodnocení mnohých kritiků.

Klíčová slova: adaptace, Alan Bennett, divadelní hra, film, adaptační proces, *The Madness of George III*, *The History Boys*

Table of Contents

Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Declaration | i |
| Permission | ii |
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Abstrakt | vi |
| Table of Contents | viii |
| 1. Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 The Aim of the Thesis | 1 |
| 2. Methodology of the Thesis | 3 |
| 2. The Madness of George III: From Play to a One Man Show | 4 |
| 2.1 Enter the Court | 4 |
| 2.2 The Mad King | 5 |
| 2.3 The Naive Newcomer | 8 |
| 2.4 The Fat Prince | 9 |
| 2.5 The Screeching Halt of Politics | 12 |
| 2.6 The Curious Case of Mr. Fox | 15 |
| 3. The History Boys: From Play to a Highlight Reel | 17 |
| 3.1 “Blue Monday” and the Presumption of Innocence | 17 |
| 3.2 The Added Lessons | 19 |
| 3.3 A Sentimental Trip | 22 |
| 3.4 Hitler, a Much-Misunderstood Man | 24 |
| 3.5 Scripps’ Religious Crisis | 26 |
| 3.6 The Funeral | 29 |
| 3.7 The Other Boys | 32 |
| 3.8 One Oddity, Rudge | 35 |
| 4. Comparison of the Two Adaptation Processes | 38 |
| 4.1 Reduction of the Original Text | 38 |
| 4.2 Show, Don’t Tell | 40 |
| 4.3 Setting | 42 |
| 5. Conclusion | 44 |
| Bibliography | 47 |

1. Introduction

1.1 The Aim of the Thesis

In 1994, Allan Bennett and Nicholas Hytner adapted *The Madness of George III* for the big screen as a screenwriter and a director, respectively. Despite the play not being “one of Bennett’s major works,”¹ as Frank Rich claimed in his review for *The New York Times*, and the play losing quality each time the King isn’t on stage according to Markland Taylor’s review in *Variety*,² the result was the award-winning *The Madness of King George*, which the British Film Institute proclaimed one of the greatest British films of the 20th century.³ Then, in 2006, came the time to adapt Bennett’s play *The History Boys*, which has earned the Olivier Award for Best New Play in 2005 and a Tony Award for Best Play during its run on Broadway, and despite Bennett once again writing the script and Hytner directing, the film bearing the title of the play came out to mixed reviews with some critics praising it, but still admitting “some of its resonance has been lost in adaptation.”⁴ One might start to wonder whose fault it is that the adaptation of *The History Boys* wasn’t as big a success as the adaptation of the weaker play in comparison when both were products of largely the same creative team, but this thesis is not to be an investigation of that case. It is rather to be an examination of the adaptation processes of both plays into movies which is intended to manifest how *The Madness of King George* managed to overshadow its own staged predecessor and how the film version of *The History Boys* supposedly lost the original text’s quality. Some

¹ Frank Rich, “Review/Theater: The Madness of George III; Creating a Lovable George III,” *Nytimes.com*, The New York Times, 17th Sept. 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/17/theater/review-theater-the-madness-of-george-iii-creating-a-lovable-george-iii.html>, 14 Mar 2019.

²Markland Taylor, “The Madness of George III,” *Variety.com*, *Variety*, 27th Sept. 1993 <https://variety.com/1993/film/reviews/the-madness-of-george-iii-2-1200433161/>, 5 Apr 2019.

³ “Best 100 British films,” *BBC.co.uk*, BBC News, 23rd Sept. 1999, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/455170.stm>, 14 Mar 2019.

⁴ Peter Travers, “The History Boys,” *RollingStone.com*, *Rolling Stone*, 13th Nov. 2006, <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/the-history-boys-255773/>, 14 Mar 2019.

suggestions as to why it is that way can be inferred from the contemporary reviews of the plays and the films.

In the case of the earlier pair, the reviews of both the play and the film primarily focus on the character of George III and on the performance of Nigel Hawthorne playing him, but while discussing the play's King, he is seen as a saving grace of an otherwise unremarkable play, with Gerald Weales even proclaiming the stage production two plays in one⁵ as he views the King's illness and the crisis of the government almost as two completely separate plots, each with its individual tone. The film's King is then in contrast discussed as a highpoint of a panoramic view of English society at the time of the King's illness.⁶ The reviews of the stage version of *The History Boys* tend to be focused primarily on themes of the play, while the reviews of the film version, even the positive ones discuss it in a way as if the themes themselves have been partially lost in the adaptation process and the film gets called "a variety show" or as "a useful record of a great night out at the theatre; but not a great film."⁷ Yet, this thesis is to prove that the two processes of adaptation, despite bearing so vastly different results, were quite similar, with the one main difference being that while adapting *The Madness of George III* the focus seems to have been placed on continuously supporting and highlighting the main strengths of the somewhat inferior original in opposition to the adaptation of *The History Boys* when the film manifests tendencies, not necessarily intentional ones, to change only certain details of the successful original which, however, makes the film

⁵ Gerald Weales, "The Madness of George III," *Commonweal* 120.19 (1993): 20, EBSCO <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgc1.14553660&site=eds-live&scope=site&lang=cs>, 14 Mar 2019.

⁶ Richard Alleva, "The Madness of King George," *Commonweal* 122.5 (1995): 15, EBSCO <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgc1.16646035&site=eds-live&scope=site&lang=cs>, 14 Mar 2019.

⁷ Robert Hanks, "The History Boys," *Independent.co.uk*, Independent, 13th Oct 2006, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/the-history-boys-15-419764.html>, 14 Mar 2019.

inconsistent in the process. Concurrently, it is to prove that the two similar adaptational processes didn't bear similar results because of the differences between the two plays.

2. Methodology of the Thesis

Before any comparisons can be drawn between the two adaptation processes, an individual analysis of both will be required. The analysis will be a combination of two approaches, one focused on characters and themes separately and diachronically and the other focused on instances where change impacts multiple aspects of the story synchronically. The first approach will be the dominant one for *The Madness of King George* as it is a play involving many themes and characters developing independently on each other and the film keeps this structure mostly intact, while the second approach will be the more frequently used one for *The History Boys* since the adapted version has a tendency of inserting scenes or longer sequences into the original text, thus influencing the development of multiple characters and themes at once. Since the analysis is based on value judgments of alterations performed during adaptation, those value judgments have to be based on generally accepted adaptation theory, so as to avoid subjectivity. Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation*, a work of general adaptational theory between any two media, and Linda Seger's *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, a guide focusing specifically on film adaptations, are used as reference points for that purpose.

2. *The Madness of George III: From Play to a One Man Show*

2.1 Enter the Court

According to Seger, expansion or, as is the case with plays, condensation is usually a necessary part of an adaptation process, as it is very rare for the adapted text to be of equal length to its adaptation.⁸ At the same time, the main difference between the two media is that while theatre is dialogue-based, film is image-based.⁹ In regards to these facts, the opening of *The Madness of King George* is a prime example of, simultaneously, a successful condensation of dialogue to only the necessary lines and an expansion of information conveyed by the combination of spoken word and imagery. The play has the court enter the stage by the stairs and essentially starts the opening scene with the assassination attempt by Margaret Nicholson. The film instead inserts the opening credits ahead of this incident and has the viewer enter the functioning court, thus letting the viewer see certain characters in everyday life and not having to explain everybody's character and opinions afterwards as the play does. To fully determine how effective this technique is, it's necessary to compare how much does the viewer learn from each opening, respectively.

After the opening scene of the play¹⁰, the audience has been shown the King acting with dignity and mercy after the assassination as well as his loving relationship with his wife, his knowledge of his land and his disapproval of his son's lifestyle. Furthermore, the roles of Pitt and Fox as political rivals and their stances have been established. The film shows all of this as well, despite cutting out a portion of the opening's text. By the end of the film's opening sequence,¹¹

⁸ Linda Seger, *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, (New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 1992) 2.

⁹ Seger 39.

¹⁰ Alan Bennett, *The Madness of George III*, (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1995) 1-4.

¹¹ *The Madness of King George*, Dir. Nicholas Hytner, The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1994, 00:00:00 – 00:08:32

the viewer is in addition made familiar with Capt. Greville and his being a newcomer to the court, Capt. Fitzroy and his cold efficiency, Lady Pembroke and her role in the court, and the “foul-tongued”¹² Lord Chancellor Thurlow. The King is also ascribed the qualities of a loving father, but more importantly he is shown to be more of a representative figure in the parliament as well as being keen on presentation even in unusual circumstances, as shown by him scolding Greville after the assassination attempt, thus introducing the theme of model family much sooner than the play does. The film's opening, therefore, has to be considered a successful and very efficient execution of the adapter's usual task of subtraction.¹³

2.2 The Mad King

As mentioned in the introduction, Nigel Hawthorne's performance in the role of King George III was the most praised aspect of the play in its reviews and the change of medium enhances his performance by relieving him of the spatial constraints of the stage. The film includes six chase scenes¹⁴ during the King's illness which would range from difficult to stage to impossible to stage, at least on the same scale. Most of these scenes are simple enhancements of the original, as can be seen when the King wakes early in Windsor¹⁵ and the scene features the same plot points in both versions, i.e. the King feeling burning, forgetting names, kissing lady Pembroke and his urine being blue, but the film also inserts the King running out of the castle, staging a group prayer and running back again while leading a sort of a Don Quixotian charge of his pages. There are instances, however, when the original text must be adjusted in order to allow the King his extraordinariness as is the case with his transfer to Kew.¹⁶

¹² *The Madness of George III* xvii

¹³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013) 19

¹⁴ *The Madness of King George* 00:20:08 – 00:20:45; 00:26:55 – 00:29:55; 00:36:57 – 00:37:21; 00:38:33 – 00:39:27; 00:59:51 – 01:00:30; 01:05:26 -01:06:20.

