

19TH ANNUAL IBSC CONFERENCE

UNEARTHING CREATIVITY

THE FACTION OF FICTION

PURSUING CREATIVITY AND LITERACY IN HISTORY THROUGH
HISTORICAL FICTION

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WHAT are we doing as teachers and WHY are we doing it?

The broad answer to this question and thus what we are pursuing as teachers fits into the general ethos of the History Department at The King's School which can be defined as attempting to **make a demonstrable difference to student learning and achievement.**

In other words, through the specified content that we are required to teach and assess, the specified skills that we are likewise required to develop and to assess and the programs of work that we are required to develop to facilitate these mandated outcomes being both demonstrated and achieved, **we are attempting to make teaching and learning effective for the students in our classrooms.** It's a tough and challenging call.

More often than not we find our teaching and learning is compromised by the demands of having to rush and plough through and attend to the mandated content and key skills which culminates in an external exam at the conclusion of secondary education, that critically tests these mandated requirements.

We do not want to leave our students exposed and nor do we want to be found accountable as the teacher, or the department, or the school that falls short of the incredible parental and public expectation and scrutiny that accompanies these final results, which are both public and published and accompanied by a frenzy of media attention.

When I talk to my staff about these demands and expectations two interesting observations typically emerge.

Firstly, they comment that as history teachers, they are blessed in dealing with such an extraordinary wealth and range of material that both interests and challenges the students in our classrooms.

I mean really, what boys are not interested in at least one or two things from the following sample list of historical goodies to teach?

***Mummies and bog bodies**

***Tutankhamun and curses and pyramids and sun temples**

***Vikings and longboats and berserkers**

***Medieval torture and crime and punishment**

***Aztec and Mayan blood sacrifices and conquistadors**

***Spectacular medieval castles and offence and defence**

***The Western Front and epic battles**

***The Cold War and espionage and the development of the V2 rocket and nuclear technology**

***The Vietnam War and rocking Australian protest music**

and

Secondly, their frustration that the chance to be more creative in their teaching and thus use this wealth of material is often sacrificed at the expense of the boxes that must be ticked – the aforementioned mandated requirements.

It is a daily challenge to us as teachers to negotiate the demands of what we must do and make sure that the pursuit of making a demonstrable difference to student learning by being creative is not lost or abandoned.

The Role of Elective History

In Years 9 and 10 (Stage 5) in New South Wales, we are blessed with an elective course of History that students can take in addition to the mandated course of History that all students in the state are required to study.

In short, its great advantage is that under a series of broad umbrella headings, schools who offer this course can develop their own units of work on whatever aspect of history they wish to pursue. It affords the most spectacular opportunities for the teachers to pursue creative teaching and to push and challenge their students free of the constraints of any external exam. All that is required is a grade of achievement for having completed the course. Even the assessment strategies and requirements are couched in broad terms. This has allowed for the most creative of expressions and outcomes from students when they are given the freedom to develop their own strategies to evidence the outcomes of their research.

In my department, the following examples of units of work have been developed under the auspices of this course:

****The history of terrorism***

****The development and importance of warfare to the shaping of the historical record***

****Ten days that shook the world***

****History and Sport: Melbourne, Munich, Mexico City and Beijing***

****The historicity of Jack the Ripper***

****The Da Vinci Code: History or Fantasy?***

****The most important people who have shaped the social and political fabric of our time***

It is through this course and the freedoms it allows to be far more creative, that the unit of work that sits as my presentation for this workshop entitled ***The Faction of Fiction*** was developed.



I can't read historical fiction because I find the real thing so much more interesting.

Antonia Fraser, the famous English biographer of Mary Queen of Scots

Rationale for The Faction of Fiction

In the person of Mary Queen of Scots we have one of the most interesting of historical characters whose tragic story has all the key ingredients necessary for a monumentally great work of historical fiction: there was treachery, murder, espionage, religious fervour, martyrdom and a tragic death. Thus, I was rather surprised by my favourite biographer's apparent lack of regard for the genre that I love so much. It was the use of her word interesting that set me thinking. Beyond the obvious that arose from this contention as to whether or not historical fiction is more or less interesting than the real thing, or whether it is a less than credible discourse, it made me consider the extent or otherwise, to which historical fiction can really present as a legitimate source of information on the historical narrative? Does it have any valid place in the record about the people and events of the past? Does it help us to properly understand and appreciate the past and why events unfolded the way they did? Does it help to engage us with and therefore connect with the lives of people from the past and help us to understand what motivated them and inspired them? Can it be considered as a legitimate representation of truth and thus the historical record?

Should we show respect to the traditional canons of scholarship?

RJ Evans. **In Defence of History.** p249

All these questions and many others were ones that I hoped to challenge my Y9 Elective History class with, by not only the reading of a self-selected work of historical fiction, but by engaging in a research task that also helped to foster both their creativity and historical literacy. Thus what I saw here was the opportunity to tie three things of enormous interest to me as a history teacher together: **1) the promotion of historical fiction, 2) the exploration of creativity and 3) the development of historical literacy.**

Does historical fiction run the risk of using imaginative licence at the expense of the truth?

Once again, the writer stains the tree of History with his thoughts...

Osip Mandelstam. *The End of the Novel*. 1920

A Russian poet arrested during the Stalinist era and sent to exile in the 1930's. He died in 1938 in a transit camp in Siberia and as the quote reveals was highly critical of Stalinist imposition on the record of events.

This question was for me the obvious one to ask and engage my students with and whilst I laid no claims to originality in pondering it, I thought that it was the important one to address. I was not sure where to proceed with it until I found this very same question presented itself to me on the back cover of a most extraordinary book that has completely changed the way I think about the writing of history as fiction. It is **accessible, challenging, confronting** and above and beyond everything, **totally honest about the shortcomings of daring to write about real events and people** because the writer **constantly questions the need to examine his claims to truth**.

When you are a novelist writing about real people, how do you resist the temptation to make things up?

Laurent Binet

A challenge to Antonia Fraser

HHhH by Laurent Binet: review

Laurent Binet's brilliantly gripping 'HHhH' resets the path of the historical novel

Every now and then a piece of work comes along that **undermines the assumptions upon which all previous works have been built**. Often impish and self-referential, and always as eager to show their workings as any top set maths student, these pieces of art complicate the genre for everyone that follows. [*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*](#) did it for the memoir, *Reservoir Dogs* for action films, and now *HHhH* does it for the historical novel. Laurent Binet's brilliantly translated debut **deconstructs the process of fiction writing in the face of the brute reality of facts**.

His subject is a daring assassination mission undertaken by two Czechoslovakian parachutists in 1942: Operation Anthropoid. Its target is Reinhard Heydrich, "the most dangerous man in the Third Reich", according to Adolf Hitler. Heydrich is officially Himmler's number two in the SS, but everyone in the organisation believes "*Himmler's Hirn heisst Heydrich*" (*HHhH*): Himmler's brain is called Heydrich. Tall, blond, clever and cartoonishly cruel, Heydrich is

the “Butcher of Prague” and a perfect prism through which to reveal and condemn the banality of evil.

Over 257 short chapters, *HHhH* recounts both the mission undertaken by Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubis as they travel from France to Britain and then on to Prague and their fateful encounter with Heydrich, and also the mission undertaken by Binet **as he tries to put together an accurate account of two men whom he admires so much but about whom he knows so little. This doesn’t stop him being scrupulous about facts: he is forever scolding himself for perceived flights of fancy. His aim is to produce what he calls an “infranovel”, one that is constantly examining its own particular claim to truth.**

If this sounds pompous, the book certainly isn’t: it achieves a playful lightness with its comic updates on the state of Binet’s relationship and its bruising analysis of other accounts of the period. And it is conventionally successful too, as both a gripping thriller and a moving testament to the heroes of the Czechoslovakian resistance. Their mission reset the path of history. **Binet’s resets the path of the historical novel.** He has a bright, bright future.

By David Annand. **The Telegraph.** 03 May 2012

“So Gabčík existed, and it was to this name that he answered. His story is as true as it is extraordinary. He and his comrades are, in my eyes, the authors of one of the greatest acts of resistance in human history, and without doubt the greatest of the Second World War. For a long time I have wanted to pay tribute to him. For a long time I have seen him lying in his little room – shutters closed, window open – listening to the creak of the tram that stops outside the Botanical Gardens. But if I put this image on paper, as I’m sneakily doing now, that won’t necessarily pay tribute to him. I am reducing this man to the ranks of a vulgar character and his actions to literature: an ignominious transformation, but what else can I do? I don’t want to darg this vision around with me all my life without having tried, at least to give it some substance. I just hope that, however bright and blinding the veneer of fiction that covers this fabulous story, you will still be able to see through it to the historical reality that lies behind it.”

Excerpt from Chapter 1 of *HHhH* by Laurent Binet.



As the workings of an assignment that would address the three aforementioned elements of promoting historical fiction, creativity and literacy formulated in my mind, some rather clear and strong questions presented themselves to me as ones that I wanted evidenced as outcomes both in the process and in the end product.

This is where I thought that I could engage my students with some really metacognitively rich instruction and engagement and thus link back to my opening question about what are we doing and why are we doing it?

*I wanted to challenge Antonia Fraser's statement and what it clearly implied and explore Evans' question about showing respect to the traditional canons of history. Does historical fiction show a lack of respect to the traditional canon of history writing?

