HISTORY THROUGH LITERATURE

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Abstract
This article explores the similarities between historical narrative and historical fiction. History as it is traditionally interpreted and reported may or may not be entirely accurate or reliable, but is generally accepted as "history". Historical fiction also shares these same properties and furthermore can give deeper insights into characters and events in a more engaging manner allowing the reader to connect and to relate more to these characters and events from the past than a history narrative would, thus forming a bridge between academic study and popular engagement with history. In this paper, I examine historiography and the historical novel and show through three examples that history can be studied and learned equally through reading a historical narrative or a historical-fictional account.

Keywords: History; Historiography, Historical Novel.

HISTÓRIA ATRAVÉS DA LITERATURA

Resumo
Este artigo explora as semelhanças entre a narrativa histórica e a ficção histórica. A história, conforme tradicionalmente interpretada e relatada, pode ou não ser completamente precisa ou confiável, mas geralmente é aceita como "história". A ficção histórica também compartilha essas mesmas características e, além disso, pode oferecer uma compreensão mais profunda de personagens e eventos de maneira mais envolvente, permitindo que o leitor se conecte e se relacione mais com esses personagens e eventos do passado do que uma narrativa histórica permitiria, assim formando uma ponte entre o estudo acadêmico e o envolvimento popular com a história. Neste artigo, examino a historiografia e o romance histórico e mostro, por meio de três exemplos, que a história pode ser estudada e aprendida igualmente através da leitura de uma narrativa histórica ou de um relato histórico-ficcional.

Palavras-chave: História; Historiografia, Romance Histórico.

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1. INTRODUCTION

If history is still taught in schools as it was when I was a teenager, I can imagine it is not one of the most popular subjects amongst Generation Z. From school I vaguely remember somethings about the Roman Empire; the fact that Henry VIII had six wives (or was it Henry VI had eight wives?); and that the Spanish Armada was defeated by that great English Hero, Sir Francis Drake, who as legend and our history classes had it, was calmly playing lawn bowls on Plymouth Hoe when the Armada was sighted, and insisted on finishing the game before taking action.

In my adult years, I have learned a great deal about: Medieval England and Wales; all of the most important events of the Cold War since its genesis in the Russian Revolution to the fall of the Berlin Wall; the principal events that have marked the story of Brazil; and a great deal more besides. My advancement and interest in history knowledge comes not from any history classes or courses, but from reading literature, or more precisely, Historical Fiction. This literary genre which has become increasingly popular over recent years can be a useful learning tool and interesting alternative to what could otherwise be rather wearisome, vapid traditional history lessons of description, analysis and dry bones of facts of ancient kings and epic battles.

2. WHAT IS HISTORY?

In 1961 with the publication of his ground-breaking work, English diplomat, journalist and historian Edward Hallet Carr asks, “What is History?” (CARR, 2008) and discusses this perplexing question and the difficulties the historian has in sorting through infinite masses of information, usually in the form of ancient manuscripts or more recent documents, in order to choose what will become *history.* Prior to Carr’s publication, French historian Marc Bloch published *Apologie pour l'histoire ou Métier d'historien* in 1949, printed in English as *The Historian's Craft* in 1953. Like Carr, Bloch investigates and considers how history is appraised, that is, the manner in which the historian analyses, interprets and reproduces the documented information; what is written down and remembered for generations, and what is cast aside and omitted for ever, who becomes the hero and who becomes the villain. More recently, historian Eric Hobsbawm puts it,

> History is not ancestral memory or collective tradition. It is what people learned from priests, schoolmasters, the writers of history books and the compilers of magazine articles and television programmes. (HOBSBAWM, 1997, p.8).

In other words, historians' interpretations can vary greatly over time and amongst geo-political entities. One striking example of this is how King Richard III of England, much vilified during the Tudor period, has been the subject of a further study due to the recent discovery of his remains under a city centre car park[2]. This research, culminating in the staggering discovery of the King's bones, was instigated by an NGO, The Richard III Society, based in England, which has campaigned for many years to reverse the image of the evil despot that Richard III has gained due to interpretations of history and a propensity for popular belief in fiction, in this specific case, the works of Shakespeare. Hobsbawm observes,

> History is the raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies [...]. The past is an essential element perhaps *the* essential element, in these ideologies. If there is no suitable past, it can always be invented. (HOBSBAWM, 1997, p.5).