¹⁵ *The Madness of George III* 15-19; and *The Madness of King George* 00:25:04 – 00:31:06.

¹⁶ *The Madness of George III* 50-51 and 54-55; and *The Madness of King George* 01:05:00 – 01:08:20

Despite the play's King being restrained in his waistcoat during his transfer to Kew and still verbally rebellious, it is still a peaceful scene compared to the film's George III fighting against the transfer and having to be apprehended by force. The progression of the King's reconvalescence is secondary to the King's antics, which in fact appears to be the main characteristic of the film's version of the play's Part 2.

The play's King spends a large portion of the play's second half constrained and has the subtleties of his recuperation explained in his doctor's dialogue throughout Part 2, as is the case in this instance from the final stages of the King's illness:

WILLIS: The nonsense that you talk is no longer helpless nonsense.
Your improprieties are deliberate, sir, intentional. You enjoy them.
They are uttered knowing you have the license of a disturbed mind.¹⁷

Film, being a visual medium, replaces these instances with visual indicators of the King's healing. The first hint of progress is provided for the audience in a brief inserted scene of the King eating his soup with increasing calm, which is later followed by the King letting himself to be constrained in the chair upon realizing his misbehaviour and lastly the King is shown cheerfully sliding down the railing with his pages.¹⁸ The clear positive of these scenes is the possibility provided to Hawthorne to primarily express the King's progress with his emotions instead of having the character of Willis talk about them as he does in the play. On the other hand, the King's recuperation is somewhat rushed by using this technique. The disease's severity might have been lessened simply because at this stage of the story it didn't provide enough chances for the King to behave in an outlandish manner and would transfer the focus from him onto his doctors. Yet somehow, despite the madness being the focal point of both the film and the play, simplifying the process of healing, thus inadvertently taking away some of its severity, in the second half doesn't hinder the film.

¹⁷ *The Madness of George III* 63.

¹⁸ *The Madness of King George* 01:07:15 – 01:09:36; 01:13:14 – 01:15:05; 01:22:14 – 01:23:05.

There is a difference between the role of the King in the play and his role in its adaptation. In the film, he is clearly the protagonist, but in the play, he is just one of its important characters, especially in Part 2. In the second half of the play's story, prime minister Pitt is struggling to maintain a majority in the House of Commons, the Prince of Wales is trying to become regent and Willis is trying to heal the King, while the King is mostly inactive and simply being healed. In other words, the King is passive for almost half of the play, which is something Seger warns strongly against¹⁹ and advises writers to make their protagonists, and all other potentially likeable characters for that matter, "more active. Or add more conflict. Or bring out the emotions more."²⁰ That is precisely what the filmmakers have done, creating a remarkably strong character, who wills himself to health with the guidance of Willis instead of simply being healed by him. This difference manifests itself most prominently when the King learns about the Bill of Regency and has a fit. In the play the fit simply passes,²¹ while in the film the King calms himself down.²² In fact, the film's version of the King resolves all of the film's conflicts. If one adheres to Weales' vision of the original text as two plays in one, then one plot culminates with Willis healing the King before Mr. Pitt loses the majority and in the other Mr. Pitt triumphs by keeping that majority for long enough to allow Willis to heal the King and prevents the establishment of regency. As discussed, the King to a large extent takes control of his recuperation in the film, but he also ends Pitt's troubles in the House of Commons. The film's prime minister loses the regency vote by three votes, while his counterpart from the play kept it by ten in the story's second and final vote. At that point, Pitt has been beaten by Fox and the Prince and the only person who can save the government is the King. And the film also allows him to save the government personally as he arrives at the parliament

¹⁹ Seger 121.

²⁰ Seger 134.

²¹ *The Madness of George III* 66-67.

²² *The Madness of King George* 01:24:30 – 01:25:35.

instead of having his convalescence announced by Thurlow as it happens in the stage version. The film's King is the centre of the story and everybody else's fate depends on him and his actions. As he says, he is the verb. He is not the object.²³

2.3 The Naive Newcomer

The King's rise to prominence doesn't diminish everyone's role in the story as Capt. Greville, a largely inconsequential character in the adapted text, also has his presence expanded. In fact, the audience is encouraged to sympathise with him from the very beginning as they're let into the court with him and see the court for the first time through his eyes.²⁴ However, the case of his character's expansion differs from the King's as the primary focus of it is not the character itself as it is instead intended to increase the presence of the theme of emotionless efficiency being rewarded by the court, which is present throughout the play through Capt. Fitzroy's behaviour but is always backgrounded until the story's culmination. In the film version, it is present from the opening sequence as Greville's intervention in the assassination attempt earns him only scolding by the King for being dishevelled.²⁵ The theme is not only present earlier, but it is also featured more prominently, leading to Greville attaining a subplot, which he considers romantic.

On the surface level changing the fate of an inconsequential secondary character and giving him a subplot might appear as a waste of the film's running time. In this case, however, it is rather an example of assigning the story to a theme as, in the play, the importance of keeping up appearances is discussed throughout by various characters but when it comes to the servants, Fitzroy's final speech is the only discussion of it.²⁶ According to Seger, adapting

²³ *The Madness of George III* 50.

²⁴ *The Madness of King George* 00:01:00.

²⁵ *The Madness of King George* 00:07:26.

²⁶ *The Madness of George III* 80.

themes in the form of discussion is risking making the film stale²⁷ while Hutcheon goes even further, claiming themes must support a story in a film or a TV adaptation.²⁸ Thus, the adapters manufactured a story for the theme to support and they have also made it more impactful. Since the audience would have been induced to sympathise with the kind Greville, his being released for his kindness and then learning, that his love interest Lady Pembroke only feigned her affection for him because “it was what was required,”²⁹ is far more likely to affect the viewer than releasing only the pages, who do at times behave disrespectfully, and rewarding Fitzroy. In other words, Greville’s storyline and seeming importance are manufactured in order to draw an emotional response from the film’s audience and, in that way, emphasize the theme of emotions being a weakness at the court. Greville is promoted from an insignificant equerry to a tragic hero whose strongest quality causes his downfall.

2.4 The Fat Prince

While the previously examined adaptations of the play’s characters had a clear direction, the heir to the throne becomes somewhat inconsistent in the process of adaptation. The fact that the film’s Prince George is neither an expansion nor a condensation of his stage predecessor, but rather a fundamentally different character, manifests itself in the casting choice alone. In the play’s text, the Prince’s defining character trait is him being fat and the early stage productions adhered to it, but the film’s casting of Rupert Everett undermines that aspect of the character. He is still talked about as fat and the film even adds his own admission of it,³⁰ but the image does not correspond with the text’s description of the caricature of a man which is “always getting fatter.”³¹ This on its own paints a more complex picture of the Prince

²⁷ Seger 138.

²⁸ Hutcheon 11.

²⁹ *The Madness of King George* 01:41:00

³⁰ *The Madness of King George* 00:09:16.

³¹ *The Madness of King George* 00:03:58.

than the play does as there is a possibility of a new interpretation, that of the King being far stricter towards his son, perhaps even overly so. This is the first sign of the Prince potentially becoming a more sympathetic character during the adaptation. However, the lack of fat is certainly not the main asset of this transformation.

The Prince is married in the play and it is an important plot point in the political conflict, but his wife is not a character in the stage version. The adaptation changed the way this marriage is hidden, allowing the two appearing in public together as the court considers her only to be the Prince's lover, which made it possible to develop her character and she was assigned a completely sympathetic one. This also changes the Prince's demeanour drastically as he no longer cares just about himself and isn't motivated only by the desire to rule as he also aims to legitimise his marriage, which is shown most openly when he reads the Bill of Regency for the first time and his only complaint is his wife not being mentioned.³² The fate of that marriage is also changed as the King forces his son to banish his wife, making her somewhat of a female counterpart to Greville, a kind character being banished without any wrongdoing while a character unkind to the King (Fitzroy and the Prince, respectively) are rewarded (promotion for Fitzroy and a reintegration into the model family for the Prince). This side of the Prince would allow for an interpretation of a man acting ambitiously in the crisis caused by his father's illness out of love for his wife, but that interpretation has one glaring flaw and that is that the adaptation has only added this part of his personality to that of his stage version instead of replacing it. In fact, in some instances, his original character is enhanced to be even more of a villain than the play presents.

It is fair to claim that the stage version of the Prince doesn't hide his animosity for his father, but he certainly does not relish in it as much as his film counterpart. On the stage, he might

³² *The Madness of King George* 01:20:40.

be an unredeemable villain, but he never goes as far as delivering his lines in the concert scene while laughing in his ill father's face as the film version does.³³ The stage version also remains motivated primarily by ambitions, but that would hardly explain a scene added for the film version, in which the Prince and a room of his associates laugh at his mother's suffering.³⁴ It is as if the filmmakers wrote two versions of a character and then decided to join them together in one contradicting whole, with George now simultaneously being more loving towards his wife while also being more vile and heartless towards his parents. There is a possible explanation in his character analysis with George being loving towards his wife mostly in private while keeping up a foppish visage in public, thus enraging his parents which have been highly critical of him his entire life, arguably excessively so. Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the Prince's character, it is more important to examine how does this newly manufactured contradictory character integrate into the film's court.

While certain parts of the story have been simplified during the adaptation process (the King's illness and the government's crisis), others have been made more realistic and complex (the King's doctors becoming more serious with only Pepys remaining obsessed with the King's stool). Perhaps surprisingly, answer to the question why does the character of the Prince find himself somewhere between these two tendencies can be found in Alan Bennett's foreword to the play. In it he mentions that in earlier drafts of the play the Prince of Wales "was originally a more genial character" than in the produced version of the play and the reason for that was that "the play works only if the antipathy between father and son, never far below the surface with all the Hanoverian kings, is sharpened and the Prince made less sympathetic."³⁵ Upon further examination, one realizes that in the film version, the filmmakers, including Bennett as a screenwriter, managed to portray the Prince in a way

³³ *The Madness of King George* 00:36:11.