*I was especially keen to have my students engage with the process of constantly questioning the truth and the issue about resisting the urge to meddle with it as Laurent Binet so brilliantly and honestly does in HHhH.

*I wanted to engage my students with a medium that I thought had immense value in both engaging with and reconstructing the past and to explore the extent to which my students as budding historians, thought that it had similar value as I did, or not, as the case may prove to be.

*I wanted them to engage with interesting and searching questions about the past. For example: How it is best recorded and who should be writing about history? Does "imaginative licence" which is such an integral part of historical fiction play a valid role when the evidence does not exist?

*As a history teacher I always push my students to continually question what is "truth" in the historical record and to see how perceptions of truth could be shaped. I saw in historical fiction, the opportunity to do this in a challenging and creative manner.

*I wanted to see if there were such strongly held perceptions about certain people and events of the past, that they were deemed to be "off-limits" with respect to re-interpretation and whether or not writers of historical fiction needed to be mindful of this when they wrote about the people and events of the past? Or are all people and topics in the historical record "up for grabs" and continual re-evaluation and re-interpretation?

*I also saw this as an opportunity to further develop their research and inquiry skills and to explore the extent to which a work of historical fiction stood up to their close historical scrutiny.

*I saw this as a fantastic opportunity to introduce them to the concepts of historicity and historiography by exploring the credibility of both characters and events central to a work of historical fiction that they had read.

*I saw this as a perfect vehicle to uphold not only the ethos of this course, but to empower my students with a creative exercise and thus enhance their historical literacy

Some Thoughts about Historical Literacy

In the History Department at The King's School we use a model or framework for literacy adapted from the **National Centre for History Education** (www.hyperhistory.org) which is an offshoot of the **Department of Education Science and Training**. The model is derived from an essay written by renowned Australian scientist Peter Fensham entitled *Towards a definition of Historical Literacy*.

The model has become a very nice way of confirming that as History teachers, we do and in fact always have attended to literacy in general and historical literacy in particular. For history teachers and history educators, there is not much about how the centre defines literacy that has not been understood, nor appreciated, nor applied by history teachers over the course of the years that I have been teaching history. In fact, the rubric and language of the four History Syllabi of NSW whilst not directly modelled on the National Centre for History Education's definition, closely parallel it.

I would extend the sentiment further and say that most, if not all teachers if they are good at their craft, intuitively and instinctively teach literacy to their students, even if they are not overtly aware of it. The NCHE certainly advocates such a sentiment.

Such expectations are also to be found in many classrooms where skilled and enthusiastic teachers, either intuitively or through careful study and professional experience, understand what historical literacy really is.

Three critical components to historical literacy emerge from Fensham's essay. One in particular has in my opinion, cogency and relevance for all teachers regardless of their subject area and thus became my key indicator of historical literacy that I could reflect upon and measure against, to judge whether both our teaching and assessment strategies were attending to and developing historical literacy.

First, historical literacy is not about a purposeless knowing of facts about the past. Historical literacy is about personal, social and political empowerment.

AND THUS I WANTED THIS STUDY OF HISTORICAL FICTION AND THE ASSOCIATED ASSIGNMENT TO BE AN "EMPOWERING" PROCESS FOR MY STUDENTS. IF STUDENTS ARE EMPOWERED THEN THEY ARE BOTH CREATIVE AND LITERATE.

What were the key elements that I considered as necessary to allow this study and the assignment to be an empowering process?

1) In broad terms I considered all of the following points that are advocated by Dr Alison Davis of the Australian Centre of Educational Research in her work on whole school literacy approaches:

- *Consideration of links to prior knowledge: frontloading

- *That the instructions were metacognitively rich. IN other words, made us think hard about what we are doing and why we are doing it

- *The integration of formative assessment that allowed for students to monitor their own learning

- *That students were given the appropriate tools for learning and problem solving

- *Selection of both text and task that accounted for the varying cognitive capacities of students

- *That there was active engagement of the students as learners

2) Then I specifically targeted the following:

a) Allow for student decision making both independent and guided about:

- *The selection of the work of fiction and articulation of why the choice was made: This is where I hoped to use frontloading activities that could be used before the reading of the novel to assess student conceptual, procedural or genre knowledge that may be necessary for success on the subsequent tasks. In particular the development of a google site that was designed to assist the students before and also during the reading of their selected novel.

- *Responsibility for the management of time to attend to all the required tasks

- *Individual choice about the method/s of presentation for the required tasks and elements

b) Suitable stimulus material that would really provoke and challenge the student's thinking and provide assistance and scaffolding to assist with the students. Hence the development of the google site.

Things that would really challenge and test the boundaries of conventional historical wisdom.

***Case Study of the movie Downfall**

***Case study of the aforementioned HHhH by Laurent Binet**

c) Questions and tasks that challenged thinking and allowed for the expression and voicing of opinions. Hence the development of a number of student surveys.

d) Access to evidence and time to allow for good research and judgements to be validated and upheld.

e) Opportunities for forums to voice and discuss and reflect upon the central issues that arose from the study: political, historical, moral and philosophical.

Notification of assignment via the TKS intranet

Outcomes
E5.2, E5.4, E5.6,
E5.7, E5.8, E5.9,
E5.10

Curriculum Area
Ancient, Medieval
and Early Modern
Societies

Format
Research paper

Weighting
25% of Course

Marking Guidelines

Due date
Task 1A or 1B
May 21
Task 2 & 3
June 15

**Academic
Integrity Policy**

Cover Sheet



History Year 9 Elective

Faction of Fiction

Overview

Task 1

Task 2

Task 3

Key Inquiry

To what extent does historical fiction, as demonstrated through the reading of my chosen novel, successfully convey to me the period within which it is set. Does the story stick to realistic and accurate historical detail? Does historical fiction have a valid role to play in the understanding of the historical record?

The following quote from the [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) will become the basis of your research. In other words, a framework from which to measure and test your chosen novel against.

*A work of historical fiction is a novel that has, as its setting, a usually **significant period of history** and that attempts to **convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions** of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages... or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters.*

Length

There is no set length for any of these tasks. You are expected to use the template and the questions as a guide to make some independent decisions about the length required, remembering that you have the entire term to complete this investigation.

Evidence

You will use **BOTH** archaeological and written evidence from the historical record to support and enhance your historical findings. Depending on when your novel is set, you may be able to use evidence from film, television and the news media. This would be very appropriate for anything in the 20th Century.

For example

1. If your central character is a person who did live, then you will be able to gather a range of evidence, **written or archaeological**, to establish something about their physical appearance and what they looked like.
2. If your central character was a fictional witch burned at the stake in Medieval Europe, then you should be able to collect written evidence from the period about what characteristics were attributed to witches and how they were depicted in artwork as a reference point to measure your character against.
3. If your novel is set in the Rome during the Barbarian invasions, then you should be able to find written and archaeological evidence for the nature of life in Rome and what atrocities were committed and how Romans in general reacted to, and viewed the invasions.

Outcomes
E5.2, E5.4, E5.6,
E5.7, E5.8, E5.9,
E5.10

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Your Tutor

History Year 9 Elective

Faction of Fiction

Overview

Task 1

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Task 3

This task is divided into two parts. You will select either **Task 1A** or **Task 1B**.

You will make **critical judgements** based on your research of the period within which your novel is set, by **comparing** the results of your research against the **people, events**, as well as **social and cultural conditions** of your chosen novel.

Task 1A 10 marks

1. You will research the **key event** that your novel is set within or around, either real or imaginary.
2. You will say whether the key event is the truth, or other, and give an explanation.

Alert

The key event might be a real one, like the storming of the Bastille during the French Revolution, or it could be an imaginary event set within a real period, such as a murder or assassination that did not happen, but is set within the French Revolution.

It is more than likely that your novel will describe one of the following types of events that actually did occur:

deaths	wars	inventions	discoveries
assassinations	revolutions	natural disasters	

Task 1B 10 marks

1. You will research any **TWO** of the **key social and cultural factors of the period** that are mentioned or described or that feature in your chosen novel.

2. Your task is to establish the truth, or other, on social/ cultural conditions of the period.

It is likely that your novel may describe one of the following types of social or cultural factors.

religious beliefs	political systems	militarism and warfare
architecture	inventions	weapons and tools
agriculture	food and clothing	male/female roles
philosophies	class systems	technology

Ensure you have used **authoritative sources** to research the key event.

Consider [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) as a first stop. This will give you an overview plus key words to research further.

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Outcomes
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E5.7, E5.8, E5.9,
E5.10

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History Year 9 Elective

Faction of Fiction

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Task 3

In **Task 3**, you will establish whether your novel upholds historical truth, and to what extent, or otherwise.

Task 3 10 marks

This task is designed for you to critically reflect on your chosen novel as to its capacity to uncover the historical truth. You will write a **critique** expressing your opinion on:

- the purpose of historical fiction,
- the problems that writers and historians have to face
- overall judgement on the success, or otherwise, of your chosen novel in unravelling the historical period within which it was set.

Consider - how has your reading of your selected novel allowed you to **engage with the period** and come to a **better understanding** and appreciation of it?