The Plantagenet dynasty was supplanted by the Tudors through a series of conflicts known as the War of the Roses, ending with one final battle on the fields of Bosworth in 1485 in which Richard III was killed and Henry Tudor was crowned Henry VII of England. One of Henry Tudor's first acts as king was to change the date of the beginning of his reign to one day before the battle thus enabling him to condemn those who fought against him as traitors to the crown. And so, history records Henry Tudor as being victorious on the field of Bosworth and being crowned king on 22 August 1485, and *history* records King Henry VII reigning from 21 August 1485, such is the nature of history. As Plantagenet and Tudor history was evolving, the Tudor propaganda machine was working full out to vilify the last Plantagenet monarch, and just over a hundred years later, with the third-generation Tudor monarch on the throne, a popular playwright concocted a sensational story of an evil, child- murdering deformed hunch-back king.

[2] A full documentary of this discovery can be seen at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SgdmR_cNP0.

Hobsbawm states that historians have a great responsibility, "to historical facts in general, and for criticizing the politico-ideological abuse of history in particular" (HOBSBAWM, 1997, p.6). About these responsibilities, he notes the immense difficulties the historian faces since there is a "current fashion for novelists to base their plots on recorded reality rather than inventing them, thus fudging the border between historical fact and fiction." (HOBSBAWM, 1997, p.6) and a post-modernist "fashion" within literature and anthropology departments of Western universities which implies that, "all facts claiming objective existence are simply intellectual constructions – in short, that there is no clear difference between fact and fiction." (HOBSBAWM, 1997, p.6). The problem is, Hobsbawm, points out, that there *is* a clear difference – "Either Elvis Presley is dead or he isn't" (HOBSBAWM, 1997, p.6) is the sharp, frank example he offers – and it is the historian's task to sift through mountains of information and carry out a thorough analysis in order to offer a clear and precise interpretation of an event or period at which the historian him/herself was not present. In this sense the historian is dependent on second- (or even in some cases, third, fourth, *etc*.) hand information from unreliable and, more often than not, biased, eyewitnesses.

Another illustration of this erroneous historiography is the story of Welsh Prince Madoc, and his "discovery" and "colonization" of North America in the 12th century. Madoc was one of the many sons of Owain Gwynedd, ruler of north-west Wales between 1137 and 1170. Madoc is said to have voyaged overseas and discovered a new world, what we now know as North America, he then returned to Wales gathered up a number of people to colonize the land, set sail westwards and was never seen again. This story was popularized during Tudor times as a claim of sovereignty over the Spanish for the New World discoveries. Welsh historian John Davies in *A History of Wales*, attributes the origin of the story to John Dee, astronomer and advisor to Queen Elizabeth I. Dee had borrowed spurious ideas from his contemporary, cartographer Humphrey Llwyd, and claimed that "King Arthur had won a vast empire in the north Atlantic, and that the voyages of Madog ab Owain Gwynedd had confirmed the title of the Welsh to those territories" (DAVIES, 1994, p.255). In the late 18th century, when the interest of Celtic culture and Welsh matters was rekindled, John Williams, a Welsh minister and historian residing in London, created and published his version of the events, and Iolo

Morganwg a self-styled neo-druid, backed up the story with "documents" proving that the descendants of Madoc and his colonizers still survived as native-American Welsh speaking tribes. These tribes were never found even though a "Madogian" Society had been formed which encouraged emigration, to some success, to the United States.

It is entirely feasible that Madoc sailed across the ocean and made landfall, it has, after all, been proven that the Viking Leif Erikson made a similar journey some 200 years previously. However, in Madoc's case there is no concrete archaeological or documented evidence, only popular hearsay. Curiously though, in his book *Princes and People of Wales*, John Miles, retired army Lt. Colonel and free-lance journalist and historian, writes,

> It is impossible to say just when the expedition set out [...]. The point of departure was Aber Kenion Gwnyon, now known as Rhos-on-Sea. Madoc and Einion made their way by a south-west course, leaving Ireland to the north. They passed east of the Azores and the ships, carried by the current, made the crossing of the Atlantic, finding landfall at Mobile Bay on the Gulf of Mexico" (MILES, 1977, p.44)

Miles' wording and tone suggest a veridical history though he offers no reference to sources nor any explanation of where the information originated. This is in contrast to the style of writer and researcher Christopher Winn (2007) who notes: "Prince Madoc, *who is said to have sailed* from Rhos-on-Sea to discover America ..." (my italics) (WINN, 2007, p.78) and "*Many people believe* that Prince Madoc did survive, landing at Mobile Bay in Alabama" (my italics) (Idem.). Whatever the truth about Prince Madoc, it is impossible to know exactly what happened, if anything at all. Is it "real history"? Did Prince Madoc land on the north American continent and establish early British colonies long before Columbus or the New World English colonizers? Or is it just purely myth originating from a fanciful story invented by an Elizabethan courtier?