³⁴ *The Madness of King George* 00:42:59.

³⁵ *The Madness of George III* xi.

which allowed him to be sympathetic while also remaining the villain the play needed. The sympathy for him is garnered elsewhere thanks to the addition of his wife as a character, while his behaviour towards his parents simultaneously becomes more nefarious to ensure his viability as the antagonist of the story. The addition of his wife also allows for the evil-doer to be punished as he is forced to banish her while his sympathetic side allows for his reintegration into the model family, which with the play's "too campy"³⁶ version only seemed as the antagonist going into hiding rather than character development. While the play used a comical caricature, the film developed a more memorable and far more complex character, whose eventual and inevitable succession, of which the viewers are informed in the end credits, doesn't appear as a villain's triumph.

2.5 The Screeching Halt of Politics

In his foreword, Alan Bennett recollects the biggest trouble with the play being how to disperse the necessary information about 18th-century politics into the dialogue without it being characters telling each other things they would clearly already know.³⁷ He doesn't disclose whether he thought he succeeded, but the reviews decisively claimed the opposite. When Frank Rich reviewed the play for the *New York Times*, he summarised the political side of the plot and specifically the Whigs' and the Prince's attempt at insurrection as "mechanically established, then laboriously wrapped up, adding little but running time and scholarly bustle,"³⁸ while Michael Billington called it "a dramatised history lesson" in *The Guardian*.³⁹ Since Bennett wasn't able to integrate all the necessary information seamlessly into the play's

³⁶ Taylor, <https://variety.com/1993/film/reviews/the-madness-of-george-iii-2-1200433161/>, 5 Apr 2019.

³⁷ *The Madness of George III* xiii.

³⁸ Rich, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/17/theater/review-theater-the-madness-of-george-iii-creating-a-lovable-george-iii.html>, 9 Apr 2019.

³⁹ Michael Billington, "The Madness of George III – review," *TheGuardian.com*, *The Guardian*, 31st Aug 2011 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/aug/31/madness-george-theatre-bath-review>, 5 Apr 2019.

dialogue, then there appears to be a severe risk of the political exposition becoming even more of a glaring flaw in the film version as it would necessarily include a lower amount of dialogue. The filmmakers seemingly solved this problem, by lowering the number of political scenes and thus transforming one half of the "two plays in one"⁴⁰ into a subplot and by making the politics serve the primary plot. As politics becomes the main focus in Part 2 of the play, the scenes from it are still crucial for the adaptation, albeit changed. However, how the political scenes of Part 1 were treated in the film cannot be overlooked as those provide the understanding of the political environment of 18th-century Britain that is necessary for Part 2.

The politics of Part 1 is still largely stable with the crisis starting later, but in the film version, the politicians rarely speak about anything else than the illness itself. Gone are the Tories discussing stock or the subplot of Sir Boothby Skrymshir looking for a position for his nephew Ramsden. The scenes originally dedicated to politics now primarily serve to enhance either the King or the Prince, depending on which side is involved in the scene. The most noticeable example of this is the King's meeting with the government before the concert, the film's concert being organised by the prince out of cruelty. On the stage, Pitt and his associates are trying to convince the King to sign a warrant only for him to angrily storm off, upon which Pitt admits the necessity for a public event to show his subjects that the King isn't incapacitated by illness,⁴¹ but in the film, this audience takes place right before the concert and the King is angered by being advised against attending said concert and his anger is used as fuel for his eccentricities during it.⁴² Meanwhile, the politically crucial warrant is not mentioned in the film. Leaving the complexities of 18th-century politics out of Part 1 like this would presumably create a problem in adapting Part 2 and yet that is also avoided by continued simplification.

⁴⁰ Weales, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgc1.14553660&site=eds-live&scope=site&lang=cs>, 9 Apr 2019.

⁴¹ *The Madness of George III* 20-24.

⁴² *The Madness of King George* 00:32:28 – 00:37:26.

Bennett himself notes in his foreword that he had to make the political crisis more threatening and for that reason he allowed Pitt's government to only maintain a majority of ten, while in reality, the prime minister was never so close to losing.⁴³ As mentioned in the section about the King, in the film, the government does lose its majority and thus its fate is in the hands of the King. This simplification of politics aims in a completely different direction to the play's efforts to show how politics even on the lowest level are paralysed by the King's illness, as exemplified by the aforementioned Ramsden's subplot. The film makes its viewer more concerned for the King's future rather than for the future of his country and that could be considered a failure in adapting the play's political story. However, by making Pitt incapable of stopping or even slowing down the crisis, stating that the only reason he hasn't lost majority is thanks to the flow of patronage from the King downwards in hierarchy⁴⁴ and making the fate of his government depending on the monarch, as well as making his politicians deal with only the monarch's illness and family situation instead of treaties or appointments, the film accomplishes Bennett's main goal for his depiction of the English politics of the 18th century and that is to show that the King is the centre of his country.⁴⁵ In other words, by leaving out parts of a subplot the filmmakers achieved a goal the author didn't achieve in the original text according to those reviewing the stage production. Seger claims that the main plot of a film has to be constantly evolving⁴⁶ and the political plot under discussion is quite stationary, even more in the original than in the film adaptation, and stationary storylines should be subject to simplification, especially "if you have a storyline that takes a great deal of explanation, or a number of characters to communicate the story,"⁴⁷ which is certainly the case with this particular storyline.

⁴³ *The Madness of George III* xi.

⁴⁴ *The Madness of King George* 00:51:13.

⁴⁵ *The Madness of George III* xii.

⁴⁶ Seger 104.

⁴⁷ Seger 107.

2.6 The Curious Case of Mr. Fox

There is one anomaly among the characters of the film adaptation and that is Mr. Fox, a character belonging to the simplified political story whose role is enhanced. His position is curious because of his inherent importance as the leader of the opposition, but at the same time, he doesn't affect the story in any significant way which creates a problem for the adaptation. In his foreword, Bennett acknowledges that in fact the entire opposition was very limited in its possibilities and so he at least attempted to make Fox a sympathetic character as the real Fox was known to be, but even those attempts were stifled in order to prevent him from becoming the protagonist over the ill King.⁴⁸ That leads to Fox's scenes becoming primarily expository, which potentially diminishes Fox's importance in the film, as most of the political exposition was left out of it. The way the filmmakers have solved this problem is by making Fox a combination of characters representing the entire opposition.

The film's Fox, therefore, entails three characters from the play; Fox, Burke (who is cut completely from the film) and mainly Sheridan, who can arguably be proclaimed the most active member of the opposition. The play assigns Sheridan the role of the orator of the opposition in the House of Commons as his real-life counterpart was well known for his speeches which are to this day being studied and their collections printed. In the film, Fox takes this position from Sheridan, thus allowing him to match wit with Pitt's and thus making their political rivalry more explicit on the screen. Also, when the film's Prince deals with the opposition it is always directly with Fox, which is not the case in the play as the play's Fox leaves for Bath upon being frustrated by his position and returns only when sent for by Sheridan, who is allowed to keep only one contribution to the story and that

⁴⁸ *The Madness of George III* xvi.

is the introduction of the prospect of regency. It is usual for film adaptations to combine characters from their originals if those characters share a function⁴⁹ and yet the effect this specific combination achieves makes it more than just a standard procedure. The film's Fox doesn't just become a representation of the opposition, more importantly, he becomes active as he now actuates and regulates the Prince's actions while also actively competing with Pitt for the majority, a competition which he wins. The play's opposition consists of three characters, each has their contributions which are all minor on their own, but by combining them in Fox, one strong leader and a major character is created. In the film, while the political plot might have been backgrounded, it was simplified into a competition between two strong characters, the "cold, distant and calculating"⁵⁰ Pitt and the newly assembled Fox.

⁴⁹ Seger 127.

⁵⁰ *The Madness of George III* xv.

3. *The History Boys: From Play to a Highlight Reel*

3.1 “Blue Monday” and the Presumption of Innocence

Unlike *The Madness of George III*, the opening of *The History Boys* does not introduce the characters of the play or the play’s setting. Instead, it introduces the play’s theme as the play begins many years after its main story culminated with Irwin, already in the wheelchair and in politics, explaining to MPs how to spin their proposal, which would significantly abolish the presumption of innocence so that the general public would view it as a positive.⁵¹ This is an example of Irwin’s journalistic style of argumentation, which he teaches his pupils during the play, being used immorally in somewhat extreme conditions, especially when compared to its primary and largely harmless use in the play as a tool for passing exams. This beginning alone might sway the audience to oppose Irwin’s technique, which is also the technique Bennett used to pass both his entrance exams and his final exams as he admits in the play’s introduction,⁵² and this tendency to shun it might increase when it is later compared to Hector’s rather light-hearted style of education which isn’t result-driven and is supposed to make his pupils more rounded people, as the character of Timms puts it.⁵³ The play’s audience might have only got familiar with one character, although out of context and out of his role in the play’s main plot, but they have been introduced to the play’s overarching themes of twisting logic to fit one’s propositions. The film replaces this opening with one quite opposite to it, which introduces the characters and the setting rather than a theme: it opens with the boys going to school to find out the results of their A-levels.⁵⁴ During this opening, the information given about the characters ranges from superfluous to inconsequential. The reason why a large portion

⁵¹ Alan Bennett, *The History Boys*, (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2004) 3.

⁵² *The History Boys* xix-xx.

⁵³ *The History Boys* 38.