1. Identify at least **FOUR** significant questions that both writers of fiction and historians would view as critical in determining the role, importance and value of historical fiction in helping us to understand the past. You can either develop your own questions, base them on ones that will arise out of classroom discussions, or take them from articles that you will be directed to look at.

2. Evaluate the success, or otherwise, of your chosen historical novel with respect to your four questions, indicating where it succeeded and where it did not. This must be supported by clear examples from your novel.
3. Conclude with a final evaluation as to whether historical fiction is a valid way to reconstruct the past and the extent to which your novel helped you to understand the period that you read about.

Download Task 3 template here - you decide how you wish to use this (in whole, model parts of it) OR create your own framework.

The template is a **strong clue** pointing to key key things that must be done and evidenced by you.

Template to assist with Task 2





Faction of Fiction Example Task 2

Use this template **OR** devise your own method for presentation. The template gives suggestions only about how to deconstruct the historical authenticity. The area in blue gives you **strong clues** about issues to consider.

The example focuses on the character of Egyptian pharaoh Cleopatra in the novel *Cleopatra*. The first two areas (in gold) have been completed for you as examples.


Task 2 The portrayal (historicity) of the central character of the novel <i>How much of what is written and portrayed about the central character is historically reliable?</i>			
Central character <i>Cleopatra</i>			
What areas/issues to be judged?	What does the historical record tell us?	Summary objective	Key question to ask?
<p>The choices that you make are yours.</p> <p>The ones listed below are suggestions only</p>	<p>Sources from the historical record that you may wish to consider:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contemporary writers 2. Writers after the fact (modern) 3. Archaeological record 4. Poetry and literature 5. Media <p>Try to include a minimum of TWO sources for each of the areas that you make a judgement on. Each source must be properly identified and contextualised.</p>	<p>What does the work of historical fiction I have read reveal to me about the truth or otherwise of the point being investigated?</p>	<p>Write a key inquiry question for each aspect of the character that you investigate. Your question needs to address a line of inquiry.</p>

Faction of Fiction Example Task 2

a. Physical Appearance Depictions / descriptions	 <p>Greek Bust of Cleopatra from the Altes Museum in Berlin Approx. AD 10</p>	<p>In the novel, Cleopatra is described by the author as being particularly beautiful. What is interesting to note is that this matches the portrayal of Cleopatra in the arts and in film. There is no doubt that the writer has followed the tradition of portraying her as a beautiful woman as shown by sources b and c.</p> <p>What is worth noting, however, is that the archaeological evidence and the written evidence from the time period is less certain that she was.</p>	<p>Do the physical descriptions of Cleopatra in the novel match those that survive from the historical record?</p> <p>Why are there such discrepancies between the depiction in the novel and the depictions in the historical record?</p>
	 <p>Cleopatra VII and her son Caesarion at the Temple of Dendera in Egypt 1st C BC</p>		
	<p>by</p>  <p><i>Cleopatra Before Caesar</i> Jean-Léon Gérôme, oil on canvas. 1866</p>		
	 <p>Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra in the movie <i>Cleopatra</i> 1966</p>		

Faction of Fiction Example Task 2

b. Character and personality traits	<p>a) <i>She used charm and sexual manipulation to control him (Antony) and she broke the masculinity of this once great General.</i></p> <p>Plutarch writing on Cleopatra in his <i>Life of Antony</i>. Approx AD 100</p> <p>b) <i>Her beauty, as we are told, was in itself not altogether incomparable, nor such as to strike those who saw her; but converse with her had an irresistible charm, and her presence, combined with the persuasiveness of her discourse and the character which was somehow diffused about her behaviour towards others, had something stimulating about it. There was sweetness also in the tones of her voice; and her tongue, like an instrument of many strings, she could readily turn to whatever language she pleased.</i></p> <p>Plutarch writing on Cleopatra in his <i>Life of Antony</i>. Approx AD 100</p>	<p>It is very clear to me that the writer of this novel has attempted to portray Cleopatra in a more balanced light than the writers of the time did.</p> <p>Rather than take the view of Roman writers like Plutarch, who based their writings on political decisions and their dislike and fear of powerful women from foreign lands, the writer has attempted to portray Cleopatra as a strong and independent ruler who was fighting for the freedom of Egypt.</p> <p>Rather than being a one sided character who is purely wicked and immoral, she is shown as having both strong and weak character traits.</p> <p>The view of Plutarch that she used her charm to break Antony is not shown and in fact, the writer shows that she used her political intelligence to form her relationship with Marc Antony. The writer has certainly portrayed her as a very intelligent and well educated woman as described in source b by Plutarch.</p>	<p>Is the Cleopatra of the novel the wicked and immoral Queen as described by the Roman writers?</p> <p>Why did Roman writers cast Cleopatra in such a bad light?</p> <p>Did they have a political agenda or were they fearful of powerful women?</p>
c. Actions and motives for actions: beliefs, religious and/or philosophical positions			
d. Interactions with individuals and groups			
e. Experiences			
f. Early life and childhood			
g. Death			
h. Final summary & evaluation			



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Outcomes
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E5.7, E5.8, E5.9,
E5.10

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History Year 9 Elective
Faction of Fiction

Overview

Task 1

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As in Task 1, you will make critical judgements based on your research of the period within which your novel is set, by comparing the results of your research against the people, events, as well as social and cultural conditions of your chosen novel.

Task 2 10 marks

You will research the historical accuracy/ truth, or otherwise, of the **key character** of the novel, either real (eg. Ramses II) or imagined (eg. a fictional general who fought at the Battle of Kadesh).

If there is more than **one key character**, you will need to make a choice.

The following four points **MUST** be looked at in determining their historical reliability.

1. physical descriptions (written, artistic and or archaeological)
2. character traits/personality (written)
3. motives for their actions (written)
4. the key experiences that shaped them from birth and early childhood through to adulthood and then to their death (written)

[Click here to download a Template example for this task.](#)

Be aware

If the central character of your novel is a fictional one, then you must judge the reliability of the above four points with respect to what we know of similar characters of the period.

Sometimes imagined characters are based on real people who lived. If this is the case, then you can use the real person who lived as your model to compare.

For example, if your fictional character is the chief priest of Amun at the Temple of Karnak during the reign of Ramses II, then does he behave and dress as, and carry out the duties and role of, a chief priest from this time period?

Frontloading via the development of a google site that engaged the students with discussion, debate and reading on: *The function and purpose of historical fiction
*Useful links to sites and articles to assist them *Direction and clues to selection of their own work *Reviews *Forum page to write their opinions and answer questions as a means of having a dialogue with me

http://www.myread.org/guide_frontloading.htm

Home

Due Dates

Focus 1

Focus 2

Focus 3

Focus 4

Focus 5

Mr Ruddock

Carr

Casinader

Chen (R)

Cocks

Croker

Duff

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Fisher

Healey

Heckendorf

Hooke

Jha

Loxton

Mahler

Moore

Padley

Rose

Saleh

Whittaker

Yang

Mr Woodgate

Andrews

Angelopoulos

Batson

Bojanic

Butterfield

Calleia

Chauhan

Chen

Clift

Cocker

Dale

Grant

Kang

Krainovic

Ladu

Shanahan

Stubbs

Vance

Zeng

Sitemap

Home



I can't read historical fiction because I find the real thing so much more interesting.

Antonia Fraser, famous English biographer on *Mary Queen of Scots*

Hmmm, isn't historical fiction primarily about the real thing?

Encyclopedia Britannica notes that historical fiction is a novel that has as its setting a usually significant period of history and that attempts to convey the spirit, manners, and social conditions of a past age with realistic detail and fidelity to historical fact. The work may deal with actual historical personages or it may contain a mixture of fictional and historical characters.

This quote forms the basis of your historical investigation into the **value** and **purpose** of historical fiction and **raises** some rather **important questions** for historians to consider.

Useful Links for Historical Fiction

1. *The Historical Novel Society*
www.historicalnovelsociety.org/
2. *HistoricalNovels.info*
<http://www.historicalnovels.info/index.html>
3. *Bookmarks Magazine*
www.bookmarksmagazine.com/historical-fiction-masters-past/sarah-l-johnson
4. *What Is Historical Fiction?*
<http://fmwriters.com/Visionback/Issue34/historicalfic.htm>

<https://sites.google.com/site/factionoffiction/due-dates>

Important

The focus tasks and activities, numbered 1-5 on the navigation bar, are to help you gain skills understanding prior to completing the assessment task *Faction of Fiction - Uncovering truth in historical fiction* [Intranet > Current Assignments].

These focus tasks are **compulsory** and **must** be completed for **TWO** reasons:

1. The tasks are designed to **assist** you in developing your **individual thoughts** and **responses** about the **function** and **purpose** of historical fiction and the **success**, or **otherwise**, of your chosen historical fiction in achieving these purposes.
2. The key ideas that you will be asked to comment upon are **central** to your assessment task.

Your HOME page

Each of you has your own home page [see navigation bar] and you have free reign to create and set up your own method of presentation for delivery of the five focus tasks.

Consider reading this <
<http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/ALAN/fall98/brown.html> >

The perspective focuses on 'perceived problems for writers of Historical Fiction'.