The mention of King Arthur above brings a further example of mutated, unreliable history. The legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table has its origins in the chaotic period of the Anglo-Saxon colonisation of the land that would become England. For the most part, the stories of Arthur were made popular through Thomas Malory's compilation of tales, *Le Mort d'Arthur*, written in the 15th century. Malory had in fact collected and compiled stories of King Arthur from

different and varying sources, even from as far away as France. These stories had been passed from generation to generation since the time of the Anglo-Saxon colonisation during the 5th to the 6th centuries. One would think that such a great and powerful leader would surely be mentioned in some document from that period. However, the earliest written records, such as *Di Excidio Britanniae* (*The Ruin of Britain*) and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, have no mention at all of any leader with the name Arthur, or the Latinised, Arturius (SCHAMA, 2000). The former was written by the Welsh monk Gildas in the mid-6th Century, the closest period to the supposed existence of Arthur. Gildas documented the history of Britain of the 5th and 6th centuries describing principal battles between Saxons and Britons. One of the most important battles in which the Saxons were defeated by the Britons was the battle of Mount Badon, fought in the late 5th or early 6th century, in the southwest of England. The victorious leader of these Britons, according to Gildas, was Romano-Celt war leader Ambrosius Aurelianus, a descendant of Roman and Celtic noble families, the name Arthur does not appear at all. Fast forward some 300 years, another Welsh monk, Nennius, in *Historia Brittonum*, *The History of the Britons*, attributes the victory over the Saxons to none other than Arthur (SCHAMA, 2000); Somehow in 300 years or so, Arthur goes from being an unknown to a household, or perhaps castlehold, name. *Historia Brittonum* then becomes one of Malory's sources for his creation of *Le Mort d'Arthur.*

An interesting hypothesis suggested by novelist Bernard Cornwell through his trilogy known as *The Warlord Chronicles*: *The Winter King*, *Enemy of God* and *Excalibur*, is that the lack of any real recorded evidence that Arthur existed is due to the fact that the warrior king never fully converted to Christianity and was therefore written out of history by the Christian monk chroniclers of the time. In these novels the first-person narrator is an old man, who, through defeat and subjection, had been forced to become a monk. He recalls his days as a great warrior before being captured, under the command of Arthur and now he is writing his memories of those times, in secret, as the Abbot of the monastery in which he abides forbids him to write anything about the pagan British warrior king. Marion Bradley, in her well-known novel *The Mists of Avalon*, also posits the question of Arthur's conflict between the ancient pagan Druidic religion and the newly emerging Christianity. Whether he at all existed and converted to Christianity we shall never know,

however the legendary figure of Arthur had become Christian somewhere through the stories circulated between the 5th and 15th centuries, culminating in Malory's epic: a great leader, defending the Christian faith against the marauding pagan Saxon hordes, and, with his knights, going on a quest to find the Holy Grail. The stories highly romanticised to fit in with the chivalric and Christian codes of the Middle Ages giving us an anachronic knights-in-shining-armour image far from the pagan Romano-Celtic tribal leader figure of the 5th century. What then does the modern historian have as evidence of the existence of King Arthur? Only some fanciful stories from the 15th century and an unreliable document of the 9th century. Moreover, in an ironic twisted development of this *history-legend* the hero figure of Arthur was appropriated by the very people that – *according to legend*, I am obliged to add – he was defending his land against. English King Edward I, after defeating the Welsh princes and subjugating the land, was hailed as the heir to King Arthur. At court in north Wales the king fashioned a round table where his knights celebrated the victory over the Welsh. Also, an inscription on Maximillian I's tomb in Innsbruck, Germany acknowledges Arthur's title as *Konig von England,* king of the English (DAVIES, 1994).

As we have seen, the history that we read today is a complex result of an analysis and interpretation of the historian from selections of documents or evidence that does not have any guarantee of authenticity of any form of truth. In this sense, we are "allowed" to see only what chroniclers have selected for us to see, and furthermore, what historians consider important enough to report; Carr observes,

> Our picture has been pre-selected and pre-determined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving. (CARR, 2008, p.12)

More recent history, within living memory, such as from World War II, can of course rely on eye-witness accounts as a source of information to build up a picture of how events unfolded. However, research about memory in the field of psychology has shown that eye-witness accounts can be unreliable due to various factors such

as anxiety or stress and that a witness will recall only information which makes sense or has more meaning for them[3].