⁵⁴ *The History Boys*, prod. BBC Two Films, dir. Nicholas Hytner, 2006, 00:00:00 – 00:04:49.

of the information can be considered superfluous is that it gets repeated in other scenes which were adapted from the play. The audience is reminded repeatedly of Scripps' being religious, Hector's love of literature and frequent use of quotes or the Headmaster's fixation on representability and therefore the inclusion of these character traits in the opening isn't necessary and only results in redundant repetition. There is one added character trait in Lockwood's working as a milkman which the Headmaster considers unsuitable for an Oxbridge candidate. This unsuitability could've been used to give Lockwood, a rather unremarkable character in the play, a unique identity, but the film uses it only as a set-up for the boys to provoke the Headmaster by claiming to have even more unsuitable jobs. Were the filmmakers to leave out the entire opening, no information or necessary exposition would have been lost, thus rendering the first five minutes of the runtime largely pointless. There is one aspect of the opening, however, which does establish the tone of the film and also captures the tone of the original play and that is the music used in it.

The use of New Order's "Blue Monday" in the opening has two functions. It helps with establishing the film's setting as it was released in 1983, the same year the film's story takes place while the play was ostensibly set in the '80s. However, at the same time as the song plays, the sign "Yorkshire, 1983" appears on the screen, so it is not the song's purpose to establish the time period. The song's more important function is establishing the film's tone. *NME* describes "Blue Monday" as a synth-pop single which even the gloomiest overcoat-sporting rockist can dance to.⁵⁵⁵⁶ That, combined with the title coming from supposedly the most depressing day of the year and some of its lyrics⁵⁷ expressing precisely Posner's

⁵⁵ Matthew Horton, "How New Order's 'Blue Monday' Changed Music Forever," *NME.com*, NME, 30 Jul 2018 <https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/how-blue-monday-changed-music-forever-771764> 21 Apr 2019.

⁵⁶ Besides "Blue Monday," the film's soundtrack consists of songs from between the 1920s and 1940s, which are a part of Hector's classes, and of English rock songs by bands such as The Smiths and The Clash, all released in 1982 or 1983 with the only exception being The Cure's "A Forest" from 1980, and these songs accompany the film's montages.

⁵⁷ Bernard Sumner, et al., "Blue Monday," 1983.

relationship with Dakin and being repeatedly told his homosexuality is just a phase, makes “Blue Monday” an excellent choice to set the story’s tone as being mostly a light-hearted story of eight young men trying to get into Oxford or Cambridge with plenty of humorous scenes while still having those depressing undertones which occasionally come to the foreground. Yet, a fitting choice of music is not enough to redeem the film’s opening from being filler at best and a waste of runtime at worst, as it in no way contributes to the film’s plot or its characters.

3.2 The Added Lessons

The adapted version of the play’s Part 1 includes a number of added scenes. Apart from the previously discussed opening, these scenes include Mrs. Lintott’s opening lesson,⁵⁸ a short joke about Anne of Cleves,⁵⁹ PE,⁶⁰ a scene in the full teacher’s lounge, immediately followed by an Art history lesson,⁶¹ and a field trip,⁶² which can be seen as an alternative for the opening of the play’s Part 2 where Irwin is a TV presenter of a history programme at the Rievaulx Abbey.⁶³ However, none of these additions provides any new information to the viewer and they also don’t move the plot forward. The reason why these scenes were added rather appears to be the reduction of the play’s dialogue. A good example of how this reduction is executed is the scene in which Irwin and the boys discuss World War I⁶⁴ and the film, in a rather Irwinesque style, leaves out a large portion of the factual side of that debate. In fact, in instances such as this one, the boys’ education gets rather reduced to gobblets from the play, as Irwin would call them. The reduction itself is as previously discussed inevitable and doesn’t

⁵⁸ *The History Boys* 00:05:49 – 00:06:21.

⁵⁹ *The History Boys* 00:18:55 – 00:19:14.

⁶⁰ *The History Boys* 00:19:14 – 00:20:58.

⁶¹ *The History Boys* 00:39:55 – 00:42:13.

⁶² *The History Boys* 00:47:07 – 00:50:32.

⁶³ *The History Boys* 58-63.

⁶⁴ *The History Boys* 00:24:27 – 00:29:52.

create any ruptures in dialogue or the plot and therefore can be only commended. The question is, however, whether the same can be said about the additions themselves.

The additions prime for analysis are the additions to the timetable, PE and Art history, as their purpose and contribution can be to a certain extent compared to other classes included. PE takes place first and its teacher Mr. Wilkes has certainly a much bigger presence in the film than Art history's Mrs. Bibby and therefore should be started with. Wilkes as a character can be summarized as an almost overzealously religious disciplinarian overshadowed in intellect by the pupils. His class, being part of the Headmaster's agenda to produce more rounded men, is utterly pointless for the Oxbridge candidates in the story and the same can be said about it in terms of contribution to the film, as it only adds physical comedy with Timms' fall.⁶⁵ The same, however, cannot be said about the locker room scene which precedes it. That is where one might argue Mr. Wilkes contributes effectively to the story and its characters.

The locker room scene⁶⁶ does, unlike the class itself, provide new information to the viewer. It is the first instance in which Posner's being Jewish and Akhtar's being Moslem is mentioned, but these can hardly be considered the exclusive contributions of this scene as both of these points get reiterated during the film's proceedings and the viewer would acquire the information elsewhere if this scene was cut out. A function unique to Wilkes is the provision of contrast for Scripps, the other character in the story who possesses Christian faith as a defining character trait. As previously mentioned, Wilkes is overzealous in his belief as he even considers his job a service to God as he takes care of the bodies God has loaned to the boys' souls. Scripps, on the other hand, thinks more critically about his own belief and this contrast is apparent when Timms gives Wilkes a note excusing him from PE. When Wilkes says "I don't do notes. Get changed. God doesn't do notes either. Did Jesus say 'Can I be excused the crucifixion?' No,"

⁶⁵ *The History Boys* 00:20:12.

⁶⁶ *The History Boys* 00:19:14 – 00:19:58.

it is Scripps who interferes by saying “Actually, sir, I think he did.” Thus, he shows that while Wilkes simply believes in the image of flawless God and Jesus without having a detailed knowledge of the biblical story, Scripps is more introspective about his belief while he is simultaneously also more educated in matters of religion. Wilkes’ presence in the film is certainly small when compared to the more important teachers from the original text, but more importantly, it is difficult to evaluate his contribution as it is so small. He doesn’t have any negative effects on the story, but he also offers very little positive. In a way, he somewhat does exactly what the Headmaster wanted in the story and makes at least Scripps more rounded. And he also isn’t the only member of the staff with such a minor contribution.

As a character, Mrs. Bibby is similar to Mrs. Lintott by being the unappreciated ‘icing on the cake’ and she herself isn’t an integral character to her own class. When it comes to her class, it doesn’t provide any new crucial information about the characters nor does it move the story forward, but it reinforces certain themes, as was the case with Wilkes’ PE. First, homosexuality, which is ever-present in the story, is addressed by a heterosexual character as Timms proclaims that Michelangelo and Caravaggio were “nancies” because their works “aren’t women. They’re just men with tits. And the tits look as if they were put on with an ice cream scoop.”⁶⁷ Then the effect Irwin’s teachings are having on the boys are shown in Lockwood’s attitude to art. He proclaims that art may be supposed to be enjoyed long-term, but presently they don’t have time for it and acting lessons would be more useful, thus angering Mrs. Bibby.⁶⁸ While Timms’ contribution to the scene is simply an interesting view of one of the characters on an issue of the story which does not affect him, Lockwood’s practicality is a very effective sign of how the boys have evolved under Irwin’s guidance at this point

⁶⁷ *The History Boys* 00:41:38.

⁶⁸ *The History Boys* 00:41:49.

of the story. Once again, however, there are no negative effects of this scene. Art history provides only details, as did PE and as do all the additions in the adapted version of Part 1.

When it comes to the smaller additions, during Mrs. Lintott's added lesson, the viewer sees that it really was her who gave the boys all the essential knowledge which was then enriched by Hector's quotes and twisted by Irwin into journalistic arguments, making her later expressed frustration much more understandable. The brief discussion of Anne of Cleves adds to the portrayal of the Headmaster as intellectually inefficient when compared to his pupils and as a stereotypical vinegary headmaster. The latter is specifically mentioned in another added scene which takes place in the teacher's lounge and during which Mrs. Lintott ascribes the Headmaster and Irwin actors who would portray them in a 1940s' film. None of these additions creates contradictions or plot holes and therefore despite their minimal contributions are not detrimental to the adaptation. The one exception among the additions of Part 1 is the field trip.

3.3 A Sentimental Trip

The film's addition of the field trip is somewhat odd for multiple reasons as it combines multiple scenes from the stage version while simultaneously filling a completely new role. Firstly, it appears to be primarily a replacement for the opening of the play's Part 2, in which the play moves forward in time to Irwin being a TV presenter and filming a programme about the Rievaulx Abbey, but it also holds ties to the taking of a commemorative school photograph⁶⁹ and to the final funeral scene.⁷⁰ Given these ties, the placement of the added scene also becomes curious as all three of its predecessors take place in Part 2 of the play while the field trip is inserted among the events of Part 1. This also creates a problem of tone as the tone of both the

⁶⁹ *The History Boys* 91-92.

⁷⁰ *The History Boys* 106-109.

play and the film shifts when the Headmaster learns of Hector's groping his pupils on a motorbike. In the film, that scene takes place directly after the field trip⁷¹ and thus the field trip assumes a new role as the last beacon of sentiment before the story becomes more overtly tragic for some of its characters while its predecessors from the play were very much a part of their tragedy. It, therefore, stands to closer examination how exactly was this transformation done and how successful it was.