Healey

Heckendorf

Hooke

Jha

Loxton

Mahler

Moore

Padley

Rose

Saleh

Whittaker

Yang

Mr Woodgate

Andrews

Angelopoulos

Batson

Bojanic

Butterfield

Calleia

Chauhan

Chen

Clift

Cocker

Dale

Grant

Kang

Krainovic

Ladu

Shanahan

Stubbs

Vance

Zeng

Sitemap

... given the review and your overview of the period, what **your** expectations for the novel are going to be.

Websites to help you find a review: www.historicalnovels.info/Authors.html OR http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_fiction

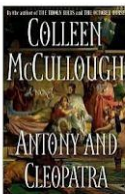
Sometimes you can find a review on the cover or inside your novel, or from a publisher's website or even the author's website if they have one. If you cannot find a review for your novel, than attempt to *find one from another work of the same author or from another work that deals with this period.*

3. **Read the following review** and consider the following:

- **Match up** the **claims** that the book jacket makes about what the book is going to deliver and the review itself.
- Are there any **clues** in this particular review about what the book has done with respect to the historical record and truth?
- Does the review inform us about where the novel may have **fallen short** with recreating the historical record?

Book Review *Anthony and Cleopatra* by Colleen McCullough

<http://faithjustice.wordpress.com/2011/04/30/book-review-anthony-and-cleopatra/> April 30, 2011 by faithjustice



I'm on a bit of a Cleopatra kick. Last week I reviewed the biography *Cleopatra: A Life* by Stacy Schiff. This week it's a novel by [Colleen McCullough](http://faithjustice).

From the book jacket:

Caesar is dead, and Rome is, again, divided. Lepidus has retreated to Africa, while Antony rules the opulent East, and Octavian claims the West, the heart of Rome, as his domain. Though this tense truce holds civil war at bay, Rome seems ripe for an emperor—a true Julian heir to lay claim to Caesar's legacy. With the bearing of a hero, and the riches of the East at his disposal, Antony seems poised to take the prize. Like a true warrior-king, he is a seasoned general whose lust for power burns alongside a passion for women, feasts, and Chian wine. His rival Octavian, seems a less convincing candidate: the slight golden haired boy is as controlled as Antony is indulgent and as cool-headed and clear-eyed as Antony is impulsive. Indeed, the two are well-matched only in ambition.

Anthony and Cleopatra is the last of seven novels, collectively called the [Masters of Rome series](http://faithjustice), covering the end of the Roman Republic in all its twisted glory. The result of this herculean task is a legacy of some of the best researched historical fiction of this time; meticulously covering politics, battles, people, religious rites, traditions, trade, architecture, etc. The best books of the series draw the reader in with fascinating characters, Machiavellian plots, and scintillating detail. The worst give the reader the sense of reading an entertaining history book. Which is not, necessarily, a bad thing. McCullough had intended to end the saga with *The October Horse*, but avid fans prevailed and she concluded with this novel, which shows the final end of the Republic and beginning of Empire.

Sample student choices for novel selection



[Home](#)[Due Dates](#)[Focus 1](#)[Focus 2](#)[Focus 3](#)[Focus 4](#)[Focus 5](#)[Mr Ruddock](#)[Carr](#)[Casinader](#)[Chen \(R\)](#)[Cocks](#)[Croker](#)[Duff](#)[Everett](#)[Fisher](#)[Healey](#)[Heckendorf](#)[Hooke](#)[Jha](#)[Loxton](#)[Mahler](#)[Moore](#)[Padley](#)[Rose](#)[Saleh](#)[Whittaker](#)[Yang](#)[Due Dates >](#)

Focus 3

posted Feb 28, 2012 10:39 PM by Linda Gibson-Langford [updated May 14, 2012 2:42 PM]

By the end of Week 4 (18th May)

You are now ready to write an **overview [200 words]** on what **YOU** believe the **purpose** and **aim** of historical fiction **should be**.

Record your response for Focus 3 on your individual page.

These questions will guide you in developing your response.

Q1. Where and when does it matter if there are discrepancies (differences) between the historical record and the writer's interpretation?

Q2. Should the writer be allowed some license (freedom) in imaginative reconstruction? If so, on what types of issues? If not, why not?

Q3. Is it reasonable where the historical record is lacking and does not provide us with the answers, for the writer to use their imagination and fill in the gaps? Should the imaginative reconstructions, however, be based on accurate historical reference points?





Q4. Do writers of historical fiction have an obligation to the historical record and truth? If so why?

Q5. Has your opinion that you expressed in Task 2 about your expectations changed as a result of your thoughts about the first four questions? If so why? If not, then why not?

You may use any examples of events or happenings from the historical record that you believe help to illustrate your opinions on the above questions, or you may to choose to use issues that have presented themselves in the reading of your chosen historical novel.

For example: Where the Holocaust or any genocide is concerned, it is critical that the writer assume responsibility to those who died to make sure that their historical novel assumes a TOTAL obligation to the truth. They MUST not invent or create events that did not occur or use their imagination to fill in the gaps. This is especially important when we are trying to properly preserve the memories of those who died under terrible circumstances.

Viewing and study of *Downfall* arose from this list where it appeared as no 9 on this list.

		10. The Great Escape 1963 Based on a true story, <i>The Great Escape</i> deals with the largest Allied escape attempt from a German POW camp during the Second World War. The first part of the film focuses on the escape efforts within the camp and the process of secretly digging an escape tunnel. The second half of the film deals with the massive effort by the German Gestapo to track down the over 70 escaped prisoners who are at this point throughout the Third Reich attempting to make their way to England and various neutral countries.
		9. Der Untergang 2004 It's the last days of Adolf Hitler, April 1945, and Hitler's personal secretary Traudl Junge finds herself in the Der Fuhrer's bunker. Facing inevitable defeat, Hitler's moods range from defiance to fight or flee, remain loyal or opt for self-preservation. Eva Braun parties while Magda Goebbels kills her children. The movie goes on to show how Hitler and Eva lived their last hours in the Bunker.
		8. Schindler's List 1993 Oskar Schindler is a vain, glorious and greedy German businessman who becomes unlikely humanitarian amid the barbaric Nazi reign when he feels compelled to turn his factory into a refuge for Jews. Based on the true story of Oskar Schindler who managed to save about 1100 Jews from being gassed at the Auschwitz concentration camp. A testament for the good in all of us.

Case Study of *DER UNTERGANG*: Why?

No single movie of the last 20 years has arguably attracted as much attention as the 2004 German movie *Der Untergang* or *Downfall*. Not surprisingly, any movie that deals with Adolf Hitler, the Nazis and the Holocaust, is bound to attract attention, scrutiny and potential wide spread criticism.

The film is set mostly in and around the Führerbunker in Berlin. The director made an effort to accurately reconstruct the look and atmosphere of the bunker through eyewitness accounts, survivors' memoirs and other historical sources. According to his commentary on the DVD, *Der Untergang* was filmed in Berlin, Munich, and in a district of Saint Petersburg, Russia, which, with its many buildings designed by German architects, was said to resemble many parts of 1940s Berlin. The film was ranked number 48 in *Empire* magazines "The 100 Best Films Of World Cinema" in 2010. As of October 2010, Rotten Tomatoes reports that 91% of critics have given the film a positive review, with an average score of 8 out of 10. The site's consensus is: "*Downfall* is an illuminating, thoughtful and detailed account of Hitler's last days".

What singled this movie out for attention, was not the fact that it dealt with the obvious crimes of the Nazis like the Holocaust, but rather, that it attempted to "understand" the nature and character of Adolf Hitler himself. Reactions to the movie were immense as evidenced by some of the reviews that follow below.

"As a piece of acting, Ganz's work is not just astounding it's actually rather moving. But I have doubts about the way his talent has been put to use. By emphasizing the painfulness of Hitler's defeat Ganz has made the dictator into a plausible human being who was kind to his cook and his young female secretaries, loved his German shepherd and was surrounded by

loyal subordinates who loved him. A few journalists in Germany wonder whether the "human" treatment of Hitler might not inadvertently aid the neo-Nazi movement?"

New Yorker film critic David Denby.

"Knowing what I did of the bunker story, I found it hard to imagine that anyone other than Neo Nazis could possibly find Hitler a sympathetic figure during his bizarre last days. Is it dangerous though to see him as a human being? Hitler was, after all, a human being, even if an especially obnoxious, detestable and evil specimen. We well know that he could be kind and considerate to his secretaries and with the next breath show cold ruthlessness and brutality, in determining the deaths of millions. Of all the screen depictions of the Führer this is the only one which to me is compelling. Part of this is the voice. Ganz has Hitler's voice to near perfection. It is chillingly authentic."

Famous biographer of Adolf Hitler Sir Ian Kershaw writing in *The Guardian* in 2004.

"Admiration I did not feel. Sympathy I felt in the sense that I would feel it for a rabid dog, while accepting that it must be destroyed. I do not feel the film provides "a sufficient response to what Hitler actually did", because I feel no film can, and no response would be sufficient."

Chicago Sun-Times film critic Roger Ebert 2004.

"Are we allowed to show the monster as a human being?"

Bild Magazine 2004

Sample Student Responses to the issue of concern raised by the film critics and other commentators

The major point of concern is clearly the portrayal of Hitler as being a human being, causing viewers to be potentially somewhat sympathetic towards him. Seeing that Hitler was so evil, this sympathy causes issues for people, promoting neo-Nazism and eradicating our perception of him as a monster. I agree with the reviews, as the sympathy involved can cause problems to the susceptible, who may question the history.