One of the most polemic instances of conflicting eye-witness accounts is that of the events of 30 January 1972, in which British soldiers fired on a peaceful civil rights march through Londonderry in Northern Ireland and killed 13 people, the day became popularly known as Bloody Sunday. According to the testimonies of the soldiers, they believed themselves to be in danger of their lives as they were being shot at from somewhere in the crowd they were facing. In his book *The IRA*, Irish historian and writer Tim Pat Coogan states, "However, *no one* else in Derry that day, including some journalist eyewitnesses of the calibre of Simon Winchester, then of *The Guardian*, *heard any shots* until the army began firing" (COOGAN, 1987, p. 344) (my italics). Conversely, in a Guardian newspaper report from the time, by aforementioned Simon Winchester writes, "those of us at the meeting *heard only one shot before the soldiers opened up* with their high velocity rifles" (WINCHESTER, 1972), (my italics); and furthermore in the same article, Winchester quotes another eye-witness at the scene as saying, "it was impossible to say who fired first" (WINCHESTER, 1972). In another archived *Guardian* report of that day, journalist Simon Hoggart, quotes the commanding officer of the paratroopers as saying,

> We moved very quickly when the firing started. Their shots were highly inaccurate. I believe in fact they lost their nerve when they saw us coming in. Nail bombs were thrown and one man who was shot was seen to be lighting a bomb as he was shot. This is open to conjecture, but I personally saw a man with an M1 carbine rifle on the balcony of a flat. I don't believe people were shot in the back while they were running away. A lot of us do think that some of the people were shot by their own indiscriminate firing. (HOGGART, 1972).

This is a widely differing account to that of other witnesses at the scene on the day. According to the marchers, nobody in the crowd was armed and everything was peaceful until the soldiers began firing; according to the commanding officer and several of the soldiers, the marchers were armed with a variety of weapons including assault rifles and nail bombs and were in the act of firing the weapons and throwing the bombs before the soldiers opened fire. There is also an obvious, albeit slight, discrepancy between Coogan's account and the Guardian reporter's account.

[3] Source: http://www.simplypsychology.org/eyewitness-testimony.html.

Who fired a gun first? Was it the soldiers or was it someone in the crowd of protesting civilians? An initial inquiry set up immediately after the events of the day, known as the Widgery Tribunal, cleared the soldiers and their commanding officer of any blame (COOGAN, 1987). This created such an outcry that a demand for another, independent investigation was called for which was finally instigated more than twenty years later in 1998. The Saville Inquiry as it was known, which was concluded and published in 2010, found that the soldiers who had given testimonies for the Widgery report had deliberately lied to protect themselves. The conclusion of the Saville Inquiry was that the soldiers fired first and were directly to blame for the deaths of unarmed civilians[4].

Had there been no outcry about the Widgery report and no consequent further inquiry, "history" would have told us that the British soldiers were attacked by a huge crowd of belligerent civilians, many of them armed with guns and bombs. As we can see in this example, as well as the psychological issues that can make a witness unreliable, the witness can deliberately lie for a variety of reasons, usually to protect themselves. In the same way, eyewitness accounts of historical battles and rebellions vary considerably; the 14th century French chronicler, Jean Froissart, puts the numbers of the crowd at the Peasant's Revolt of 1381 in England as 50,000 whereas a more likely figure is between 5,000 and 10,000 (SCHAMA, 2000). Bruce Campbell states "*roughly* 10,000 insurgents *may* have assembled" (CAMPBELL, 2006, p.223) (my italics), a greatly varying number that illustrates that we never can know for sure the exact truth of these events.

History then is not a straightforward matter of the study of the past and a reporting of that past as a chronological sequence of events; some singular facts we know to be undoubtedly true, Elvis Presley *is* dead (though this is still disputed by some people), great historical events on the other hand, such as the world wars, need to be treated, analysed and reported with meticulous care and attention.

[4] The Saville Inquiry report can be found online at: http://www.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org.

3. THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

Over the years there has been a continuing fascination for identifying with and relating to the past through the production and consumption of historical fiction. Kate Mitchell (2013) notes the public interest reflected in the number of historical novels on best seller lists and as recipients of literary awards. Mitchell observes that when the Institute of Historical Research in the United Kingdom held its annual conference in 2011 the main topic discussed was historical fiction and an internet website was opened for the public because of popular request.

From Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* and *Ivanhoe* to today's best seller writer Ken Follett's *Pillars of the Earth* and his latest New York Times listed *Winter of the World,* these novels are an alternative window into the past which may or may not be an historically accurate account of events, though, as we have seen above, historiography itself may or may not be historically accurate. Historical novels offer an alternative window into the past in the sense that, though events may have been recorded at the time by contemporary chroniclers, a novelist can create a more detailed verisimilar scene around the event taking place, such as an exchange of views going on between knights observing King Henry II of England as he fulminates about Archbishop Thomas Becket. In the second half of the 12th Century, King Henry II was at odds with his former friend, whom he had appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury, over church versus crown matters. In one of his famous rages the King's words were recorded as, "What miserable drones and traitors have I nourished and promoted in my household, who let their lord be treated with such shameful contempt by a low-born clerk!" (SCHAMA, 2000, p.142), the response to this outburst however was not recorded. In his historical novel *Pillars of the Earth*, Ken Follett places one of the principal fictional characters as one of the historical four knights who were present at the time of the King's moment of anger. The knights understood the King's utterance as a direct order to assassinate the archbishop. Follett suggests a brief conversation between the knights as, "Some of us think the time has come for sterner measures", "What do you mean?", "Execution!" (FOLLETT, 1990, p.953). Whether these actual words were spoken or not, the created verisimilitude is appropriate for the occurrence and the whole episode becomes a real event that we can relate to more than a reported dry fact of the date and the names of players involved in the assassination of the Archbishop.

The author's creation of a fictional universe within the real universe attributes tangible personality and identity to figures we may otherwise have only known about through tedious school history lessons of meaningless dates and names. The author is also at liberty to create a personality and life story around an otherwise anonymous figure recorded present at an historical event whose actions may well be part of documented history; in London in 1381, when the rebel leader Wat Tyler confronted the 14 year old King Richard II during the Peasants' Revolt, someone in the crowd was heard to shout out an accusation that Tyler was a thief, according to Schama, the accuser was a young squire in the entourage of the king (SCHAMA, 2000). Author Edward Rutherfurd, in his epic historical novel *London: The Novel* puts the words into the mouth of the main fictional character in the chapter that deals with that period of history, "And then James Bull entered English history, 'I know that fellow,' he blurted out, his voice ringing across Smithfield. 'He's a highwayman from Kent.'" (RUTHERFURD, 1998, p. 575). The narrator's meta-fictional announcement that Bull "entered English history" makes the bridge from the novel to a history narrative, reminding the informed reader that this fictional novel is dealing with real history.

This meta-fictional bridging within the narrative, as well as writers' notes in prefaces and end notes, began in early historical novels as the authors' response to reviewers' anxieties that the readers may not know of how to interpret the novel, i.e., as fiction or history (STEVENS, 2013). In this way, the author allows the reader to recognize the historical facts within the fictional narrative. In her novels, American author Sharon Penman frequently reinforces a narrative of a specific historical event by inserting fragments of medieval manuscripts, "From the chronicle of the thirteenth-century monk Robert of Gloucester: 'Such was the murder of Evesham, for battle it was none'" (PENMAN, 1988, p.527); by changing to a very formal narrative style in short paragraphs in order to convey an impression of a history narrative, "On November 12th of God's Year, 1276, the royal council of the English King judged Llewelyn ap Gruffydd to be in rebellion, and war was declared against Wales" (PENMAN, 1991, p.227); or, as with Rutherfurd's meta-fictional bridging style sentences that appear throughout the fictional narrative, such as in this example, "The number of Jews hanged was given as nineteen in the

official records, as two hundred and ninety-three by the chroniclers of the time" (PENMAN, 1991, p.356)

According to Hungarian literary critic Georg Lukács, one of the first to study the historical novel, this genre evolved from the realist novels of the 19th century, which in their turn emerged because of socio-cultural upheavals of the time: the Napoleonic Wars, the rising wave of the Industrial Revolution and the beginnings of capitalism (LUKÁCS, 1983). Earlier, 18th century Gothic novels, such as Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, demonstrate elements of historical fiction that Sir Walter Scott would elaborate into what are widely considered as the first historical novels in Western culture (de GROOT, 2010). *The Castle of Otranto* is presented as a 16th century translation, of a much earlier Italian manuscript, which was "found in the library of an ancient Catholic family in the north of England" (WALPOLE, 1766, p. v). Walpole demonstrates a sense of authenticity to historiography in the preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, when the narrator observes, "[The writer] must represent his actors as believing [the manners of the times]" (WALPOLE, 1766, p. v), however, Lucáks notes that,

> What is lacking in the so-called historical novel before Sir Walter Scott is precisely the specifically historical, that is, derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age (LUCÁKS, 1983, p.19)

Furthermore, "in the most famous 'historical novel' of the eighteenth century, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, history is likewise treated as mere costumery" (LUCÁKS, 1983, p.19), that is, as just a decorative background to the plot. The individuality of characters and bringing history to the forefront of the novel is later developed by Scott with his publication of the so-called *Waverley* novels beginning in 1814 with a book of that name.