In the opening scene of the play's Part 2, the audience is shown Irwin in his wheelchair and a broken Posner talking vaguely about some incident which happened in the past, thus foreshadowing the tragic death of Hector which is about to come. Later, when the boys are being photographed, their beloved teacher is not allowed by the Headmaster to be in that photograph as he is practically being erased from the school and its history even before retiring. A question then arises how could components of these two quite dark scenes be transferred into the film's sentimental field trip. When it comes to the connection with Irwin's history programme, the film uses only the setting and some of the original's dialogue with Irwin instructing his pupils to study Henry VIII if they want to understand Stalin or Margaret Thatcher and with the brief discussion of the toilet practices of monks also being a remnant of Irwin's TV monologue. The photograph being taken is now supposed to commemorate the field trip only and Hector still isn't in any trouble because of his misconduct and for those reasons he is allowed in the photograph while the vinegary Headmaster is missing from it. None of these aspects on their own however make the scene the beacon of sentiment it becomes.

The scene is not in any way unique in the context of the film. There is Hector being defiant towards Irwin and kind towards Mrs. Lintott, a dialogue about differences between the boys'

⁷¹ *The History Boys* 00:50:41 – 00:53:40.

religions and about homosexuality (which is again led primarily by heterosexual characters without involvement in the sub-plot of Posner, Dakin, and Irwin), and there is Dakin's being closer to Irwin than any of the other boys. All of these aspects have been seen previously and there is nothing making this scene stand out in comparison to the scenes that came before it except precisely that it is the last one of this tone and type. Afterwards, Hector's retirement becomes imminent, Posner's heartbreak becomes more immediate and not just prospective, Dakin's flirtatious relationship with Irwin escalates and even the boys' debates in class turn somewhat hostile. Therefore, when during Hector's funeral his speech from before the picture is taken is repeated and then, in the end credits, the photo itself is shown, there isn't sentiment felt towards this scene because it was the best of times the boys had in the story's duration, but because it was the last of the good times they had. After all, it is with this scene that the troublesome part begins for the boys, as is the case for the film and its adaptation process.

3.4 Hitler, a Much-Misunderstood Man

Once the Headmaster learns of Hector's misconduct, the adaptation process changes as scenes from the original text are transferred into the film in much less reduced state than the previous ones, which immediately becomes apparent as the following scene between Hector and Posner lasts approximately six minutes with minimal reduction.⁷² However, it is also in this section of the film, which roughly correlates with the play's Part 2, where additions start to be inconsistent and detrimental to the film as a whole and particularly to its characters. It is Posner who suffers perhaps the biggest blow. At the start of Part 2 of both the film and the play, he stands out amongst the boys by being the most openly emotional, Jewish and the one sharing Hector's sensibilities more than any other of the boys. Yet all of these

⁷² *The History Boys* 00:54:00 – 01:00:20.

character traits are made somewhat inconsistent during this portion of the story, starting with Posner's Jewishness.

One of the scenes adapted from the original text almost without change is the joint lesson with both Hector and Irwin.⁷³ It is during this scene when the boys' previously light-hearted debates turn quite hostile as the topic of the Holocaust is discussed. For Posner, this is understandably a much more personal subject than for any of the other boys and so they all, except for Scripps, discuss it like any other topic and when it is compared to the Dissolution of the Monasteries, Posner exclaims "the difference is, I didn't lose any relatives in the Dissolution of the Monasteries." It is at this point in the story that Irwin goes too far as it is shown that his method could be used to explain away one of the most monstrous events in human history and as such it has repercussions. Posner's parents complain to the school by a letter,⁷⁴ Posner himself is hit by his uncle and it leads to a candid conversation between him and Irwin.⁷⁵ The young teacher's facade is penetrated as he apologises for being dispassionate, but he also explains how Posner can use his Jewishness to his advantage when answering a question on the Holocaust in a surprising way. A problem arises for the film, however, as neither the consequences of the discussion of the Holocaust nor the candid conversation appear in it. Therefore, when the play's Posner and the film's Posner are to answer a question on the Holocaust, their motivations differ.

The film's Posner answers a question on Holocaust earlier than his play counterpart as the film has the boys writing an in-class essay. Afterwards, some of the boys summarise their answers to Mrs. Lintott with quips and when it's Posner's turn, he says "I was so nice about Hitler. A much-misunderstood Man."⁷⁶ Without the play's events in between the in-class discussion

⁷³ *The History Boys* 01:04:41 – 01:08:28.

⁷⁴ *The History Boys* 77-79.

⁷⁵ *The History Boys* 79-80.

⁷⁶ *The History Boys* 01:20:31.

of Holocaust and Posner's answering a question on it, Posner's character seems to abandon his moral convictions and heritage for no particular reason as he acts in defiance of views previously expressed by himself essentially immediately after taking a strong stance against Irwin. Furthermore, when the film provides a montage of the boys attending their interviews at their respective universities, Posner cheerfully celebrates how his answer on Hitler was liked.⁷⁷ The play's Posner answers a question on the Holocaust during the interview and the reception of his answer is the same, but he perceives it much less cheerfully in his account of the event.

There was a question on the Holocaust. And I did play it down. They asked me about it at the interview. Praised what they called my sense of detachment. Said it was the foundation of writing history. I think I did well.⁷⁸

Play's Posner isn't happy about his answer, but he understands what benefits it has for him as a Jew to answer this way and therefore he does it to get accepted. However, it cannot be deduced so clearly from the film why would its version of Posner change his views so radically and be suddenly favourable towards Hitler as he was clearly hostile towards the idea of such an answer the last time it was brought up. Inconsistencies in how important Posner's origin is to him at certain times resemble also Scripps' situation in the film. For him, however, it is his religion which functions as a source of inconsistencies.

3.5 Scripps' Religious Crisis

Scripps is paradoxical as a character. He appears to be the closest friend of both Dakin and Posner, he does share some of Hector's and Posner's sensibilities, as is evident in the previously examined discussion of the Holocaust, and yet he becomes a journalist, a profession somewhat despised by Hector, and he is paradoxical even in his defining character

⁷⁷ *The History Boys* 01:22:35.

⁷⁸ *The History Boys* 96.

trait of being a devout Christian despite also being a critical thinker which is something for which even his vicar considers him a freak in the play.⁷⁹ Scripps also serves as the play's narrator and for that reason, his somewhat neutral standing in the play's conflicts is fitting to make him knowledgeable and understanding of both sides and to make him only a "superficial character"⁸⁰ as Andrew Bruff describes him in the study guide of the play. He, however, doesn't have the role of a narrator in the film and only his role as a superficial character remains from the play. The film then increased the divide between his faith and his reason, perhaps even as an attempt to make Scripps more well-rounded. Furthermore, how his dilemma ends was also changed.

The play's Scripps' dilemma of faith seemingly escalates when he attends a Eucharist in the college chapel.

It was a genuine act of worship, though I knew it would do me no harm with the college, the self-servingness of my devotions in this instance leaving me untroubled. I really wanted to get in. I have never particularly liked myself but the boy I was, kneeling in that cold and empty chapel that winter morning, fills me now with longing and pity.⁸¹

The only time Scripps approaches his faith without critical thinking and irony is in that moment. After this culmination of his "romance with God,"⁸² as he calls it, faith only becomes a period of his life he looks back on fondly while becoming a journalist. That is his story arc in the play, while the film focuses on another aspect of his faith. During both the play and the film, Scripps is fascinated by Dakin's sexual escapades as he as a devout Christian is celibate. The film's Scripps ends his religious dilemma with a proclamation "I'm gonna get fucking out of the way first"⁸³ when the boys discuss their plans for the future. Instead of showing how the only time

⁷⁹ *The History Boys* 7.

⁸⁰ Andrew Bruff, "Character Analysis," *The History Boys* 158.

⁸¹ *The History Boys* 96.

⁸² *The History Boys* 45.

⁸³ *The History Boys* 01:39:11.

Scripps was fully uncritically religious was in his time of need, the film chooses Scripps' sexual urges to win over his religion. Which one of these two endings one prefers is up to personal preference, but the film's dilemma is certainly inferior to the one in the play because of the portrayal of it leading up to the culmination.

The film takes what was primarily an intellectual dilemma and transforms it into a personal crisis of faith to the point that while Scripps is visiting the college chapel, he is shown to be incapable of praying.⁸⁴ This would also be a possible outcome of his dilemma, but the problem is that it isn't the first time the viewer would see Scripps' inability to pray as the same happens in his very first appearance on screen.⁸⁵ Therefore Scripps is clearly in a more advanced stage of his dilemma than his play counterpart. Yet the film keeps the play's dialogue regarding this topic unchanged. This leads to errors in continuity and the character becomes inconsistent as the same Scripps who is shown to be unable to pray in the very first scene is later said to be a devout Christian who "does not wank,"⁸⁶ and lets himself to be groped by his teacher in the name of Jesus.⁸⁷ The film has increased Scripps' divide between the intellectual and the religious and it somewhat changed his behaviour, but it didn't modify his dialogue from the original play to correspond with this change. The decision in favour of a different outcome of Scripps' crisis of faith in the film cannot be objectively admonished but the crisis itself is filled with contradictions in terms of the chronology of its progression.

⁸⁴ *The History Boys* 01:22:00.

⁸⁵ *The History Boys* 00:01:53.

⁸⁶ *The History Boys* 00:44:54.

⁸⁷ *The History Boys* 00:17:13.