The concerns of all the writers seems to be the portrayal of Hitler as a human being and as such, giving him sympathy and giving the Neo Nazis a 'voice'. I agree with this statement. He should not have been portrayed in a way to create sympathy for a man who is arguably the worst human being in history.

Historical Case Study: *The fate of the Goebbels children and a moral debate*

Hitler's minister for propaganda and enlightenment Joseph Goebbels's last testament appended to Hitler's, claimed that his wife and children supported him in his refusal to leave Berlin, qualifying this by asserting that the children would support the decision if they were old enough to speak for themselves. Both pilot Hanna Reitsch (who had left the bunker on April 29) and Traudel Junge (who left on May 1) carried letters to the outside world from those remaining. Included was a letter from Magda to Harald, her eldest son from an earlier marriage who was in an Allied POW camp.

The following day, on May 1, 1945, the Goebbels' six children were injected with morphine (likely by an SS dentist, Helmut Kunz) and then, when they were unconscious, killed by having a crushed ampoule of cyanide placed in their mouths. Accounts differ over how involved Magda was with the killing of her children. According to Kunz, he administered the morphine but it was Magda Goebbels and Ludwig Stumpfegger (Hitler's personal doctor) who administered the cyanide tablets.

Another account says that the children were told they would be leaving for Berchtesgaden in the morning, and Ludwig Stumpfegger was said to have provided Magda with morphine to sedate the children. Erna Flegel a nurse in the bunker claims that Magda reassured the children about the morphine by telling them that they needed inoculations because they would be staying in the bunker for a long time. Some witnesses claimed that SS doctor Ludwig Stumpfegger crushed the cyanide capsules into the children's mouths, but as no witnesses to the event survived it is impossible to know. American investigation concluded that, although Stumpfegger was probably involved in drugging the children, it was Magda who most likely killed them. He suggested that witnesses blamed the deaths on Stumpfegger because he was a convenient target.

Magda Goebbels appears to have contemplated and talked about killing her children at least a month in advance. After the war, Günther Quandt's sister-in-law Eleanore recalled Magda saying she did not want her children to grow up hearing that their father had been one of the century's foremost criminals and that reincarnation might grant her children a better future life. Hannah Reitsch the pilot who stayed in the bunker after flying Luftwaffe General von Greim in to meet with Hitler, said Magda asked her in the last days to help ensure she did not back away from killing the children if it came to that.

She also refused several offers from others, such as Albert Speer to take the children out of Berlin. The children seemed unaware of the impending danger, but the eldest child, Helga, seemed to sense that the adults were lying to her about the outcome of the war and asked what would happen to them. Rochus Misch, a radio operator in the bunker, reported that Helga, whom he called the brightest of the children, was "crying softly" just before bedtime on that final night and wore a glum expression as her mother brushed her hair and kissed her and her siblings. Magda had to push Helga towards the stairs that led to the upper bunker.

Misch recalled later that he suspected what was about to happen and would always regret not intervening. The children's bodies, in nightclothes, with ribbons tied in the girls' hair, were found in the two-tiered bunk beds where they were killed, when Soviet troops entered the bunker a day later. A Soviet autopsy on Helga's body noted "several black and blue bruises",

indicating that she probably woke up and struggled with her killer. A photograph taken during the autopsy showed heavy bruising on the dead child's face. The injuries were apparently caused when her killer forced a cyanide capsule into her mouth. On May 3, 1945, the day after Soviet troops led by Lt. Col. Ivan Klimenko had discovered the burned bodies of their parents in the courtyard above, they found the bodies of the six children in their beds, dressed in their nightgowns, the girls wearing bows in their hair.

Vice Admiral Hans Voss was brought to the Chancellery garden to identify the bodies, as was Hans Fritzsche, a leading German radio commentator who had answered directly to Goebbels. Their bodies were brought to the Buchau Cemetery in Berlin for autopsy and inquest by Soviet doctors. In spite of repeated attempts, even Frau Behrend, the children's grandmother, never learned what became of the bodies. After the fall of the Soviet Union it was revealed that the bodies were repeatedly buried and exhumed, along with the remains of Hitler, Eva Braun, Joseph and Magda Goebbels, General Hans Krebs and Hitler's dogs. The last burial had been at the SMERSH facility in Magdeburg (East Germany) on February 21, 1946. In 1970, KGB director Yuri Andropov authorised an operation to destroy the remains. On April 4, 1970, a Soviet KGB team with detailed burial charts secretly exhumed five wooden boxes. The remains from the boxes were thoroughly burned and crushed, after which the ashes were thrown into the Biederitz river, a tributary of the nearby Elbe.

Rochus Misch, a former radio operator for Adolf Hitler, attracted controversy in Germany in 2005 when he called for a memorial plaque to be installed in honor of the six Goebbels children. Critics in Germany felt it would taint the memory of Holocaust victims to honor the children of the notorious Nazi leader and his wife. Despite their parents' crimes, Misch argued that the children themselves were innocent and that to treat them as criminals like their parents was wrong and that they were murdered just as other victims during the war were murdered. The objections were so strong that the plans for a memorial plaque were abandoned and the six children murdered by their parents became as much tragic victims of the war as did so many other innocent people.



Papers reveal how Goebbels children were killed

Allan Hall. *The Telegraph*. October 10, 2009

BERLIN: As the Red Army closed in on Berlin, Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, and his wife, Magda, gathered their six children and made their way to the Fuhrerbunker beneath the bombed-out Chancellery. The children were knocked out with morphine by an SS doctor and then had cyanide capsules crushed between their teeth. Afterwards Goebbels shot his wife, then himself. Now German researchers have shed new light on the murders by uncovering previously unseen accounts of the doctor's post-war trial

Maik Wogersien, a public prosecutor, found an account of the court case in 1959 that included a confession by Dr Helmut Kunz, who helped with the killing of Helga, 12, Hildegard, 11, Helmut, nine, Holdine, eight, Hedwig, six, and Heidrun, four - names starting with H in honour of Hitler. In Kunz's evidence before the Hamm Upper State Court, he said: "Towards the end of April, Magda came up to me and said, 'I need your help in the killing of the children.' I refused her, saying that was not my responsibility. "But Magda Goebbels insisted and shortly afterwards declared to me that it was no longer a request for help but a direct order from Hitler."

Kunz was originally a dentist with the SS Death's Head division but became a trusted friend of Hitler after being wounded in the field and transferred to a desk job in the Chancellery. He told the court he escaped the bunker but was tracked down by Magda Goebbels hours later. She said he must return or "you will be a dead man". On the evening of May 1, 1945, he was forced to carry out his grim duty. "The children were all in one room. But they were not asleep. 'Have no fear,' said Magda Goebbels. 'The doctor here is going to give you an injection of the sort that all children and soldiers get.' She left the room. I injected them with morphine - the eldest daughters first, then the son, then the other daughters. It took around 10 minutes.

"When the children were off, Magda Goebbels went into the room, the cyanide capsules in her hand. She was in there for several minutes, then stepped out, crying, saying, 'Doctor, I cannot do it. You must.'

"I answered immediately, 'No, I cannot.' Then she cried, 'Well, if you cannot do it, then get Stumpfegger.'" Dr Ludwig Stumpfegger, a physician close to Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, murdered the children. Mr Wogersien said the papers gave a new insight into the last moments of the Goebbels family and into postwar justice. "They throw light on the mild punishments of Nazis at the time and how the law was opaque, with a judiciary composed of many former Nazi judges. They also show how a mother became so corrupted by Nazism that she would allow this to happen to innocent children."

Question to ponder: The study of history and particularly the tragic events in the historical record often bring difficult questions to consider and debate. This is certainly true with the sad fate of the children of Joseph and Magda Goebbels. Given the evidence and coupled with your viewing of the movie, do you believe that the children of Joseph and Magda Goebbels were innocent victims of their parents' crimes and thus worthy of being remembered by a memorial plaque? Why? Why not?

Sample Student Response on the issue of a commemorative plaque to honour the memory of the Goebbels children

I do not believe that a memorial should be built for the Goebbels children, even if they were completely innocent victims. It would be a radical thing to do, singling out six children from the millions that died during the war as either through civilian casualties or victims of the holocaust. The people who say they were not innocent and were part of the regime are completely misguided, but putting up a plaque would be extremely disrespectful towards those who are direct relatives or friends to victims who perished. If any memorial should be constructed, it should be for all the children who died in the war, not just the Goebbels children.

Do historical movies also have a valid role or not to play in the re-telling of the historical record? If they do, then are they subject to the same considerations and problems and therefore the same scrutiny as any medium that attempts to reconstruct the past? For example, would you apply the same considerations that we have considered with respect to historical fiction to historical movies?

Which of the following issues do you believe would have to be considered as critical for a director of a historical movie to consider if they were attempting to portray the truth on either an important person or event from the past.