Waverley deals with the historical events of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 in Scotland, an attempt by the exiled Charles Edward Stuart, the son of King James II of England, to regain the throne for the House of Stuart. In this novel, a young officer in the English army, Edward Waverley, travels to the highlands but there sympathises with the Jacobean cause and is captured and accused of treason. The Jacobean highlanders rescue Waverley and he is taken to a castle to meet Charles

Stuart, popularly known as "Bonnie Prince Charlie", pretender to the British throne. Scott is able to insert fictional characters into the historical setting and events to interact with historical characters such as the Scottish rebel barons and the pretender Prince, to form a believable history. Lukács (1983) notes that, what differentiates Scott's work from the earlier Gothic novels and the realistic social novels of the 18th and early 19th centuries is that, rather than merely describing the social norms of the time using the historic period as a background, the historic events in Scott's novels have a direct impact on the characters and the society described. This, according to Lukács, is the beginning of the historical novel.

Waverley was the first of a series of novels which Scott published anonymously, and which are known as the *Waverly Novels*, each one being published as 'from the author of Waverley'. One of the better known of these, *Ivanhoe* (pub.1819), deals with an earlier period of history, 13th century England, and the conflicts between the Saxons and the Anglo-Normans who had already been established as England's ruling class having supplanted the Saxons over 200 years previously. Once again, the eponymous protagonist interacts with factual-historical characters within a factual-historical framework, with an authenticity that communicates as much reliable information as an historical narrative. In order to do this, the authentic and accurate portrayal of the fictional characters must be consistent with the real characters; they must be given life into the world where the historical characters already exist. In this sense Lukács notes,

> What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality. (LUKÁCS, 1983, p.42)

Scott's work had a profound influence on 19th century writers, not only authors of fiction, but also historians; Thomas Macaulay complained that the duty of the historian had been appropriated by the novelist (de GROOT, 2010). Charles Dickens is amongst the British writers upon which Scott's work had great impact. Dickens's first historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* has as its background the anti-Catholic riots of London in 1780. In his narrative, Dickens describes the violence and destruction of parts of London through the personal 'eye-witness' accounts of the

characters caught up in the unrest. Much the same discontent transferred to the streets of 18th century Paris is described by the characters of *A Tale of Two Cities* embroiled in the events of the French Revolution.

In Europe and Russia, writers such as Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and Pushkin were following the developments of the historical literary trend, and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* became an outstanding example of the Russian literature form of the historical novel.

By the beginning of the 20th century the historical novel had become a clear sub-genre and bibliographical guides were published, such as Jonathan Nields's *Guide to the Best Historical Novels and Tales*, published in 1902 and Ernest Baker's *A Guide to Historical Fiction* in 1914 (de GROOT, 2010), listing the options available from around the world. At that time Baker observed that historical fiction had educational value and would be of interest for both a student or a professor of history and "for the reader interested in history who has not the time or inclination to study the most serious historians" (BAKER, 1914, p. vii). Furthermore, Baker recognised the importance of the contribution that historical fiction had to offer to the study of history,

> Historical fiction is not history, but it is often better than history. A fine historical painting, a pageant, or a play may easily teach more and carry a deeper impression than whole chapters of description and analysis. [...] a good [historical novel] – though chronology may be at fault and facts inaccurately stated, will probably succeed in making a period live in the imagination when textbooks merely give us dry bones (BAKER, 1914, p. vii).

From evolving into a sub-genre in itself, the historical novel has since diversified into sub-sub-genres with the emergence of historical romance, adventure, war, and even science-fiction (time travel into the past). Amongst the last mentioned is Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander*, in which the heroine, a Second World War nurse, travels back in time to 18th century Scotland and becomes involved in the Jacobite Rebellion; bringing the historical novel full circle back to where it began with Scott's *Waverley*. Also, in science-fiction, Kurt Vonnegut's satirical *Slaughterhouse-Five* takes the historical novel into new dimensions of literary forms when the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, finds himself in different time phases of his life,

unexpectedly and with no set chronological pattern – which is also how the novel is written – after being abducted and kept in a 'zoo' on a distant planet by alien beings. Through different periods of his life Pilgrim finds himself in pre- and Post-Second World War USA, in the war itself as a solder during the Battle of the Bulge, which took place in the winter of 1944-45; and as a prisoner of war in Dresden when it was bombed by the allies in February 1945. The bombing of Dresden, one of the most destructive single events of the war, is used as the main historical background setting of the novel, it was there that the author himself was a prisoner of war, and during the night of the bombing, held in the cellar of the Slaughterhouse, designated number five. The Second World War is also the historical background framework for Ian McEwan's meta-fictional work *Atonement* in which the characters are involved in the Blitz, the bombing of London by the German *Luftwaffe* during the early 1940s; and the Allied military withdrawal from mainland Europe at the beaches of Dunkirk in the Spring of 1940.