3.6 The Funeral

The section of the original play which has been changed the most during adaptation is certainly its final scene, Hector's funeral.⁸⁸ The first change in the ending, which has been previously mentioned, is Irwin's not being bound to a wheelchair in the fatal accident. This change, however, affects, perhaps surprisingly, Dakin's character rather than Irwin's. This is the only point when the film uses narration as in the play the events of the accident are recounted by Scripps, Irwin, Dakin, and Rudge, but the film uses only Dakin as a narrator, giving him also Scripp's and Irwin's lines as well. In the play, Dakin never meets Irwin for a drink because Irwin is in a wheelchair, which Dakin admits to being the reason, but he still claims to have done enough for Irwin as he at least asked him.⁸⁹ The film's Dakin shares his counterpart's vanity, considering his having sex with Irwin as a reward for the teacher, but in the narration at the funeral, it is him who says the lines originally belonging to Irwin claiming they never met for a drink "incidentally."⁹⁰ As Dakin now also doesn't have a problem looking at Irwin, as is shown by the two sharing a smile at the funeral, the film provides no explanation why the two never met for a drink. The superficial Dakin of the play rejects the wheelchair-bound Irwin, who was in love with him, while the film's Dakin, who has been equally as superficial up until this point, appears to have been rejected, without an explanation, which goes against his character of being the only one of the boys for whom life is easy and his being complacent for that reason. His no longer being the cause of that drink not happening, however, isn't the only change made to his character during the funeral.

Despite the act of rejection of Irwin being taken away from him, when it comes to the reveal of what has become of the boys by the time Mrs. Lintott dies, Dakin is still his superficial self as he claims to be happy as a tax lawyer simply because the money is incredible. The film might

⁸⁸ *The History Boys* 01:41:25 – 01:47:20.

⁸⁹ *The History Boys* 106.

⁹⁰ *The History Boys* 01:42:07.

have taken his perhaps most deplorable act away from him, but he still remains the character defined by his vanity. Hence the film keeps the idea, as noted by Bruff,⁹¹ that the worst person among the boys was created by Irwin's style of teaching as Dakin could be considered Irwin's champion in regards to the clash between his style and Hector's. But the film certainly lessens that connection compared to the play. There, Mrs. Lintott describes Dakin as "a tax lawyer, telling highly paid fibs and making frequent trips to the Gulf States" after which Dakin admits to money being his motivation.⁹² Especially the term "fibs" ties Dakin back to Irwin as making fibs is exactly what Hector previously accused him of doing.⁹³ His fate is left mostly unaltered, but it has been made more moderate compared to the man willing to spin anything for money as the play portrays him.

Scripps, who spent the play as something of a mediator between the two ways of teaching and their champions (Dakin and Posner), has his outcome left unchanged. He becomes a journalist, something Hector considered Irwin to be, but he also has desires to leave his profession in order to "really write."⁹⁴ At this point, Irwin's transformation into a less of an extremist is also made definitive as Mrs. Lintott only recounts his time being a TV presenter of a history programme. The film never mentions his using his method to help the government gain support for controversial laws. Therefore, Irwin, just as is the case with Dakin, has his negative impact on the world lessened.

The last person to have his fate revealed is Posner. Out of the three boys which the play firmly places on the Hector-Irwin scale, it is Hector's champion Posner who has his outcome changed most severely. Posner's fate from the play is fully negative as recounted by Mrs. Lintott:

⁹¹ *The History Boys* 153.

⁹² *The History Boys* 107.

⁹³ *The History Boys* 72.

⁹⁴ *The History Boys* 108.

He lives in a cottage he has renovated himself, has an allotment and periodic breakdowns.

He haunts the local library and keeps a scrapbook of the achievements of his one-time classmates and has a host of friends... though only on the internet, and none in his right name or even gender. He has long since stopped asking himself where it went wrong.⁹⁵

The one who followed Irwin's teachings most closely became hedonistic and the one who followed Hector's became a wreck. Neither the purely practical style nor the romantic one have positive results. Posner's tragic end is necessary for the play's dynamic and message to work. He is a living proof of Irwin's words that there isn't time anymore for Hector's kind of teaching. Yet, the film doesn't support this claim of Irwin's nearly as much as the play did.

In the film, Mrs. Lintott again confirms Posner's position as the one who took all he was ever taught by Hector to heart but he himself recounts his present situation:

Slightly to my surprise, I have ended up like you, a teacher. I'm a bit of a stock figure. I do a wonderful school play for instance. And though I never touch the boys, it's always a struggle, but maybe that's why I'm a good teacher. I'm not happy but I'm not unhappy about it.⁹⁶

While Posner's ending may not have been turned into a standard happy ending, he is still a far cry from the lonely wreck the play makes of him. In addition, his primary problems now stem from his desire for the boys he teaches, which means he shares the same problems with Hector because of their sexuality and not because of their shared, somewhat romantic, outlook on life or their sensibilities. It changes the context of the dialogue which follows as Posner is no longer a proof of Irwin's assertions about Hector's teachings being outdated and Scripps' assertion of it being the only education worth having no longer has the same meaning. For him, in the original account, Hector's teaching has that value despite its effects, but now it is fully justified

⁹⁵ *The History Boys* 108.

⁹⁶ *The History Boys* 01:46:12.

as it isn't among the causes of Posner's suffering anymore. Beyond the final lines now having a different context, the changes to Dakin's and mainly to Posner's fate, change the dynamic of the story.

A certain lack of direction in adapting some of the characters becomes apparent during the final scene. Irwin and Dakin have both been made less negative characters without Irwin's involvement with the government and without Dakin's final rejection of his teacher and the full extent of his activities as a tax lawyer being revealed. But they simultaneously become more clearly negative due to the fact that Hector's side of the clash is now lacking negative effects. This might suggest that the film is explicitly more on Hector's side than the play was, but there are also factors denoting the opposite. In the film, Posner gets a scholarship thanks to a willing use of Irwin's method and for the play's version of Posner, as the audience would have known at that point, that is where his breakdowns began and his life fell into ruin. The film's audience, however, would see it as an entirely positive achievement of Posner's goal. The film fluctuates between attempts to make Irwin a more positive character and simultaneously making him more clearly negative in contrast to Hector and the results of his style of teaching, which are no longer disastrous for his champion Posner, while Irwin still produces the hedonistic Dakin. Hector remains as flawed a man as he was in the play, but since his sensibility-driven approach to teaching no longer produces the wreck that is the play's Posner, he is too strongly positive for his dynamic with the fluctuating Irwin to work.

3.7 The Other Boys

Although there are eight boys in the story, only three of them are important to the plot (Dakin, Posner, and Scripps), which leaves a dilemma what is to be done with the others. The play embraces their genericity as it only really needs them to provide witty dialogue in classroom

scenes. However, since the film has to reduce the amount of dialogue from the stage version, it appears the film possesses a tendency to make them more unique while not increasing their role in the story. There are two ways this is done. Either a boy shows a completely new character trait or one of his character traits from the play is amplified. While neither creates compelling and complex characters, the latter is still more successful in giving the characters a presence.

When it comes to being generic, Crowther and Lockwood are superior to their classmates. They're so generic that the play even gives them identical careers of becoming magistrates. The former has almost no character traits in the play except for his fondness of theatre which is however mentioned only once in order to show how the boys have to conceal their interests which aren't suitable for university.⁹⁷ By casting Samuel Anderson, the character was made to differ from the other boys due to his race in both the original stage production and the film. However, the play doesn't include any mentions of this difference in the text. The film does make a mention of it and further adds one more character trait, but both are mentioned only once. It is during the field trip to the abbey and during a conversation with the original racially diverse character, Akhtar.⁹⁸ As Akhtar admonishes Christians for their toilet practices, Crowther identifies himself as Christian, thus somewhat bordering on Scripps' character, and provides a counterargument about Hindu practices involving Ganga. Then, following a correction about Akhtar's being Moslem, he makes an ironic racist remark "You all look the same to me anyway" which none of the other boys could deliver with the same effect. However, since none of these character traits are ever mentioned again, it is not enough to substantially differentiate Crowther from Lockwood and so it is the latter who has to change.

As previously mentioned, the first time the viewer sees Lockwood in the film, he is working as a milkman for which he gets scolded by the headmaster as he doesn't find it dignifying

⁹⁷ *The History Boys* 82.

⁹⁸ *The History Boys* 00:48:41.

enough for an Oxbridge candidate. This could be used as a character trait even though it would make him somewhat similar to Rudge, but it is never mentioned again and Lockwood instead receives his differences at the very end. Instead of Posner, it is Lockwood who receives the most tragic fate as instead of becoming a magistrate he becomes a soldier, reaching the rank of lieutenant, and is killed by friendly fire at the age of 28.⁹⁹ One could claim that he follows in the tradition of other secondary characters like *Hamlet's* Rosencrantz and Guildenstern who have suffered a seemingly needless tragic fate, but the problem with Lockwood, in particular, is that his fate almost completely lacks any sort of setup or foreshadowing. His joining the army is mentioned only once in passing and it takes place only five minutes before his death is revealed during the funeral scene.¹⁰⁰ The film has succeeded in differentiating Crowther and Lockwood by mostly letting the former stay generic with his specific traits being limited to inconsequential one-off mentions and hastily changing the latter's fate at the very end and making it come completely out of the left field. It appears to have been easier to adapt the characters of Akhtar and Timms as there was no need for invention of new and distinct outcomes for them and they could also work with character traits the play has given them.

Akhtar is Indian and Moslem, Timms is vulgar and, with the casting of James Corden, overweight. The film simply focuses on these characteristics more than the play did, thus ensuring they are consistent, albeit at the expense of them becoming stereotypes. Akhtar is given a stereotypically large family, as seen the first time he is on screen,¹⁰¹ his membership in the computer club is kept and he enjoys provoking the Christian P.E. teacher. However, his religion also tends to be muted when it is used to make Posner stand out as is the case during the conversation about foreskins, when in the film, it is only Posner mentioned for not having

⁹⁹ *The History Boys* 01:44:45.

¹⁰⁰ *The History Boys* 01:39:00.

¹⁰¹ *The History Boys* 00:02:30.

one.¹⁰² Timms' vulgarity isn't shared with any of the main characters and so it is allowed to manifest itself freely. In addition, the film also includes stereotypical digs at his physical state as having him splat on the mats during P.E. and eating chocolate in a montage of the boys studying. The result of the treatment of these two characters is that neither becomes any more important for the story's plot or themes but they at least have a consistent role and so when the film needs to make a racial comment by an outsider it uses Akhtar and when it needs someone to say something vulgar it uses Timms. This all leaves only one of the boys, Rudge, to have his presence successfully increased.