Issue for Consideration	Yes	No
Availability of evidence or otherwise	23	0
Respect to religious beliefs that may be easily offended	21	2
Respect to political views that may be easily offended	10	13
Distance of time impacting on memory and recollections	23	0
The use of imaginative licence	23	0

Of interest here was:

***the overwhelming recognition of the importance of the need for the consideration of available evidence as being important, but not precluding the possibility either of the use of imaginative licence.**

***the caution that had to be exercised with respect to religious sensibilities far outweighing political ones.**

Sample student response to set assignment

Faction of Fiction

Task 1B: Food, Clothing and Transport of the 18th century

During the 18th century, changes began to occur in both food and clothing and in transport, largely as a result of advances in technology made in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution. However, it is important to note that in regard to food and clothing, the most significant changes were experienced only by the more wealthy classes. Although there had been dramatic improvements in farming techniques due to the Industrial Revolution, food and diet was hardly changed. Clothing during the 18th century for the wealthy was important, as fashion became essential to express class and wealth, although the clothing of poorer less privileged people did not change. Transport was also improved with the 18th century as the Industrial Revolution created new forms of transport and decreased travelling time. The novel **Gideon the Cutpurse** by Linda Buckley-Archer is written with reference to these historical facts reflecting the social and cultural conditions of the 18th century.

The novel **Gideon the Cutpurse** frequently refers to the food and clothing of the time. During the 18th century clothing for the poor hardly changed from that of earlier centuries although fashion for the wealthy became an important social factor to express class and wealth. Men in the 18th century continued to wear knee-length trouser like garments called breeches and stockings. They also wore waistcoats, frock coats and linen shirts and began to wear buckled shoes instead of boots. Women who were in fashion during the 18th century wore hooped petticoats under their dresses and carried folding fans. These large dresses replaced the two part dresses (bodice and skirt) and sometimes two skirts (an upper and underskirt) of the 17th century. Another item of clothing worn by both men and women were wigs.

The clothing described in the novel is true to the 18th century. Within the novel a wealthy family is described and what they are wearing does keep with the time period the 18th century. The novel describes a “man wearing a tightly curled white wig” and a “three-cornered hat”. It also describes a woman wearing a “magnificent blue silk...dress...the width of the lady’s dress was nothing less than startling”. These extracts demonstrate that the characters in the novel wore appropriate clothing for the period including women in hooped petticoats under their dresses and men wearing white wigs. The novel supports the social and cultural norms of the 18th century.

Agriculture was also greatly improved in the 18th century. In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution better farming techniques were developed including the use of a seed drill, to sow seed in straight lines and a horse drawn hoe more easily destroying weeds between rows of crops and digging up fields. Also pre-18th century English agriculture had a certain structure, consisting of a 3-field rotation with one remaining unused. In the 18th century Robert Townsend developed a new method of farming in which the 3rd field grew turnips both suppling food for livestock over winter and re fertilising the soil.

With these major agricultural changes farming reliability and quality was greatly increased. However, because England exported most of its produce, English food and diet was not improved but remained

plain and unvaried, other than for the wealthy classes. Foods such as meat remained a luxury during the 18th century and a poor person's food consisted mainly of bread and potatoes although a variety of cheeses were introduced to England. Meat and even fruit were associated with the wealthy and those with status and land.

Gideon the Cutpurse continues to demonstrate the true social and cultural conditions of the period with food. People in the novel eat “hunks of bread, salty white cheese and roast chicken” showing that these people were a wealthy family during the 18th century eating meat and newly introduced cheese. Also true to the period people in the novel ate unusual parts of an animal on one occasion the wealthy Byng family eat a “calf's head pie” along with cabbage and fish. These items were regarded during the period as luxury items only eaten by the wealthy while the poor subsisted on “potatoes”. Thus the novel reflects social and cultural norms of the 18th century.

Transport in the 18th century was also greatly improved in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution although there were still many dangers with travel due to highwaymen.

The Industrial Revolution gave rise to improvement in the quality of the roads. During the 18th century the first civil engineers appeared to transform the muddy, waterlogged, jagged and dangerous roads networked throughout the country into smooth, hardwearing and water-resistant surfaces. During this time people travelled on horse or by horse and cart, and it has also been said that with the improvement in the condition of the roads and surroundings that the risk of highwaymen attacks decreased. Other transport improvement of the 18th century due to the Industrial Revolution included steam engines, railways and canals.

The novel reflects the social and cultural truth about transport during the 18th century revealing that improved infrastructure and transportation reduced travelling time. Whilst highwaymen increased risk when travelling. Both of these elements were a large aspect of 18th century England. This is illustrated in the instance when travelling to London from Derbyshire, Mr Parson is proud to state that the trip will take “Two and a half days!...an amazingly short time...” due to the improved roads and that “We shall make a brave show to any footpad, highwayman or cutpurse that crosses our path...”. The novel continues to be historically accurate as it describes the characters on “slipper leather seats inside the stuffy carriage, now full of sounds of creaking wood, groaning axles,” illustrating the transport that was actually used during the 18th century.

The 18th century brought many changes in the social and cultural factors of England as outlined above. These changes and developments including food, clothing and transport as presented in **Gideon the Cutpurse** are mostly portrayed accurately to reflect what life was actually like during the 18th century.

Task 2 Key Character Investigation

Novel Gideon the Cutpurse	Reality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A man with a blond pigtail” (p48) • “threatening to cuff one of them around the ear and making as if to kick another’s bottom.” • “not a gentlemen” A “social inferiors.” 	Not based on any known character
Novel The Tar Man	Reality Dick Turpin
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Tall, powerfully built...wore a vast ragged coat and a black hat in the shape of a triangle.”25 • “Fierce-looking knife”26 • “gnarled, filthy hands...cunning fingers.” Slid them into every pocket checking every crease. Removed peter’s woollen scarf and took money from pocket. • Smelt of “tobacco smoke and ale and stale sweat.” • “inspecting the pound coins he had stolen and biting them between his back teeth.” • “Black hair that escaped in rats’ tails” • “Terrible scar” • ““Never try to hoodwink a hoodwinker,”” • “man capable of anything” • “Don’t go expecting kindness from one who has been shown non.”” • ““I could dine handsomely for a month on hair of this quality.”” • “the Black Lion Tavern in Covent Garden...” • “I have seen him many a time with the Carrick gang.”55 • “Everyone who knows him fears him.. he is the henchman of a powerful man.” Pg 86 • “life was not easy.” And “He soon took to stealing food and...had become a petty thief.” • “dark, sullen looks were against him” • “so, at the tender age of fourteen, he was to face those last terrible moments in his life alone.” • Torture mouse-boy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1706-39 (18c) • Robbing remote farm houses with Essex gang • Father small farmer poor upbringing • Stole animals to make money • Raided remote farm houses forces women to give up valuables • Violent-torture • Sentenced to death http://www.stand-and-deliver.org.uk/highwaymen/dick_turpin.htm <p> http://clc2.uniservity.com/GroupHomepage.asp?GroupId=203145 www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/bynpwllr/roads3.htm </p>

The novel **Gideon the Cutpurse** by Linda Buckley-Archer is about two children, Kate and Peter, who are transported back from the 21st century and trapped in the 18th century. Another major character in the novel is The Tar Man. The Tar Man's "life was not easy" when growing up and "He soon took to stealing food and...had become a petty thief."

During the 18th century, cutpurses, highwayman, thieves and general criminals were a major influence and factor in society and so I have chosen to investigate the historical accuracy of the fictional character, The Tar Man.

Peter describes The Tar Man's physique and appearance as a man, "Tall, powerfully built...wore a vast ragged coat and a black hat in the shape of a triangle". From artistic sources and research conducted in Task 1b the clothing that The Tar Man is described to be wearing is historically correct although his actual physique as tall and built is most probably not historically accurate. In the 18th century meat was still a luxury and generally only regularly consumed by the wealthy, and food quality was not high. Consequently, people in the 18th century typically would have been smaller than adults in the 21st century, and it is unlikely that they would have been 'built' in the sense of a powerfully built man in the 21st century. This would especially be the case for a person from a poor family such as that in which The Tar Man had grown up, and who "was almost always hungry".

The Tar Man is also portrayed smelling of "tobacco smoke and ale and stale sweat...[and with] black hair that escaped in rat's tails". This is an accurate portrayal of how a thief would have looked during the 18th century. During that time smoking and drinking was done by most men, bathing was not common and hygiene was an unknown, so people would have smelt of stale sweat and poor men's hair was commonly especially untidy. This is supported when Peter describes The Tar Man's "gnarled, filthy hands".

In terms of character traits and personality, The Tar Man is described as a "man capable of anything" showing his fierceness and power over people, "everyone who knows him fears him...he is the henchman of a powerful man". The Tar Man is a smart and dominant character as shown when he confronts Peter, saying "Never try to hoodwink a hoodwinker". This shows The Tar Man's threatening character traits and how he tries to dominate others. These traits were common amongst thieves like The Tar Man during the historical period in which the novel is set.

The Tar Man's character is a direct result of his upbringing. While growing up The Tar Man's father died when he was young and he "was mostly left to shift for himself" as the family struggled to survive. The Tar Man was "almost always left hungry" and "He soon took to stealing food and, by the time he had reached his teens, he had become a petty thief". This poor upbringing meant The Tar Man was doomed, and when he was fourteen he was sentenced to be hung on false charges, because of his reputation, his "dark, sullen looks were against him". Although his hanging was not successfully conducted and even though in tradition after being removed from the gibbet he was "bound and covered in tar-soaked calico", he survived although physically and mentally damaged. These experiences are historically accurate for the period, as there have been many recordings of people surviving the gibbet including a sixteen year old boy named William Duell, who was hanged on the 24th of November 1740.