The historical novel then has come a long way from 18th century Gothic, the social realist novels of the early 19th century and Walter Scott's *Waverly*. Historical fiction now includes various sub-genres and even novels which deal with alternative histories, or *uchronia*, such as William Overgard's *The Divide* set thirty years after a Nazi German victory of the Second World War; or Alan Moore's dystopian New York in his graphic novel *Watchmen*.

4. READING FICTION, LEARNING HISTORY

13th Century, England

By the beginning of the 13th century, King John of England had already lost much of the territory in France, the Angevin Empire, that his brother, Richard I, The Lionheart, had built up, maintained and defended over 10 years of his reign. Closer to home, John faced rebellion from his supposed allies, the Norman-English barons discontented with John's heavy-handed rule, his imposition of a scutage tax – payment in lieu of military service – and his mistreatment of high-born hostages and prisoners, contrary to the epoch's Chivalric Code. Amongst his more noxious deeds, John had ordered the assassination of his nephew, Arthur of Brittany, John's rival to the throne of England; hanged several Welsh noble hostages including children as

young as 12; and imprisoned the wife and son of his one-time friend William de Braose. Maud de Braose and her son, also named William, were imprisoned in Corfe castle and left to starve to death. By April 2015 the outraged barons were in open rebellion and marched on and captured John's holdings in London, Lincoln and Exeter in the south of England. John agreed on a truce and met with the rebel barons in the fields of Runnymede on the banks of the River Thames. It was at this location on 10th of June 1215 that the Barons presented John with a list of their demands and conditions for reform. Years later this document became known as the *Magna Carta Libertatum,* the Great Charter of Freedoms, one of the first documents to restrict the power of the monarch and an important symbol of liberty until today.

Soon after, King John wholly ignored the concessions, and the rebellion was rekindled to become a full civil war. With much of the baronage against him and facing an invasion by the Prince Louise of France, whom the rebel barons had invited to lead them, with the promise of the throne of England if victorious, John found his support dwindling. Whilst the king was campaigning in the east of England his baggage train traversing a wide sandy bay and carrying supplies and possessions, including the crown treasury, jewels and gold, was caught by treacherous shifting sands and a sudden tidal surge; the mules and baggage carts were lost in the bay. To this day the King's Treasure has never been found despite numerous treasure hunting expeditions. Soon after this incident King John, weakened from months of war and constantly on the move, contracted dysentery and died in October 2016. The barons rejected the French Prince Louis and John's eldest son at 9 years old became King Henry III. "The Greatest Knight" William Marshal, Earl of Pembroke, was appointed Lord Protector and Regent until the young King became of age.

19th Century, Brazil.

Toward the end of the 19th Century, amongst the growing discontent in several regions of the newly formed Republic of Brazil, Antônio Vincente Mendes Macie, a self-proclaimed prophet, founded a religious community in the village of Canudos in the State of Bahia. Over the next few years, the community grew, attracted by the charismatic leader Macie, who became known as Antônio Conselheiro, Antony the Counsellor. The Counsellor had been preaching anti-

republicanism and Sebastianism, the belief that a 16th century king of Portugal, Dom Sebastian, who had been defeated and killed in a battle against an Islamic army in Morocco, would be resurrected and would drive the "infidel republicans" from the land. Such anti-republican sentiments soon caught the attention of the authorities, and Brazil's first elected civilian president, Prudente de Moraes, ordered government forces to apprehend the rebel leader. What the Brazilian army did not expect was the fierce resistance that the community of Canudos put up. Vastly underestimating the power of the adversary, the first expedition force to advance on Canudos consisted of only a hundred men. When more than a quarter were killed or wounded, the depleted expeditionary force retreated to wait for further orders. In January 1897 a larger force advanced, this time of over 500 men, including artillery and machine guns; after two days of fierce battle, they too were defeated and were forced to withdraw. A third expeditionary force was assembled consisting of over 1,300 men and commanded by Colonel Antônio Moreira César, a veteran of the Federalist Revolution of Rio Grande do Sul in the south of Brazil. In this attack three hundred men including the Colonel and his second in command lost their lives and the survivors once again retreated abandoning their weapons and artillery which were taken up by the Canudos defenders. A fourth and final expeditionary force of 8,000 men, heavy machine guns and artillery, which included a British made Whitworth heavy cannon, surrounded the village and tried to force the remaining Canudos defenders into starvation and submission. After a morning of heavy artillery bombardment, in a final assault the government forces swept through the village and killed all remaining rebels as well as women and children who had stayed behind.