3.8 One Oddity, Rudge

The play's Rudge doesn't influence the plot in any way but he easily stands out among the boys because he is not witty. He is treated as if he has already overachieved just by being up for Oxford. In fact, he almost appears to function outside of the plot as all the play's highbrow discussions of morality and history go past him and he gets into Christ Church simply because he is good at rugby and his father was a college servant there. Even the boys' fascination with sex isn't shared by him as for Rudge it is simply something he does on Fridays before he plays rugby and golf on the weekend.¹⁰³ Despite him being mostly left out of the Hector-Irwin conflict, he is somewhat similar to one of the school's teachers, Mrs. Lintott, in that he is just as unappreciated and underrated among the boys as she is among the teachers. The film made this connection much clearer and used it to increase Rudge's part in the story.

¹⁰² *The History Boys* 00:22:02

¹⁰³ *The History Boys* 22.

In the play, Rudge and Lintott only have one private dialogue and its only purpose is for Lintott to find out more about Irwin.¹⁰⁴ Yet, they are both, perhaps inadvertently, intertwined by being the most practical among their peers with occasional outbursts of frustration. Lintott is the teacher who actually taught the boys factual history and without her Hector would have nothing to add flavour to and Irwin would have nothing to spin and this leads to her frustrations truly manifesting themselves when she is told Irwin is going to get her job¹⁰⁵ and in her speech about history being women following men with a bucket.¹⁰⁶ Rudge has more moments of his frustration coming out, most notable being his proclaiming the line, which was later used as a tagline on the film's poster, "History is just one fucking thing after another,"¹⁰⁷ and both the use of Rudge in the marketing of the film and his increased presence indicate that the play's rather minor character was assigned much more importance for the adaptation, although he still doesn't affect the main conflict at all. Creating two similar enough characters in Lintott and Rudge, however, isn't enough to build a connection between them and so the filmmakers changed a scene which in the original is set in a collective to include only the two of them.¹⁰⁸ During the celebration of the boys' getting into their selected universities, it is automatically assumed that Rudge didn't get in, which is just a setup for him to reveal how easy it was for him to get in, and when Mrs. Lintott catches a glimpse of seemingly unhappy Rudge she immediately goes to talk to him in the corridor, thus showing that the film's teacher was genuinely concerned for the boy whom everybody else considered a lost cause and whom she talked to only once in the play in hopes of learning more about Irwin. During the funeral scene, Posner says he ended up like Mrs. Lintott, but one could argue that it is Rudge who resembles her closer. Just as she was teaching the boys the most practical part of history while being

¹⁰⁴ *The History Boys* 33-34.

¹⁰⁵ *The History Boys* 95-96.

¹⁰⁶ *The History Boys* 84-85.

¹⁰⁷ *The History Boys* 85.

¹⁰⁸ *The History Boys* 97-98; *The History Boys* 01:30:14 – 01:33:01

unappreciated, Rudge's profession of being a builder is of lower-standing compared to the others, but he provides the most practical product, "affordable homes for first-time buyers."¹⁰⁹ If Dakin can be called Irwin's champion and Posner Hector's, then the film version of Rudge is Lintott's.

¹⁰⁹ *The History Boys* 107.

4. Comparison of the Two Adaptation Processes

4.1 Reduction of the Original Text

As previously mentioned, reduction of text is inevitable when transferring from a text-based medium into a visual one. Yet, only the film adaptation of *The History Boys* was criticised for doing it to the point of creating a simple reminder of a good night in the theatre, something the reviews saw as a possible result of cutting a large portion of the play's text.¹¹⁰ Yet, the reception of *The Madness of King George* rules out the importance of the extent of preservation of the adapted text as the reviews do not once indicate that the film would be inferior to the play despite leaving out a bigger portion of the stage version's text than *The History Boys* does. In fact, the amount of preserved text is important to adaptation criticism only in the case of translations and transcriptions, where fidelity to the adapted text is the aim. For a transition between two media, Hutcheon uses the term "revision," which are a combination of all adaptational techniques including condensation and expansion, meaning it cannot be specified what use of the adapted text constitutes a successful adaptation.¹¹¹ The amount of preserved text is therefore not an effective criticism and it is still to be determined what caused the 'lost resonance.'

One should ask what is the strongest point of each play according to reviews. In *The Madness of George III*, it is the suffering of the King and Nigel Hawthorne's emotional performance. That part of the play has been left intact during the transfer between the two media and the original text, including not only its dialogue but also some of its characters and subplots, have been sacrificed seemingly in order to keep the King's struggle and its effect on the people around him the most prominent part of the film. This falls in line with Hutcheon's points on

¹¹⁰ Hanks, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/the-history-boys-15-419764.html>, 21 Sep 2019.

¹¹¹ Hutcheon 171.

what the audience expects from an adaptation, i.e. the comfort of recognition and the delight of novelty in a self-sufficient work,¹¹² and in this particular case the recognised aspect is simultaneously the strongest aspect of the play while all the added aspects support it. In *The History Boys*, on the other hand, it is not only the themes of the play but also the witty dialogue itself and the views of the characters that are central. If preserving the play's witty dialogue was the main focus of the filmmakers' efforts, that would explain why the French brothel scene¹¹³ was left intact even though it adds nothing to the plot and takes up approximately five minutes of screen time. The main issue with that is that the context of the dialogue hasn't survived the condensation. The dialogue itself cannot function without some of its emotional levity which hasn't transferred into the film. With the plot and characters suffering from new inconsistencies, which have been examined in the chapter about the adaptation, the memorable lines now mainly function as a reminder of how entertaining the dialogue was in the play to those who examine it with the knowledge of the adapted text, which also had a complex and consistent plot. In other words, the part familiar to the audience from the play has lost its support in condensation and the added aspects didn't sufficiently replace what was lost. While adapting *The Madness of George III* the filmmakers had the advantage that they could use the strongest aspect of the play to make one character and his journey the central focus of the film, which is something that Seger finds optimal for successful adaptation,¹¹⁴ but they had no such advantage with the later adaptation as dialogue and characters' views have to have a foundation themselves. If the characters and the story are inconsistent, then the dialogue and the characters' views lack a foundation and they cannot successfully carry the film on their own, hence the film fails to meet audience's criteria for a successful adaptation and is viewed as an echo of the play which hasn't been successful in transferring the play's identity nor in creating its own.

¹¹² Hutcheon 173.

¹¹³ *The History Boys* 00:11:20 – 00:16:30.

¹¹⁴ Seger 81.

4.2 Show, Don't Tell

In Chapter 2.2, it has been analysed how *The Madness of King George* handles the illness and the recuperation of its titular character much better than its stage predecessor because it has the advantage of being able to show subtle changes in the character's behaviour. The play has to have it described in expository dialogue instead in order to inform the audience of the King's progress. This is a prime example of how the filmmakers used the "show, don't tell" technique. The film adaptation of *The History Boys* uses the same technique at certain points but with varying degrees of success. Once again, the problem in the film stems from inconsistencies created by that what's shown clashing with that what's told and from the film wasting its running time either by showing what the viewer has already been told or telling what the viewer has already been shown.

When it comes to inconsistencies between what is shown and what is told, the example of Scripps' faith is the most prominent. As previously mentioned, the first time he appears on the screen, he is already shown to be unable to pray and yet he is still talked about as a devout Christian by the other characters as well as by himself. Another case of inconsistency created by this is Hector's groping of his pupils on the motorbike. The film shows two instances of Hector groping the boys,¹¹⁵ but the way he does it was changed compared to the play as the film's Hector always does it when the bike has to stop. There are some changes made in the script to reflect this alteration as the boys no longer mention being scared of roundabouts nor does Mrs. Lintott mention a red light being the cause of Hector getting caught. Yet, when the headmaster describes what Hector has been doing, scenes which the viewer was already shown, he talks about "a hand on boy's genitals at 50 miles an hour."¹¹⁶ Admittedly,

¹¹⁵ *The History Boys* 00:18:28; 00:46:48.

¹¹⁶ *The History Boys* 00:52:54.

inconsistencies such as this can be considered minor but they are a sign that there was less attention to detail present in adapting *The History Boys* for the screen than in adapting *The Madness of George III* as no such inconsistencies could be found in its film version.

As a possible stand-in for the stage production's videos of school life, *The History Boys* includes three montages, two of the boys studying and one of their university interviews. Montages could function as an efficient visual provider of information but they are largely redundant in the film. The first montage shows the boys studying in the library,¹¹⁷ which is something that the viewer would most likely expect them to do, with the only new information being Posner's infatuation with Dakin as shown in his subtly looking at him, but the problem with that is that for the rest of the film Posner is anything but subtle as only a couple of minutes later he is singing "Bewitched" to him in front of the entire class¹¹⁸ and he also talks about this infatuation openly numerous times. The second montage of studying provides additional information by showing the overweight Timms eating chocolate, Akhtar being watched by his many siblings, Irwin being dissatisfied with their essays and Dakin paying more attention to studying than to Fiona.¹¹⁹ Apart from the last one, it is mostly a case of repetition of previously established behaviour and character traits. Only Dakin's behaviour is a visual proof that he truly wants to please Irwin more than anyone else as he himself mentions.¹²⁰ The last montage supplements the characters' accounts of what happened during their stays at their respective universities for an interview.¹²¹ Apart from visualising those accounts, including continuing the visual misrepresentation of Scripps' faith and the culmination of the Hitler answer plot thread, it adds Rudge's interview, including his name being recognised. Because of this, what could have been a surprising reveal of Rudge getting accepted despite everyone doubting him

¹¹⁷ *The History Boys* 00:23:45 – 00:24:16.