The upbringing and experiences of The Tar Man are historically accurate as the poor are forced to steal and turn to a life of crime to survive. The techniques and procedures carried out during his execution are also historically accurate, being hanged and "bound and covered in tar-soaked calico", was the punishment meted out to cutpurses and thieves. "Nathaniel [The Tar Man] was left alone, howling in anguish at a world without pity" for his experiences.

These key experiences in The Tar Man's childhood, struggling to survive with little income for family from mother and a dead father, are the motive for the life that he was forced to live, becoming a thief and finding people that had something he wanted. "If someone needs to be found he will find them...it is his habit to play with them a little", "Don't go expecting kindness from one who has been shown none". The Tar Man in his adulthood continues a life of crime as someone, "capable of anything" and feared by everyone, "Everyone who knows him fears him... he is the henchman of a powerful man".

His life experiences are historically accurate for someone living in the same situations at the time. For example Dick Turpin was a robber from the 18th century who was also forced into a life of crime. Like The Tar Man, Dick Turpin grew up in a poor family but his father was a farmer and soon started to steal animals from remote farms to make money. Dick Turpin as an adult began robbing and raiding remote farm houses with the Essex gang and forced women to give up all the valuables in the house. Although a fictional character The Tar Man is historically correct to the circumstances and actions of a real criminal of the 18th century, he often stole, "a few pennies here, an old jacket...a chicken for dinner-". The Tar man was also part of a gang, "I have seen him many a time with the Carrick gang" and they were both sentenced to death by hanging off the gibbet.

Dick Turpin used violent torture to receive what he wanted. Although The Tar Man is not described in the novel committing torture against people there is one incident where he does perform a sort of torture against a boy called Tom. Tom, who works for The Tar Man, tries to escape his control. When Tom attempts this The Tar Man steals Tom's most loved possession, his pet mouse, and tortures it by swinging it by its tail above a candle flame, and in turn torturing the unstable and shaken Tom.

The fictional character The Tar Man's physical description, character traits, motives for actions and key experiences are all historically accurate and reliable. I determined this by researching the life style and experiences/causes of a real criminal during the 18th century and the general appearance and quality of people's lives.

Task 3: Critical Review

Purpose of Historical Fiction

Historical fiction fulfils an important purpose when helping us to understand the past. For many people historical fiction adds excitement to the past and displays or delivers the truth of the time to them in a way that is both engaging and interesting, "People who would not pick up a narrative history book will perhaps pick up a novel and find their interest engaged by predicaments from the past." Geraldine Brooks.¹

For this reason it is essential that historical fiction is historically accurate to give us, as the reader, an accurate knowledge of the past, "a historical novelist owes it to their readers to be as truthful as they can." Sharon Penman.²

The HistoricalNovels home page states that the purpose of historical fiction is to "help us understand our own time and our own motivations better" and that a historical novel "lets us do more than simply read history" but "lets us participate in the hopes, fears, passions, mistakes and triumphs of the people who lived it."³

I completely agree with what the HistoricalNovels websites says. I believe that historical fiction adds a story to facts of history, so that we can then relate to the history easier as the novel is made more lively and interesting. Historical fiction, including "Gideon the Cutpurse", in a way acts as both a disguise and a platform for revealing historical facts of the period it is set in.

Problems writers and historians face

Historians and writers of historical fiction encounter many problems when exploring and writing historical fiction. A problem that the Historical Novel Society website raises is "when does 'contemporary' end, and 'historical' begin? What about novels that are part historical, part contemporary? And how much distortion of history will we allow before a book becomes more fantasy than historical?"

To resolve this problem The Historical Novel Society website says that "To be deemed historical (in our sense), a novel must have been written at least fifty years after the events described, or have been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events (who therefore approaches them only by research)."

I believe that this solution is not correct when resolving problems with historical literature. For example historians in their career look for primary and secondary sources when determining if something is historically accurate or not. Primary sources are possibly the most important when determining this and are those that were recorded at the time of the event by eye-witnesses.

These sources although possibly bias, which justifies The Historical Novel Society's decision that literature can only be accurate if the person finds the information "only by research" (not alive during the event) either archaeological or historical literal, this means the information loses some aspects of the event and its historical accuracy by losing the personal experiences of people during the event or time. This poses another problem as people want characters within historical fiction to be historically accurate, in terms of what they felt and thought, so that they can see what it was really like during the

¹ <http://geraldinebrooks.com/> or <https://sites.google.com/site/factionoffiction/due-dates/week1>

² <https://sites.google.com/site/factionoffiction/due-dates/week1>

³ www.historicalnovelsociety.org

time. These primary sources are also classified inaccurate because they were recorded by people at the time of the event not “50 years after the event.”

Other problems writers and historians have to face are:

- Where and when does it matter if there are differences between the historical record and the writer’s interpretation?
- Should the writer be allowed some freedom in imaginative reconstruction? If so, on what types of issues? If not, why not?
- Is it reasonable where the historical record is lacking and does not provide us with the answers, for the writer to use their imagination and fill in the gaps? Should the imaginative reconstructions, however, be based on accurate historical reference points?
- Do writers of historical fiction have an obligation to the historical record and truth? If so why?

Historical success of ‘Gideon The Cutpurse’ by ‘Linda Buckley-Archer’

The novel **Gideon The Cutpurse** is mostly historically accurate. Set in the 18th century **Gideon The Cutpurse** successfully displays the accurate social and cultural factors and characters/personalities of the time.

Firstly, ‘Where and when does it matter if there are differences between the historical record and the writer’s interpretation?’. In the case of Gideon the Cutpurse I was unable to find any differences between historical records and the writer’s interpretation.

Although this novel includes time travel, this does not detract from the historical accuracy of the two time periods, although the 18th century was the only one investigated, as it is simply a fictional device used by the author to connect the present with the past.

Secondly, ‘should the writer be allowed some freedom in imaginative reconstruction? If so, on what types of issues? If not, why not?’ I believe that an author should have the freedom to use their imagination in some issues to reconstruct events. With an author’s imagination a historical text can become more engaging and therefore more informing although there is a limit to how imaginative an author can be and how much reconstruction they can add to an event, personality or idea.

In this case Linda Buckley-Archer accurately reconstructs the 18th century. Linda correctly portrays the social and cultural factors and characters/personalities of the time but through her imagination, the character conflicts and their conflict with their environment adds excitement and creates interest within the reader to learn more about the 18th century and the lifestyle/influences during the time period. The novel **Gideon the Cutpurse** provides an insight into the lives of a variety of levels of society and their experiences, including food, clothing, transportation, social structure and behaviour in the 18th century. In this case imaginative reconstruction used was appropriate and to the correct extent.

Thirdly, ‘Is it reasonable where the historical record is lacking and does not provide us with the answers, for the writer to use their imagination and fill in the gaps? Should the imaginative reconstructions, however, be based on accurate historical reference points?’

I believe that where lacking historical information and records an author can ‘fill in the gaps’ by using their imagination, although if too much ‘gap filling’ takes place the historical accuracy of the novel will be questionable. For example if there is a famous battle but there is only records from the

beginning and end an author may fill in the gaps of the battle as long as they notify readers that the events of the battle are only estimated using records before and after the battle and may not be accurate. Imaginative reconstructions should be based on accurate historical reference points.

For my chosen novel because the characters are fictional there is no need to 'fill in the gaps' about their lives as it can be just based upon any real person during the time or a few people, although the author must research to determine if information collected about similar people to their character is correct. In **Gideon the Cutpurse** there is no exploring into historical events and occurrences so no gap filling is needed. Also although gap filling would probably have been used in this novel the imaginative reconstructions are correct to historical records of the time.

Finally, 'Do writers of historical fiction have an obligation to the historical record and truth? If so why?'. I believe writers of historical fiction do have an obligation to the historical record and truth, as outlined above "a historical novelist owes it to their readers to be as truthful as they can" says Sharon Penman. If writers of historical fiction did not have to be historically accurate and oblige historical records and the truth, the novel would not be historical fiction. These novels would be inaccurate and untrue, perceiving the social and cultural factors and characters/personalities of a time or event that did not occur or have existed during that time period.

Linda Buckley-Archer has successfully made an obligation to historical record and truth by accurately representing 18th century social and cultural factors and characters/personalities. For example, the novelist Linda Buckley Archer fulfils this purpose through her accurate re-enactment of predicaments involving thieves and victims in the 18th century.

Overall **Gideon the Cutpurse** by Linda Buckley-Archer is historically accurate. Set in the 18th century 'Gideon The Cutpurse' successfully displays the accurate social and cultural factors and characters/personalities of the time and even meets a problem that the Historical Novel Society website faces that "when does 'contemporary' end, and 'historical' begin? What about novels that are part historical, part contemporary? And how much distortion of history will we allow before a book becomes more fantasy than historical?"

To resolve this problem The Historical Novel Society website says that "To be deemed historical (in our sense), a novel must have been written at least fifty years after the events described, or have been written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events (who therefore approaches them only by research)." and so this novel can be completely deemed historically accurate by confronting and overcoming all problems that authors of historical fiction face and because it meets The Historical Novel Society's expectations and guidelines.