It is estimated that the War of Canudos claimed the lives of over 25,000 rebels and 5,000 government troops between November 1896 and October 1897. When the dust had settled, the Brazilian army officers discovered that Antônio Conselheiro himself had died of dysentery a little over a month before. His body was exhumed, and the head removed and displayed on a pike at a military victory parade. What was initially thought to be a minor inconvenient rebellion to be quickly and effectively crushed, turned out to be one of the bloodiest civil wars in Brazilian history.

20th Century, Cuba

At one of the most critical periods of the Cold War in 1961, the United States, under the presidency of John F. Kennedy deployed nuclear missiles in Turkey and Italy at key strategical positions for a nuclear strike into Soviet Union territory. Tensions between the two super-powers had been escalating since a US pilot had been shot down while flying a U2 "Spy-Plane" at extreme high altitude over Soviet territory in May 1960. US pilot Francis Gary Powers survived the crash but was captured, held and interrogated by the KGB before being convicted of espionage and sentenced to 10 years in a labour camp. Furthermore, in April 1961, the US financed and coordinated a failed invasion of the Caribbean Island of Cuba by Cuban exiles in an attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro's newly established communist government. The deployment in Europe of American missiles was a further provocation that the Soviets, led by Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, could not ignore. As a counter-measure Khrushchev ordered the supply of materials to construct missiles with nuclear capability to Cuba, which was allied to the Soviet Union since it had become a communist state in the 1959 revolution. US intelligence had been monitoring the Soviet-Cuban collaboration, and to prevent further materials from reaching the island, Kennedy declared a naval blockade in order to impede any Soviet ships from reaching the island. With both sides occupying international waters with heavily armed naval vessels in a classic standoff, the most critical moment went largely unnoticed by the world. The US warships detected a Soviet submarine patrolling the waters around the island. When the submarine was located, low-potential depth charges were launched in an attempt to force the submarine to the surface. With no communication to the surface the crew of the submarine interpreted the explosions as an act of war and made all the necessary preparations to launch a nuclear torpedo against the US naval ships. The torpedo launch required the consensual authorization of the three senior officers on board. Two of the officers were willing for the launch to go ahead, while the third, Flotilla Commander Vasily Aleksandrovich Arkhipov, refused to give his consent. Arkhipov was later credited as being, quite literally, "the man who saved the world". The Cuban Missile Crisis, as the events became to be known, was finally resolved diplomatically when the

Soviets agreed to withdraw from Cuba on condition that the US would remove its missiles from Europe.

5. CONCLUSION

Above are three examples of historical events unconnected in any way. What brings these three pieces of historical information together here is that I have chosen to illustrate them as examples of history through literature. The above historical information was gleaned entirely from historical novels. Sharon Kay Penman in her novel *Here Be Dragons*, published in 1985, recounts the history of King John of England's unpopular reign, the First Barons' War, the signing of the *Magna Carta* and the unfortunate incident of the King's lost treasure. The history of the War of Canudos is told in Errol Lincoln Uys' *Brazil: A Novel*, the narrative of which recounts events beginning in 1491 and end with an afterword of the year 2000. Finally, the events of the Cuban Missile Crisis are told in Ken Follett's third novel of his "Century Trilogy", *Edge of Eternity*. The trilogy deals with all the major world events that led up to the World Wars, the genesis of the Cold War and the collapse of Communism; all seen through the eyes of the members of five inter-related families, American, Russian, German, English and Welsh, who interact with the major historical figures of the 20th Century.

These novels are but a tiny example of a huge selection of historical fiction available that deals with all epochs of human history, the further back into the past, the more equivocal the documented evidence is that the novelist has to rely on; and the very same can be said of the historian. The historical facts of these novels can be verified through history narratives, it may or may not be important for the reader to know the accuracy of, or indeed, if these events really happened.

In conclusion, we can see that historiography and historical fiction are in many ways similar in that they both produce a narrative which can convey information that tells us a story from a past time. A history narrative gives us stories from the past which are reported as facts, as chosen, identified and interpreted by the historian; a historical fiction narrative can give us those same stories and fill in the spaces with verisimilar actions and dialogue of fictional or non-fictional characters enabling us to connect and identify more with our past and our histories.

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