¹¹⁸ *The History Boys* 00:29:48.

¹¹⁹ *The History Boys* 01:09:41 – 01:10:31.

¹²⁰ *The History Boys* 01:08:41.

¹²¹ *The History Boys* 01:21:36 – 01:23:23.

is needlessly foreshadowed before it is talked about a few minutes later. These montages are typical of the film's tendencies of unnecessarily repeating pieces of information about the characters, which the viewer already knows, instead of evolving them.

4.3 Setting

Linda Seger considers the use of space in theatre as one of the main obstacles for film adaptations of plays as the stage can represent a large number of locations or no specific place at all while a film has to be filmed somewhere specific.¹²² Once again, the adaptation of *The Madness of George III* had an advantage over the adaptation of *The History Boys* as the former has every scene set in a specific location, thus providing the filmmakers with a number of potential visually distinct settings. Furthermore, the King is no longer limited by the physical space of a stage and is allowed to make his antics bigger as he can now run freely through the fields surrounding his castle. One can claim that the source material was fitter for film than for the stage, to begin with. Unfortunately for the filmmakers, *The History Boys* falls more into the category of plays being set nowhere in particular.

The setting of *The History Boys* is a school in Sheffield of the 1980s, but Bennett himself admits in his foreword that the time period was picked purely based on its school system, which was still close to his personal experience from the 1950s,¹²³ and the school being specifically in Sheffield is relevant only for one line by Posner in both the play and the film¹²⁴ and could be replaced by practically any English industrial town. The film makes the time period more concrete, both visually and through its soundtrack, but by specifying the time period more overtly the filmmakers made their story clash with their setting as the behaviour and speech

¹²² Seger 37.

¹²³ *The History Boys* xxiv.

¹²⁴ *The History Boys* 42; *The History Boys* 00:44:17

of Bennett's characters doesn't fit into the 1980s as Peter Bradshaw notes in his review for the *Guardian*.¹²⁵ Furthermore, not being physically limited by the stage has almost no effect on the film. Most of the scenes can take place anywhere – within the obvious limits – without the setting affecting them. Scenes from the original were spread out into various areas of the school mainly because most of the film taking part in one classroom would be visually uninteresting in a film while it is nothing unusual for stage productions. While the story of *The Madness of George III* transitioned into its cinematic setting seamlessly and it was only enhanced by it, the transition between the two media harmed *The History Boys* as its characters and their dialogue, the strongest aspects of the stage production, clashes with the film's realistic setting.

¹²⁵ Peter Bradshaw, "The History Boys," *TheGuardian.com*, The Guardian, 13 Oct 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/oct/13/drama>, 3 Dec 2019.

5. Conclusion

The fact that the transfer to film suited *The Madness of George III* manifests itself from the opening of the film adaptation as the film is allowed to replace a large portion of the play's expository dialogue, which, according to reviews, made the play feel like a history lesson, with visual information. The film has apparently also taken into account what the most praised aspect of the original was, i.e. the performance of Nigel Hawthorne in the role of the King, and the possibilities provided by the new medium were used to enhance it even further. The original plot was also adjusted to make the King the overt protagonist and not just one of the principal characters and to make him an active participant in the second half of the film, a part of the story during which he was mostly passive in the stage version. There is one more character other than the King who had his presence significantly increased and that is Captain Greville who also got a much more tragic ending in order for his subplot to represent the theme of cold efficiency being valued above all else in court which was present in the adapted text but wasn't as prominent. The antagonist of the story, the Prince, has approximately the same amount of presence in both the play and the film but he is a fundamentally different character in each of them as a fat pompous caricature of the stage was transformed into a far more complex character for the big screen, a man loving towards his forbidden wife and hateful towards his parents who have presumably been overtly critical of him his entire life. The political half of the play's plot is arguably the biggest sacrifice to the King's foregrounding as it has been largely simplified but at the same time it achieves in the film what Alan Bennett claims in his foreword to have wanted to achieve in the play, i.e. it shows that all of Britain's political system depended on the king, and it has also been transformed into a personal struggle between Mr. Pitt and the leader of the opposition, Mr. Fox, who is assembled newly for the film by combining three members of the opposition from the play. The filmmakers have reduced the

original text only to its central struggles but by doing so they truly let them stand out and leave a strong impression.

When evaluating the film adaptation of *The History Boys*, the film can be split into two halves. The majority of changes and additions made in the first half do not have a negative effect on the story or its characters and usually add detail. However, some negative tendencies can be found in the first half and in fact, they are present from the film's opening which replaces the play's introduction of one of its major themes with a scene introducing the characters which could be cut without the audience missing any information about these characters. Yet, if one was to point to a typical addition of the film's first half, it would be the field trip to an abbey. It doesn't influence the plot in any way but it later obtains a symbolical meaning as a reminder of the boys' good times as the story's tone turns darker after this scene. It is also at this point that the adaptation process changes.

The second half includes scenes adapted from the play's text with minimal edits but it also includes changes which make the plot and some of the characters inconsistent. The sensitive Posner abandons his moral principles and defends Hitler despite previously being firmly against doing so without anything happening to justify this significant change of opinion. Scripps' faith, one of his defining attributes, becomes inconsistent as the text still paints a picture of a devout Christian while the visually transmitted information shows him as being incapable of praying. The most significant changes take place during the film's final scene, Hector's funeral, where Dakin's vanity is downplayed as he no longer rejects Irwin for being in a wheelchair, thus lessening the negative impact of this side of the conflict between Irwin's practicality and Hector's sensibility. Yet, even more damage to this dynamic is done by Posner's new ending who goes from the nervous wreck of the play to a content teacher, thus preventing Hector's style of teaching from being detrimental and making one side of the central conflict justified. The film has to be commended for how it treated Rudge, making him a low-brow voice of the

unappreciated, but improving a minor character which has no influence on the main plot isn't enough to compensate for making some of the story's main characters inconsistent and for disturbing the dynamic of the struggle between practicality and sensibility.

When comparing the two adaptation processes, it almost seems as if *The History Boys* was doomed from the start to be the inferior adaptation. *The Madness of King George* could use the critically acclaimed King as the central focus and then change other aspects of the adapted text to support him and this way to create a stronger whole. The change of medium itself helped as the King was no longer limited by the spatial constraints of a stage. The filmmakers also had the possibilities to cut a large portion of expository dialogue regarding the King's disease due to the ability of a camera to show its details up close. Meanwhile, the dialogue of *The History Boys* was seen as its biggest strength and even though a portion of it had to be cut, as is inevitable for a transfer between a play and a film, it was left largely intact in numerous scenes but dialogue itself can't be a foundation of the story and doesn't function as well when the characters delivering it are inconsistent and exist in an altered and disrupted plot. Furthermore, the change of medium didn't lead to many meaningful enhancements to the adapted text. On the contrary, the play's setting had to be concretised for film and a realistic setting only clashed with the theatrical dialogue. Each of these stories simply seems to be a better fit for one medium, the suffering of George III can be better shown in a film despite starting its existence on stage while the 'controlled silliness' of *The History Boys* couldn't be efficiently transferred into the film's more realistic setting and created only an echo of the successful stage version.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Bennett, Alan. *The History Boys*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2017.

Bennett, Alan. *The Madness of George III*. London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 1995.

The History Boys. Dir. Nicholas Hytner. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2006.

The Madness of King George. Dir. Nicholas Hytner. The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1994.

Secondary sources

Alleva, Richard. "The Madness of King George." *Commonweal* 122.5 (1995): 15.

EBSCO <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.16646035&site=eds-live&scope=site&lang=cs>. 21 Nov 2018.

"Best 100 British films." *BBC.co.uk*. BBC News, 23rd Sept. 1999.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/455170.stm>. 14 Mar 2019.

Billington, Michael. "The Madness of George III – review." *TheGuardian.com*. The Guardian, 31st Aug 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/aug/31/madness-george-theatre-bath-review>. 5 Apr 2019.

Bradshaw, Peter. "The History Boys." *TheGuardian.com*. The Guardian, 13 Oct 2006.

<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/oct/13/drama>. 3 Dec 2019.

Bruff, Andrew. "Character Analysis." *The History Boys* 158.

Ebert, Roger. "The Madness of King George." *Rogerebert.com*. 27th Jan. 1995.

<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-madness-of-king-george-1995>. 21 Nov 2018.

Hanks, Robert. "The History Boys." *Independent.co.uk*. Independent, 13th Oct 2006.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/the-history-boys-15-419764.html>. 14 Mar 2019.

Horton, Matthew. "How New Order's 'Blue Monday' Changed Music Forever." *NME.com*.

NME, 30 Jul 2018. <https://www.nme.com/blogs/nme-blogs/how-blue-monday-changed-music-forever-771764>. 21 Apr 2019.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

Rich, Frank. "Review/Theater: The Madness of George III; Creating a Lovable George III."

Nytimes.com. The New York Times, 17th Sept. 1993.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/17/theater/review-theater-the-madness-of-george-iii-creating-a-lovable-george-iii.html>. 14 Mar 2019.

Seger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fat and Fiction into Film*. New York City: Henry Holt and Company, 1992.

Sumner, Bernard, et al. "Blue Monday." 1983.

Taylor, Markland. "The Madness of George III." *Variety.com*. Variety, 27th Sept. 1993.
<https://variety.com/1993/film/reviews/the-madness-of-george-iii-2-1200433161/>. 5 Apr 2019.

Travers, Peter. "The History Boys." *RollingStone.com*. Rolling Stone, 13th Nov. 2006.
<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/the-history-boys-255773/>. 14 Mar 2019.

Weales, Gerald. "The Madness of George III." *Commonweal* 120.19 (1993): 20. EBSCO
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?authtype=shib&custid=s1240919&direct=true&db=edsclr&AN=edsgcl.14553660&site=eds-live&scope=site&lang=cs>. 14 Mar 2019.