Is Historical Fiction a valid way to reconstruct the past? To what extent does Gideon The Cutpurse help you understand the 18th century?

I believe historical fiction is a valid way to reconstruct the past. As discussed above historical fiction adds excitement to the past and displays or delivers the truth of the time to them in a way that is both engaging and interesting. "People who would not pick up a narrative history book will perhaps pick up a novel and find their interest engaged by predicaments from the past." Geraldine Brooks.

The HistoricalNovels home page describes that the purpose of historical fiction is to "help us understand our own time and our own motivations better" and that a historical novel "lets us do more than simply read history" but "lets us participate in the hopes, fears, passions, mistakes and triumphs of the people who lived it."

I completely agree with what the HistoricalNovels websites says and therefore believe historical fiction is a valid way to reconstruct the past. I believe that Historical Fiction adds a story to facts of history, so that we can then relate to the history easier as the novel is made more lively and interesting. Historical fiction in a way acts as a disguise and vehicle for historical facts, although is only valid if the novel abides by the historical records researched.

Gideon The Cutpurse helped me extremely to understand the 18th century. Although I knew thieves and villains played a significant role in earlier centuries this novel helped me understand to what extent they impacted on and were part of everyday living and society in the 18th century. Also it had never occurred to me that the industrial revolution had such a huge effect on travel during the 18th century and later, decreasing the likelihood of crime by making travel safer. This novel also provided me a better understanding of the life experiences including and styles including clothing, food.

Through characters such as The Tar Man and the Byng family I now better understand the life style that both the upper and lower class experienced including the difference in diet and quality of life, such as work, shelter and childhood.

I had once only thought that lack of meat was a major problem and a luxury item during the Middle Ages and shortly after although **Gideon the Cutpurse** showed me that meat was still a luxury during the 18th century. This novel also revealed that children growing up in poorer families during the 18th century, such as that of The Tar Man, were malnourished and to be driven to crime for their survival.

When reading and exploring the novel **Gideon the Cutpurse** one unsurprising concept explored was that of the villains and criminals, especially cutpurses and highwaymen. **Gideon the Cutpurse** confirmed my understanding of a typical criminals life experiences during the 18th century, becoming criminals because they were “mostly left to shift for [themselves] himself” as their families struggled to survive. The Tar Man was “almost always left hungry” and “He soon took to stealing food and, by the time he had reached his teens, he had become a petty thief”⁴.

⁴ Buckley-Archer, Linda. Gideon the Cutpurse. London: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

Final reflective thoughts of the students

- 1) Is historical fiction a valid form to aid and assist our understanding of the historical record?
- 2) Should historical fiction be considered as a valid source for research into the historical record?
- 3) Should historians/archaeologists or identified experts in an area of history be the only ones writing historical fiction?
- 4) Is it legitimate when the evidence is clearly lacking, to use “imaginative scope” or “license” to reconstruct the events of the past in a work of historical fiction?
- 5) Is it legitimate to challenge traditional or accepted views of people and events of the past and write about them in a new light in a work of historical fiction?

Indicate your thoughts to each of these key questions with a yes or no in the table below. If you are undecided because you think the answer needs further qualification, then leave blank.

Q	Yes	No
1	23	0
2	18	5
3	2	21
4	23	0
5	20	3

Of interest I thought, was the:

***100% acceptance that historical fiction helped us to understand the past and that most considered it a valid source for research purposes.**

***100% acceptance that imaginative scope was legitimate, but all qualified this with two conditions, being only when the evidence was lacking and as long as the imaginative scope made sense to the period, events and people as we understood it to be from the available evidence.**

***Almost 100% acceptance that traditional views were challengeable. Those few that did not were concerned primarily with challenges to historical personages such as Jesus Christ and events such as the Holocaust. Those that did, said that if the evidence supported the challenge then we had to consider history in the new light.**

*Identify 4 historical figures who you would select as ones **worthy** of being the **central character** of a work of historical fiction.

*Identify a reason why you did. For example: Their importance, or the fact that you just like them and are interested in them, or because they had some profound impact on the world and the historical record, or because they are unknown and more should be known about them for some important reason, or because they are controversial and therefore would make for a good story line, or because they did something either so good or so bad that it is worth remembering and considering, or because they serve to remind us of important lessons to be learnt?

*Identify at least one issue for each one that could possibly present as an **obstacle** in writing about them and one factor that would present as an **aid** to writing about them. For example: a lack of historical information, a lack of differing perspectives/opinion, that they are important religious and or political figures and therefore opinions on them vary so widely that someone or some group is likely to be offended by an interpretation on them, or that they have such a good or bad reputation, that it would be just too hard to challenge this view.

*Rank them from 1-4 in terms of the ease of trying to accurately recreate their lives in a work of fiction, considering the available evidence, agendas and other problems that exist. 6 being the least problematic to re-create and 1 being the most difficult.

Historical Character	A reason for selection	An issue that would be an obstacle in writing on them	A factor that would assist in writing on them	Rank from 1-4

Examples of characters selected: Julius Caesar, William Adams, Adolf Hitler, Alexander the Great, JFK, Jesus Christ, Albert Einstein, Bill Gates, Nelson Mandela, The Wright Brothers, Richard the Lion Heart, Marco Polo, Napoleon Bonaparte, Christopher Columbus, William Wallace, Genghis Khan, Francisco Pizarro, Winston Churchill.

Most common reasons cited: Impact both positive and negatively on the historical record and the value of lessons learned by history

Most cited obstacles: Lack of evidence followed by religious attitudes

Most cited factor to assist: The availability of evidence

For each of the 5 historical characters that follow, identify an **interpretation** about either their personality or their lives that if presented in a work of historical fiction, could be **confronting** for certain people or groups and could certainly force the reader to **re-think** how they viewed this character. Rank them from 1-5 in terms of the ones that you think would be the most controversial to write about and present in a new or different way. 1 being the most controversial and 5 being the least. To assist you, a brief biography of each one is supplied below the table. Information in the biographies may help you to consider what type of interpretation in a historical novel would cause controversy or debate. The first character has been highlighted to help you identify those things that if challenged or seen differently, could be regarded as controversial.

Historical Character	Identify a controversial interpretation	Should any of these characters be off limits to writers of historical fiction or should they ALL be open to questioning and even possible re-interpretation? Why? Why not?
Jesus Christ		
Alexander the Great		
Winston Churchill		
Adolf Hitler		
Cleopatra VII		

***Jesus was overwhelmingly identified by my class as the most potentially confronting due to the implications of challenging people's religious beliefs, particularly on matters of his birth, miracles, death and resurrection. Some respondents even felt it would be the basis for potential conflict and or persecution.**

***Hitler came next, with most respondents feeling that re-interpretation of him ran the risk of giving neo-Nazis a platform to use and insulting the memory of holocaust and war victims and that this was to be avoided at all costs.**

***Churchill was next with most respondents feeling that a controversial interpretation would find him less than the great war hero we think of him as being, but that this was not of any great concern to us.**

***Alexander the Great followed, with most respondents focusing on the issue of the word Great, but felt it would not be so controversial if he was found to be lacking in greatness.**

***Cleopatra VII came in a clear last. Gender bias of boys? They overwhelmingly felt that any reinterpretation of her was of no great concern to the historical record.**

For each of the 6 events that follow, identify an interpretation about either why they occurred or what actually occurred that if presented in a work of historical fiction, could be confronting for certain people or groups and could certainly force the reader to re-think how they viewed this event. Rank them from 1-5 in terms of the ones that you think would be the most controversial to write about and present in a new or different way. 1 being the most controversial. To assist you, a brief description of each one is supplied below the table. Information in the biographies may help you to consider and then decide what type of interpretation in a historical novel would cause controversy or debate. The first event has been highlighted to help you identify those things that if challenged or seen differently, could be regarded as controversial.

Historical Event	Identify a controversial interpretation about the event	Should any of these events be off limits to writers of historical fiction or should they all be open to questioning and even possible re-interpretation? Why? Why not?
The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki		
The Holocaust and the Final Solution		
The destruction of the World Trade centre		
The eruption of Mt Vesuvius and the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii		
The Battle of Stalingrad		

If we accept that writers of historical fiction have some obligation to tell the “truth” as best they can, then which of the following issues do you believe have to be considered in achieving this goal? Indicate your feeling with a yes or no.

Issue to Consider	Needs to be Considered	Does not Need to be Considered
The expertise of the writer on the subject matter.	23	0
The political beliefs of the writer. For example a Marxist or Communist follower	7	16
The religious beliefs of the writer. For example a fundamental Christian or Muslim	23	0
The experience of the writer: For example a survivor of the Holocaust	5	18
The availability or otherwise of the evidence at our disposal	23	0

Which of these obstacles do you believe to be the one that could potentially MOST impact on someone writing a work of historical fiction and therefore arriving at a “truthful account” of the events. Explain briefly why you believe this to be the case.

Issue	Explanation

Most respondents 20/23 felt that the availability or otherwise of the evidence was the most important issue to consider. They largely talked about the gaps the lack of evidence left, thus leaving the potential for too much imaginative licence to be taken by writers when they wrote their historical fiction. That said, they all felt that this was reasonable to do, but that great care has to be exorcised.